



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner
Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner
Date: May 17, 2016
Re: **Riverside Neighborhood Protective Zoning Proposal**

Overview

The Riverside Neighborhood Protective Zoning petition, which will be heard by the Board on May 24, proposes that portions of the Residence C-1 base zoning district in the area bounded by Putnam Avenue, Franklin Street and River Street be rezoned to Residence C (refer to *Riverside Existing Zoning* map).

Both Residence C and Residence C-1 zones allow one-family, two-family, townhouse and multi-family residential uses, with developments consisting of 12 or more units requiring a special permit from the Planning Board. A footnote in Residence C also provides that buildings in existence as of December 1, 1986, are allowed to follow the Residence C-1 dimensional requirements if the interior of the building is reconstructed or if the building is damaged or destroyed by fire or other catastrophe, and rebuilt within the same footprint and volume.

Zoning Requirements in Residence C & C-1 Districts

The changes that would be effected by the petition are summarized in the table below.

Zoning Requirement	Residence C-1	Residence C
Minimum Lot Size	5,000 SF	5,000 SF
Minimum Lot Width	50 feet	50 feet
Maximum FAR	0.75	0.6
Maximum Height	35 feet	35 feet
Allowed Unit Density	1,500 SF lot area per unit	1,800 SF lot area per unit
Minimum Front Yard	10 feet; formula	10 feet; formula
Minimum Side Yards	7.5 feet; formula	7.5 feet; formula (sum of 20 feet)
Minimum Rear Yard	20 feet (or more; max 30 feet)	20 feet (or more; max 30 feet)
Minimum Open Space	30% of lot area	36% of lot area
Required Parking	One space per unit	One space per unit

Area Planning and Zoning History

The history of development in this area of Riverside largely predates the zoning ordinance, with most residential development taking place throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The area has been zoned Residence C-1, or its equivalent, since the establishment of the zoning ordinance in 1924.

The Cambridge Growth Policy, created in 1993 to provide a policy framework for citywide planning and zoning, states that “Existing residential neighborhoods, or any portions of a neighborhood having an identifiable and consistent built character, should be maintained at their prevailing pattern of development and building density and scale.” The zoning regulations for residential neighborhoods have remained fairly stable since that time. However, the City adopted a zoning amendment in 1998 (known as the “Backyard Rezoning”) that increased the required lot area per dwelling unit from 1,200 square feet to 1,500 square feet, increased the required open space from 15% to 30% of a lot, and established a minimum rear yard setback of at least 20 feet in Residence C-1.

The zoning for this particular neighborhood was last reviewed as part of the Riverside Neighborhood Study in 2003. Some of the relevant goals emerging from that study include the following:

- Maintain and enhance Riverside's residential character and scale of two- and three-story houses
- Prevent the loss of existing housing
- Encourage local home ownership
- Preserve residential diversity
- Preserve affordable housing
- Create new affordable housing that is in harmony with its surroundings

The zoning recommendations, which were implemented through an amendment adopted in 2003, maintained the Residence C-1 zoning designation at the core of the neighborhood while changing the zoning in some transition areas, such as the riverfront area, the edges of Central Square, and the Western Avenue and River Street corridors.

The “Residence C” zoning designation was created through a zoning amendment adopted in 1987. The requirements were the same as Residence C-1, except with more restrictive dimensional requirements including FAR, dwelling unit density, setback and open space requirements. The designation was applied to former Residence C-1 areas in the Cambridgeport neighborhood, which remains the only neighborhood with a significant Residence C district, although a small area at Sherman Street and Bellis Circle in Neighborhood Nine was rezoned to Residence C in 2011 as the result of a petition from neighbors.

Analysis of Existing Conditions

The proposed rezoning area covers only a portion of the Residence C-1 district in Riverside, containing about 372 parcels. For this analysis, staff has defined a broader study area that includes the entire Residence C-1 district in Riverside, containing about 639 parcels. The attached series of maps illustrate the findings summarized below for both the study area and the smaller proposed rezoning area.

