

City of Cambridge  
Community Development Department  
**Allowing Multifamily Housing  
Citywide**

Housing Committee Discussion  
September 13, 2022





# Background

# Reminder: What is Multifamily?

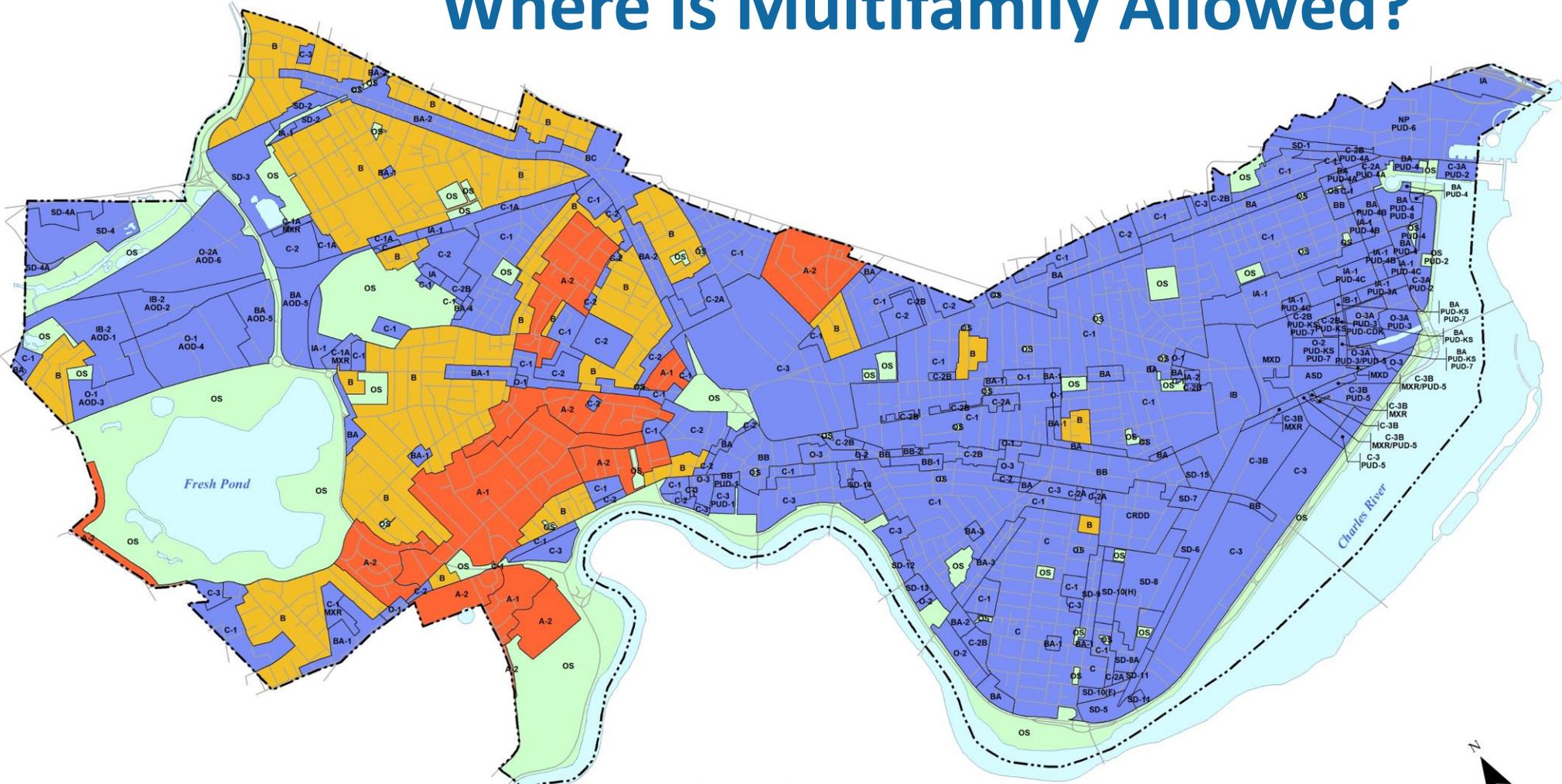
- Type of residential land use
- “Family” units – internal bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens
- 3+ housing units in a building
- Could be homeownership or rental

