



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: October 9, 2012
Re: **Trolley Square Map Change Petition**

The petition proposes a zoning map change for parcels in the vicinity of Trolley Square in North Cambridge from Business A-2 (BA-2) to Residence C-2B (C-2B). Since the time that the petition was originally filed in spring 2012, there have been additional discussions between city staff, property owners, and neighbors affected by the changes, and a further exploration of the issues, considerations, and possible solutions.

The petition is the result of a recommendation of the North Massachusetts Avenue Improvement Study to look at the Business A-2 zoning district boundaries where they extend past the typical 100 feet from Massachusetts Avenue and into more residential areas. In Trolley Square, there are several parcels further than 100 feet from Massachusetts Avenue that are currently in a Business A-2 zoning district and adjacent to residential neighborhoods in a Residence B zoning district as well as Linear Park.

Land uses on these parcels currently include a Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) facility used to store and maintain trackless trolleys, an auto body shop, and a parking lot associated with a mixed use development located primarily in Somerville.

The Residence C-2B district allows residential uses at similar dimensional standards and density as is currently allowed in the BA-2 district with additional setback (determined by a formula based on building dimensions) and open space requirements. Other than a few uses (e.g. Hotel) the BA-2 district allows a wider range of uses including office and retail.

Dimensional Changes

Dimensional Standard	BA-2 Regulation (current)	C-2B Regulation
Max. Residential FAR	1.75 (with ground floor non-residential at Trolley Yard)	1.75
Max. Non-Residential FAR	1.75 (1.0 at Trolley Yard)	NA
Min. Lot Area per Dwelling Unit	600sqft	600sqft
Min. Setbacks	front 5', rear 20', side 10'*	Formula
Max. Height – Residential	45' (50' w/ ground floor non-residential at Trolley Yard)**	45'
Max. Height – Non-Residential	45'	NA
Min. Ratio of Open Space on Lot	No min.	15%

*The side yard setback requirement for the BA-2 district is twenty feet where it abuts a lot in residential district.

** The height limit for the BA-2 district is 35 feet for any portion of a building located within 50 feet of a residential district

Use Changes (Summarized)

Principal Use	Allowed in BA-2 (current)	Allowed in C-2B
Hotel or Motel	No	Special Permit
Bus/Rail Passenger Station	Special Permit	No
Radio TV Studio	Yes	No
Certain Institutional Uses	Yes/Special Permit*	No*
Office and Laboratory	Yes	No
Most Retail Uses	Yes	No
Art Craft Studio	Yes	Special Permit
Auto Oriented Fast Food	Special Permit	No
Auto Service Station	Special Permit	No
Auto Repair	Special Permit	No

* Depending on applicability of Institutional Use Regulations for uses exempted by state statute.

Issues

CDD staff held a meeting with abutting neighbors and property owners on September 27, 2012 and the following key issues were discussed:

- **Uses:** It was largely agreed that the commercial zoning of this area, where it abuts residences, should be changed to residence-based zoning. However, some property owners preferred keeping the ability to retain some commercial uses as well, such as home-based offices or retail stores (such as a bike shop) that could serve users of Linear Park.
- **Heights/Setbacks:** There was concern about the impacts of new, larger-scale development adjacent to smaller-scaled residential uses in the Residence B district, and the need to ensure an appropriate transition where new buildings might abut lower-scale residences.
- **Linear Park Expansion and Access:** There was interest in the possibility of expanding the width of Linear Park where it currently becomes a narrow path next to the Trolley Yard. It was also noted that many people access Linear Park from the end of Elmwood Street to the north through an informal opening in the fence, and that there should be a more formal connection to the park from that direction.

Considerations

The area included in the map change petition consists of three specific sub-areas that each have particular considerations that should be taken into account:

The MBTA Trolley Yard

The MBTA Trolley Yard is a relatively large site that is mostly landlocked with the exception of limited frontage along Massachusetts Avenue. The parcel is adjacent to multifamily housing developments along Massachusetts Avenue, Linear Park and relatively smaller-scaled residential uses within the Residence B zoning district.

It is conceivable that a site such as this, which extends deep into the neighborhood from Massachusetts Avenue, might be considered for residential uses at some point in the future. The proposed C-2B district allows for residential uses at a height of 45 feet. This is in contrast to the height of 35 feet allowed in the adjacent Residence B district. Most of the existing residential structures that abut the parcel are 35 feet or lower.

The northern edge of the parcel also extends past the borders of Linear Park on the east and western edges, resulting in a narrowing of the park. If the site were redeveloped in the future, there are zoning options to ensure that the area would be converted to green space, as well as incentives that could be put in place to encourage the dedication of that area to public open space.

Dick's Auto Body

The parcels on the west side of Elmwood Street are mostly associated with an active auto body shop. The existing buildings on the lots are approximately 20-30 feet in height and constructed to the property line (no setbacks). It is possible that the lots could be redeveloped with residential uses at some point in the future. The proposed C-2B district's allowed height of 45 feet however, is inconsistent with the abutting residential homes, which range in height from approximately 20 feet to 35 feet. There could also be potentially significant contamination concerns as a result of current and past land uses on the site.

Davis Square Lofts

The parcel on the eastern side of Elmwood Street affected by the proposed zoning change is currently an accessory parking lot for a mixed use condominium development with office uses which is located primarily within Somerville. Because the parcel does not directly abut any residential properties, there is not a compelling reason to rezone this portion to C-2B as it would prohibit any expansion of the mix of uses that exists. The location may also be appropriate for some mix of low scale office or retail uses along with residential development on the site.