

## BA-5 Zoning District Zoning Memorandum

### Purpose

The purpose of the requested zoning change and zoning district creation is in part to acknowledge the need for housing in the City of Cambridge, but to do so in a way that does not dramatically alter the character of the neighborhood or completely disrupt the Mass Ave Overlay. The intent of this memo is to highlight the changes requested, explain them as simply as possible, and provide a rationale for each change. The City of Cambridge has embarked on several important studies that have informed our request, namely Envision Cambridge (2019) and the Cambridge Street Planning Study (2022-). We recognize that the Cambridge Street Planning Study is yet to be completed but the preliminary work by CDD clearly shows a direction and intent that we agree with and see as a model for the Mass Ave Overlay. This zoning petition is a bit of a “marriage” between building code, zoning, and urban form that attempts to address the issues of housing and mixed-use development in a way that does not upend the character of an existing neighborhood but recognizes the need for citywide participation in our housing goals.

### History

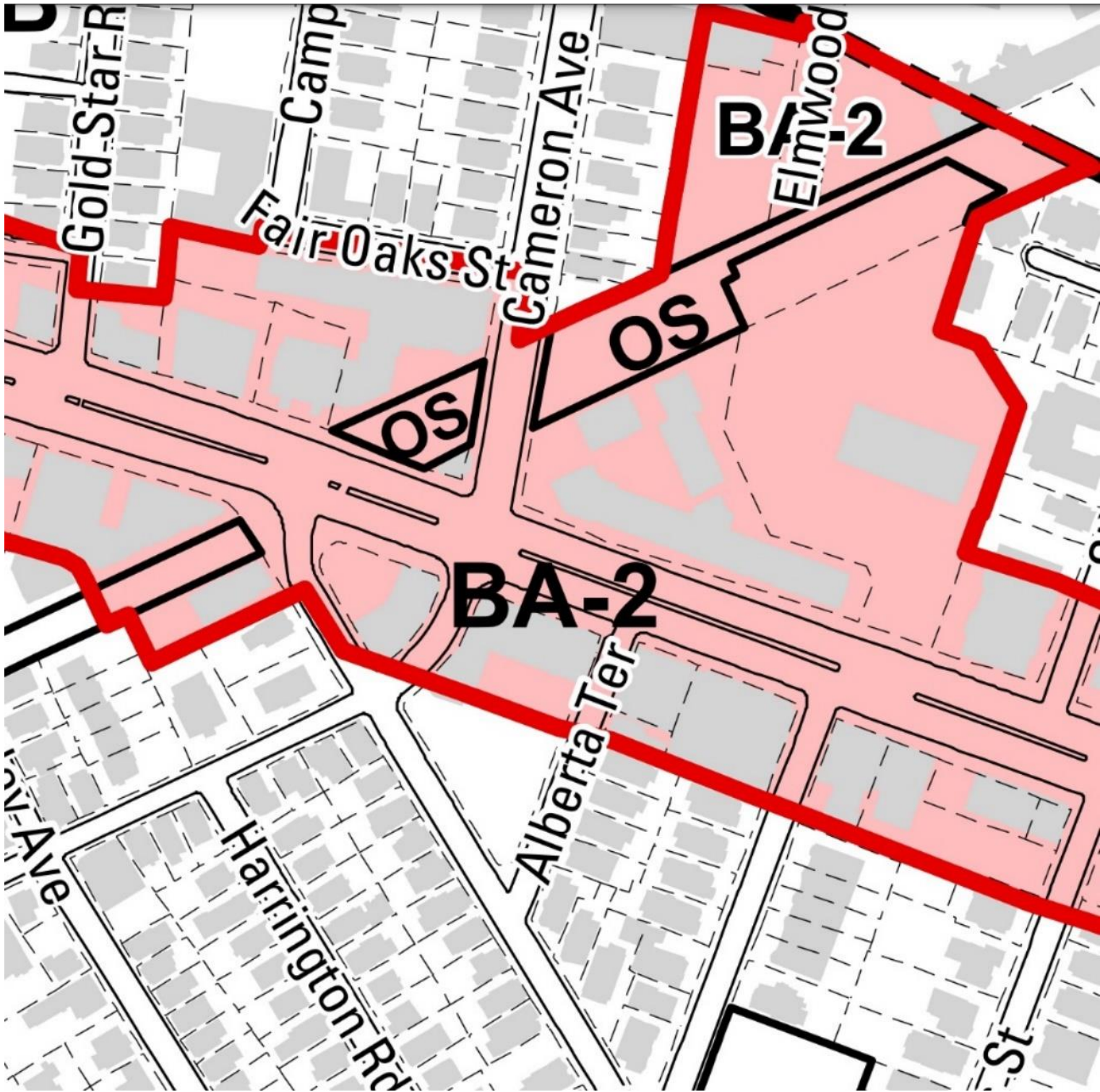
The Mass Ave Overlay was first created in 1986 and has since been amended five times in whole and several additional times in part. The last amendment was in 2012, which designated several parcels as historical (the district we hope to create is not included) and provided for outdoor seating for restaurants. The zoning request we have suggested for this district is very much like the original pre-1986 zoning and more akin to a return to a prior condition than something novel to the area.

