



Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee The District by District Approach to FAR Reductions

The most recently developed FAR scenario being considered is the "district by district" one. The "district-by-district" approach revises FAR levels with more attention to individual district circumstances than do the more rule-driven scenarios, such as the "25% Cut" one. This approach has been used to tailor changes similar to those resulting from the "Transit and Use Sensitive" and "Housing Incentive" scenarios, but with more sensitivity to the circumstances of particular places, and with simpler outcomes for everyone.

The intention of this scenario is to shape FARs to encourage housing development, and in doing so to reflect the differences in trip generation rates of different uses, aiming at reduced congestion. This scenario would reduce FARs for non-residential uses, leaving the allowable FARs for residential uses unchanged. That gives residential development substantial relative advantage, especially in mixed-use development. These are the guidelines we followed in carrying out that intention.

- The basic approach was to lower permitted FAR for all non-residential uses by about one-third with minor departures to simplify arithmetic). That is a deeper reduction than in the "25% cut," offset by including no residential density reductions. The highest business FAR in the City would then be 3.0 (at or near Harvard Square, Kendall Square, and Lechmere Square). Those revisions would typically result in residential FARs being FAR 0.5 higher than non-residential ones.
- Despite the basic approach of reducing by one-third, FARs was in no case reduced below FAR 1.0, since doing so would jeopardize important planning intentions, such as encouraging housing over stores.
- Deeper FAR cuts were made where recent experience and analysis demonstrates that a 1/3 reduction would leave FARs that are still sharply inconsistent with traffic concerns. Three of the districts so identified (IB1, PUD6, and SD1) are in East Cambridge, one (PUD5) near Alewife.
- Deeper FAR cuts were also made where a combination of circumstances add up to substantial inconsistency with the overall pattern being sought. The two districts so identified (BB-1 and BB-2) are on Massachusetts Avenue between Harvard and Central Squares, relatively distant from transit stations, and with a presently allowed FAR that even when reduced by one-third would remain inconsistent with both existing development and regulations in surrounding areas.

The resulting changes would be far simpler than those from the "Transit and Use Sensitive" scenario, affecting only a minority of the zoning districts in the City, and at most adding a second FAR category within each affected district, rather than having up to six applicable FARs within a single district. As calibrated in this example, the district-by-district approach would be more powerfully advantageous for housing development than all but one of the other approaches, and with different calibration through FAR-setting, could be made even more supportive of housing.

No new regulatory boundaries would need to be created, such as the "near transit" distinction that would divide districts under the "transit sensitive" approach.

The scenario described above is just one possible application of the "district-by-district" approach. For example, deeper FAR reductions for business or zoning map changes to replace business with residential zoning could be part of alternative "district-by-district" scenarios. Those would result in very different outcomes serving different policy intent, but would share the basic district-by-district quality of being shaped to fit individual district circumstances rather than being tied to rules applicable uniformly across the City.

- ▶ Return to **Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee**
- ▶ Return to **Zoning, Planning Board and Urban Design**
- ▶ Return to **Community Planning Division Home**
- ▶ Return to **Community Development Department Home**