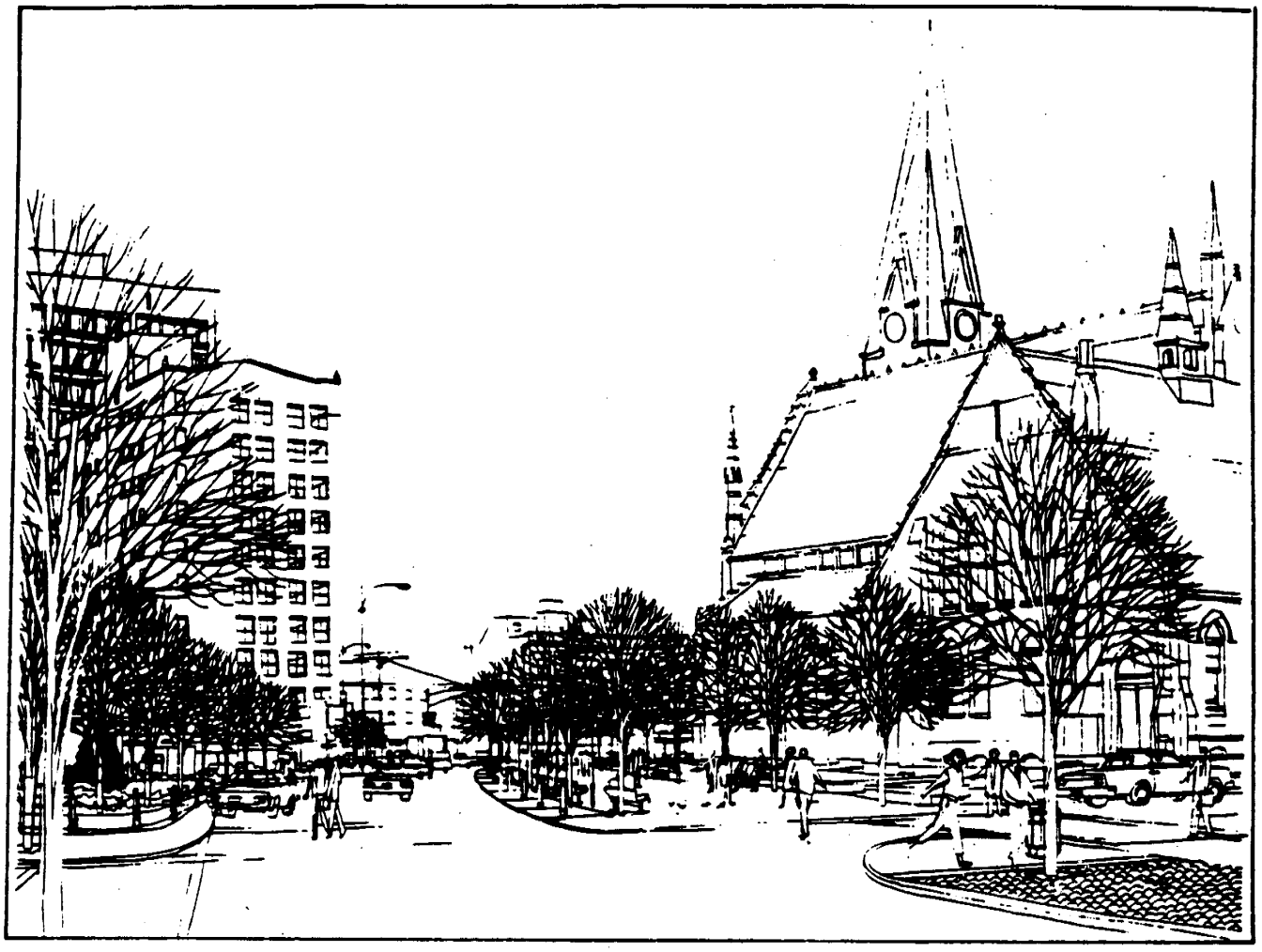

City of Cambridge

CENTRAL SQUARE ACTION PLAN

November 1987

CENTRAL SQUARE ACTION PLAN

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

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NOVEMBER, 1987

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the work of the Cambridge City Council's Central Square Subcommittee the "Central Square Report" was produced in April, 1983. This report identified problems contributing to the loss of shopper confidence and the deterioration of the Central Square retail area. In addition the "Central Square Report" outlined recommendations to halt and reverse the Square's decline as a neighborhood shopping area.

The City Manager appointed a Central Square Committee to monitor the implementation measures outlined in the report. To assist the Committee a special Economic Development Subcommittee was established to develop an Action Plan that is responsive to the resident and buisness concerns for orderly economic growth of the Square in the future.

The Economic Development Subcommittee is comprised of four neighborhood representatives (one each from Neighborhood 4; Mid-Cambridge; Cambridgeport; and, Riverside), four business representatives, and one representative each from the Chamber of Commerce, YMCA, RCCC, and the City. The Subcommittee has met over the last two years actively participating in research efforts, meeting with neighborhood and business groups, and conducting community meetings. These efforts have lead to the development of the goals, objectives, and plan of action presented in this report.

A key objective of the Subcommittee's work was to strengthen Central Square's retail viability by attracting a stronger neighborhood consumer base. Therefore, the methodology incorporated a Market Analysis by Economics Research Associates; existing conditions survey and analysis by Community Development Department staff; community meetings on preliminary findings; outreach efforts via attendance at business and neighborhood meetings; and, attendance at various meetings of City Boards and Committee's discussing issues relative to Central Square and its neighborhoods. These efforts provided the basis for the subsequent analysis and recommendations contained in this report for strengthening Central Square's retail market.

The Central Square Economic Development Subcommittee wishes to acknowledge the work and support of the Central Square Committee; the residents of Neighborhood 4, Mid-Cambridge, Cambridgeport, and Riverside; the Central Square Business Association; the Cambridge Community Development Department; the Cambridge Historical Commission; the Cambridge License Commission; and all the other people and departments who participated in the planning process. Special thanks goes to the City Council's Central Square Subcommittee whose original efforts in the "Central Square Report" are responsible for the attention the Square has received over the last five years.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Central Square Economic Development Subcommittee has met over the last two years actively participating in research efforts, meeting with neighborhood and business groups and conducting community meetings. The result of these efforts have been compiled in this report. The purpose of this report is to develop a long range Action Plan that will be economically viable and respectful of the Square's present unique retail environment.

The goals of the plan are to:

- encourage responsible and orderly development;
- strengthen the retail base and the market capture of the neighborhoods;
- preserve the Square's cultural diversity;
- create an active people-oriented space;
- improve the physical and visual environment;
- provide retail establishments that cater to the people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods;
- encourage the development of new mixed income housing units; and
- promote compatible retail adjacent to residential uses.

A key objective of the Subcommittee's work is to strengthen Central Square's retail viability by attracting a stronger neighborhood consumer base. The Subcommittee retained Economics Research Associates, a marketing consultant, to evaluate the Square's present market capture and to recommend a retail mix that would strengthen the capture of the neighborhood market. The recommended retail uses include specialty food stores, a junior department store, factory outlets, home furnishings and fixtures, card and gift shop, dance and exercise apparel, art gallery, and a book store.

Businesses such as drug, liquor, convenience stores and fast food establishments are already well represented. The proposed cap on fast food establishments together with a revised fast food definition will keep the number of fast food establishments from exceeding the present number. The Action Plan also proposes limiting convenience stores from locating within 1000 feet from each other.

In addition to improving the retail mix of the Square retail development recommendations also focus on the following:

- improving the appearance of the Square through development of design guidelines in the Urban Design Plan;

- Centralizing the marketing and promotions of the Square through a marketing committee and a downtown manager; and

- Requiring additional guidelines and amending some existing regulations on licensing common victualler, entertainment, and liquor licenses.

Zoning recommendations and Urban Design objectives have been formulated to implement the goals and objectives of this report. These recommendations include the creation of an Overlay District as outlined on page 41. The regulations of the Overlay would encourage the development of housing, encourage retention and rehabilitation of historically significant structures, promote a unified image of the Square as a retail area, and minimize fears of excessive heights along Massachusetts Avenue and adjacent to residential areas. Some of the key elements are summarized below:

- requires design review for projects over 2000 square feet;
- establishes a height limit on Massachusetts Avenue;
- requires setbacks adjacent to residentially zoned areas;
- requires active ground floor uses along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street;
- promotes a viable retail mix by capping fast food establishments; restricting auto dependent/related uses such as gasoline stations, auto rental or repair, etc; and, restricting non pedestrian oriented office uses;
- identifies structures which are potential landmarks and potentially significant for inclusion in a National Register District.

Housing recommendations are proposed to encourage the creation of more housing opportunities in Central Square. Incentives are built into the Overlay area for housing development. City owned parking lots are recommended to be used as leveraging mechanisims for the development of mixed income housing units.

The recommendations for Streets, Sidewalks and Open Space are focused at tying all of the public areas within Central Square together and creating a clean and safe pedestrian oriented environment. Recommendations include expansion of the MBTA Red Line and Central Square Enhancement Project improvements, creating safer pedestrian areas at Auburn Street and Western Avenue and at Lafayette Square and, the creation of pedestrian links between the neighborhood and the retail area.

Improvements to the current traffic situation in Central Square need further study, but efforts to reroute truck traffic from River Street and Western Avenue and to encourage greater use of

public transit facilities by the Square's employees are encouraged. A further study of present parking and loading requirements should be undertaken by an independent transportation consultant.

The continued efforts of the Central Square neighborhood, business people, property owners and the City are necessary for the Square to realize its potential as a full service community retail district. The combined efforts of these groups in developing the Central Square Action Plan must continue until the plan is implemented and the goals of revitalization are achieved.

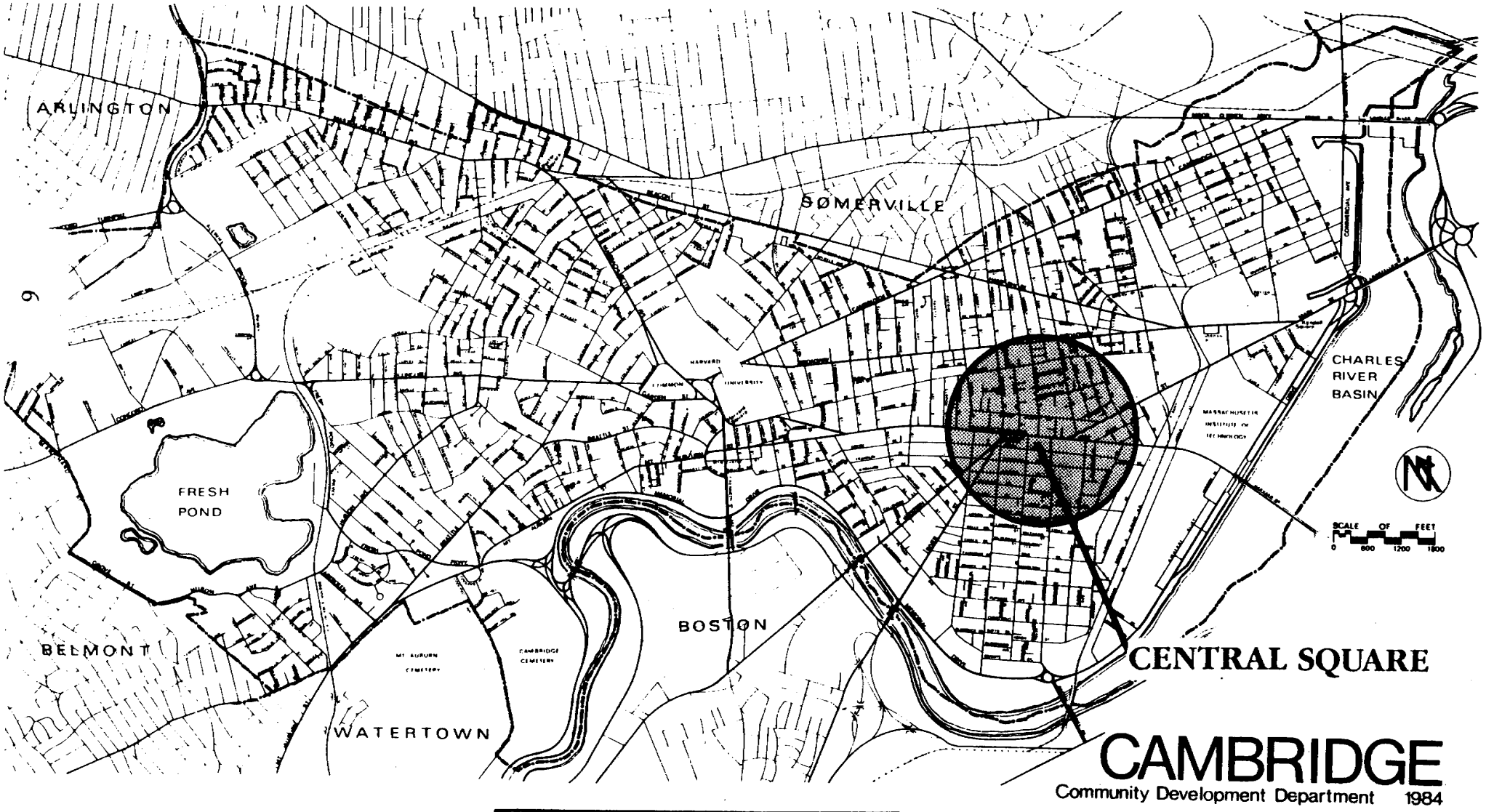
STUDY AREA

Central Square is located at the junction of four diverse Cambridge neighborhoods: Neighborhood 4; Mid-Cambridge; Cambridgeport; and Riverside. It contains a varied mix of retail, eating and drinking, office and residential uses. The Square's concentration of commercial activity is located between two major institutional nodes. One of these nodes includes City Hall, the YMCA, the YWCA, the U.S. Post Office, the Division of Employment Security and various religious organizations and is the western boundary. The eastern boundary and second institutional node is defined by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