Land Use

Both zoning districts allow the same uses. The existing area is dominated by 1-2 family residences and multi-family residences, as shown in the *Riverside Study Area Land Use and Residential Units* map. A few parcels have group residential use (assisted living/boarded houses, educational residential), mixed use (residential + commercial) and non-residential uses (commercial, office, industrial, charitable/religious, education).

Parcels by Land Use Category	Rezoning Petition Area	Study Area
1-2 residential units	188 (50%)	307 (48%)
3+ residential units	161 (43%)	285 (45%)
Group residential use	0 (0%)	4 (<1%)
Mixed use	11 (3%)	20 (3%)
Non-residential use	12 (3%)	23 (3%)
Transportation	0 (0%)	3 (<1%)
Public open space	1 (<1%)	1 (<1%)
Vacant	1 (<1%)	3 (<1%)

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department. ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE.

Dimensional Characteristics

Analysis was conducted to compare existing conditions to dimensional requirements under both Residence C-1 and Residence C zoning for the following characteristics:

- Floor Area Ratio (FAR)
- Open Space (amount of usable open space on a parcel divided by the total area of the lot)
- Lot Area per Dwelling Unit (unit density)

On each of the included maps, red and green parcels conform to the FAR, unit density, or open space ratio requirements allowed under the current C-1 zoning. If the block were rezoned to Residence C, then the red parcels would become non-conforming. The pink parcels do not conform under C or C-1 zoning.

FAR

More than 59% of the parcels exceed the maximum allowed Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limit of 0.75 in Residence C-1. With the conversion to Residence C, approximately 81% of the parcels will not conform to the maximum allowed FAR limit of 0.6. This will result in the vast majority of parcels having non-conforming FAR.

Parcels by FAR¹	Rezoning Petition Area	Study Area
Greater than 0.75 (non-conforming parcels)	220 (59%)	398 (62%)
0.6 – 0.75 (impacted parcels)	80 (22%)	120 (19%)
Less than 0.6 (conforming parcels)	72 (19%)	121 (19%)

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department. ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE.

¹ Gross Floor Area used for FAR calculation includes basement and cellar living space with 7 feet or more height in all buildings including single-family and two-family homes. According to the recently adopted Barrett Amendment, any basement space within single-family and two-family homes would be excluded from FAR.

Ratio of Open Space to Lot Area

Nearly 80% of the parcels meet the requirement for at least 30% of the lot to be open space in Residence C-1. With the conversion to Residence C, more than 67% of the parcels will meet the requirement for at least 36% of the lot to be open space. Therefore, most parcels would remain conforming to open space requirements.

Parcels by Ratio of Open Space to Lot Area	Rezoning Petition Area	Study Area
Less than 30% (non-conforming parcels)	71 (20%)	137 (21%)
30% - 36% (impacted parcels)	42 (11%)	74 (12%)
Greater than 36% (conforming parcels)	257 (69%)	431 (67%)

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department. ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE.

Lot Area per Dwelling Unit

More than 56% of the parcels do not meet the current unit density requirement of 1,500 sq. ft. of lot area per dwelling unit for Residence C-1. Approximately 70% of the parcels will not conform to the unit density requirement of 1,800 sq. ft. per dwelling unit with the conversion to Residence C.

Parcels by Lot Area / Dwelling Unit	Rezoning Petition Area	Study Area
Less than 1500 sq.ft./DU (non-conforming parcels)	203 (56%)	358 (58%)
1500 - 1800 sq.ft./DU (impacted parcels)	51 (14%)	73 (12%)
Greater than 1800 sq.ft./DU (conforming parcels)	106 (30%)	184 (30%)

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department. ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE.

