



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BRIAN MURPHY
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: January 14, 2014
Re: **Chun, et al. Zoning Petition (Cambridge Highlands) – Memo #2**

At the previous hearing, Planning Board members requested analysis from staff on the following general topics:

- Existing patterns of development in the neighborhood, and how townhouses relate to those patterns (*i.e.*, if there is a rationale for limiting townhouse development more in this district than in others).
- Review of conditions at the end of Loomis Street, where the zoning transitions from residential to industrial.
- Potential zoning options to address neighborhood concerns.

Existing Patterns of Development

The attached map helps to illustrate the mix of residential use types in the neighborhood. The following are some highlights:

- 86% of all housing units in the neighborhood are in single-family or two-family dwellings.
- There are 5 parcels with existing townhouse developments, containing a total of 22 dwelling units.
- There are two single-family house lots with 9,000 square feet of lot area or more, meaning that current zoning would allow them to be redeveloped as three-unit townhouse developments.
- There is one vacant parcel at the end of Loomis Street, which is partly zoned Residence B and partly zoned Industry B-2. Approximately 12-14 total units would be allowed; a townhouse development of 6 or more units in the Residence B district requires a special permit from the Planning Board.

One could conclude that townhouse development is not a significant component of the mix of uses in the Highlands neighborhood, and therefore it may be appropriate to restrict that development type. However, if townhouse options were restricted, it would be important to consider what other development options would be appropriate for the small number of lots that are large enough to accommodate more than two dwelling units.

Zoning Options

The following chart considers some approaches to modifying the zoning in the area. These could be applied separately or in combination, and could be accomplished by amending the base zoning or by creating a zoning overlay district for all or part of the current district. The appropriate mechanism can be decided based on what approach or set of approaches is preferred.

Option	Impacts on Existing Lots	Impacts on Future Development
Apply Residence A-2 zoning (as proposed in Chun, et al. Petition).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-family and townhouse developments would be non-conforming by use. • Many lots would become non-conforming by lot area, number of units or other dimensional standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only single-family homes could be built. • Some existing single-family homes could be subdivided into two units, with no exterior alterations.
Retain Residence B zoning, but prohibit townhouse residential uses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Townhouse developments would be non-conforming by use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of three or more units would have to be in detached single-family and two-family dwellings (Planning Board special permit required for multiple dwellings at least 75 feet from lot line, per 5.53).
Retain Residence B zoning, but increase minimum lot area per dwelling unit (e.g., 2,500 SF for the first two units and 5,000 SF for each additional unit).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some lots would become non-conforming by number of units, but two-family and townhouse dwellings would remain conforming by use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The two larger single-family house lots would not be allowed to build three units. • For the remaining large vacant lot, there may be an incentive to subdivide into separate 5,000 SF lots.
Retain Residence B zoning, but lower the threshold for Planning Board special permit review of townhouse development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots would remain conforming by use and dimensional standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most (or potentially all) townhouse development would require site plan review, site-specific conditions could be applied.

With regard to non-conformities, there is a distinction between use non-conformities and dimensional non-conformities. Either type of non-conformity can present difficulties in making alterations to a home and could have financial implications. However, the zoning provides some degree of flexibility in making alterations to a non-conforming building so long as the use is allowed. There is less flexibility in instances where an alteration or enlargement of a non-conforming use is proposed.