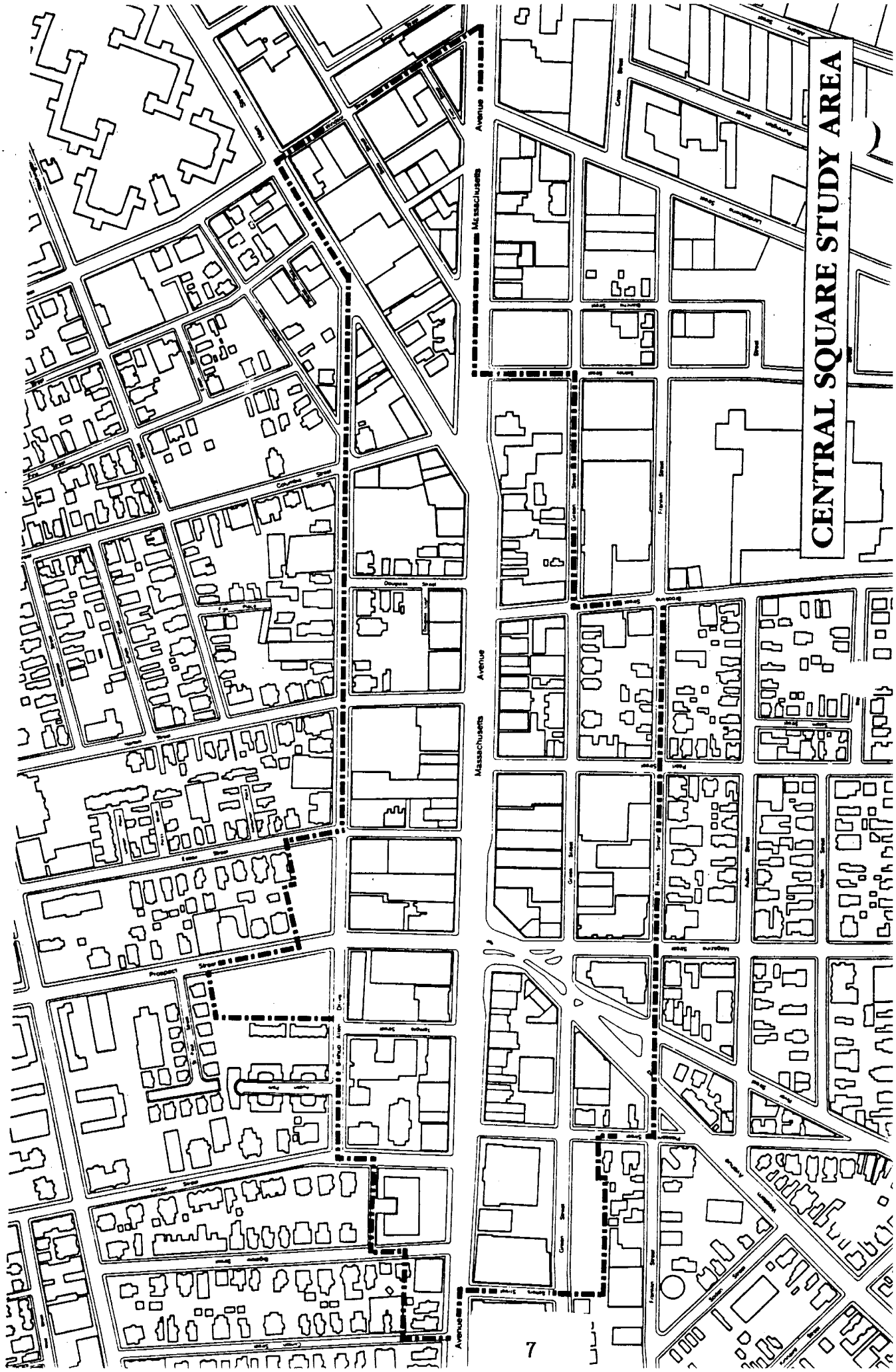
Central Square is centrally located in Cambridge between Harvard University and MIT and lies along the City's main thoroughfare, Massachusetts Avenue. The Square is within minutes to both the Mass Pike and Route 93. Public transportation is provided by numerous bus routes and the MBTA Red Line subway (refer to Location Map on page 6.

The Central Square study area consists of the business district which runs along Massachusetts Avenue between Clinton/Sellers Streets on the west and Sidney/Windsor Streets on the east. The boundary extends approximately one block north from Massachusetts Avenue to Bishop Allen Drive and between one to two blocks south to Green Street and Franklin Street. The boundaries also include two large underdeveloped land parcels north of Bishop Allen Drive along Prospect Street (refer to the Central Square Study Area Map on page 7.

The boundaries extend beyond the primary commercial area which lies between Inman Street and Lafayette Square for the following reasons: 1) To include the City Hall institutional node which clearly is identified as being in Central Square; 2) To include the entire Business - B zone in the study; 3) To gain a better understanding of how the Square does or does not work as a continuous commercial strip; and 4) To evaluate impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods.



LOCATION MAP


CENTRAL SQUARE STUDY AREA
Massachusetts Avenue
Massachusetts Avenue
Prospect Street
Columbia Street
Douglass Street
Franklin Street
Green Street
Magazine Street
Auburn Street
Pearl Street
Bishop Allen Drive
Temple Street
Avenue

HISTORY OF A COMMERCIAL CENTER

Central Square's beginning as a commercial center pre-dates back to Cambridge's incorporation as a City. Its cyclical rise and fall as a market is evident in the Square's image today. Understanding these cycles can aid us in formulating plans for Central Square's future.

Central Square's rise to prominence as a commercial center began in 1793 with the construction of the West Boston Bridge in the location of the present Longfellow Bridge. The Bridge drew commercial traffic down River Street, Western Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue to Main Street and the market and port of Boston beyond. Initially, settlement clustered on the highground around Lafayette Square. Taverns, blacksmith shops, stores and warehouses, as well as houses for about 100 residents in and around Central Square comprised the area's settlement at the turn of the 19th century.

Freight wagons, omnibuses, and foot traffic bound for the West Boston Bridge encouraged commercial growth in Central Square between River and Main Streets. The rest of the village of Cambridgeport grew slowly in the first half of the 19th century. Much of the land south and east of Central Square was marshy and ill-suited to either housing or farming. In 1853, this changed when construction of an embankment for the Grand Junction Railroad allowed for the draining and filling of land in Cambridgeport. Factories grew up alongside the railroad tracks while housing for commuters to Boston was built closer to Massachusetts Avenue. By the 1870s, Cambridgeport was a bustling area of factories and suburban housing whose commercial core was Central Square.

The late 19th century scale of Central Square was fairly uniform with three, four, and five story buildings. Most of Central Square's buildings had retail storefronts on the ground floor and offices above, though the upper floors of a few buildings contained apartments. The period from 1870 to 1912 was Central Square's heyday, when many of the City's most prominent doctors, lawyers, real estate brokers, insurance agents and other businessmen maintained offices there. Many other important commercial establishments also operated in Central Square, including the Cambridge Chronicle and four other Cambridge newspapers.

The development of transportation networks in the 19th century were instrumental to the physical and economic growth of Central Square. Transportation developments in the 20th century had considerable different implications for the Square.

The opening of the subway from Harvard Square to Boston in 1912 significantly reduced the commuting time to Boston's business centers drawing trade away from Central Square. In addition, the automobile opened up the western suburbs for expansion while Cambridgeport declined in population. Central Square lost its prominence as a regional commercial center and now served primarily local market needs.

As Central Square shifted to a neighborhood - based economy in the 1920's the scale of the Square changed dramatically to reflect this shift. Several of the larger buildings in the square were cut down in size from multi-story structures to one and two story structures. When older buildings were demolished they were replaced with one and two story "taxpayer" structures. These structures were intended to provide the owners with income sufficient to pay the taxes on the property until such time, as the market warranted the replacement of these buildings with more intensive development.

Slowly, Central Square started to rebuild its economy, but the plans to build an eight-lane commuter "inner-belt" highway in the 1960's negatively affected property values and contributed to the trend of disinvestment. Although the "inner-belt" plans were defeated Central Square was unable to turn around this trend of disinvestment. Todays commercial uses are dominated by lower-end goods and eating and drinking establishments.

Many of the prominent structures of Central Square's heyday are still a part of the Square today, but neglect, layers of old signage and "modern" storefronts hide the historical charm and detailing of many of these structures. New hope is awakening in Central Square today. Major rehabilitation project such as the YMCA, MBTA Red Line Station, Shawmut Bank, 485 and 678 Massachusetts Avenue renovations have shown a new commitment to the Square. New construction has shown an emphasis on housing as evidenced by Church Corner Apartments and the proposed development at 595 Massachusetts Avenue. Revitalization efforts have received major public and private attention. It is through these efforts that Central Square will grow into the 21st Century.

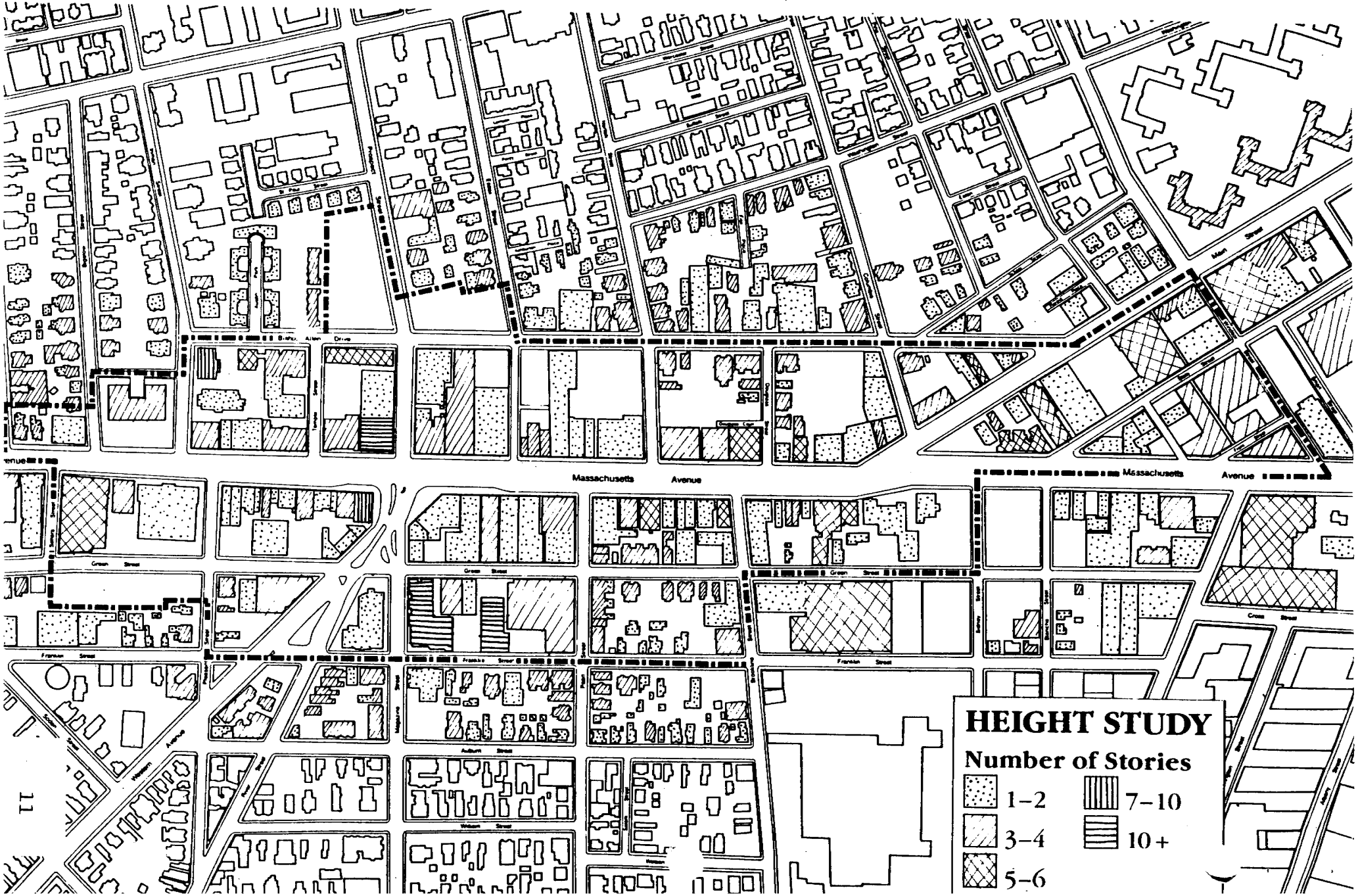
GOALS FOR ACTION

The real estate market has undergone dramatic changes in Massachusetts over the last five years. The rapid escalation of property values has caused grave concern for Cambridge residents and business people as property owners cash in on appreciated property values. In many cases the sale of property leads to an intensification of development for underdeveloped land and displacement of existing businesses. As can be seen in the Building Heights map on page 11 many of the buildings in Central Square are developed well below their 4.0 FAR potential. This has led to a concern over the future changes in Central Square's density, retail composition and diversity. As development pressures increase and the proposed development at University Park takes shape Central Square is certain to change.