Potential for Additional Dwelling Units

One of the possible concerns giving rise to this petition is the potential for existing lots to add new dwelling units, either by adding new structures to the lot, expanding existing structures, or tearing down and rebuilding lots. One of the specific concerns in the petition is the loss of single-family homes.

As a part of the analysis, staff has assembled the chart below showing the impact of the proposed zoning on the number of lots that could add dwelling units. As shown, a small number of parcels with single-family residences, two-family residences, and three-family residences have sufficient land area to add at least one more unit while meeting the Lot Area per Dwelling Unit requirement. However, creating additional units would also require that FAR, open space and other dimensional requirements are met.

Potential for additional unit	Existing C-1 Residential District	Proposed C Residential District
Rezoning Petition Area		
One-family	27	16
Two-family	18	4
Three-family	2	1
Study Area		
One-family	51	30
Two-family	27	7
Three-family	6	2

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department. ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE.

The analysis shows that the zoning petition would significantly reduce the number of single-family and two-family house lots that would be allowed more dwelling units than currently exist. Many of those lots, for economic or other site-specific reasons, would be unlikely to add more units regardless of the specific zoning requirements. The proposed rezoning would likely make the expansion of existing residential lots more difficult and less frequent, but it would not completely eliminate all scenarios in which redevelopment or expansion of a single-family lot would be allowed.

List of Maps:

- *Riverside Existing Zoning*
- *Riverside Study Area Land Use and Residential Units*
- *Riverside Study Area Existing Floor Area Ratio*
- *Riverside Study Area Open Space Requirements*
- *Riverside Study Area Lot Area per Dwelling Unit*

Riverside Study Area Land Use and Residential Units

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Study Area Boundary
 Petition Area Boundary

Land Use Categories

Residential

- 1 - 2 units (307 parcels)
- 3+ units (285 parcels)
- Assisted Living/Boarding Houses (1 parcels)
- Education Residential (3 parcels)

Residential with ground floor Commercial

- 1 - 2 units (7 parcels)
- 3+ units (9 parcels)

Mixed Use

- Commercial with Residential (2 parcels)
- Residential with Commercial (2 parcels)

Other Categories

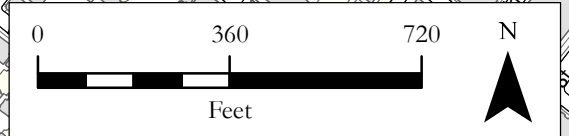
- General Commercial (3 parcels)
- Office (5 parcels)
- Industrial (1 parcels)
- Charitable/Religious (4 parcels)
- Education (3 parcels)
- Public Open Space (1 parcels)
- Transportation (3 parcels)
- Vacant Land (3 parcels)

