



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	September 3, 2013
Subject:	Craig Kelley Petition (Flat Roofs / Rainwater Separation)
Recommendation:	The Planning Board DOES NOT RECOMMEND adoption of the proposed zoning amendment, but suggests alternative approaches.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The Planning Board considered this proposed zoning amendment at a public hearing on June 18, 2013 and continued deliberation on September 3, 2013. The proposal would create a new Section 5.55, which would allow increases in the Gross Floor Area and height of existing residential buildings by special permit as an incentive for property owners to remove internal drainage connections to the City sewer from buildings with flat roofs. The Planning Board heard testimony from Nicolai Cauchy, a resident who supports the petition, and from Owen O’Riordan, the City Engineer and Acting Commissioner of Public Works.

The Planning Board recognizes the environmental benefit of removing these direct central drain connections, which would reduce rainwater intake into the combined sewer system and help to mitigate the impacts on water quality that result from sewer system overflows. In addition, allowing rainwater to collect into the ground rather than being directed into the sewer system would promote groundwater recharge, which would benefit watershed protection. However, the Board also acknowledges that the environmental benefits would be modest, given that only a fraction of rainwater is collected on rooftops, and that most rainwater runoff from rooftops would continue to enter the sewer system eventually.

It is not typical in Cambridge to allow buildings to add an extra story above the height limit, particularly in close-knit neighborhoods where buildings with flat roofs are most common and the prevailing height tends to be three stories. Allowing those buildings to add a story would significantly increase property values for some owners, by providing greater floor area and views, while other owners in the same neighborhood would not be able to enjoy those benefits and would be impacted by the increased size and height of nearby buildings.

Therefore, the Planning Board believes that the public benefit to be gained by the removal of central storm drains would not justify the impact of allowing the construction of an extra story on residential buildings.

On the other hand, the Board believes that there is merit in allowing some modest zoning flexibility to facilitate the removal of central storm drains where the property owner wishes to do

so. Allowing property owners a few feet of height relief by special permit, rather than a variance, could facilitate the alteration of a concave roof that collects rainwater into a pitched roof that allows water to run off onto the property. As a modest incentive, additional Gross Floor Area could be allowed by special permit for the creation of a small roof deck, so that the owner could increase the value of the property by adding some usable open space and views in the process of making the necessary roof alterations. This incentive would be better scaled to the resulting public benefit, and would avoid some of the impacts of adding significant height and mass to an existing building in an established neighborhood. Potential concerns around privacy, noise and other impacts would still need to be considered in the special permit review process.

The Board suggests that the Council consider this strategy as an alternative to the proposed zoning amendment.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H Russell", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hugh Russell, Chair.