



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

P L A N N I N G B O A R D

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: June 3, 2014

Subject: Chun, et al. Zoning Petition (Cambridge Highlands)

Recommendation: The Planning Board does NOT RECOMMEND adoption, and submits its comments on suggested alternative zoning text.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The Planning Board continues to recommend against rezoning the Residence B district in the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood to Residence A-2, for reasons expressed in our prior recommendation on this petition.

However, at our most recent public hearing, the Board dedicated time to consideration of suggested zoning text prepared by Community Development Department staff in response to discussions by the Ordinance Committee. The suggested text would create a Cambridge Highlands Overlay District, which would allow the Residence B base zoning to control except for specific modifications in the overlay zoning text. The overlay zoning would be a way to incorporate development controls that are tailored to the neighborhood while avoiding severe impacts on existing homes.

The suggested overlay zoning text includes the following modifications:

1. Reduction of the threshold for Townhouse and Multifamily Special Permit review to any project with three or more units. (Currently, in Residence B the threshold is six or more units.)
2. Increase in the required lot area per dwelling unit to 5,000 square feet for portions of a lot greater than 5,000 square feet. (Currently, in Residence B the minimum is 4,000 square feet of lot area per unit for portions of a lot greater than 5,000 square feet.)

Requirement (1) reflects the Planning Board's previous recommendation on this zoning petition. The Board continues to believe that required project review is the most direct way to address the concerns expressed around preservation of neighborhood character. Although there are limited opportunities for new townhouse development in the neighborhood, a robust design review process would help to ensure that new buildings are designed in keeping with the character of existing homes. Moreover, site plan review would help to mitigate issues related to traffic and parking. The Board is especially sensitive to neighbors' concerns about the vacant parcel at the end of Loomis Street, where it has been difficult to control cut-through traffic from the adjacent

industrial district. Project review could ensure that future development on that site would include requirements to effectively and permanently cut off such traffic and resolve Loomis Street as a residential dead-end, consistent with the Concord-Alewife Plan.

Requirement (2) reflects a desire among neighbors to further restrict dwelling unit density on larger lots in the neighborhood. The typical 5,000 square-foot single-family or two-family house lots in the neighborhood would not be affected, but the number of permitted units would be reduced somewhat on lots that are 9,000 square feet or more. The following table summarizes the effect of this change.

Number of Dwelling Units	Minimum Lot Area Required	
	<i>Current Zoning</i>	<i>Suggested Zoning</i>
1 or 2	5,000 square feet	5,000 square feet
3	9,000 square feet	10,000 square feet
4	13,000 square feet	15,000 square feet
5	17,000 square feet	20,000 square feet

Planning Board members did not reach consensus on whether this approach should be recommended. On the one hand, the neighborhood does have an established character of single-family and two-family homes, and therefore it would not be inappropriate to impose additional controls on larger-scale development. On the other hand, the current controls in the Residence B zoning already reduce dwelling unit density for larger lots, and although the suggested change would further reduce the number of units allowed on a very small number of lots that are over 9,000 square feet in size, this reduction would be negligible and would not necessarily address issues around preservation of neighborhood character in a meaningful way.

Therefore, the Board does not give its full support to the suggested change in lot area per dwelling unit. As a planning strategy, we believe that it would not contribute greatly toward serving the neighborhood's goals. The Board leaves this to the Council to determine if it is in the public interest for other reasons.

In making this recommendation, we would like to express our appreciation toward Mr. Chun and other Cambridge Highlands neighbors for their continued attention to this matter and for the clear manner in which they have articulated their concerns to the Board.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Hugh Russell, Chair.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BRIAN MURPHY
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: May 28, 2014
Re: **Chun, et al. Zoning Petition – Refiled (#3)**

This is to update the Planning Board on the status of the Chun, et al. Zoning Petition, which proposes to rezone the Residence B section of the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood to Residence A-2.

When this proposal was last heard by the Planning Board, CDD staff presented options for zoning changes meant to directly address the urban design character and transportation impacts of townhouse development. After hearing public testimony, the sense of the Board was that a change to Residence A-2 would have significant impacts on homeowners in the neighborhood and was not preferred. The option recommended by the Planning Board was to make all developments of 3 units or more (including any townhouse development) subject to special permit review. This would require site-specific consideration of new projects and would allow mitigating measures to be included as requirements in the special permit.

The Planning Board's recommendation was communicated to the City Council on April 28. Because the petition would expire on May 21, and the Council wished to have more time to discuss the matter, the petition was refiled.

The City Council's Ordinance Committee held a public hearing on May 20 at which Councillors expressed a desire to consider, in addition to the special permit requirement recommended by the Planning Board, increasing the minimum lot area per dwelling unit in the district for lots that are larger than 5,000 square feet. This change would not impact most existing single-family and two-family house lots, but would reduce the total number of units permitted on a small number of lots that are 9,000 square feet or more. The Ordinance Committee requested zoning text from CDD staff that would effect this change in addition to the change recommended by the Planning Board.

Each of these changes could be implemented by creating a Cambridge Highlands Overlay Zoning District and creating zoning text that would modify the rules of the base Residence B zoning. The Residence B zoning would continue to apply in general, except where the overlay zoning text specifically modifies the base requirements.

The following pages include zoning text intended to create an overlay district and make the suggested modifications. Also included are the chart of options originally presented to the Planning Board and a map showing existing development types in the neighborhood.