The purpose of this report is to develop a long range Action Plan that will be economically viable and respectful of the Square's present unique retail environment. The goals of the plan are to:

- encourage responsible and orderly development;
- strengthen the retail base and the market capture of the neighborhoods;
- preserve the Square's cultural diversity;
- create an active people-oriented space;
- improve the physical and visual environment;
- provide retail establishments that cater to the people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods;
- encourage the development of new mixed income housing units; and
- promote compatable retail adjacent to residential uses.

The realization of these goals can only be achieved through the continued cooperation of residents, business people, property owners, developers, and the City. Community support from all groups and diligent implementation of the Action Plan will provide a clearer understanding of Central Square's future vision.


HEIGHT STUDY
Number of Stories
1–2
3–4
5–6
7–10
10+
Massachusetts Avenue
Massachusetts Avenue
Green Street
Franklin Street
Auburn Street
Cross Street
Main Street
Western Avenue

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

During the two year planning process the Economic Development Subcommittee met with neighborhood and business groups through community and individual group meetings. Economics Research Associates of Cambridge was retained to undertake a Market Analysis which included a neighborhood, business and consumer survey. In addition Subcommittee members attended License Commission, Board of Zoning Appeal, Planning Board, and City Council hearings to achieve a fuller understanding of the everyday issues and concerns of Central Square businesses, residents and property owners.

Most retailers and residents agree that the creation of a cleaner, safer environment and better selection and quality of goods would make significant strides in strengthening Central Square's retail draw. One concern of the business community not entirely shared by the neighborhoods is the need for more parking.

The area of greatest disagreement between residential and business communities lies in the appropriateness and degree of new development in Central Square. Neither between nor within the resident and business groups is agreement unanimous. Residential concerns associated with developments are primarily the impacts of height, traffic and parking, and gentrification of the Square. Business concerns are centered around displacement, escalating rents, and the apparent lack of interest of some property owners to make improvements in their leased spaces.

Residents and some business people agree that Central Square offers a good selection of eating and drinking establishments, but feel that these establishments are becoming too numerous, especially fast food establishments. Although restaurants are plentiful and varied most people agree that American, deli and family-style restaurants are lacking. Many restaurant owners expressed concerns over the large number of restaurants competing for the same business, making it difficult for all to be successful.

Additionally, fast food etablishments are the generators of much of the litter and trash found in the Square. Improper disposal of paper and plastic products is contributing to the negative physical image of the Square.

The City has also experienced some concern over how to effectively classify restaurants as to their true intent to cater primarily to a take-out clientele or to be a sit down restaurant. Definitional problems in the City's Zoning Ordinance have allowed what appear to be fast food oriented restaurants to receive

common victuallers licenses and has prompted a temporary fast food moratorium in Central Square adopted by the City Council until the Action Plan is completed.

Central Square is located on Massachusetts Avenue, the City's main throughway. Easy access is provided to the Massachusetts Turnpike via Western Avenue and River Street and to Route 93. Given its central location car and truck traffic has become a problem for Central Square. Presently compounding the traffic problem is the disruption to traffic flow caused by the construction of the MBTA Red Line Station renovations and the Central Square Enhancement Project. Although construction activities will result in a more attractive environment when completed, the traffic disruption, trash, noise, and visual chaos resulting from the long construction period has begun to wear on the residents, patrons and merchants of Central Square.

An area of concern primarily for the residents south of Massachusetts Avenue on or near Green Street and Brookline Street is centered around the land use conflict resulting from the infiltration of night club uses into primarily residential areas. Night clubs in this area have raised concerns over noise and parking in the evening and late night hours.

These concerns are only a broad view of those expressed by the community. Other concerns include the plight of the homeless, crime, loitering and maintenance of the Square. All of these issues contribute to the negative image people have of Central Square. It is the role of the Economic Development Subcommittee through its varied representatives to see that the concerns of all parties are addressed fairly in the Action Plan.

CURRENT CHANGES

Slowly economic pressures are beginning to take shape in Central Square through modernization, renovation and new construction. After many years of disinvestment property owners are beginning to reinvest in their quickly appreciating properties. Properties including Hi-Fi Pizza, the YMCA, Shawmut County Bank, and SEA Consultants have undergone substantial rehabilitation. Projects such as these are necessary to establish a solid building base and reestablish a positive physical appearance of the Square.

Public improvements to the MBTA Red Line are nearing completion and evidence of a new pedestrian oriented streetscape are becoming apparent. In addition, the creation of a new open space project, the Central Square Enchancement Project, is under construction and will be completed by the end of 1987. These public improvement projects are evidence of a reclamation of Central Square for the pedestrian. Construction and traffic have ruled too long contributing to negative perceptions of the Square.

A new mixed-use residential/retail complex, Church Corner Apartments, has already brought more people into the heart of Central Square to live and shop. Another mixed-use residential/commercial development is planned for the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Essex Street. Bringing people to live, shop, work and socialize in Central Square is what is needed to breathe renewed life into the Square.

Other changes are still ongoing and their impact on Central Square is not yet clear. The development of University Park over the next ten years with its retail space and new employees will add a new dimension to the Central Square market. University Park is a 27 acre site in the Cambridgeport neighborhood owned by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Plans include a mixed use proposal for research and development space, light industrial spaces, office space, retail space, housing, a hotel and conference center, parking, and open space.

Vacancies and the turn over of small businesses are becoming more common in Central Square. Eating and drinking establishments are first to seek occupancy in the vacant storefronts, but the present fast food moratorium has been successful at keeping them at bay while the Action Plan was being developed.

As development pressures increase it will become increasingly more difficult to try to stabilize the speculation in the retail environment. Development and implementation of the Action Plan has never been more critical to the realization of the revitalization goals for Central Square.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

Development objectives have been formulated out of the information gathered through meetings, reports, research and discussions over the course of the planning process. An improved retail environment is contingent upon a clear understanding of the retail, housing, open space, and parking and transportation objectives designed to achieve the goals of the Action Plan.

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT

Central Square offers four major strengths as a business district; a central location in Cambridge; excellent access via public transportation and highways; a unique variety of business establishments; and a sincere commitment by many of its businesses to stay in the Square. Yet despite its strengths it fails to capture the buying power of its surrounding residential neighborhoods and the local work force. The Square's once strong retail draw has eroded over the years.

According to the Market Analysis by Economics Research Associates (ERA) strong neighborhood customer loyalty has not been established in Central Square. Harvard Square is its main competitor for items such as books, records and clothing. Neighborhood residents and shopper respondents to ERA's survey suggest that to strengthen and increase shopping desirability in Central Square the Square needs to improve the quality of its merchandise, its retail mix, and the appearance and safety of its environment.

Business survey respondents expressed a desire to stay in Central Square, but there is a universal desire among the business community to see that both the actual and the perceived images of the Square are improved. Improvements to building facades, store displays and public areas would assist in improving the physical appearance of the Square. Increased police presence via foot patrols was recommended to improve both the incidences and perceptions of crime. (Over the last few months police visibility has been increased in the Square and has relieved some youth associated problems.)

The quality of the existing buildings in Central Square is mixed. There are still many one and two story "tax payer" structures in the Square, but many of the older structures still have retained the architectural detailing and workmanship prevalent in the Square's heyday. Much of this detailing may be difficult to see because it lies beneath layers of old signage, dirt and modern storefronts. The dignity of these older buildings can be restored and would add to the quality of the building stock in Central Square which has started with those structures which have alreadey been renovated. Preservation of these buildings should be encouraged because of the added quality of life, scale, and rich history they bring to the Square.

Retail Development Objectives

The Central Square Action Plan can help to provide for the viability of Central Square as a retail district by encouraging a more diverse mix of business establishments to locate in the Square and by promoting a strong retail frontage. In meeting these goals the following actions are proposed to support a healthier retail environment.

Use

- Businesses now in Central Square should be encouraged to remain.
- Vacancies should be filled by businesses that will complement and complete the existing retail offerings.
- Affordable space should be provided for small start-up retail businesses.
- Establishments which provide live entertainment should be located away from residential areas or provide appropriate measures to avoid problems arising from incompatible land uses.
- A strong linear retail frontage should be maintained along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street.

Business Assistance

- Technical assistance should be made available for merchants to improve storefront displays, make facade improvements, and carry out unified promotions.

Scale

- The scale and architectural style of development should be compatible with historically significant structures and residential areas.

Signage

- A unified signage plan should be created and implemented. New signage should conform, not only to the basic requirements of the sign ordinance, but to a vision of Central Square as a special people oriented place. Large scale signs oriented to the automobile should be phased out as soon as possible.
- All old signage should be removed by the property owner shortly after a tenant vacates a space.

Safety

- Greater police visibility and enforcement of traffic, litter, noise and loitering laws should create a safer and more secure environment.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Although the Action Plan is primarily concerned with developing a viable marketplace objectives for housing; streets, sidewalks and open space; and traffic and parking need to become an integral part of that goal.

The pressure of the housing market has had sigificant impacts on the affordability of housing throughout Cambridge and the greater Boston metropolitan area. The strength of the current "luxury" housing market leaves little incentive for the development of affordable units.

Central Square is surrounded by four very distinct residential neighborhoods: Neighborhood 4, Mid-Cambridge, Cambridgeport, and Riverside. These neighborhoods are constantly besieged by students, professionals, families, and the elderly looking for housing. The limited number of available units go to those who can afford to pay market rate prices. Historically Central Square neighborhoods have provided housing opportunities for all income levels, but the scarcity and high price of land is narrowing that range. New office developments in Kendall Square and Cambridgeport will add to the increased demand on housing in the surrounding Central Square neighborhoods.

Fortunately the recent softening of the office market in Cambridge has made housing an attractive development option in commercial areas. The recently completed Church Corner Apartments project provides ground floor retail with mixed-income apartment units above. State and federal programs provided the subsidies for the below market rate units. Another mixed-use development proposed for the corner of Essex Street and Massachusetts Avenue will provide a percentage of below market rate units through the incentive provided by the long term lease of City owned land.

Providing housing opportunities within the Central Square commercial area will aid in animating and enlivening the Square while attracting potential shoppers and additional users to help police the area.

Housing Development Objectives

The Central Square Action Plan encourages housing development in conjunction with new retail development in the revitalization area. The development of housing and retail uses will need to be planned to ensure compatibility of the land uses and to avoid conflicts between these uses. Housing opportunities for all income groups should be provided wherever possible. The following objectives encourage mixed use retail and housing development in Central Square.

Affordability

- The City owned parking lots on Bishop Allen Drive at Norfolk Street and Douglas-Columbia Streets and on Green Street should be used as incentives for the development of mixed-income housing, either rental or ownership. Displaced parking must be replaced within the Square and available to the public at a cost comparable to other public space within Central Square.

- Developers should be encouraged to participate in State and Federal subsidy programs for the creation of below market rate units.

- New residential units should be provided in a range of unit sizes.

Scale

- New development should respect the size and scale of adjacent areas with the maximum height concentrated along Massachusetts Avenue.

Compatability

- Review the appropriateness of the business zoning for the areas south of Green Street to minimize land use conflicts.

STREETS, SIDEWALKS AND OPEN SPACE

Until recently Central Square's only public and open space amenities were found in the green grass areas in front of City Hall, the Post Office and the First Baptist Church along with the few trees that dot Massachusetts Avenue. Presently under construction are the MBTA Red Line improvements and the Central Square Enhancement Project. Both projects will be completed by late 1987 and will provide a safer and more pedestrian oriented character to the public spaces around Central Square.

These projects though are only beginning to scratch the hard surfaces that make up the balance of Central Square's public space. The MBTA street level improvements include only the areas from Prospect Street/Western Avenue to Norfolk/Pearl Streets. The Enhancement Project continues these street and open space improvements down River Street and Western Avenue to Franklin Street. The Enhancement Project continues these street and open space improvements down River Street and Western Avenue to Franklin Street. The Enhancement Project should be extended down Western Avenue to at least the intersection of Auburn Street to address the pedestrian-vehicular conflict at that intersection.

In addition to improving sidewalks on Massachusetts Avenue and the side streets that lead to Bishop Allen Drive and Green Street the public parking areas are sorely lacking landscape amenities and need to be better integrated into the commercial area.

Almost unamimously the primary recommendation from residents, business people, property owners and shoppers is to clean up the Square. The long construction period for the MBTA and now the new construction work for the Enhancement Project has added to the run down and dirty appearance of the Square. The speedy completion of these projects will add greatly to the beginning of a new positive image and improved business, shopper and resident moral. Also, the need for clean public restroom facilities has been recommended to provide better shopper convenience.

Streets, Sidewalks and Open Space Objectives

Further improvements in open space are needed in the areas not covered by the MBTA and the Enhancement Project. Even upon completion of the MBTA project there will be many areas without trees or greenery because of the extensive vault and utility system that lies beneath the sidewalks. Improvement and maintenance of these improvements to Central Square's physical image, both public and private, is essential to gain consumer confidence and interest. The following objectives support the goal to improve the Square's physical and visual image. (Refer to the Urban Design Plan on page 40.)

Streets and Sidewalks

- Improvements now underway along Massachusetts Avenue should be continued to Bigelow and Sellers Streets and to Main and Sydney Streets.

- Sidewalks along Massachusetts Avenue between Essex Street and Main Street should be widened where possible.

- Pedestrian scale lighting should be installed along Massachusetts Avenue from City Hall to Main Street and down Western Avenue into the Enhancement Project. The same "Washington Post" light standard used elsewhere on Massachusetts Avenue should also be used in Central Square.

- Improvements should be made at the corner of Western Avenue and Auburn Street that will provide for safer and easier pedestrian access. Improvements should be seen as a continuation of the Central Square Enhancement Project.