### Current District and Zoning

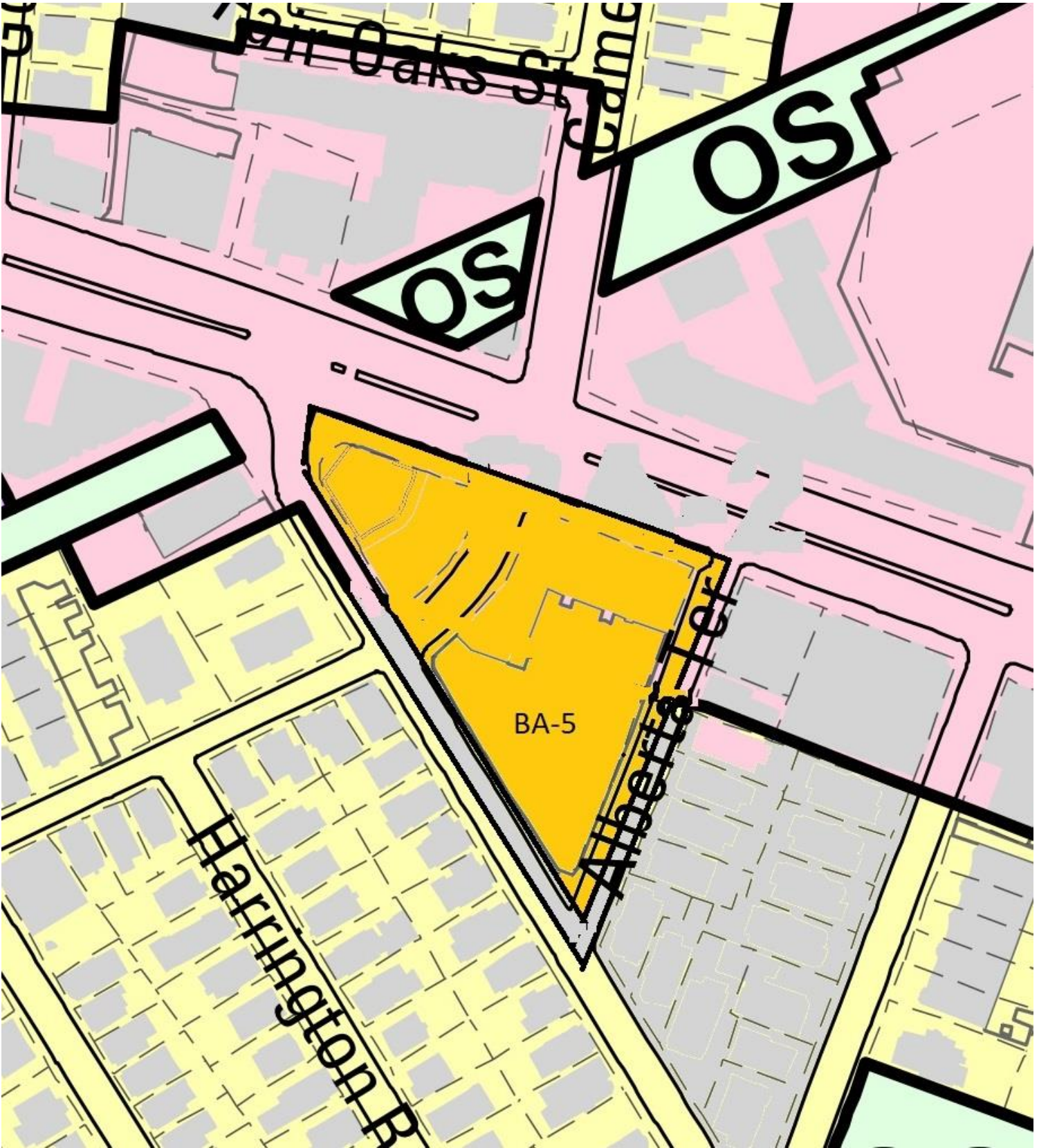
The proposal to create the BA-5 district combines two lots over the course of roughly 1 acre of land, part of which currently resides in a Residential B District and the remainder in the BA-2 neighborhood business district. The Residential B District has a height limitation of 35’ and a Floor Area Ratio of .5 for the first 5,000 sqft then reduces to a further .35 with a lot per dwelling unit calculation of 2500 sqft per unit for the first 5,000 sqft then it increases to 4,000 sqft. The BA-2 Zoning District has a height limitation of 50’ with a bulk control plane at 35’ requiring a setback for all but the primary street, a base FAR of 1.0/1.75 for Commercial and Residential respectively, and a lot per dwelling unit calculation of 600 sqft per unit. The Mass Ave Overlay has a maximum height of 60’ for the district, but a maximum height of only 45’ within the BA-2 Zoning District. also requires that all projects that abut a residential district maintain a 50’ setback.