Amend the Zoning Map of the City of Cambridge by designating on the map the Cambridge Highlands Overlay District that area bounded and described below:

Beginning at a point, said point being the intersection of the centerline of Concord Avenue and the Cambridge Municipal Boundary with the Town of Belmont;

Thence proceeding in a northerly direction along the Cambridge Municipal Boundary to its intersection with the centerline of Normandy Avenue;

Thence turning and proceeding in an easterly direction along the centerline of Normandy Avenue until before the point at which such centerline turns in a southerly direction, and thence continuing along the easterly extension of that same line segment to its intersection with the western boundary of that lot identified as 267A-244 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map;

Thence turning and proceeding in a northerly direction along the western boundary of that lot identified as 267A-244 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map to its intersection with the northern boundary of that same lot;

Thence turning and proceeding in an easterly direction along the northern boundaries of the following lots as identified on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map: 267A-244, 267A-245, 267A-248, 267A-249, 267A-246, 267A-261, 267A-260 and 267A-258 to its terminus;

Thence turning and proceeding in a southerly direction along the eastern boundaries of the following lots as identified on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map: 267A-258, 267A-257, 267A-200 and 267A-243 to its terminus;

Thence turning and proceeding in an easterly direction along the northern boundaries of the following lots as identified on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map: 267C-55, 267C-66 and 267C-92 for the first one hundred feet of its length;

Thence turning and proceeding in a southerly direction along that line that is parallel to and one hundred feet to the east of the western boundaries of those lots identified as 267C-92 and 267C-91 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map to its intersection with the northern boundary of that lot identified as 267C-70 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map;

Thence turning and proceeding in a westerly direction along the northern boundary of that lot identified as 267C-70 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map to its terminus;

Thence turning and proceeding in a southerly direction along the western boundary of that lot identified as 267C-70 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map to its terminus;

Thence turning and proceeding in a westerly direction along the northern boundary of that lot identified as 267D-322 (also known as Rafferty Park) on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map to its terminus;

Thence turning and proceeding in southerly direction along the western boundaries of those lots identified as 267D-322 (also known as Rafferty Park) and 267D-339 on the City of Cambridge Assessor's Map and its southerly extension to its intersection with the centerline of Concord Avenue;

Thence turning and proceeding in a westerly direction along the centerline of Concord Avenue to the point of origin;

Such boundary encompassing, entirely and to the exclusion of other districts, a base zoning district having a designation of Residence B on May 5, 2014.

Create the new Section 20.800 in Article 20 of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Cambridge as follows:

20.800 CAMBRIDGE HIGHLANDS OVERLAY DISTRICT

20.801 Purpose. It is the purpose of the Cambridge Highlands Overlay District to modify the base zoning requirements applicable in the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood with the intent of supporting the unique character of that district, which is predominantly modest-sized single-family and two-family homes. Stricter controls are applied to development on larger lots so that they might better fit the established character of the neighborhood.

20.802 Establishment and Applicability. There is hereby established on the Zoning Map of the City of Cambridge the Cambridge Highlands Overlay District. Except as set forth in this Section, the requirements applicable in the base zoning district shall apply within the Cambridge Highlands Overlay District.

20.803 Lot Area Per Dwelling Unit. The permitted number of dwelling units on a lot within the Cambridge Highlands Overlay District shall be calculated as follows. A minimum lot area per dwelling unit of two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet shall apply to the first five thousand (5,000) square feet of lot area. For those portions of any lot exceeding five thousand (5,000) square feet, the minimum lot area for each permitted dwelling unit shall be five thousand (5,000) square feet. However, for any lot in existence as of May 5, 2014 that is subsequently subdivided into two or more lots, the total number of units on the subdivided lots, in total, shall at no time exceed that permitted on the lot before the subdivision occurred. Unless otherwise permitted by special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeal, the dwelling units permitted on each subdivided lot shall be in the same ratio as that lot's area is to the area of the unsubdivided lot. Nothing in this Section shall prohibit the subdivision of a Townhouse Development conforming at the time of its construction, as permitted in Section 11.10. Where the base zoning sets forth a more restrictive standard, the more restrictive standard shall apply.

20.804 Townhouse and Multifamily Special Permit Applicability. A special permit pursuant to the Procedure for Townhouses and Multifamily Dwellings set forth in Section 10.47 of the Zoning Ordinance shall be required for any development resulting in a total of three (3) or more units on a lot that is wholly or partially within the Cambridge Highlands Overlay District.

Zoning Options

The following chart was presented to the Planning Board in a memo dated January 14, 2014, and is reproduced here for convenience. While the Planning Board recommended the approach suggested in the final row of the chart, City Councillors requested that CDD staff also consider the approach suggested in the second-to-last row.

Option	Impacts on Existing Lots	Impacts on Future Development
Apply Residence A-2 zoning (as proposed in Chun, et al. Petition).	- 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.	- 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.	Townhouse developments would be non-conforming by use.	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 (<i>e.g.</i> , 2,500 SF for the first two units and 5,000 SF for each additional unit).	Some lots would become non-conforming by number of units, but two-family and townhouse dwellings would remain conforming by use.	- 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.	Lots would remain conforming by use and dimensional standards.	Most (or potentially all) townhouse development would require site plan review, site-specific conditions could be applied.

Map

The map on the following page, also previously provided to the Planning Board, provides some information about existing development characteristics of the neighborhood.

Cambridge Highlands Existing Development

Cambridge, Massachusetts