- Create a stronger focal point at Lafayette Square either through a landmark building or landscaping.

- Public restrooms should be provided within the business area.

- The appearance of secondary public ways such as Green Street, Bishop Allen Drive, Temple Street, Norfolk Street, etc. should be improved by repairing sidewalks, signage, lighting and where possible provide new trees.
- A kiosk and directory system including a Central Square logo and distinctive signage should be developed to locate public facilities, announce attractions, locate parking and advertise promotions.
- The entry and sitting area in front of City Hall should be enhanced.

Open Space

- All new development projects should include landscaping and open space areas as part of their project.

Maintenance

- Maintenance of all street and sidewalk and open space improvements should become a priority and a combined effort of both the City and the Central Square Business Association.
- All laws pertaining to littering should be strongly enforced.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING

Massachusetts Avenue is a main throughway across Cambridge. Western Avenue, River Street, Prospect Street and Main Street all carry traffic to and from the surrounding highways. Large volumes of traffic continue to flow through Central Square every day. In addition, Central Square is a main stop over and terminus for many of the MBTA bus lines and truck route. The noise, fumes and confusion caused by the large volume of traffic add to the negative physical and perceived image of Central Square.

Pedestrians constantly vie with trucks, cars and buses. Again the present construction situation has caused more confusion than what would be expected. When the MBTA Red Line improvements are completed traffic should move more smoothly and problems associated with bus layovers should be reduced. In addition, plans for an alternate truck route are being studied that would remove truck traffic from Western Avenue and River Street further reducing congestion. Despite these efforts traffic will continue to be a prominent force in this highly pedestrian commercial area.

Public transportation in and around Central Square is served by numerous bus lines, the MBTA redline subway and taxicabs. The MBTA is presently undergoing a Circumferential Transit Feasibility Study which will examine possible improved transit services for Boston and its surrounding areas. The present MBTA redline construction project is expanding subway platform areas to accommodate longer subway trains and therefore more passengers. During this construction process taxicab stands have been temporarily relocated. The taxicab services within the Square are important to the Square's public transportation offerings and should continue to provide service for the Square's public transportation users upon completion of construction.

The Square has five municipal public parking lots, a public parking garage, and many metered parking spaces along Massachusetts Avenue and on side streets. In total there are approximately 850 to 900 public parking spaces available in Central Square. Central Square has more available and reasonably priced public parking facilities than any other retail area in Cambridge. The public parking lots most often full are the lots on Green Street behind the Post Office and the lot at Bishop Allen Drive and Norfolk Street. Parking is usually available in the garage and in the Bishop Allen/Columbus/Douglas Street lot. Despite the availability of parking many merchants believe that the lack of parking is keeping potential customers away.

Most of the inability to find parking comes from not knowing where the parking is located. Public lots are poorly signed and customers easily get confused in the pattern of one way streets around the Square. Also, many employees utilize the public parking spaces leaving fewer spaces for customers.

Security has been cited as a concern by persons using the municipal parking lots and garage. Visual and physical access from Massachusetts Avenue to these lots is limited because of their location behind buildings which do not open up to the lots.

Many of the businesses in Central Square do not have loading or service areas off of the public right of way. As a result it is not uncommon to find delivery trucks blocking passage on sidewalks on Green Street and side streets, and double parked on Massachusetts Avenue.

The new development in and around Central Square will add to the existing traffic system. How this added traffic is handled is critical to the future traffic situation in Central Square and surrounding areas.

Traffic and Parking Objectives

Improvements to the traffic and parking situation in Central Square are necessary to improving the physical and visual image of the Square as well as the Square's liveability and capacity to absorb any new development.

Public Transportation

- MBTA bus route lay overs should be minimized and moved to Kendall Square or elsewhere where appropriate.
- Use of the MBTA by employees should be encouraged by employers.
- Employers in the Square should be encouraged to participate in an area wide transit plan.
- Taxicab stands should be replaced in Central Square upon completion of the MBTA red line improvements.

Parking

- A transportation consultant should be retained to conduct a parking supply assessment, to evaluate parking requirements, and to evaluate the potential for restricted loading hours.

- Signage should be upgraded directing people and cars to public parking lots.

- The adequacy of the lighting along side streets leading to and in the public parking lots should be assessed for security and improved where needed.

Private Transportation

- Bicycle racks should be provided to promote bicycling.

- Plans to remove truck traffic from River Street and Western Avenue should be supported and encouraged.

Roadway Improvements

- The condition of sidewalks and roadways should be improved where needed.

- The intersection of Western Avenue and Auburn Street should be redesigned to provide safe and easy pedestrian crossings.

Service Vehicles

- Loading hours should be monitored to avoid conflicts with peak pedestrian useage and automobile traffic.

THE URBAN DESIGN PLAN

The urban design plan is the blueprint for Central Square's physical future. It embodies the development potential needs, concerns, and objectives established during the planning process. The urban design plan provides the Square a unified and workable development plan for the decade ahead.

URBAN DESIGN OBJECTIVES

The building blocks of Central Square's future can be found in its past. The urban design plan builds from the strong fabric of historical structures surviving in Central Square today. They provide the Square with a rich heritage and character that gets lost in some of todays concrete and steel structures. The objectives of the urban design plan for Central Square are as follows.

Preservation

- Preserve, through restoration, rehabilitation and/or reuse all Potential Landmark buildings as identified by the Cambridge Historical Commission in (revised July, 1987) their "Historic and Architectural Evaluation of Structures". (See Architectural Features map in Appendix VII.)

- Wherever possible, preserve, through restoration, rehabilitation and/or reuse , all Potentially Significant buildings as identified by the Cambridge Historical Commission in their "Historical and Architectural Evaluation of Structures" (revised July, 1987). (See Architectural Features map in Appendix VII.)

Massing and Height

- Encourage new construction compatible with predominant materials, setbacks, scale, height, and massing of pre-1950 Central Square buildings.

- Encourage the building height along Massachusetts Avenue to step down as it approaches a residential area.

Signage

- As storefronts are upgraded and new signage developed, ensure that storefronts and sign design is compatible with the historic character of the building.

- New signage should be oriented towards the pedestrian and not the automobile.

Activity

- Create an animated and active environment both in the day time and evening hours.

- Provide safe and inviting links between the business area and neighborhoods.

- Develop pedestrian amenities in public areas using the same materials and colors used in the MBTA and Central Square Enhancement projects.

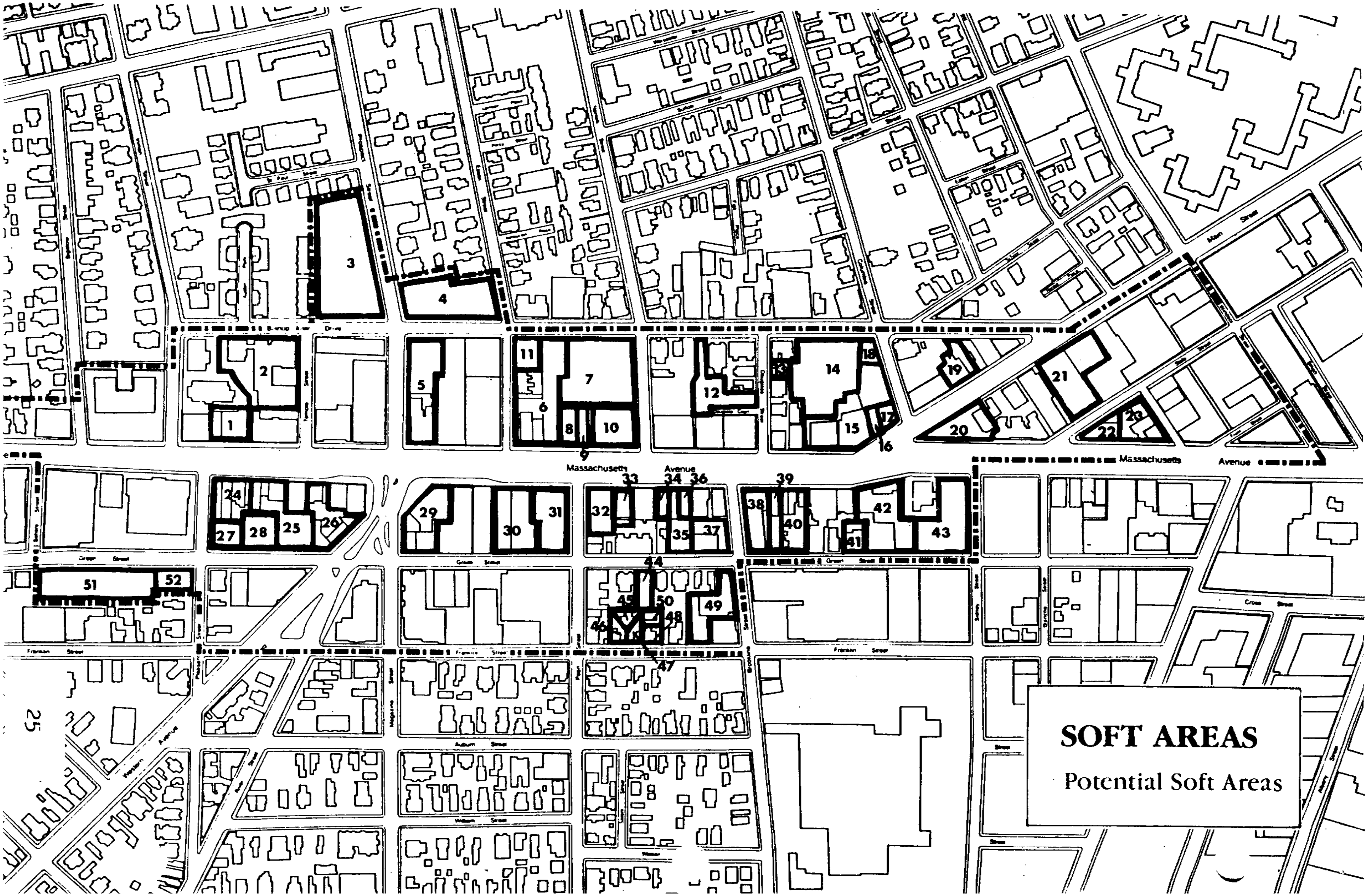
Renovations and rehabilitation of Central Square's older structures will aid in the development of a more desireable image for the Square. Recapturing the character, warmth and detailing of the structures determined to be significant or potentially significant will strengthen the framework from which underdeveloped parcels or non significant structures can rebuild while quickly reestablishing the Square's unique historic identity.

The urban design plan views each potential development site as a site within the context of Central Square and not as a project solely unto itself. The design, height, setback, bulk, orientation access, etc. of each project should respect the buildings around it and not diminish their integrity.

THE URBAN DESIGN PLAN

The urban design plan establishes general development guidelines and criteria to use as a review for development proposals. The Soft Areas map on page 25 shows properties which are the most likely sites for redevelopment within the next twenty years. This "hard/soft" analysis is based upon the degree to which the property is presently developed, the potential for combining several underdeveloped lots, the existing development determents (i.e., rent controlled units, long term tenant leases, architectural/historical significance, etc.), the interest expressed by some property owners, and the objectives expressed in this report. Hard buildings are those which do not seem likely to be redeveloped over the next twenty years, whereas buildings are more likely to be potential sites for future development.

The Hard/Soft analysis reveals that considerable development opportunitues and pressures will exist if market forces over the next twenty years continue to bear on the greater Boston area. Table #1 on page 26 outlines each potential development parcel and its present floor area ratio (FAR).


SOFT AREAS
Potential Soft Areas
Massachusetts Avenue
Bishop Allen Drive
Main Street
Green Street
Franklin Street
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
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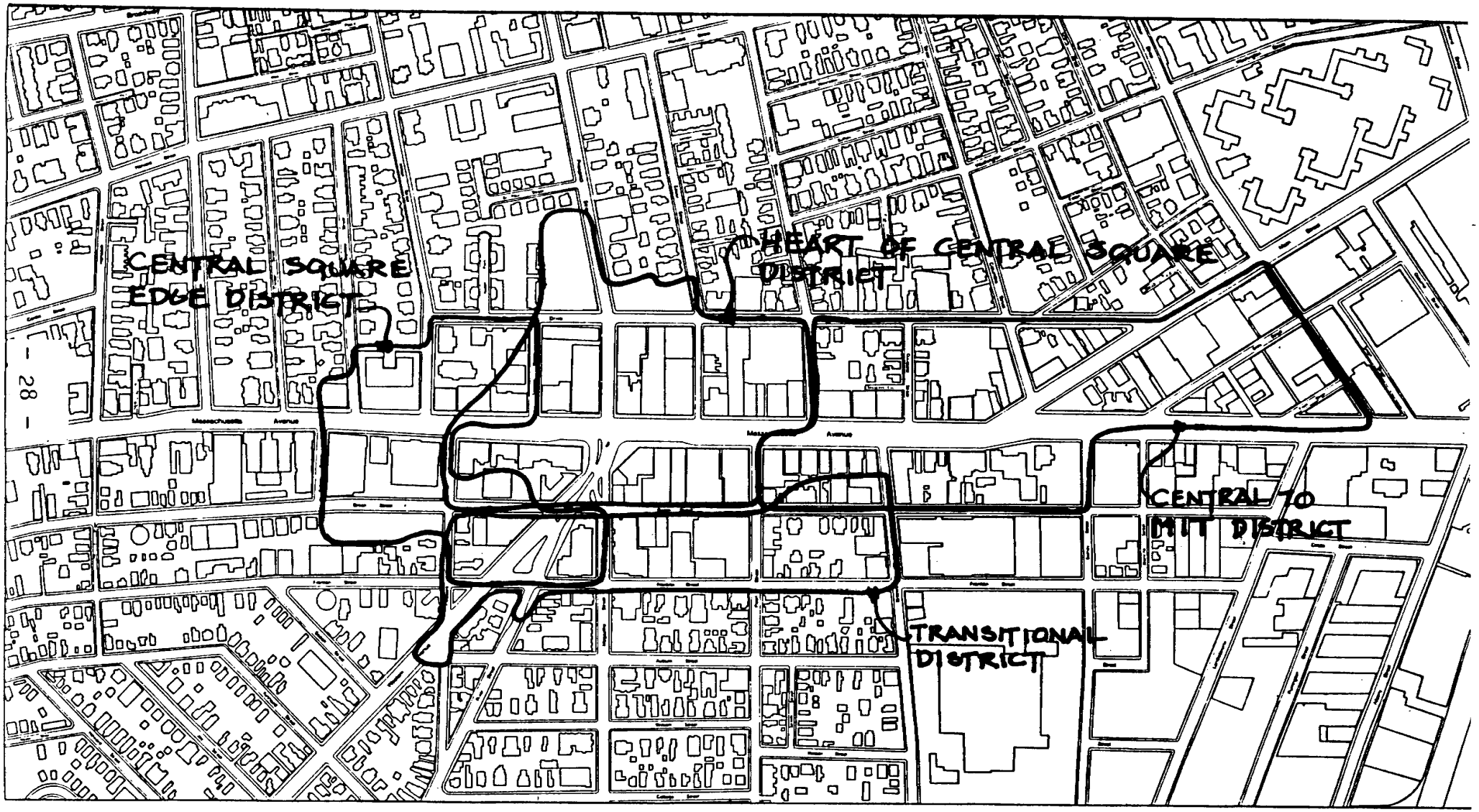
52