One- and Two-Unit Residences

- 1 unit
- 2 units

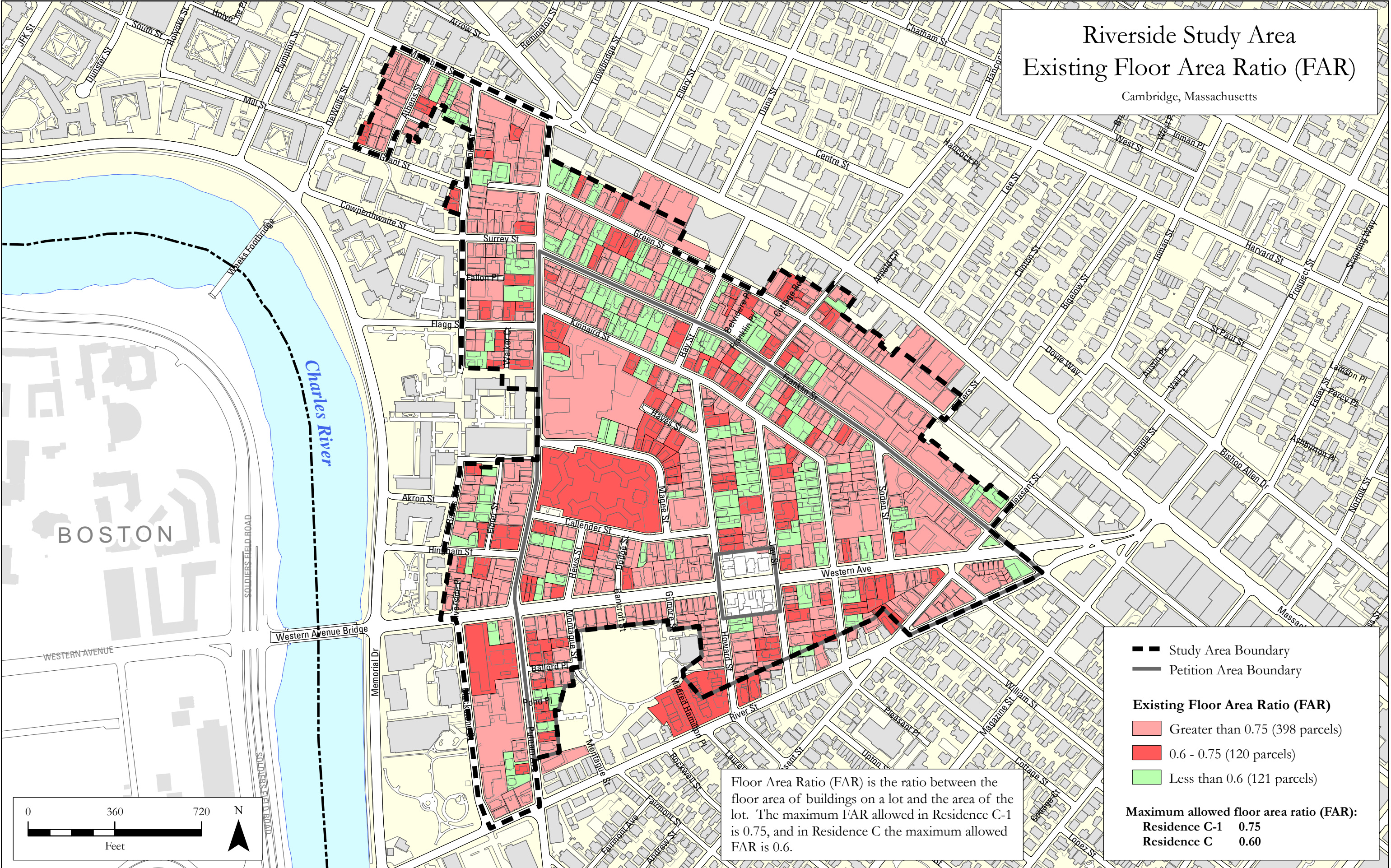
Notes on land use data:

- Land use categories reflect the principal use of each parcel.
- Parcels with buildings under construction are shown with the planned principal use of the parcel.
- Land use determination is based on Assessing data as of December 31, 2011, as supplemented by information from subsequent building permits and Development Logs through July 1, 2015.