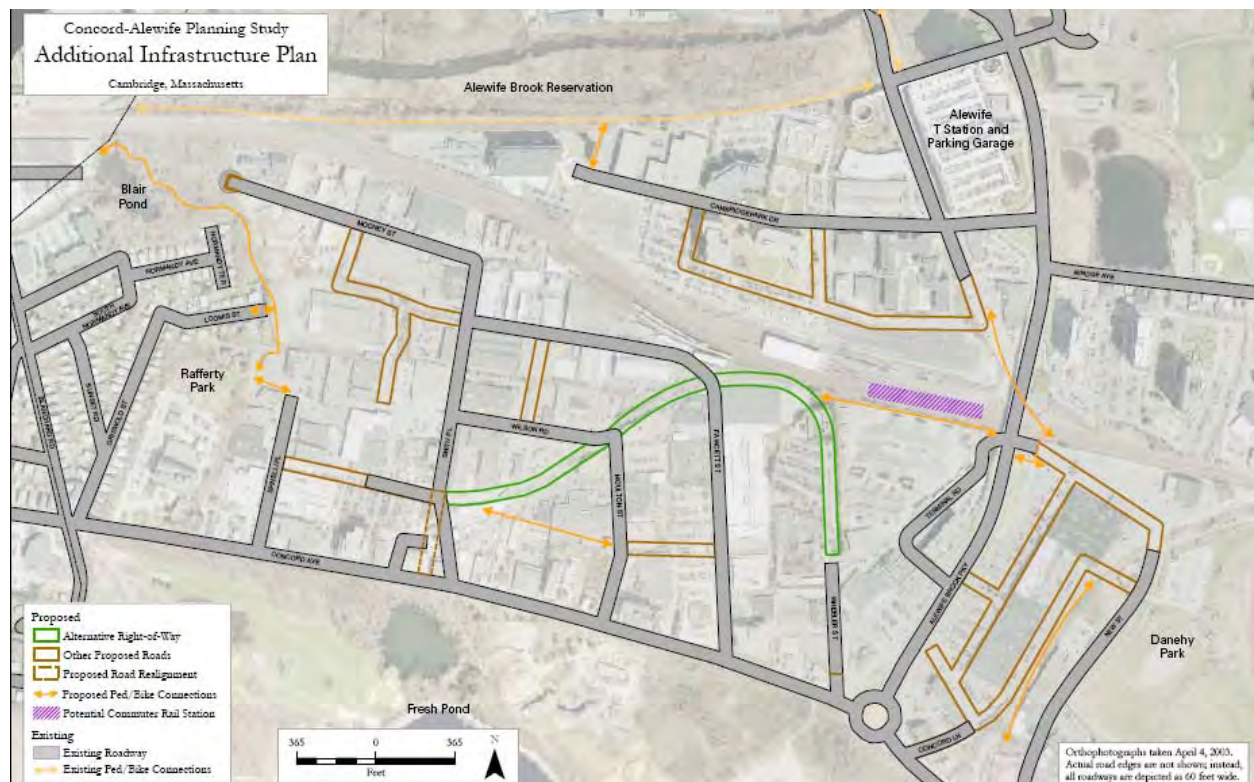
Loomis Street

The existing zoning boundary between the residential Highlands neighborhood and the industrial district to the east has been in drawn in its current location since as early as 1943. Before that time, the boundary had been drawn slightly further to the west.

The public right-of-way on Loomis Street is a dead-end that terminates just before entering the Industry B-1 zoning district. However, the road continues as a private drive that serves two parcels that are partly in the Residence B District and partly in the Industry B-2 district, one of which has been redeveloped with townhouses, the other of which remains vacant. Abutting these lots to the east is an “industrial condo” building with multiple owners which has public roadway access from Adley Road to the east.

There is no public connection from Loomis Street to any public streets in the “Quadrangle” district to the east. The most recent planning study for the area, the Concord-Alewife Planning Study (2006), supports the creation of pedestrian and bicycle connections from Loomis Street into the Quadrangle, but does not recommend making a vehicular connection.