TABLE 1 : Potential Development Sites

Parcel	Property Owner	Approximate FAR
1	Central Trust	1.0
2	Cambridge YWCA	
3	Julius Tofias Company	0 (parking)
4	Julius Tofias Company	0 (parking)
5	Wm. Hennessey Trust	1.6
6	Jay R. Schochet & Langdon T. Clay	
7	City of Cambridge	0 (parking)
8	James & Barbara Hill	2.0
9	Harry N. Katis	2.0
10	Max & Mary Naggar	1.0
11	City of Cambridge	0 (parking)
12	J.R. Fennell Realty Trust	0 (parking)
13	Wm McAvinney & Carolyn Fuller	1.0
14	City of Cambridge	0 (parking)
15	J.R. Fennell Realty Trust	1.0
16	Livingstone Selman	3.0
17	Albert Smith	1.0
18	Marks Wholesale Inc.	1.0
19	J.R. Fennell Realty Trust	.5
20	Shell Oil Co.	.25
21	U-Haul	1.3
22	S. Ullian	.8
23	L. Oshry (Superior Auto Warehouse)	.75
24	Barbara Murphy (Central Sq. Real Estate Trust)	.8
25	Harry M. Katis	2.0 & 0 (parking)
26	Maurice Simon (Central Trust)	.75
27	City of Cambridge	0 (parking)
28	Maurice Simon (Central Trust)	1.0
29	Holmes Real Estate Trust	1.2
30	Paul Cifrino	1.0
31	George & Ethel Rothman	2.25
32	Carl F. Barron	2.0
33	Nosleda Realty Corp.	2.0
34	Harold Rosenwald	1.0
35	Peter Tortorella & Julius Tate (Macy Realty Tr.)	1.25
36	Donald Holland	1.0
37	Maurice Simon (Central Trust)	1.25
38	Emile Dupont	.9
39	Albert Hom	.5
40	M.I.T.	.8
41	M.I.T.	
42	Salvation Army of Mass.	1.0
43	M.I.T.	0
44	Eiko Onagi & Satoru Toga	0 (parking)
45	Richard, Lydia, David & Anna Greenspan	1.0
46	Jane Stanley	1.0
47	Christine Connaire	1.0
48	Joseph & Gladys Mello	1.0
49	George & Ethel Rothman	.6
50	Gloria & John Martin	1.25
51	Cambridge YMCA	
52	City of Cambridge	0 (parking)

For discussion purposes Central Square can be broken down into four subdistricts. Each subdistrict has some unique qualities, but each is a part of one business district and therefore they are all interconnected. These subdistricts are as follows and can be seen on page 28:

- Central Square Edge District
- Heart of Central Square District
- Central Square to MIT District
- Transitional District



City of Cambridge

CENTRAL SQUARE ACTION PLAN

Central Square Economic Development Subcommittee

FEET

CENTRAL SQUARE DISTRICTS

Prepared by: Cambridge Community Development Department

January 198

INSTITUTIONAL DISTRICT

The boundaries of the Central Square Edge District are shown on page #30. It is also called the "Institutional Node: because it contains a range of governmental religious and neighborhood services.

This district is substantially developed and has a strong architectural presence and therefore provides a stable edge to the business district. The buildings are characteristic of the "Beaux Arts/City Beautiful" character and contribute substantially to the historic architectural quality of the Square.

Private Development

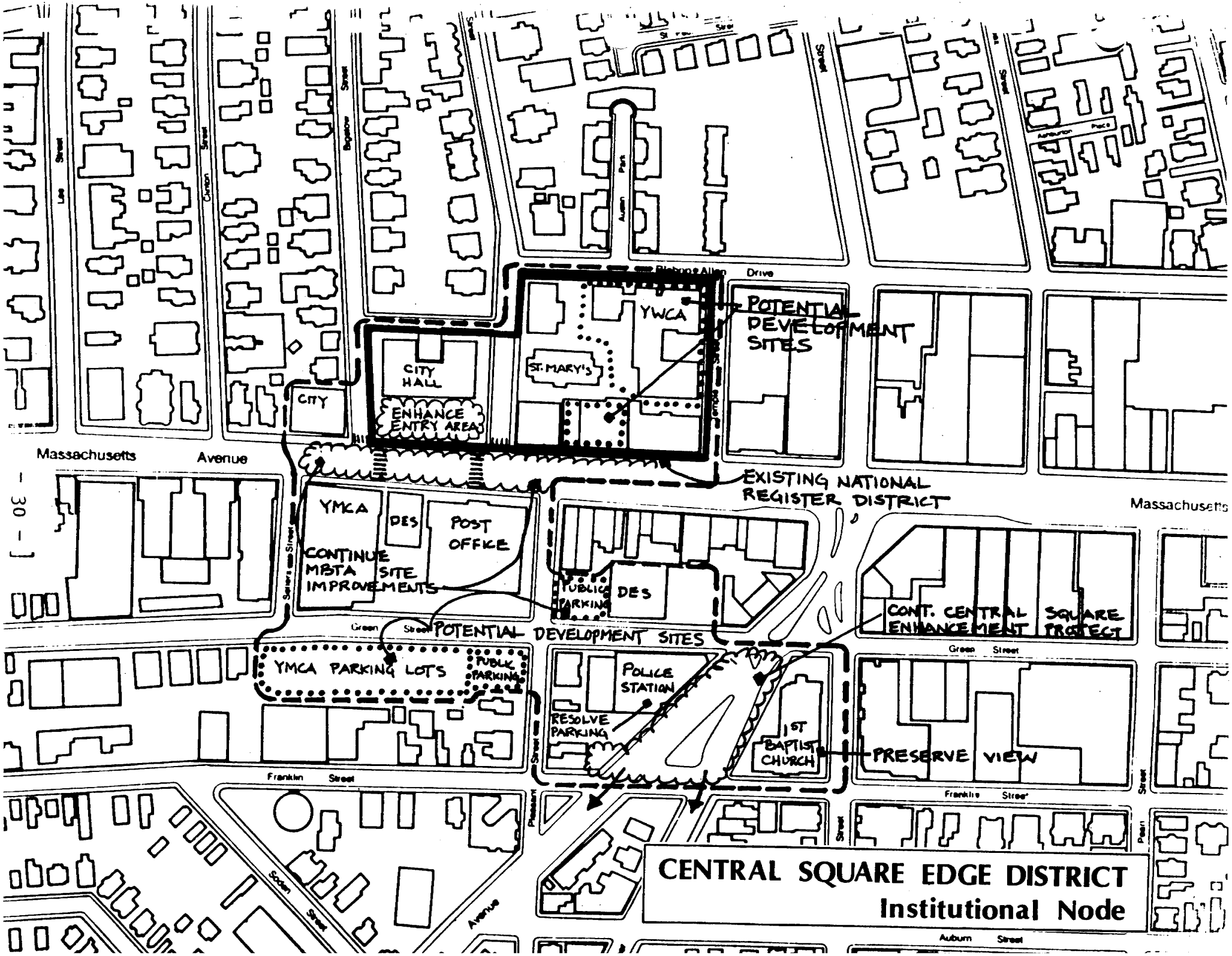
Within this district parcel nos. 1, 2, 27, 51 and 52 shown on the Soft Areas map on page 25 are the most likely to be affected by future development pressures. Parcel nos. 27, 51 and 52 are a stretch of parking lots along Green Street behind the YMCA and Post Office owned by the YMCA and the City of Cambridge. The presence of the City owned parking lots could be used as a tool to encourage mixed income housing, enclosed parking and open space.

Redevelopment of parcel no. 1 should be done with strict attention paid to its adjacent national register properties. Since it is on Massachusetts Avenue a strong retail frontage is necessary with possible upper level office development.

The YMCA and the YWCA have been falling on difficult financial times. Their presence in Central Square is important and every effort should be made to perpetuate their continued existance here. In light of the limited financial assistance available, if these properties are sold or redeveloped for other uses then maintenance of the architectural integrity of the buildings should be encouraged.

Public Spaces

Open space in the entire Central Square area is limited. One of the greatest opportunities for enhancing useable open space is in front of City Hall. This space should be enhanced by improving the existing entry and sitting area. Improvements will help to identify this area as an important and active public space. Tieing the area to the public sidewalks with uniform paving materials will anchor this edge of the business district to the retail area.



CENTRAL SQUARE EDGE DISTRICT
Institutional Node

HEART OF CENTRAL SQUARE DISTRICT

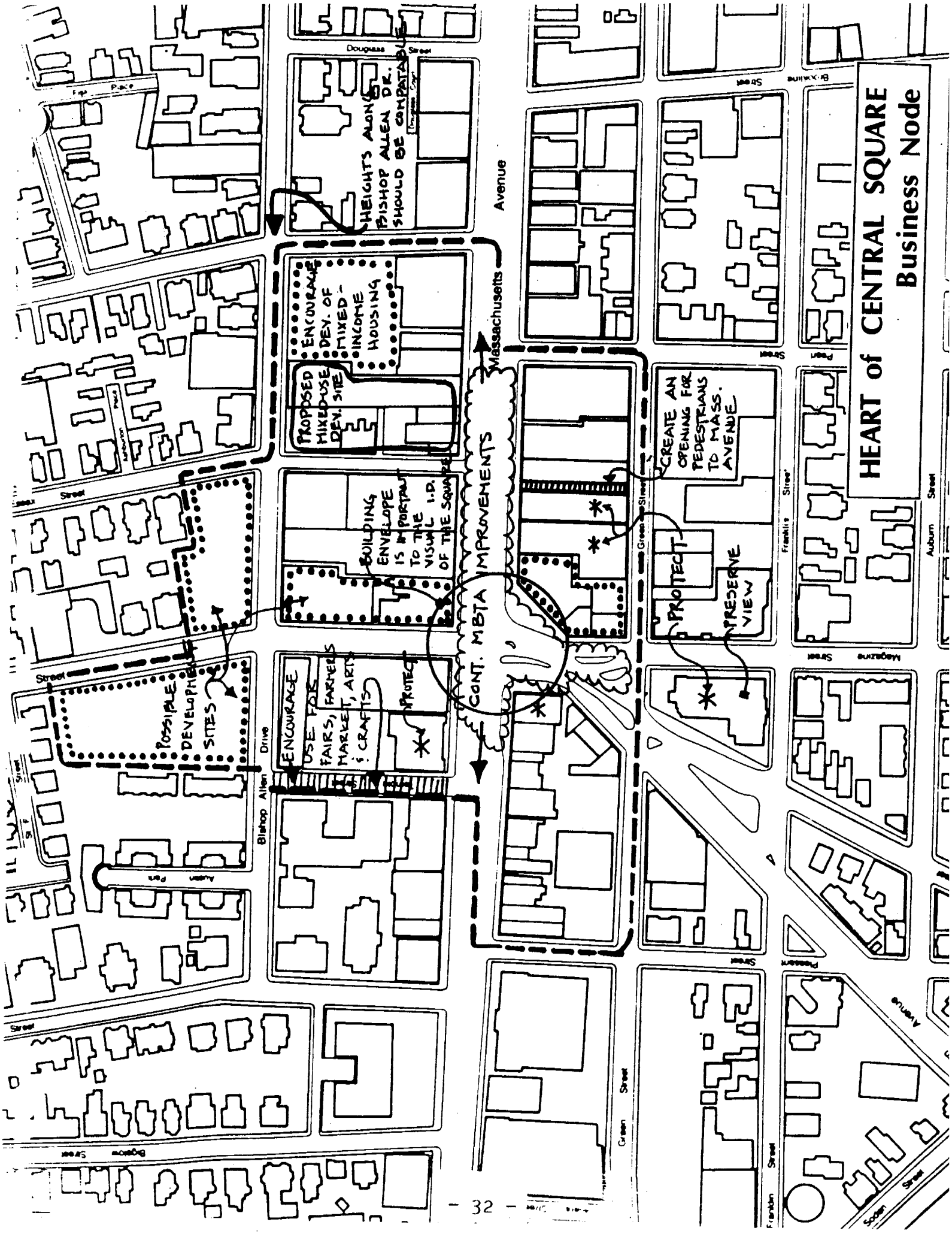
The "Heart of Central Square" is the area which contains the majority of the commercial uses and is what most people identify as "Central Square". The Heart of Central square is also being called the Business Node and is shown on page 32. This area contains a strong commercial use frontage with no voids in the building mass. Despite this strong frontage many parcels are "soft" and likely to be redeveloped in the near future. The soft buildings are primarily one to three story structures. In fact within the entire district there are only six structures containing more than four stories. No property owners, at present, control an entire block, but there are some large parcel owners and the possiblity of assembly is not unattainable. This district contains some of the largest individually owned land parcels in the Square.