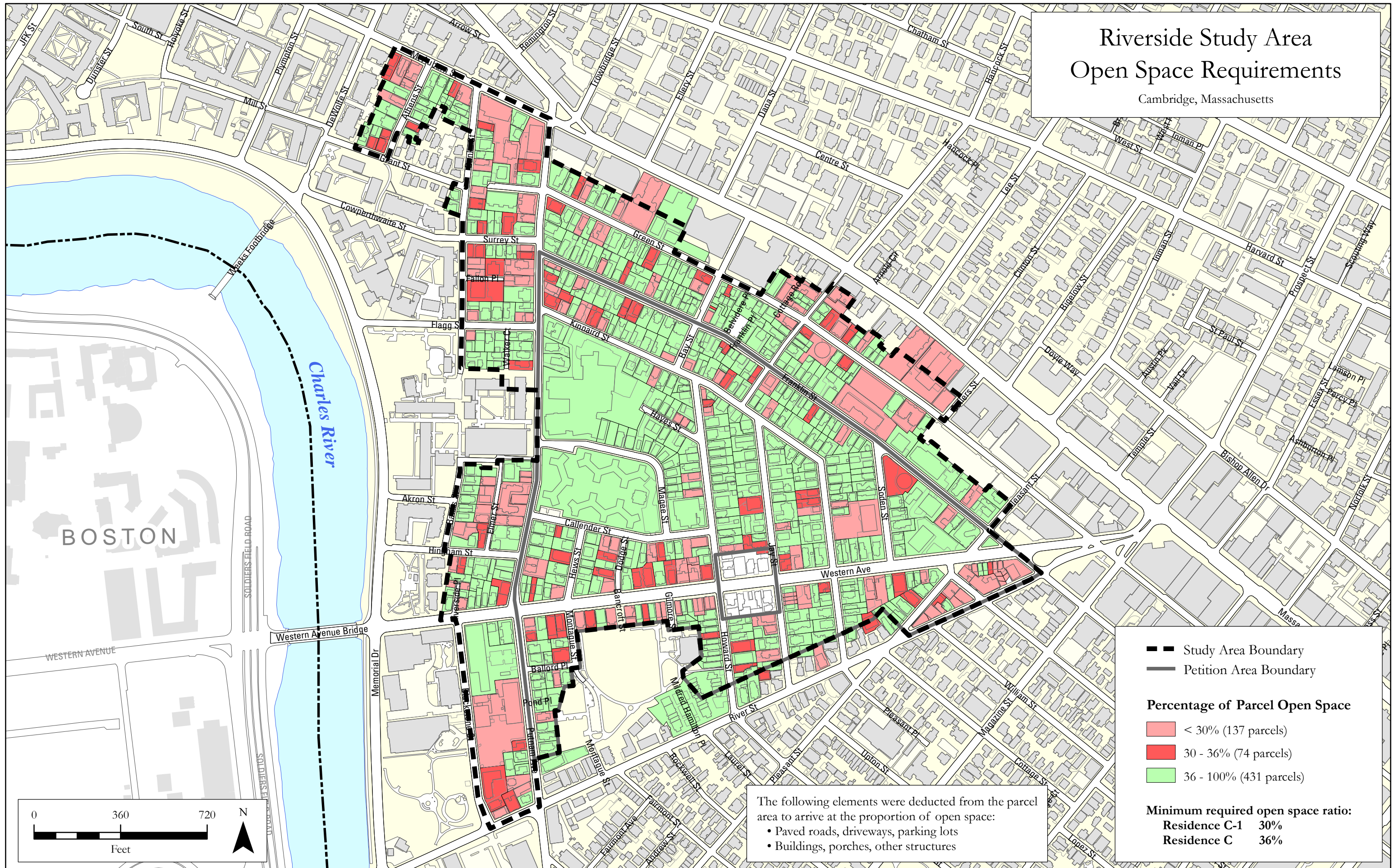
Riverside Study Area Existing Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