## ***NOT multifamily:***

- Detached 1-family or 2-family dwellings  
(including multiple dwellings on a lot)
- “Semi-detached” townhouse development  
(1-family or 2-family attached on side walls)
- “Group” housing – lodging houses, dorms

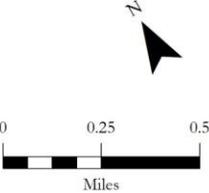


# Where is Multifamily Allowed?



Zoning Districts by Multifamily Permissibility

- Only single-family allowed
- Only single-family, two-family, and townhouse allowed
- Multifamily allowed
- Open Space zoning districts



# Allowing Multifamily Citywide

Districts	Current Zoning	What needs to change?
Residence A-1, A-2, B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multifamily use not allowed</li><li>• Density prohibits multiple units on most lots</li><li>• Restrictions on multiple buildings on a lot</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Allow multifamily housing as a use</b></li><li>• <b>Allow more units per acre</b></li><li>• Consider ways to allow more buildings on a lot</li></ul>
All other districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Multifamily uses allowed</li><li>• Density allows multiple units on most lots</li><li>• No restrictions on multiple buildings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>No changes necessary to allow</b></li><li>• Could consider ways to encourage more multifamily housing</li></ul>



# Discussions So Far

# Process To-Date

City Council Policy Order (recommended 11/16):

Work with the Planning Board to develop **concepts** and **principles** to eliminate single family and two family only zones

CDD + Planning Board Discussions (so far):

- January 4, 2022 – Background Information, Potential Approaches
- January 18, 2022 – Envision Framework
- March 15, 2022 – Zoning Principles and Concepts
  - April 19, 2022 – Report to City Council



# Planning Board Discussion

## Goals and Benefits

- A more fair city, not more exclusive in some areas than others
- No reason to exclude multifamily housing, most neighborhoods already have a variety of housing types
- Encourage creation of more housing units – more opportunities in more parts of the city
- Multifamily housing in Cambridge and other transit-served communities serves broader environmental goals
- Statewide, regional policies encourage multifamily housing



# Planning Board Discussion

## Issues and Concerns

- New market-rate housing will be high-cost, wealthier households
- Increased property values if more development is allowed
- Preserving private open space (backyards) and tree canopy
- Balance between accommodating families with children and higher cost of larger homes
- Competition for residential on-street parking
- Architectural character of neighborhoods, avoiding teardowns
- Unintended consequences



# Planning Board Discussion

## Suggested Zoning Principles

- Allow an **equitable range of housing types and unit sizes** in all residential districts (no districts limited to large, 1/2-family homes)
- Allow **additional housing units** in restrictive zoning districts, to create more housing opportunities in those areas
- Consider impacts on **housing cost and affordability**
- Encourage preservation of **usable open space, trees, and architectural character of building exteriors**
- Limit overburdening of **on-street parking**



# Planning Board Discussion

## Preferred Approaches

- **Change standards in current districts**, rather than a complete rezoning
- Aim for **incremental, not wholesale** change
- Advance **some things sooner** (e.g., more use types, housing units); others will need more study and discussion (e.g., setbacks, parking)
- **Non-zoning strategies** are also needed – e.g., affordability will need subsidies, &c.



# Planning Board Discussion

## Policy Considerations: *What are the Council's priorities?*

- **Equity** – should the City allow the same types of housing across the City, or different types in different neighborhoods?
- **Housing production** – is more housing density desirable in some areas compared to others?
- **Housing costs** – is it a priority to allow more market-rate units, even if they are higher-priced?
- **Neighborhood impacts** – how to balance housing priorities with needs for open space, trees, and parking?



