



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

October 18, 2011

To the Honorable, the City Council,

Re: Planning Board recommendation on the Julia Bishop, et al Zoning Petition to amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section 17.20 – Special District 2, to delete some uses currently allowed, decrease allowable development and create fence regulations along Linear Park.

Recommendation: The Planning Board does not recommend adoption of the zoning changes proposed in the Petition.

Discussion: The Petition proposes changes to the existing requirements of the Special District 2 (SD-2) zoning district which is primarily located adjacent to Linear Park; along Harvey Street on the south side, and at the terminus of Madison Avenue, Magoun Street, Brookford Street, Cottage Park Avenue, Edmunds Street and Tyler Court on the north side. Historically, the area had consisted of industrial uses adjacent to the former railroad line, which is now Linear Park. Special District 2 was created in 2000 with the intention of encouraging residential uses in the district in a form and density compatible with adjacent residential uses.

The proposed zoning changes would prohibit all commercial uses (with the possible exception of artist studios), reduce the density allowed in the district from a floor area ratio (FAR) of 0.65 to 0.50 FAR, increase the minimum lot area per dwelling unit from 1,800 square feet to 2,500 square feet, establish a maximum height of 35 feet for any portion of a building that is 50 feet or less from another zoning district, and introduce new visibility requirements for fences within the building setback along Linear Park.

Many of the parcels in and near Special District 2 have been relatively recently redeveloped into residential uses. The few remaining parcels on the north side of Linear Park would be most affected by this zoning change. Among those properties, the former Fawcett Oil site is the largest.

The Board finds no compelling reason to change the Special District 2 zoning requirements, and acknowledges that the current zoning was adopted about a decade ago after extensive discussion at the Planning Board and at City Council involving neighbors and property owners in the area. The Board believes that recent residential projects that have been approved under the current

regulations demonstrate that the current zoning, with the requirement that larger residential projects receive a Townhouse or Multifamily Special Permit, provides an appropriate set of tools to review and improve projects where necessary. Further, although creating and enforcing specific fence regulations is difficult, the design review process allows the Board to consider issues of safety and visual access to open space. The Board is also wary of hindering the original intent of Special District 2 and potentially discouraging the continued transformation of the district to predominantly residential use.

The Board recognizes that there are traffic concerns about any potential new development, especially for residents of the streets that terminate at the district mostly along the former Fawcett Oil site. Sue Clippinger, Director of the City of Cambridge, Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TP&T) Department submitted a memorandum dated October 18, 2011 discussing traffic patterns in the area. Traffic on residential side streets is already very low, and any new traffic generated may be noticeable to residents; however, it is the view of TP&T that the existing streets can accommodate the small increase in traffic that would be generated by a new residential development. Furthermore, it is estimated that the number of potential new trips is only slightly reduced (one or two fewer trips in the peak hours on each of the streets) if the Special District 2 zoning is changed as proposed.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H Russell", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hugh Russell, Chair