### Proposed Zoning

There are two fundamental changes requested. The first is the creation of a BA-5 zoning district which includes 2400-2418 Mass Ave and over 36k sqft of buildable area over multiple owners. The map change includes bringing the residential B district that “splits” the lot at 2400 Mass Ave into the Mass Ave Overlay, and combining two adjacent parcels along Mass Ave to create a new zoning district that obeys most of the rules of the existing Mass Ave Overlay illustrated below:



Existing Zoning Map



Proposed Zoning Map

The other changes requested relate to height, FAR, setbacks, and density.

### **Height**

The newly created zoning district increases the allowed height to 80'. The request is meant to only apply to the Massachusetts Avenue facing side of the district and includes (illustrated below) a setback from the abutting residential districts. The purpose of this request is to add more units of housing along the Mass Ave section of this district in ways suggested by both Envision and the Cambridge Street Study. It is important to note that the building codes trigger midrise construction at above 70' (which would not be economical for this scale of building) so it is unlikely that any project that results from this zoning change would reach 80'. However, we felt it important to allow for a maximum amount of flexibility on Mass Ave so that headhouse, roof decks, and other uses that will not trigger mid-rise construction regulations but may exceed 70' will be allowed without having to seek a variance.

### **FAR (Floor Area Ratio)**

We have added an FAR increase to 4.0 from the existing 1.75 for residential uses only. It is important to note that with the inclusionary housing ordinance the effective existing FAR would be 2.275. The reason for this change is to increase the amount of housing that can be built and to achieve optimal design without making sacrifices to "max out." The dimensional limitation of the zoning will be an effective "safeguard" against bulk and design elements not addressed directly through zoning but in Planning Board special permit review. By increasing FAR to the degree we propose, projects that proceed will not be bottlenecked in ways that limit the intent of this zoning proposal, which is to increase housing stock first and foremost.