# Changes to Allow More Housing Uses

# Changes to Allow More Housing Uses

What's allowed now *in Res. A-1, A-2:*



1,250 (+/-) square feet



3,000 (+/-) square feet



6,000 (+/-) square feet

← “Detached” (Single-Family) Housing →

# What range of uses should be allowed in all districts?



*Two-family*

*Townhouses/Rowhouses*



*3 units*

*6 units  
Multifamily*

*10+ units*

*Group housing  
(e.g., Lodging House)*

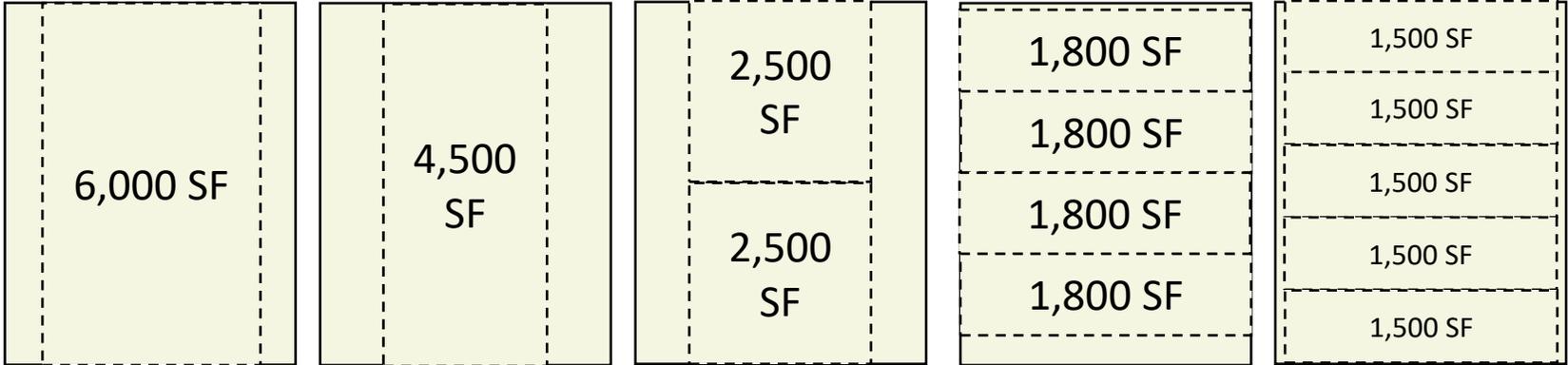


# Changes to Allow More Units per Acre

# How Density is Limited – Lot Area per Unit

District	A-1	A-2	B	C	C-1
Min. Lot Area/ Unit	6,000 SF	4,500 SF	2,500 SF*	1,800 SF	1,500 SF
Max. FAR	0.50	0.50	0.50*	0.60	0.75

**EXAMPLE: 8,000 SF lot**



\*2,500 SF lot area /unit and 0.50 FAR for the first 5,000 SF of lot area, 4,000 SF lot area/unit and 0.35 FAR for lot area over 5,000 SF



1 unit allowed  
4,000 SF GFA



1 unit allowed  
4,000 SF GFA



2 units allowed\*  
3,550 SF GFA



4 units allowed  
4,800 SF GFA



5 units allowed  
6,000 SF GFA

# Current zoning creates unequal unit sizes

*What's allowed now:*



District	Max. Height	Max. FAR	Min. Lot Area/Unit	Optimized GFA/Unit Range	Net Units/Acre Range
A-1	35 feet	0.50	6,000 SF	3,000-6,000 SF	3.6-7.3
A-2	35 feet	0.50	4,500 SF	2,250-4,500 SF	4.8-9.7
B	35 feet	0.50(-)*	2,500(+) SF*	1,250-2,500 SF	8.7-17.4*
C	35 feet	0.60	1,800 SF	1,080-2,160 SF	12.1-24.2
C-1	35 feet	0.75	1,500 SF	1,125-2,250 SF	14.5-29.0