Cambridge, Massachusetts



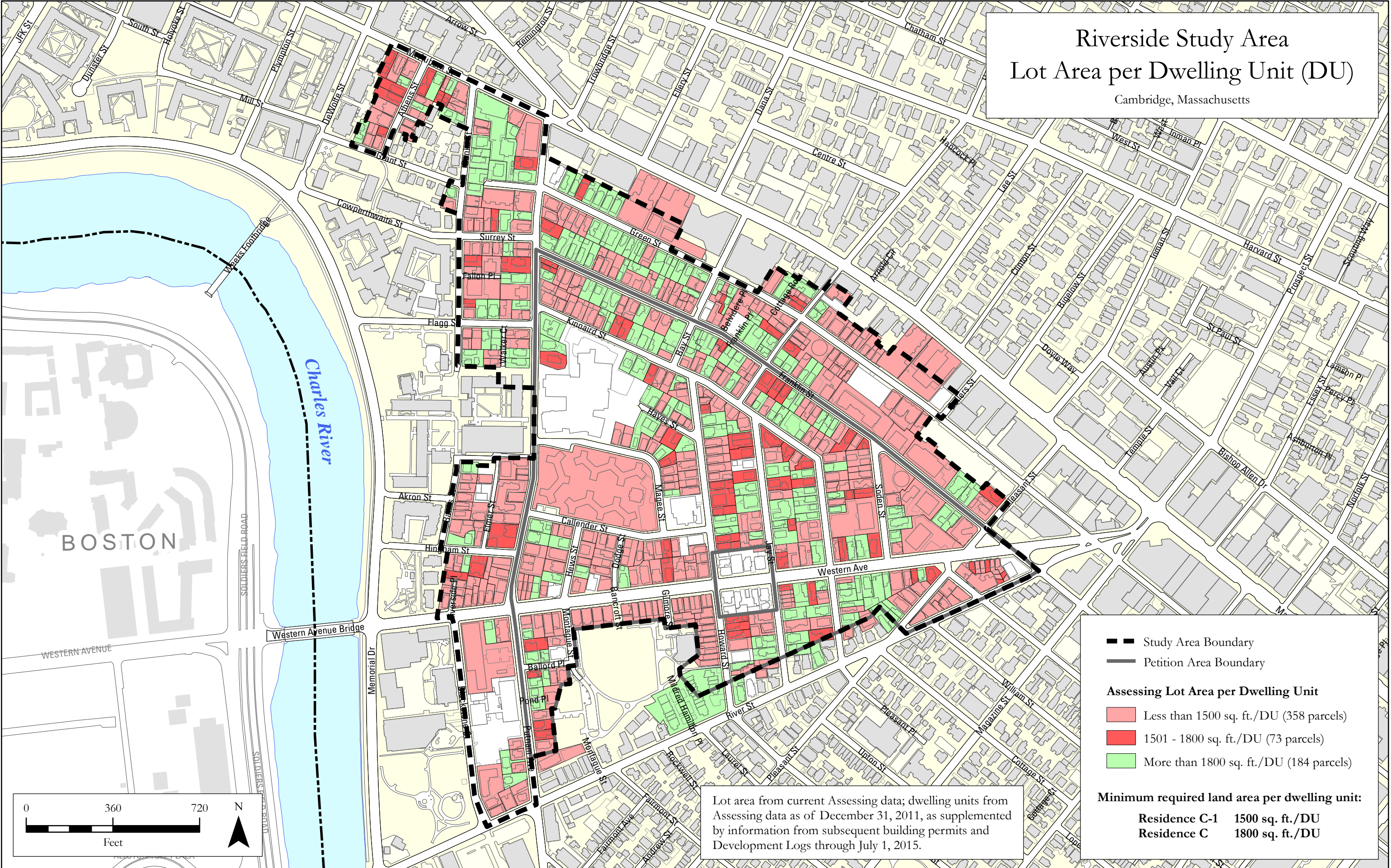
Riverside Study Area Open Space Requirements

Cambridge, Massachusetts



Riverside Study Area Lot Area per Dwelling Unit (DU)

Cambridge, Massachusetts



- - - Study Area Boundary
 ——— Petition Area Boundary

Assessing Lot Area per Dwelling Unit

- Less than 1500 sq. ft./DU (358 parcels)
- 1501 - 1800 sq. ft./DU (73 parcels)
- More than 1800 sq. ft./DU (184 parcels)

Minimum required land area per dwelling unit:

Residence C-1	1500 sq. ft./DU
Residence C	1800 sq. ft./DU

Lot area from current Assessing data; dwelling units from Assessing data as of December 31, 2011, as supplemented by information from subsequent building permits and Development Logs through July 1, 2015.