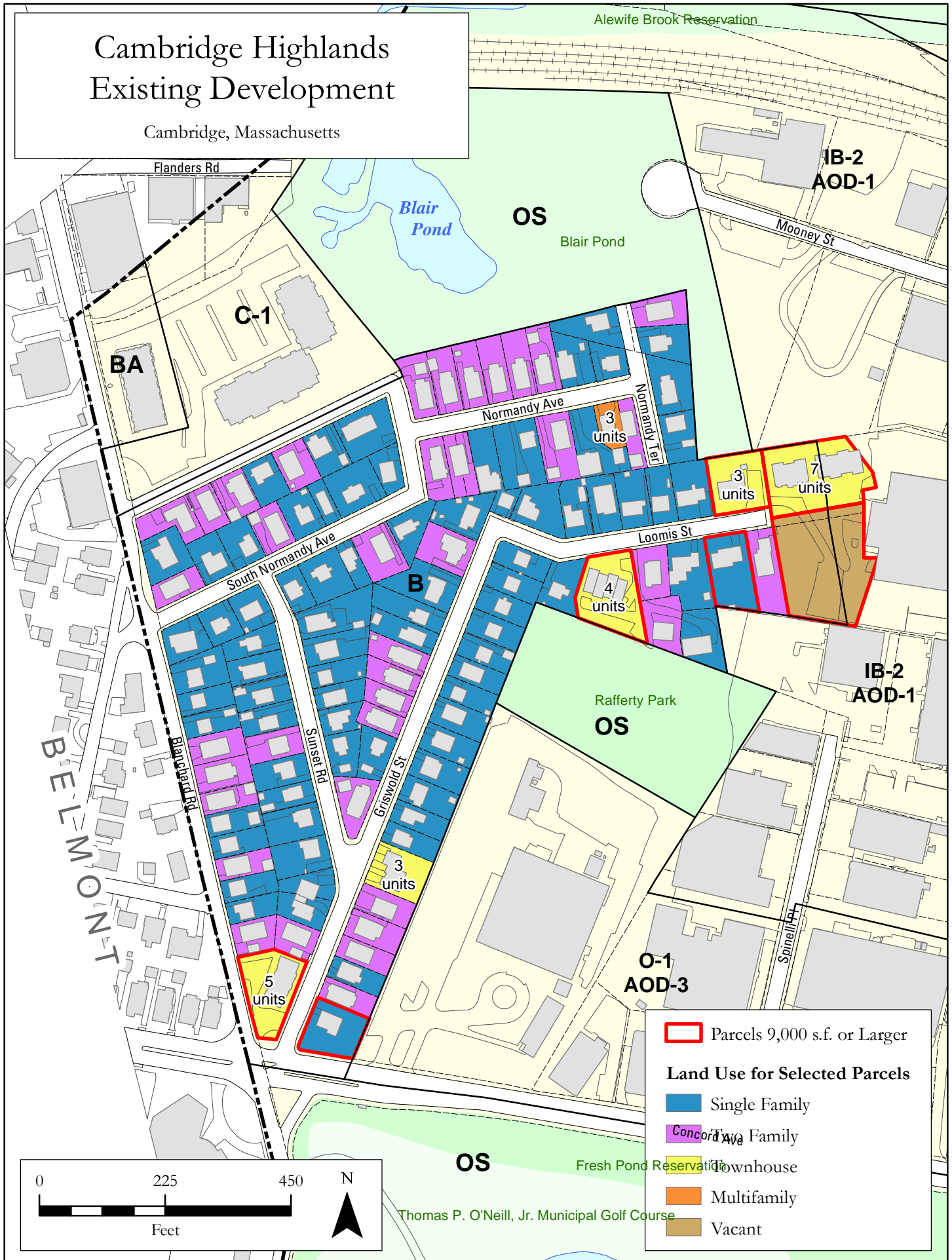
Over a number of years, Highlands neighborhood residents have raised concerns about truck traffic from the Quadrangle cutting through abutting parking lots and private drives in order to access Loomis Street. The City does not support this connection and has worked actively to discourage the owner of the drive from allowing such cut-through traffic.



Concord-Alewife Planning Study – Additional [Secondary] Infrastructure Plan (2006)

Cambridge Highlands Existing Development

Cambridge, Massachusetts



Legend

- Parcels 9,000 s.f. or Larger

Land Use for Selected Parcels

- Single Family
- Concordia Family
- Townhouse
- Multifamily
- Vacant