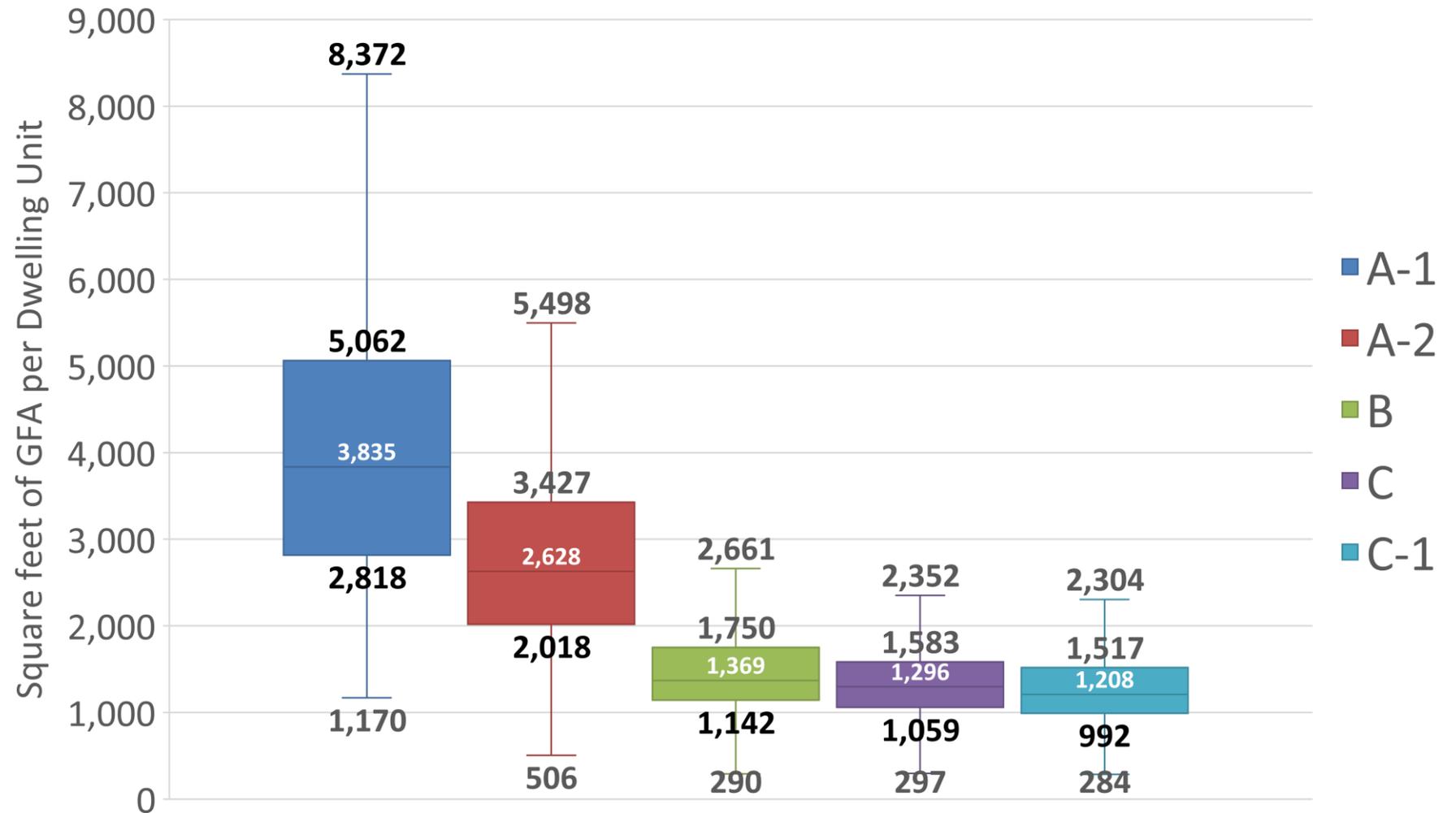
\*2,500 SF lot area /unit and 0.50 FAR for the first 5,000 SF of lot area,  
4,000 SF lot area/unit and 0.35 FAR for lot area over 5,000 SF

