



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: September 9, 2011
Re: Bishop, et al. Zoning Petition – Special District 2

Background – Special District 2

SD-2 was created in 2000 specifically for the area around Linear Park. The prior designation of the area was Industry A-1, which allowed residential and commercial uses at a maximum FAR of 1.25 and height of 45 feet. The purpose of SD-2 is as follows:

It is the intent of this Special District 2 to encourage the establishment of residential uses in the district in a form and density compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhood. However, given the significant presence of nonresidential uses in the district, provision is made for the conversion of those existing nonresidential uses to other nonresidential uses more compatible with the residential neighbors, with the intent that all nonresidential uses will, over time, be replaced with permitted residential use.

The regulations for SD-2 are similar to those for Residence B, which adjoins the district, with the following main exceptions:

- Multifamily residential uses are allowed.
- Limited office and retail uses are allowed within existing non-residential buildings.
- The maximum base FAR is 0.65 (instead of 0.50), and is not reduced for portions of the lot over 5,000 square feet.
- The minimum lot area per dwelling unit is 1,800 square feet (instead of 2,500), and is not increased for portions of the lot over 5,000 square feet.
- The maximum height is 40 feet (instead of 35), with a maximum cornice height of 30 feet.
- There are provisions allowing for flexibility where an existing non-residential building is converted to residential use (these provisions are now applicable citywide through Section 5.28.2).
- There are provisions to allow additional density where an existing commercial building with an FAR greater than 0.65 is demolished to construct new residential buildings.

Proposed Changes

The Bishop, et al. petition proposes to modify the SD-2 zoning standards to allow residential uses only at a lower density and height, with the following major changes:

- The allowed office and retail uses would be eliminated, with the possible exception of arts/crafts studio.
- The FAR and lot area per dwelling unit would be lowered to the Residence B figures (0.5 FAR and 2,500 SF/unit – however, the more restrictive density standards that apply to lots larger than 5,000 square feet in the B district would not apply in SD-2).
- The maximum height would be reduced to 35 feet within 50 feet of a district with a 35’ height limit (which would include the Residence B and Open Space districts) or the sideline of a street.
- Additional provisions would regulate fences along Linear Park.

Zoning Analysis of SD-2

This analysis includes all parcels that are entirely or partially within SD-2, *with the exception of the W.R. Grace site, of which only about 3% is within SD-2*. The attached map titled “Existing Land Use and FAR” illustrates some of the information discussed below.

Uses in SD-2

Although the district remains predominantly non-residential, most of the new and proposed development in the district has been for housing, including new construction and conversion of non-residential structures to residential use. It is reasonable to expect that the remaining commercial sites in the district will be redeveloped to housing in the future.

| Use Category | Number of Parcels | Percent of Total Land Area |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Commercial | 7 | 70 % |
| Residential | 18 | 24 % |
| Mixed Use | 1 | 3 % |
| Industrial | 1 | 1 % |
| Vacant | 1 | 1 % |

Existing Development in SD-2

Because there are relatively few lots within the district, and because there is such wide variation in the size and use of lots as well as the age and type of buildings on the lots, it is difficult to discern a clear prevailing development pattern. Most of the land in SD-2 is occupied by two major commercial properties, known as “Cambridge Lumber” (for which the Planning Board granted a special permit for residential redevelopment on September 6, 2011) and “Fawcett Oil” (for which a special permit application is anticipated in the near future). In addition, there are some medium-sized lots with large commercial buildings, some of which have been converted to housing or mixed-use development, and about a dozen smaller residential house lots.

| Parcel Set | First Quartile | Median | Third Quartile |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| All Parcels Wholly or Partially in SD-2 (except W.R. Grace site) | 0.47 FAR | 0.58 FAR | 1.02 FAR |
| Residential Parcels Wholly or Partially in SD-2 (except W.R. Grace site) | 0.53 FAR 1,996 SF/unit | 0.61 FAR 1,851 SF/unit | 1.03 FAR 1,128 SF/unit |
| All Parcels ENTIRELY in SD-2 | 0.40 FAR | 0.55 FAR | 0.94 FAR |
| Residential Parcels ENTIRELY in SD-2 | 0.53 FAR 1,970 SF/unit | 0.58 FAR 1,851 SF/unit | 0.99 FAR 1,330 SF/unit |

DATA SOURCE: Cambridge Assessing Department, 2008 – ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE

Existing Development in Adjacent Residential Districts

Adjoining SD-2 to the north and south are districts zoned Residence B. Neighbors have referred to these areas as the “Whittemore Triangle” (to the north) and the “Harvey Rectangle” (to the south). The following table provides some statistical data for these two Residence B areas.

| Parcel Set | First Quartile | Median | Third Quartile |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Residential Parcels – “Whittemore Triangle” (Residence B north of SD-2) | 0.37 FAR 4,000 SF/unit | 0.56 FAR 2,200 SF/unit | 0.72 FAR 1,935 SF/unit |
| Residence B Parcels – “Harvey Rectangle” (Residence B south of SD-2) | 0.39 FAR 3,000 SF/unit | 0.54 FAR 2,112 SF/unit | 0.70 FAR 1,596 SF/unit |

DATA SOURCE: Cambridge Assessing Department, 2008 – ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE

Development Sites

The previously mentioned “Cambridge Lumber” and “Fawcett Oil” sites (outlined on the attached maps) are the sites in SD-2 on which new housing construction has been proposed. A special permit (#258) was recently granted for 20 units and 34,472 square feet of residential development on the Cambridge Lumber site; no special permit application has yet been submitted for the Fawcett Oil site (although a residential proposal – called “Tyler Green” – has been discussed publicly). Below is an analysis of the maximum residential Gross Floor Area (GFA) and number of dwelling units that would be allowed on each of those sites under the current zoning and the proposed zoning change.

Note: Numbers in (parentheses) denote the allowed development when utilizing the Inclusionary Housing bonus allowed by Section 11.200.

| Site | Current Zoning | | Proposed Zoning | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| | Allowed Res. GFA | Allowed Units | Allowed Res. GFA | Allowed Units |
| Cambridge Lumber (Harvey Street) | 34,869 (45,239) | 29 (37) | 26,822 (34,869) | 21 (27) |
| Fawcett Oil (“Tyler Green”) | 97,729 (127,047) | 82 (106) | 76,787 (99,822) | 60 (76) |

DATA SOURCE: Cambridge Assessing Department, 2008 – ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE

Aside from these two large sites, there are a handful of parcels in SD-2 with remaining development capacity. Below is an analysis of parcels with the zoning potential to add at least 1,000 square feet of residential floor area or at least two new dwelling units.

| Parcel | Current Zoning | | Proposed Zoning | | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| | Existing GFA | Existing Units | Allowed Res. GFA | Allowed Units | Allowed Res. GFA | Allowed Units |
| 2464 Mass Ave (part in BA-2) | 20,164 (commercial) | 0 | 26,966 | 24 | 24,510 | 22 |
| 16-18 Edmunds St (part in BA-2) | 3,750 (residential) | 1 | 6,513 | 5 | 5,739 | 5 |
| 22 Cottage Park St (part in Res. B) | 25,809 (commercial) | 0 | 6,980 | 6 | 6,308 | 5 |
| 27 Cottage Park St (part in Res. B) | 4,000 (commercial) | 0 | 5,633 | 4 | 4,964 | 4 |
| 91 Harvey St | 4,914 (commercial) | 0 | 4,664 | 3 | 3,588 | 2 |

DATA SOURCE: Cambridge Assessing Department, 2008 – ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE

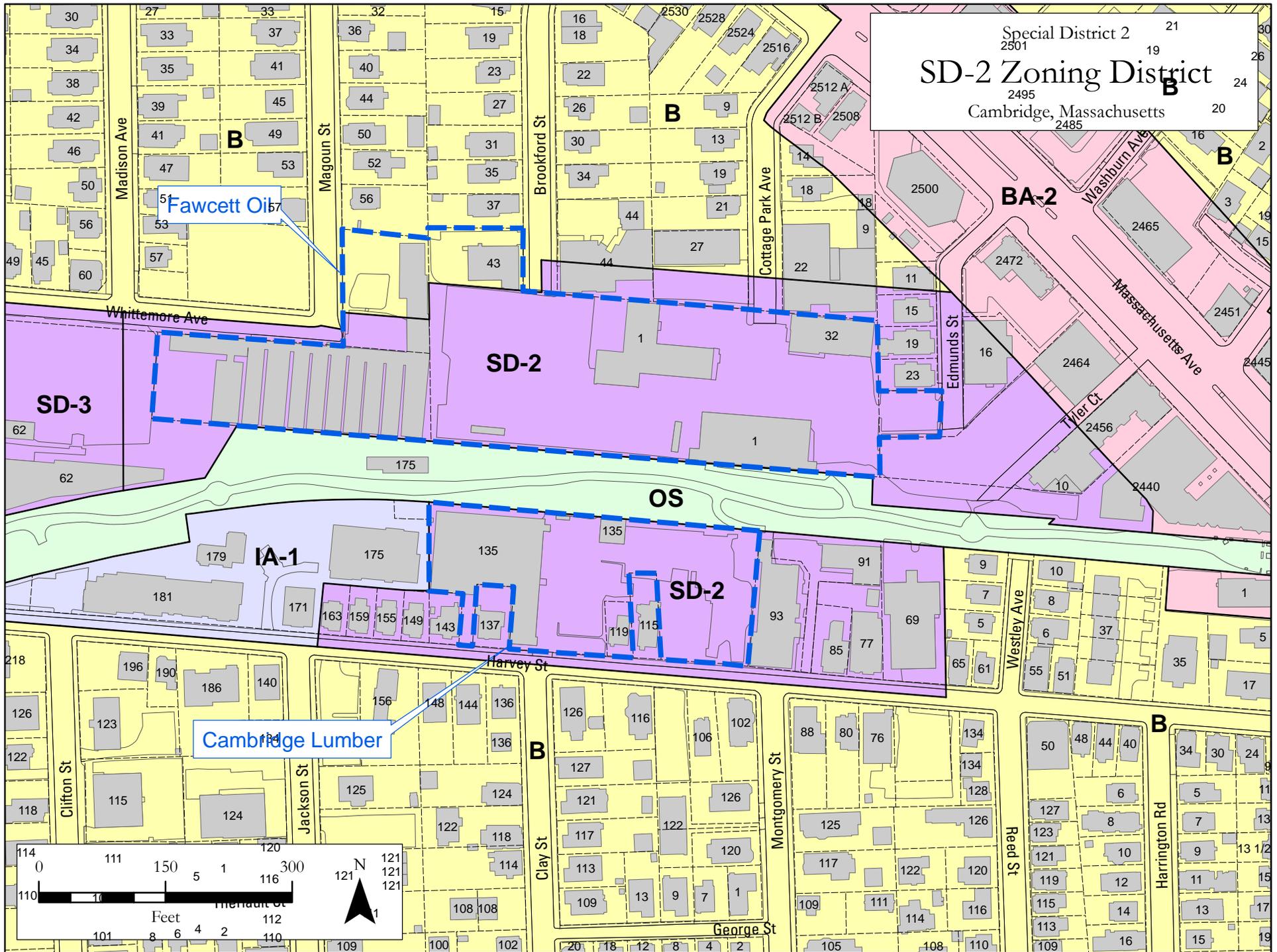
Note that in instances where the existing commercial floor area is significantly greater than the allowed residential floor area (22 Cottage Park Street in particular), a conversion of the commercial structure to residential use would be a more likely development outcome than tear-down and rebuilding of the site. (Also note that 22 Cottage Park Street and 27 Cottage Park Street are in common ownership – however, they do not abut each other and therefore could not be developed as a single lot.)

Conclusions

It is very likely that any future redevelopment in SD-2 will be residential, which is consistent with the purpose of the district. Therefore the proposal to remove the allowed non-residential uses is reasonable and consistent with the intent of the district.

The purpose of SD-2 is to encourage development of “a form and density compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhood,” but “compatible” does not necessarily mean “equivalent.” Circumstances that are unique to lots in this district (such as larger land areas, difficult environmental conditions, adjacency to open space and pedestrian/bicycle amenities, traffic patterns, etc.) could suggest that a form or density that is different from Residence B is appropriate. Many issues need to be considered to determine what density standard – 0.50 FAR, 0.65 FAR, or some other standard – is appropriate in this unique area. Similarly, consideration should be given to whether it is necessary to require a 35-foot height limit within 50 feet of a lower-scale district or a street – which would effectively cover most of the district – to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas. Alternate standards could be considered.

Finally, while the proposed addition of fence regulations to allow visual access from Linear Park is consistent with the City’s goals for public enjoyment of open space, the enforceability of the proposed language should be considered. A set of measurable standards relating to fence height and permeability might be more appropriate, or possibly criteria to be considered as part of a design review process.



Special District 2
 Existing Land Use and FAR
 Cambridge, Massachusetts