### **Setbacks**

We have retained the existing setback requiring any property within a certain range of an existing residential district but have reduced that required setback from 50' to 35'. The reason for this change is twofold. First, the setback is measured from the center line of the street on Cedar which reaches far into the lots with little effect past the first 24' for the lots in the BA-5. Any project built along Cedar would therefore be at 35' in height regardless of any further setback based solely on constructability of the project. Second, the setback on the residential side of Alberta creates further issues of constructability for meaningful housing development on that side due to the steep drop off two lots in toward Cedar. If any projects proceed from the passage of this zoning, the Planning Board will be able to address issues of character design in their review process, which we feel is a better outcome for any and all parties that may be of interest.

### **Lot Per Dwelling Unit Calc**

The lot per dwelling unit calculation has been lowered to 300 sqft per unit. This was done for the entirety of the zoning district. We believe that this calculation is the biggest limiting factor in new housing creation and thus should be significantly reduced in "soft" areas where housing is both desirable and transit orientated. The current scheme would allow for roughly 48 units on the BA-2 side and 4 units on the Res B side of the 2400 section of the district; however, based on other limiting factors those unit counts would never be realized largely due to FAR constraints and the limitations of Res B zoning.

### **Footnote Changes**

There are several other changes that relate to the Mass Ave Overlay zoning specifically that we have addressed by way of footnote that surgically alter the BA-5 district but in ways that will not disrupt the pattern of the district in its entirety. We have allowed for an exemption for rooftop spaces that are not within 20' of a residential building. We added an exemption from a section of the Mass Ave Overlay that would require building heights to be lowered if the commercial retail floor was less than 15'. We felt this provision was anachronistic and did not reflect a building pattern along Mass Ave and therefore should not be a limiting factor on residential height.

## **Summary**

The intent of the zoning and map change is to increase housing stock, but to do so in a way that recognizes the character of the neighborhood and does not materially disrupt the Mass Ave Overlay zoning. In many ways this zoning reflects a template of what has been suggested through multiple planning studies completed or in progress with the Cambridge Community Development Department. It should also be noted the existing Affordable Housing Overlay would already allow for a significantly larger development in the district with heights at 45' on Cedar and 70' on Mass Ave, but with a higher overall density and unit count and zero public process. This zoning proposal attempts to manage neighbor expectation and balance it against the Cambridge community as a whole and our collective responsibility to meet growing demand but respect the environment in which we grow.

## **Outreach**

To date we have met with some of the neighbors in the district and began outreach in October of 2022. We met with the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee and other residents (25 people were in attendance). Concerns ranged from height to solar array blockage, and there were some who felt we should have done more outreach prior to filing. We have requested a meeting with the Alewife study group and hope to continue outreach and discussion with neighbors and stakeholders but wish to recognize that this is a city-wide issue and not simply about any one neighborhood group. Further the process we embark on today is the first step of many until an actual project will be brought forward. If this zoning proposal should pass any project designed under the new zoning would face design review by CDD and Planning Board and possibly the BZA prior to any approval and that process would instigate a new round of outreach and discussions.