# Current zoning creates unequal unit sizes

Typical GFA/unit ratios

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department

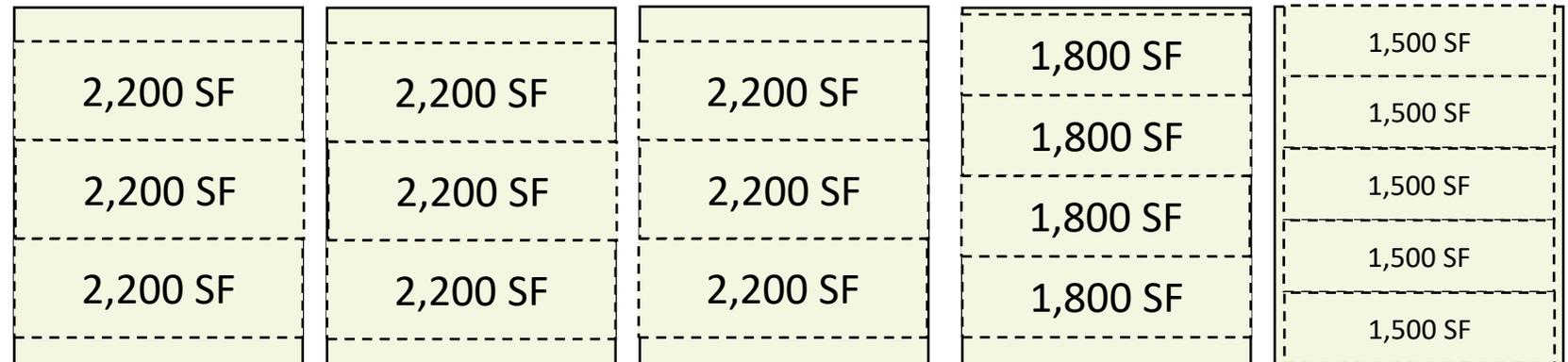
**NOTE: ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE**



# What would encourage more equal unit sizes?

District	A-1	A-2	B	C	C-1
Min. Lot Area/ Unit	2,200 SF	2,200 SF	2,200 SF	1,800 SF	1,500 SF
Max. FAR	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.60	0.75

**EXAMPLE: 8,000 SF lot**



3 units allowed  
4,000 SF GFA



3 units allowed  
4,000 SF GFA



3 units allowed  
4,000 SF GFA



4 units allowed  
4,800 SF GFA



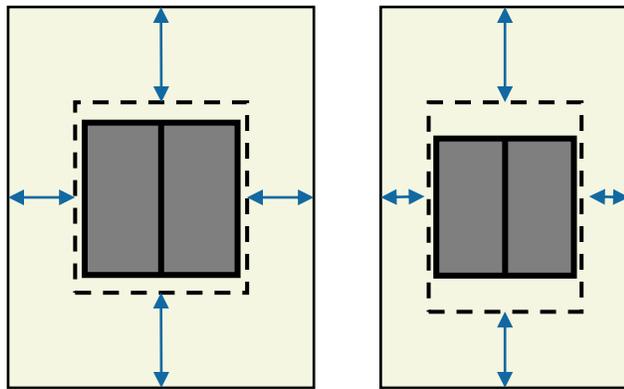
5 units allowed  
6,000 SF GFA



# Changes to Allow More Site Configurations

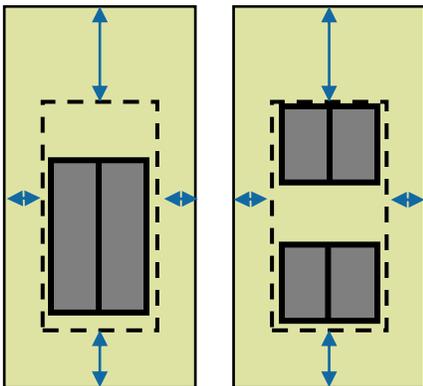
# Changes to Allow More Site Configurations