Private Development

Two significant possibilities exist for the development of housing. Parcel Nos. 3 and 4 are presently used for accessory parking for the office tower at 675 Massachusetts Avenue. A mixed use development of ground floor retail, housing and structured parking would be appropriate for parcel no. 3 with town house development on parcel no. 4. The height and massing of these structures should be complementary to the adjacent residentially zoned areas. Open space in the mixed use area should be used as a buffer between the parking and commercial uses and adjacent residential uses.

The second housing opportunity and an opportunity to create affordable housing can be realized by using the City's parking lot at Bishop Allen Drive and Norfolk Street (Parcel No.7). This lot could be developed independently for housing and parking or in combination with one or more of the properties along Massachusetts Avenue. The public parking should be replaced as part of the development.

Commercial development is strong along Massachusetts Avenue and has started to filter down the side streets into the neighborhood. The transition between commercial and residential uses has been strained by the incompatability of certain commercial uses with residential uses. The block with the most land use conflicts is between Pearl Street and Brookline Avenue along Green Street. There are a number of residential units which face the service areas to commercial buildings and which are poorly maintained. In addition the intersection of Brookline and Green Street has a concentration of liquor and entertainment licenses which has created a constant outcry from abutting neighbors regarding noise, parking and patron disorderly conduct. Every effort should be made to minimize future land use conflicts.


HEART of CENTRAL SQUARE
Business Node
HEIGHTS ALONG BISHOP ALLEN DR. SHOULD BE COMPATABLE
ENCOURAGE DEV. OF MIXED-INCOME HOUSING
PROPOSED MIXED-USE DEV. SITE
BUILDING ENVELOPE IS IMPORTANT TO THE VISUAL I.D. OF THE SQUARE
CONT. MBTA IMPROVEMENTS
CREATE AN OPENING FOR PEDESTRIANS TO MASS. AVENUE
PROTECT
PRESERVE VIEW
POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT SITES
ENCOURAGE USE FOR FAIRS, FARMERS MARKET, ARTS & CRAFTS
PROTECT
Massachusetts Avenue
Douglass Street
Bishop Allen Drive
Green Street
Franklin Street
Auburn Street
Magazine Street
Pleasant Street
Avenue
Soden Street
Bigelow Street
Austin Park
Ashburton Place
Essex Street
Fish Place
Brookline Street
Pearl Street

Public Spaces

The MBTA Red Line improvements are an extensive renovation of the subway station and street level improvements. Construction has been ongoing for two years and should be completed by the end of 1987. New wider sidewalks, sitting areas, bus shelters, trees, and crosswalks are only some of the improvements being made along Massachusetts Avenue between Western Avenue and Pearl Street. These improvements have created public spaces that are more suited to the high volume of pedestrian use found in Central Square. A comprehensive maintenance program is necessary to ensure the longevity of the improvements and to maintain the image they will create.

The MBTA Red Line street and sidewalk improvements are limited to only a few blocks in the Square. Continuation of these improvements using the same materials and color palate throughout the business area will greatly aid in unifying the area visually.

CENTRAL SQUARE TO M.I.T. DISTRICT

As you head away from Central Square towards MIT the strong retail pattern begins to break up and give way to office space. Property holdings are generally smaller than in the previous district with the exception of land holdings by M.I.T., and J. R. Fennell Realty Trust and the Salvation Army. Also, properties are less likely to run the length of the block from Massachusetts Avenue to either Bishop Allen Drive or Green Street. The Central Square to M.I.T. District is shown on page 35.

Private Development

Blocks in this district are a combination of commercial structures mixed in with residential structures. This character is likely to continue because of the presence of rent controlled residential units (see the Rent Controled Residential Units Map in Appendix VIII) and the protection of these units under the City's Rent Control Ordinance. Except for the large properties noted above development in this area is not likely to be substantial unless several properties are combined. Despite this there are a number of sites determined to be "soft" because of the anticipated development pressures on underdeveloped land adjacent to the University Park development.

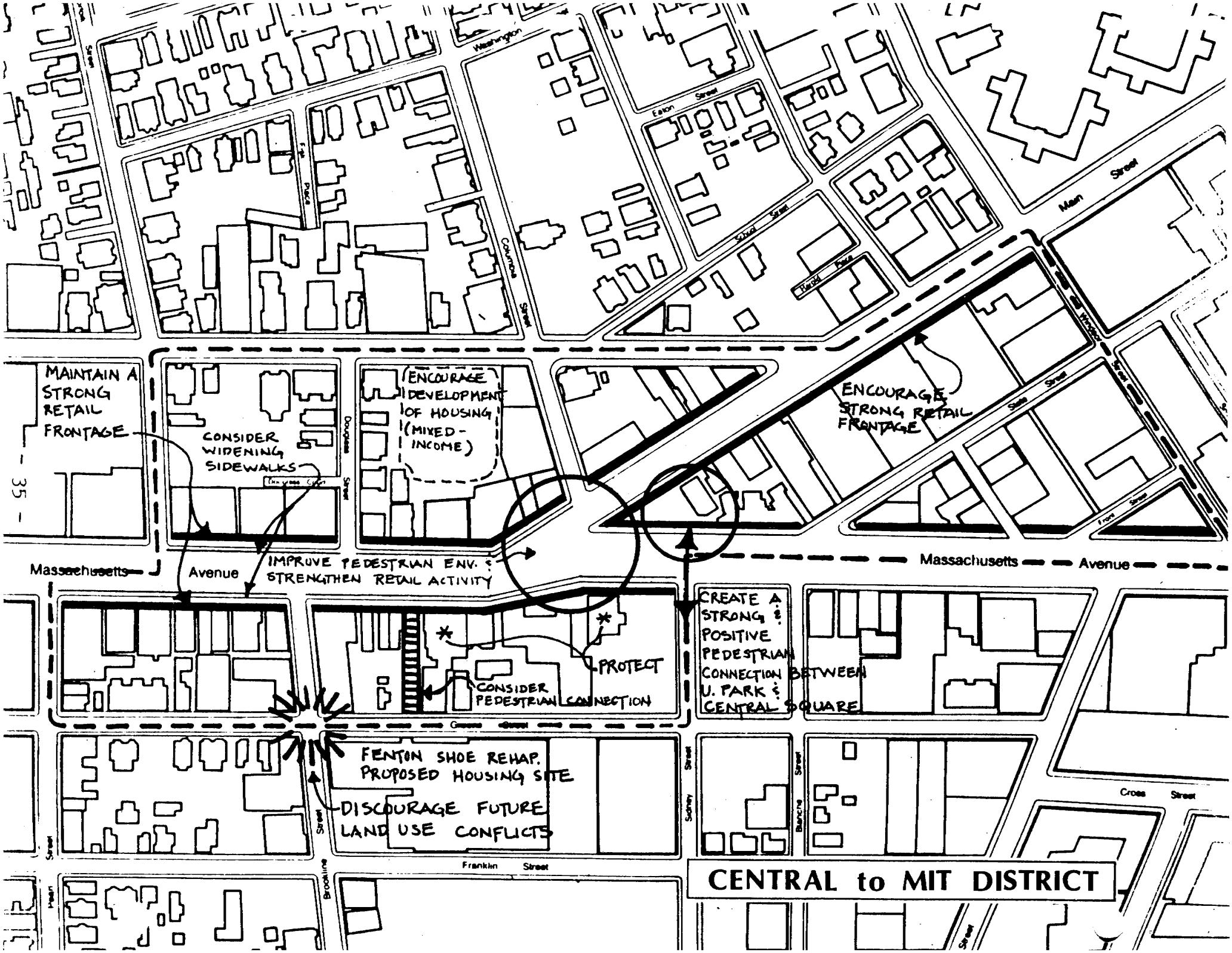
The City possesses yet another opportunity to create additional mixed income housing in Central Square. Parcel number 14 contains over half an acre of land. Acquisition of land on either Douglas Street or Columbia Street would improve access to and from this site if it were to be developed. Consideration of this lot, or any of the other lots previously mentioned, for housing development must replace the existing public parking within the Central Square area. Further analysis is needed to determine the most cost efficient way or location to replace this parking.

In order to strengthen the weak pedestrian and commercial frontage active retail uses should be continued along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street and office space disallowed at the ground floor level. An active commercial and pedestrian area is important to making a successful link between the Central Square business district and the proposed University Park development.

Public Spaces

Transportation improvements in combination with public space improvements should be made at Lafayette Square at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. The increased traffic that will be generated by development in Cambridgeport will require that special attention be given to managing traffic flows, both automotive and pedestrian.

It is particularly important to tie the MBTA street and sidewalk improvements to this district. The breakdown of active retail uses especially around Lafayette Square has caused a weakening of the commercial strip. Unified public space improvements will visually tie this area together with the "Heart of Central Square District".


MAINTAIN A STRONG RETAIL FRONTAGE
CONSIDER WIDENING SIDEWALKS
ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING (MIXED-INCOME)
ENCOURAGE STRONG RETAIL FRONTAGE
IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN ENV. & STRENGTHEN RETAIL ACTIVITY
PROTECT
CONSIDER PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION
CREATE A STRONG & POSITIVE PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION BETWEEN U. PARK & CENTRAL SQUARE
FENTON SHOE REHAP. PROPOSED HOUSING SITE
DISCOURAGE FUTURE LAND USE CONFLICTS
Massachusetts Avenue
Massachusetts Avenue
Main Street
Washington
Eaton Street
School Street
Columbia Street
Douglass Street
Franklin Street
Brookline Street
Sidney Street
Blanche Street
Cross Street
Front Street
Pearl Street
CENTRAL to MIT DISTRICT

TRANSITION DISTRICT

The Transition District is the area that separates the main retail activity along Massachusetts Avenue from the strictly residential character of the Cambridgeport neighborhood (refer to map on page 37). As a transitional area the character of the district is mixed from block to block but predominately residential in nature. Very few "soft" development areas exist and except for parcel number 49 assembly of several small lots would be necessary to achieve any sizeable development.

Private Development

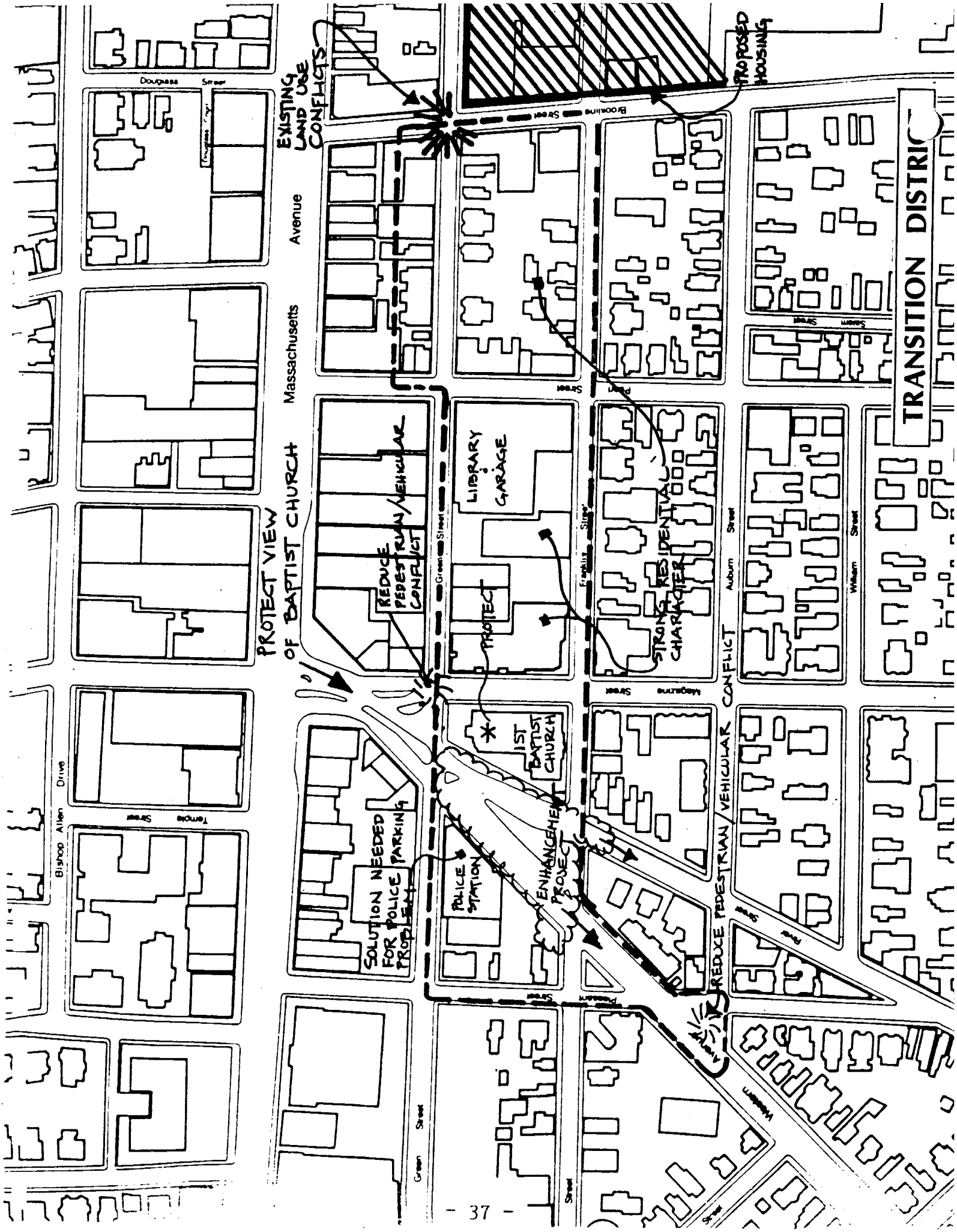
Commercial uses front primarily along Massachusetts Avenue, but some businesses are located along the side streets leading into the Transition District. Businesses along Brookline Street with entertainment licenses have been responsible for land use conflicts in this area. Since these businesses typically are busiest at night more opportunity exists for conflicts with the residential uses than other types of business uses. Complaints such as noise, loitering, and parking violations are common complaints of nearby residents. Only businesses that are compatible with residential uses should be allowed to be located off of the main business area of Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street.