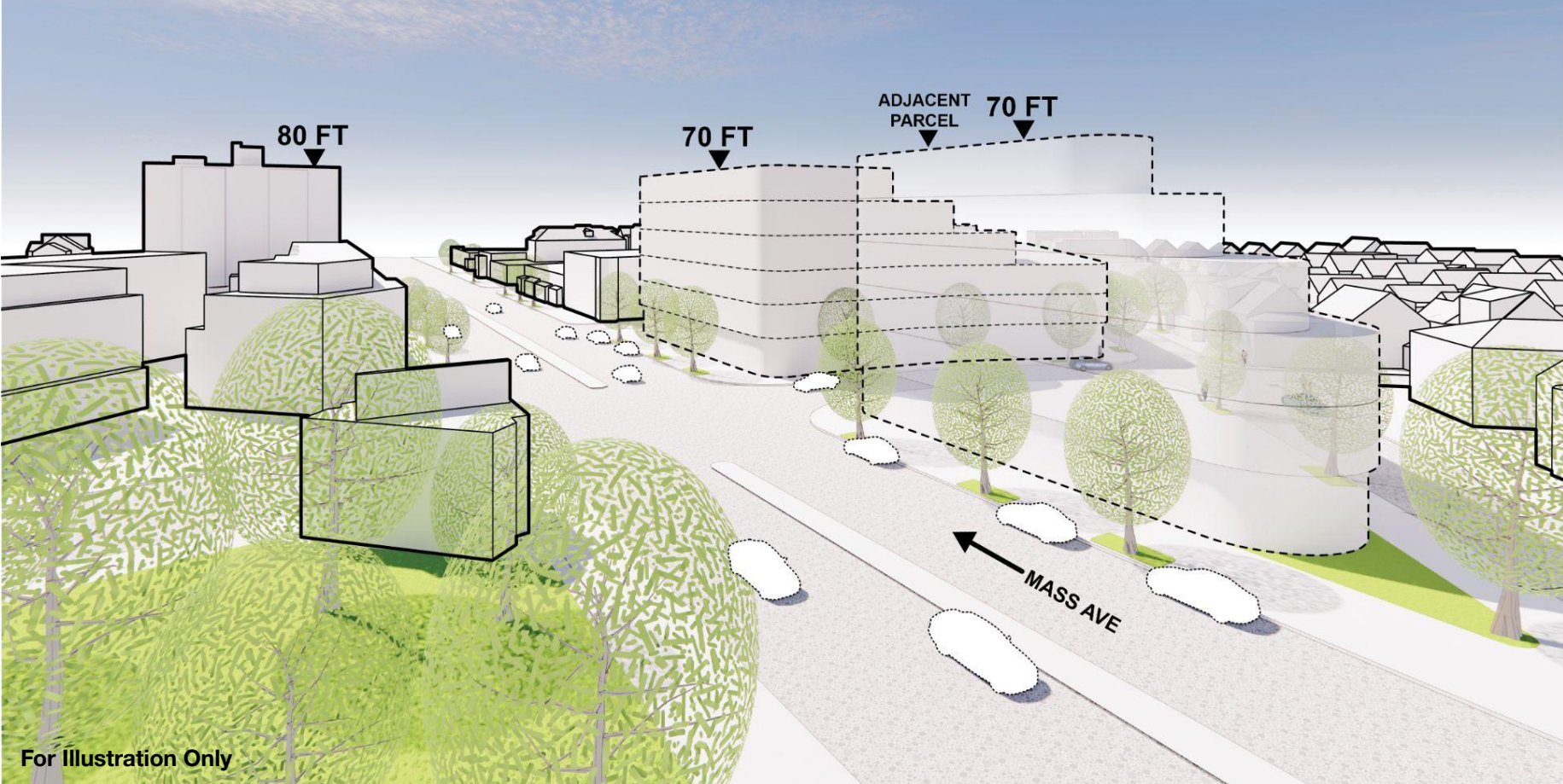
We thank you for your time and consideration. Below we have included several images produced by MERGE architects that illustrate how the zoning might be used in massing studies only (to be clear, these are not design drawings). Please be advised that any project that would be subject to this zoning would likely be subject to article 19 and special permit review.