*What's allowed now:*



## *Residence A-1, A-2*

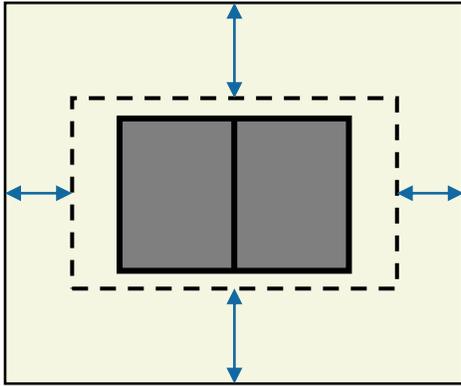
- Detached dwellings only
- Lots below a certain size can't be subdivided
- One principal structure per lot



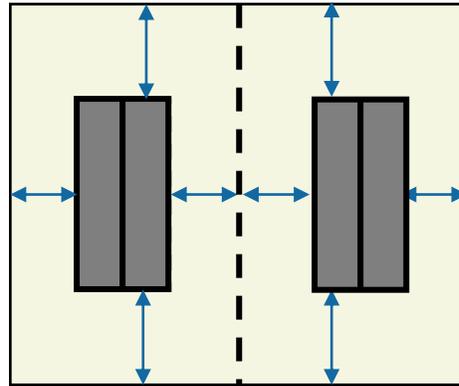
## *Residence B*

- Detached, two-family, townhouse
- Lots < 10,000 SF in area or < 100 feet wide can't be subdivided
- Multiple structures per lot, **special permit** if second structure is > 75 feet from street

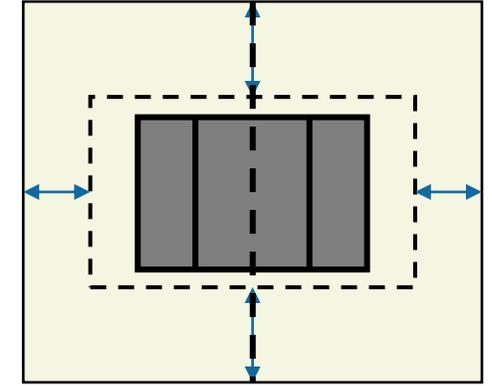
## What other site configurations should be allowed?



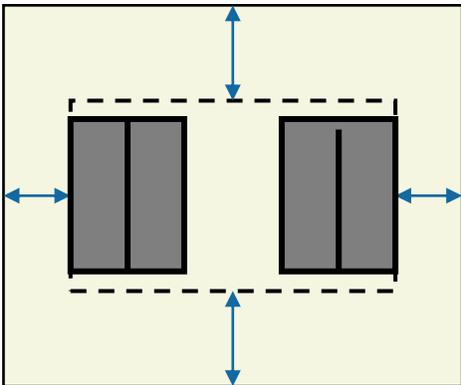
*Current standards prevent subdivision in Res. A-1, A-2*



*Detached subdivision*



*Townhouse subdivision*



*Multiple dwellings per lot*

### *Considerations:*

- Allowing multiple structures can provide infill opportunities without altering existing buildings
- Larger multi-unit buildings can result in more efficient development, usable open space, and/or consistency with neighborhood development patterns



# Other Considerations

# Options for Further Study

*These would not change under the concepts presented:*

Zoning Requirements	Issues and Considerations
FAR and Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More FAR could raise land values, result in larger units</li><li>• 3-story height is typical across neighborhoods; more height could promote open space</li></ul>
Setbacks and Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Takes more study to know how requirements interact with each other and with existing conditions</li></ul>
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Zoning petition currently in review</li><li>• CDD study to hear community views, review regulations</li></ul>
Affordability Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current zoning has “mandatory inclusionary” at 10+ units, “voluntary inclusionary” at &lt; 10 units</li><li>• Changes need careful legal and economic study</li></ul>



# Evaluating Preferred Options

*Additional study could be done on:*

- **Comparison to Existing Conditions:** Map existing vs. allowed units across districts
- **Design Outcomes:** Model building and site designs on example lots
- **Economic Outcomes:** Model effects on development value, property value, home prices for example lots; compare with affordable housing opportunities
- **Planning Goals:** Evaluate according to Envision Cambridge metrics of livability, diversity & equity, economic opportunity, sustainability & resilience, community health & wellbeing, learning



# Discussion