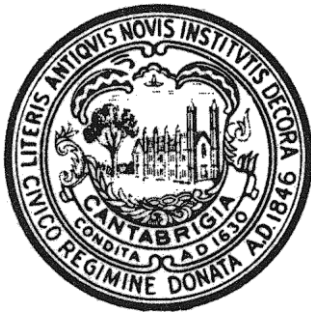




CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: March 17, 2026

Subject: 2025 Town Gown Reports and Presentations

To the Honorable, the City Council,

On February 3, 2026, the Planning Board (the “Board”) heard the annual “Town Gown” presentations from Harvard University, MIT, and Lesley University. These presentations supplemented the 2025 Town Gown Reports provided by those three institutions (as well as the Hult International School of Business, which did not give a presentation as they are only asked to present every other year). CDD staff also presented information about trends over time and comparisons to national and regional statistics. Board members discussed the reports and presentations with representatives of the three institutions and made comments. The Board then voted to send a report with a summary of its comments to the City Council.

Overall, Board members expressed strong appreciation and admiration for the reports and presentations. All have been consistently informative and show an outstanding amount of thought and effort. Board members reflected on the importance of regular reporting and discussion, which has helped provide a clearer picture of each institution’s future trajectory. The reports and presentations were also found to be responsive to issues raised in previous years’ discussions, providing more information about campus landscaping, climate resilience strategies, decarbonization, and other topics. Board members especially appreciated how the reports balanced reporting on the physical campus with information about the institutions’ programs and how they intersect with the larger Cambridge community.

Some reports and presentations remarked on recent changes to federal policies and the considerable pressure those policies have placed on higher education more generally and in Cambridge particularly. Institutions now exist in a very different environment than at the time of last year’s Town Gown presentations. Board members appreciated the institutions for their candor in discussing the impacts of those policies and were inspired by their resilience in the current political headwinds.

Board members identified some issues that may benefit from more discussion in the future. One request was to learn more about what goes into the internal planning process for institutions, and how they think about issues such as future student enrollment over the long term and how that informs future institutional growth and campus planning. Board members also asked for additional focus on the public realm, possibly through more consistent mapping and metrics on subjects such as public open space and tree canopy. One specific map that was appreciated by Board members was Harvard’s map of facilities open to the public, which other institutions were

encouraged to provide. Board members also noted areas where institutions might work with City departments to study topics within the larger context of citywide planning and practices, such as stormwater management and parking occupancy. Board members appreciated CDD staff's comparison of data from the Town Gown reports with similar information from the City of Boston, to provide greater context.

Finally, Board members suggested that it may be a good time to engage in more collaborative planning with institutions on how the City can better plan for future institutional growth. Cambridge has had longstanding institutional planning goals, including accommodating future growth within existing campus boundaries and adjacent mixed-use areas and providing housing for students and affiliates. However, there has been little recent discussion of policies to advance those goals. This topic was raised during a prior hearing on Institutional Use Zoning, which can no longer be applied to non-profit educational uses based on state law and recent zoning changes. Board members noted that institutions are currently in a slower growth phase, which provides an opportunity to engage in future planning. Such planning could touch on topics including housing, transportation and parking, urban forest, stormwater management, and similar topics in addition to overall institutional growth.

The Planning Board voted 7-0 in favor of transmitting the above report.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Tom Sieniewicz, Chair.