# 2400 Mass Ave

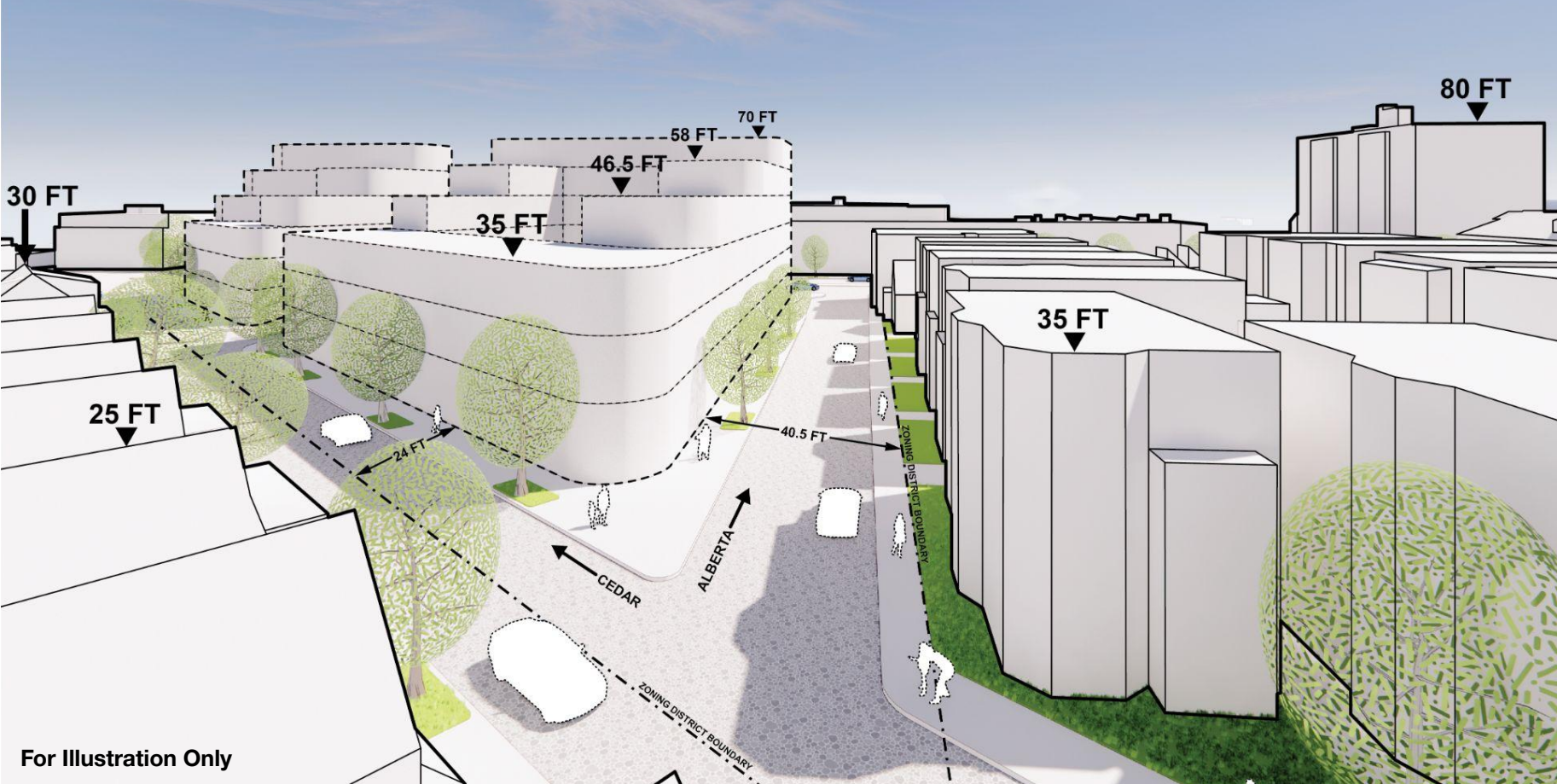
North Cambridge Partners LLC

BA-5 Zoning Renderings  
12/07/2022

Perspective - Mass Ave

