



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: August 23, 2023
Subject: Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Amendments Zoning Petition Meeting Notes

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To Members of the Planning Board,

On August 8, 2023, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss a Zoning Petition by City Council (the “Council”), to amend Article 2 and Article 11 to modify the height and open space standards applicable to Affordable Housing Overlay Developments, among other changes.

The Board heard a presentation from City Councillors, followed by public comment and discussion among Board members. The Planning Board voted to continue the hearing to August 29th, in order to further discuss the proposed Petition among Planning Board members. The following is a summary of the key points of discussion raised by Planning Board members at the August 8th hearing:

- Board members generally agreed that Cambridge needs more housing, and more affordable housing.
- Board members had various opinions about the taller heights proposed by the Petition.
 - Some Board members were comfortable with the heights proposed, noting that taller and more dense housing development around transit is an environmentally friendly and sustainable development pattern.
 - Some Board members were concerned about potential impacts (such as wind and shadow) of taller buildings, and compatibility with the prevailing character of development in many of the areas affected by the Petition.
 - Some Board members agreed that greater heights may be appropriate in some of the major corridors but not in some corridors that may be more minor in nature.
 - Some Board members believed it was unlikely that there would be a large number of development proposals at the heights proposed by the Petition.

- Some Board members supported further study to determine what heights are needed and feasible for affordable housing developers to achieve.
- Because the AHO is designed to be as-of-right, Planning Board members acknowledged that there is a limited ability to shape and refine AHO developments that move through the Board’s advisory design review process. Some Board members raised the concern that it may be more difficult to encourage complementary development if the AHO heights are increased and other dimensional requirements are further relaxed.
- Board members agreed that the competitiveness of the existing AHO has declined as other zoning changes have taken effect, such as the elimination of minimum parking requirements citywide. Board members noted, however, that a major benefit of the original AHO is that 100% affordable housing development can proceed “as-of-right”, and that this benefit remains in lieu of other zoning changes.
- Some Board members expressed concern that significant increases in housing may overburden existing transit infrastructure, on which the new developments will rely.
- Some Board members stressed the importance of connecting residents in taller developments to open space and nature.