Public Spaces

Presently a new open space project, the Central Square Enhancement Project, is under construction along Western Avenue and River Street. An opportunity exists to extend these improvements down Western Avenue to Auburn and Pleasant Streets to reduce the pedestrian-vehicular conflict at this large intersection.

To further relieve the vehicular congestion on Western Avenue and River Street the State is investigating rerouting truck traffic coming off of the Massachusetts Turnpike and therefore removing it from Western Avenue and River Street. Every effort should be made to encourage this rerouting plan.

Although two municipal parking lots and one municipal parking garage is located on Green Street, parking is a severe problem around the police station. Development of the Central Square Enhancement Project reduced the number of available parking spaces on Western Avenue further adding to this problem. Solutions to the police department parking problem need to be explored further.


TRANSITION DISTRIC
EXISTING LAND USE CONFLICTS
PROPOSED HOUSING
PROTECT VIEW OF BAPTIST CHURCH
REDUCE PEDESTRIAN/VEHICULAR CONFLICT
LIBRARY & GARAGE
PROTECT
STRONG RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER
1ST BAPTIST CHURCH
SOLUTION NEEDED FOR POLICE PARKING PROBLEM
POLICE STATION
ENHANCEMENT PROJECT
REDUCE PEDESTRIAN/VEHICULAR CONFLICT
Massachusetts Avenue
Douglass Street
Brookline Street
Green Street
Franklin Street
Magazine Street
Auburn Street
William Street
Salem Street
Pleasant Street
Temple Street
Bishop Allen Drive
Western Avenue

SUMMARY OF KEY URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Land Use

- Encourage strong retail frontage for Massachusetts Ave. and Main Street;
- New development south of Green Street and north of Bishop Allen Drive should be residentially oriented;
- City property should be considered a valuable negotiating tool for the creation of mixed income housing by either the City or private developer;
- Create a focal point or "anchor" at Lafayette Square that will strengthen pedestrian and retail activity.

Heights, Setbacks and Dimensions

- Build to property line along Masschusetts Ave. and Main Street;
- Greatest height is recommended for Massachusetts Ave. area with descending height as development approaches Green Street and Bishop Allen Drive;
- Create an identity at the "Heart" of the Square at Massachusetts Ave. and Prospect St/Western Ave and allow heights to be greatest here;
- Development along narrow side streets should provide set backs and a non continuous building surface to avoid the creation of "canyons".

Streets, Sidewalks and Open Space

- Continue MBTA and Central Square Enhancement improvements;
- Create pedestrian links between neighborhoods and Massachusetts Avenue wherever possible;
- Strengthen the tie between Lafayette Square and the "Heart" of Central Square;
- Provide safe and easy pedestrian access at the intersection of Western Avenue and Auburn Street.
- Enhance the entry and sitting areas in front of City Hall and tie these improvements to the business area public improvements.

Preservation

- Renovate potential landmarks and buildings deemed to be potentially significant whenever possible;

- Establish a National Register District as shown in Appendix VII.

- Building materials to be compatible with historic character of Central Square.

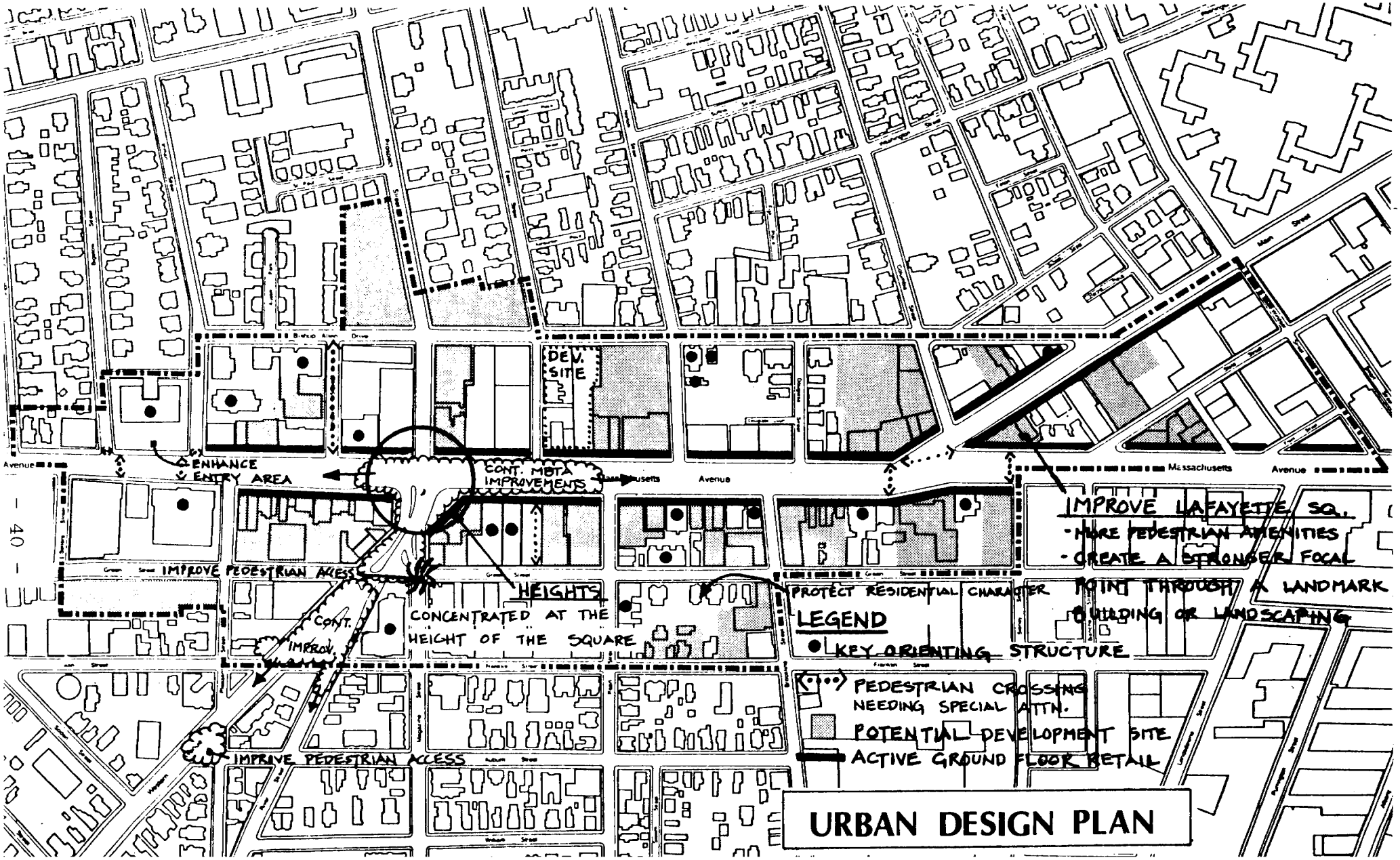
Traffic and Parking

- Parking should be studied further to determine if a new direction or policy for parking regulations is necessary and to analyse how best to replace parking in lots recommended for housing development.

Signage

- Public signage in the Square should be improved especially signage to identify the location of municipal parking facilities;

- Business signs should be complementary to building to which it is adfixed and not competitive with the building's architecture.


DEV. SITE
ENHANCE ENTRY AREA
CONT. MBTA IMPROVEMENTS
IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
HEIGHTS CONCENTRATED AT THE HEIGHT OF THE SQUARE
CONT. IMPROV.
IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN ACCESS
PROTECT RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER
IMPROVE LAFAYETTE SQ.
- MORE PEDESTRIAN AMENITIES
- CREATE A STRONGER FOCAL POINT THROUGH A LANDMARK BUILDING OR LANDSCAPING
LEGEND
KEY ORIENTING STRUCTURE
PEDESTRIAN CROSSING NEEDING SPECIAL ATTN.
POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT SITE
ACTIVE GROUND FLOOR RETAIL
URBAN DESIGN PLAN

THE ACTION PLAN
FOR
CENTRAL SQUARE

Implementation of the goals and objectives for revitalization of Central Square requires the continued cooperation and commitment of the residents, business people, property owners and the City. In addition to the Urban Design Plan recommendations previously discussed specific steps need to be taken to ensure that the objectives for the Urban Design Plan are realized.

ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

The most effective way to ensure compliance with the stated urban design plan is through zoning mechanisms. Public and design reviews of large developments will allow potential conflicts to be resolved while protecting the objectives of the plan.

Several zoning actions are proposed for the Central Square area:

1. Create a Central Square Overlay District;

2. Rezone the Business B zone south of Green Street between Pleasant and Brookline Streets;

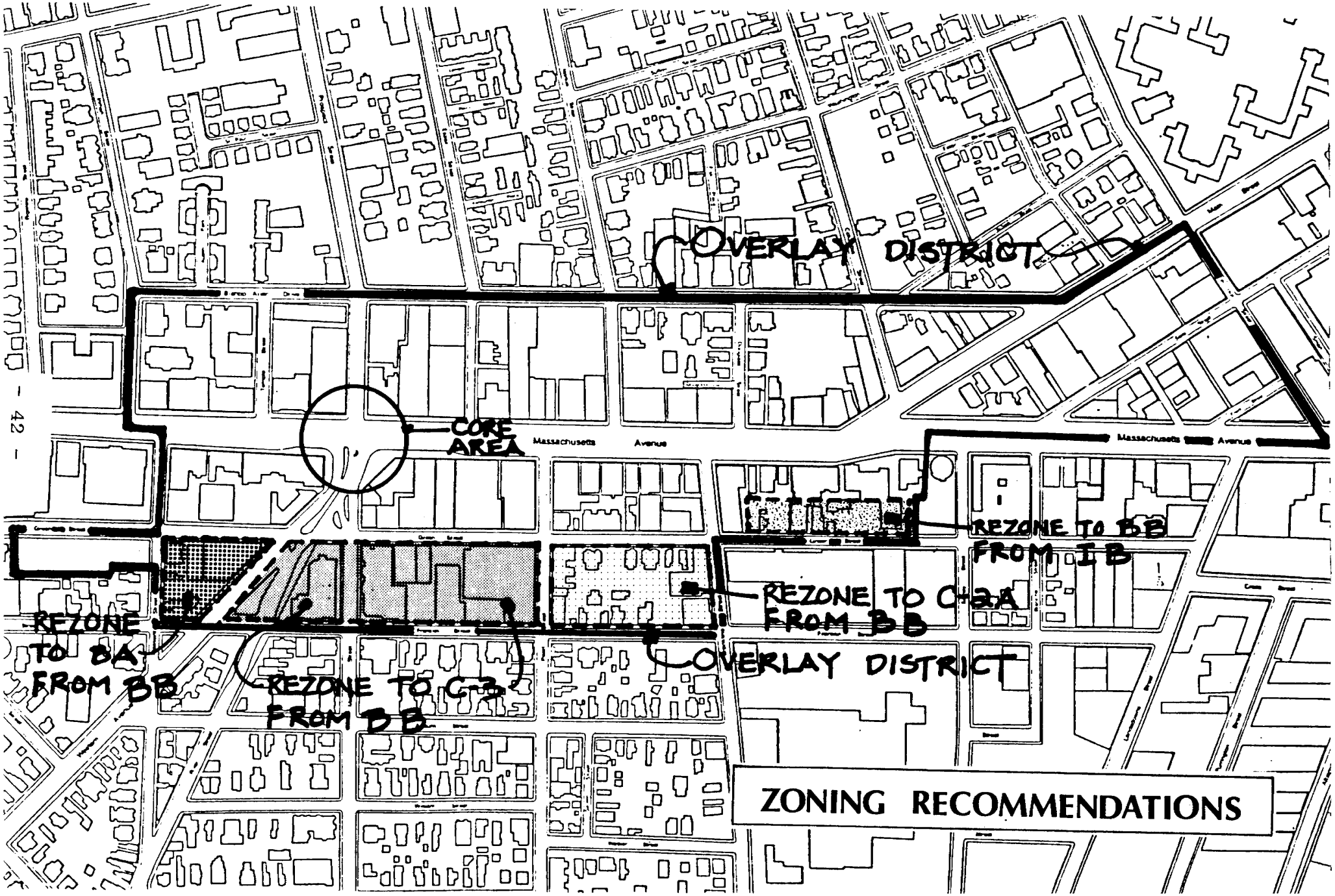
3. Rezone the Industrial B zone north of Green Street between Brookline and Sidney Streets.