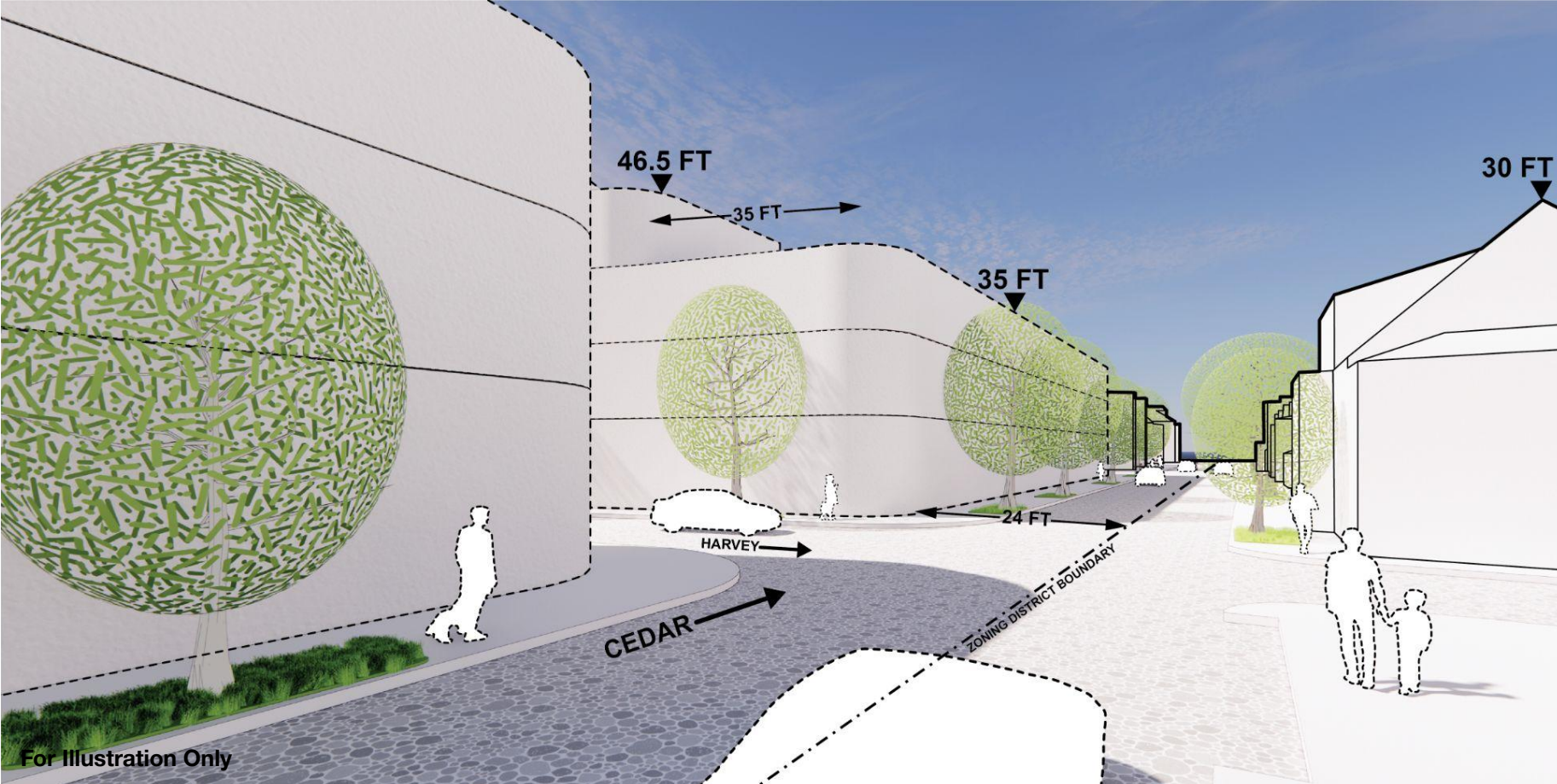


# Perspective - Cedar + Alberta





# Perspective - Cedar + Harvey



For Illustration Only