



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	April 1, 2014
Subject:	Chun, et al. Zoning Petition
Recommendation:	The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption and suggests a possible alternative approach.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The Board considered the Chun, et al. Zoning Petition at a series of public hearings over the past five months. The proposal is to rezone the section of the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood currently zoned Residence B to Residence A-2. Residence B allows single-family, two-family and townhouse dwellings, while Residence A-2 allows only single-family homes.

Information has been provided by the Community Development Department regarding the character of the neighborhood and the impacts of the proposed change. The neighborhood has a mix of single-family and two-family homes, with a handful of existing townhouse buildings and a few lots that might allow townhouse development in the future. A change to Residence A-2 would prohibit future townhouse development, but would also make many existing house lots nonconforming, potentially making any future alterations to those lots more difficult.

Testimony from supporters of the petition raised concerns about the effects of future townhouse development on traffic and neighborhood character. Particular concerns were raised with regard to large lots toward the end of Loomis Street, including one large vacant parcel that could be developed in the future, and an existing single-family house lot that is large enough to be redeveloped into a three-unit townhouse development. Testimony was also heard from homeowners opposed to the rezoning petition because of the impact it would have on the conformity of existing properties.

The Board agrees that the proposed change would have significant impacts on existing lots and does not support a rezoning to Residence A-2. However, the Board is sensitive to the issues around townhouse development and neighborhood character. The Highlands neighborhood is unique in Cambridge for having almost entirely single-family and two-family homes. Past development has shown that, if designed appropriately, new townhouse development can fit into the character of the neighborhood. Additional development controls could help to ensure that the remaining larger lots in the neighborhood, if developed, would be of an appropriate design and would mitigate any site-specific impacts.

Following discussion and consideration of different alternative approaches to controlling future development on larger lots, the Board recommends that the Council consider working with Community Development Department staff to draft a substitute zoning petition for the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood that would make projects with more than two dwelling units subject to review and approval by the Planning Board. In approving a project, the Board would apply the Criteria for Approval of Townhouse and Multifamily Dwellings set forth in Section 10.47.4 of the Zoning Ordinance, which address issues such as the existing landscape, the relationship of new buildings to the existing built environment, design of open space, design and layout of parking and driveways, and service facilities such as trash and utilities.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Russell", written in a cursive style.

Hugh Russell, Chair.