The Overlay District

An Overlay District is a set of zoning regulations which are in addition to the existing base district regulations or are in lieu of those regulations. Overlay provisions are designed to protect special concerns for sensitive development areas.

The proposed Central Square Overlay District would include almost the entire Business B area (refer to the map on page 42) and it is recommending that the base zoning remain substantially in place. Exceptions to this include rezoning the area south of Green Street into three different zoning classifications and a small portion of the area north of Green Street as follows (refer to the Zoning Table on page 43 for definitions of Zoning terms):

- South of Green Street between Pleasant Street and Western Avenue
  - Rezone this area from BB to BA to better reflect the nature of the present development and adjacent residential neighborhood. Little opportunity presently exists for significant redevelopment because of the size of the lots and present development.


OVERLAY DISTRICT
CORE AREA
Massachusetts Avenue
Massachusetts Avenue
REZONE TO BB FROM IB
REZONE TO C-2A FROM BB
REZONE TO BA FROM BB
REZONE TO C-3 FROM BB
OVERLAY DISTRICT
ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS

Zoning Table

The following is a summary of the regulations of the zoning districts discussed in this chapter.

Zone		FAR*	Maximum Height	Minimum Lot Area Per Dwelling Unit	Maximum Dwelling Units Per Acre
Residential Districts					
C1	Residence Multi Family, apts., dorms	.75	35′	1200 sq. ft.	36
C2	Residence Multi-family	1.75	85′	600 sq. ft.	72
C2A	Residence Multi-family	2.5	60′	300 sq. ft.	145
C3	Residence Multi-family	3.0	none	300 sq. ft.	145
Business Districts					
BA	Business Neighborhood retail, office	1.0	35′		
	Multi-family Residence @ Res. C-2	1.75	85′	600 sq. ft.	72
BB	Business General retail, office	4.0	none		
	Multi-family Residence @ Res. C-3	3.0	none	300 sq. ft.	145
Industrial Districts					
IB	All uses except housing	4.0	none	-	-

*Floor Area Ratio (FAR): limits how intensively a lot may be built upon. Indirectly it controls building volume. FAR is the gross floor area of the building divided by the area of the lot. Areas devoted to parking, to building mechanical systems and certain other areas are not counted when calculating gross floor area.

Source: Zoning Primer, Community Development Dept., The City of Cambridge

- South of Green Street between Western Avenue and Pearl Street
  - Rezone this area from BB to C-3. This area offers little opportunity for development, but the new zoning classification is more appropriate to the high density residential character that presently exists.

- South of Green Street between Pearl Street and Brookline Street
  - Rezone this area from BB to C-2A. This block is presently characterized by low scale residential type development. A significant number of these residential units are rent controlled. The rezoning will ensure the preservation of this area for housing and eliminate the present fear of encroachment by businesses into this area.

- North of Green Street a portion of the area between Brookline Street and Sidney Street
  - Rezone this area from IB to BB. This area is adjacent to the proposed University Park site which is presently undergoing zoning revisions. Rezoning this small area to BB is consistent with the objective of creating a strong Massachusetts Avenue retail frontage and promoting compatability in development and land use.

The following provisions are proposed to be included in the Overlay requirements:

- Height and FAR
  - 60' and 2.0 FAR as of right within the BB zone for projects which do not include housing as part of the development
  - 60' and 3.0 FAR as of right within the BB zone for projects which do include housing as a significant part of the development
  - 80' and 4.0 FAR within the BB zone with the approval of a special permit *
  - 115' and 4.0 FAR within the Central Square "Core Area" with the approval of a special permit *
  - all development projects containing more than 2000 square feet shall undergo development consultation conducted by a Central Square Advisory Committee similar to the Harvard Square Advisory Committee
  - * the criteria for a special permit will reflect the goals and criteria established in this report for housing (including mixed income housing), retail, etc.

- Setbacks
  - where development abuts residentially zoned areas it must step back above 45'
  - development along Massachusetts Avenue must step back above 60' as a condition of the special permit except within the "Core Area".

- o Retail requirements
  - active ground floor retail use will be required along Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. Also allowed are residential uses and commercial office uses such as banks, insurance and agency offices that promote active pedestrian use
  - no gasoline stations, auto repair, used car sales or auto leasing uses
  - the number of fast food restaurants as defined by the Overlay fast food definition shall be capped at the present number (Bakeries are excluded from this restriction)
  - bakeries are allowed only by special permit (A bakery is an establishment that offers for sale baked goods including, but not limited to bread, pastries, cakes, pies, and rolls for consumption off premises)
  - convenient stores/24 hour stores can not be located within 1000' of each other (bakeries are excluded from this restriction)
  - all old signage is to be removed by the property owner within 30 days of tenant vacating premises.
- o Parking
  - additional parking requirements are contingent upon the findings of a parking analysis.

The BA zoning for the north side of Bishop Allen Drive should be studied further for possible rezoning actions. Given the nature of the land uses and the scale of the area and adjacent residential areas a rezoning of this area from a business zone to a residential zone r be appropriate. If this property is rezoned to a residential zone, then the Overlay setback requirements that requires a height setback when adjacent to residentially zoned land would protect the scale and character along Bishop Allen Drive.

The parking lots at the corner of Bishop Allen Drive and Prospect Street should also be looked at for possible rezoning action. The present site restriction which requires the maintenance of accessory parking for 675 Massachusetts Avenue, and the character of Prospect Street should be considered if a rezoning action is proposed.

RETAIL DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Downtown Manager

- o Hire a downtown manager to work with Central Square businesses.

  For Central Square to function efficiently as a commercial retail center it should be treated as if it were a "shopping mall." A mall manager would work to ensure the success of the mall and therefore its individual retailers. This principle can and should be applied in Central Square.

The downtown manager would be hired by the Central Square Committee and the business community, but should be an autonomous agent and report to a Board comprised of business, neighborhood, and City representatives. Areas of responsibiity should includeassistance to individual businesses with individual and group promotions, window displays, and public relations; assistance with membership recruitment to the Central Square Business Association; assistance to the entire business district through development of a newsletter, promotions, advertising, identification logo, and street and sidewalk cleaning programs; and act as a liason with the City business community and Central Square customers. The downtown manager should be funded cooperatively between the Business community and the City.

Marketing Committee

- Establish a Marketing Committee to pursue desired retail uses for vacant retail space.

  A marketing subcommittee of the Central Square Committee should be comprised of a business representative, a neighborhood representative and a City representative to work with property owners, the Central Square Business Association, the City, and developers. The Committee will work to attract businesses to Central Square that will complete and complement the existing retail offerings.

  The Committee should assist with the development of a promotional brochure to be used in combination with the Shawmut County Bank video for retail recruitment purposes.

Community Development Department Assistance

- The City should maintain a Community Development Department staff person to continue working on issues relating to Central Square, implement the recommendations put forth in this document, and to act as a liason between the City, community, business people and property owners.

Retail Mix

- Suggested improvements to the retail mix by Economic Research Associates and neighborhood residents include:

  Convenience Retail: Expansion and upgrading of Purity Supreme, specialty food stores such as a full service bakery, butcher shop, delicatessen, coffee and spice shop, fish market, etc. The specialty food stores should be encouraged to locate adjacent to each other. Businesses such as drug, liquor, and twenty four hour stores are presently well represented.

Comparison Retail: Probably the single most important addition to Central Square would be that of a junior dept. store that offer high quality off-price apparel and/or general merchandise. Otl comparison retail uses should include factory outlets; specialty home furnishing and fixtures such as wall paper, curtain, draperies, upholstery, kitchen and housewares, etc; card and gift shop, dance and exercise apparel, art gallery, and a book store.

Eating and Drinking Establishments

- No additional fast food restaurants are needed in Central Square as supported by the ERA Market survey. Unless a restaurant can meet the following criteria it will be considered fast food:

  1. uses non disposble plates, glasses and silverware for all patrons; and
  2. provides printed individual menus for all patrons; and
  3. a minimum of 75% of the available seating is at individual free standing tables (not counters).

  The exemption for uses with 1750 square feet or less of gross floor area and with no more than five employees within a twenty-four hour period from Section 11.30 of the Zoning Ordinance does not apply to the Central Square Overlay.

- The present moratorium on fast food establishments in Central Square should be extended until Action Plan recommendations related to eating and drinking establishments can be implemente

Architectural Assistance

- Develop a new assistance program for facade and signage improvements.

  Many property owners and businesses have expressed a renewed interest in the City's old facade improvements program. Assistance in the form of loans, rebates or grants should be made available for qualifying rehabs and renovations. All improvements are subject to a design review process by the Central Square Advisory Committee.

Licensing

- Require additional guidelines and amend some existing regulations on licensing common victualler, entertainment, and liquor licenses in Central Square as follows:

  1. Establish a cap on fast food restaurants within the proposed Central Square Overlay area and apply the three restaurant criteria when reviewing applications for common victualler licenses.

2. Limit the length of time a pocket license can be held before it gets returned to the City.

3. Do not allow the sale of alcohol in containers smaller than 200 ml.

4. All establishments that allow patron dancing must have its main entrance on Massachusetts Avenue or Main Street unless it is a one time only permit for a special event.

5. Any enterpise which prepares food on premises for consumptic off the premises must be licensed first by the License Commission, so that it may be determined whether or not the enterprise is likely to develop into a nuisance or otherwise harm the general welfare of the area.

Signage

- Create a unified signage plan that requires signage to be oriente towards the pedestrian; respects the architecture of the building it is placed upon; and, requires the removal of signage that does not reflect the present building use, is not considered historically significant, and/or the tenant has moved and the space has been vacant for more than 30 days.

Safety

- Greater police visibility is needed in Central Square. Regular foot patrols should be scheduled to patrol the business area to ensure consumer, business and neighborhood safety.

- Traffic, noise, litter and loitering laws should be more strigently enforced.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish incentives to build mixed use developments which includ mixed-income housing in the Overlay District.

- Create mixed-income housing development opportunities on City owned land.

STREETS, SIDEWALKS AND OPEN SPACE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue the MBTA street and sidewalk improvements throughout the Square creating a unified streetscape.

- Work with abutting property owners to improve the pedestrian atmosphere of Temple Street so that it can be closed on a temporary basis to thru traffic to allow the Farmer's Market to b held there weekly and to allow other special events to be held.

- Enhance the sitting and entry area in front of City Hall.

- Continue the Central Square Enhancement improvements down Weste Avenue to the intersection with Auburn Street creating a safer pedestrian area.

- Provide and maintain public restrooms.

- Create pedestrian links mid block between residential areas and the business district where appropriate. Ensure safe lighting and visibility into these areas.

- Create a focal point at Lafayette Square and improve the pedestrian areas.

- Discourage the feeding of pigeons and littering in Central Square by strongly enforcing littering and other pertinent laws.

TRAFFIC AND PARKING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hire an independent consultant to undertake an analysis of the parking situation in Central Square. The analysis should also consider the appropriate ratio of parking required per square foot for different development uses; the most economical way to replace public parking displaced due to development of City owned lots; how to encourage greater use of public transportation by area employees; and, evaluate the potential to restrict loading hours.

- Work with the MBTA to minimize the number of bus layovers in Central Square, encourage the extension of certain lines to Kendall Square.

- Access and improve where needed the streets, sidewalks and lighting connecting the residential neighborhoods to the business area.

- Provide bicycle racks near the MBTA subway station entrances and bus stops.

- Develop an Area Wide Transit Plan for Central Square employers.

- Support efforts to reroute truck traffic off of River Street and Western Avenue.

- All open air parking lots for commercial uses within the Overlay District should be licensed by the License Commission.

- All signage in the Square should be coordinated and improved, especially directional signage to parking areas.

- The number of taxicab stands provided upon completion of the MBTA construction project should be consistent with the Cambridge Taxicab Advisory Committee's recommendations.

FUNDING SOURCES

Implementation of the Action Plan requires a financial commitment from the public sector, property owners, developers, and Central Square businesses over a number of years through public facility improvements, private investment, fiscal and economic incentives, and State and Federal assistance programs. Coordination of all of these efforts are necessary to achieve the revitalization objectives of the Urban Design and Action Plans for Central Square.

Public Improvements

The City will develop various proposals for State and Federal funding to implement the Action Plan's goals and objectives. This effort will involve applications for funding from Urban Development Action Grants (UDAG), Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the City and Town Commons Program, Community Development Action Grants (CDAG), and other State and Federal programs that may become available for commercial, residential, open space and parking assistance.

In addition, the City can provide financial incentives for redevelopment by the lease of City owned land for construction of affordable housing units. Also, the City should explore the possibility of tax deferments or incentives for developers who build mixed income housing.

The City has worked with several developers to obtain UDAG financing. As the UDAG funds are repaid they could be channeled back into Central Square loan pools for renovation, rehabilitations, and facade projects.

Seed money from CDBG and the City's Public Investment Fund should be channeled into low interest loan programs or grants for the development of a new facade and signage program.

Private Improvements

The private sector must work in cooperation with the City for assistance through State and Federal programs and in obtaining private financing for their obligations. In addition, they must seek assistance through sources not channeled through the City such as Small Business Association (SBA) funding and private investors and partnerships.

The banks in Central Square offer a unique opportunity to channel their strength into a combined low interest loan pool by pledging a percentage or predetermined amount of their deposits. This pool could be used for financing new development offering a percentage retail and/or residential space at below market rates.

CONCLUSION

The revitalization of Central Square requires continued cooperation among the businesses, property owners, residents and City agencies. Cooperation among these groups of future developments will ensure that the goals and objectives developed here are implemented and achieved.