SOUTH CAMBRIDGEPORT DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

Introduction

These guidelines supplement the provisions of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance* dealing with the districts generally south of Pacific Street and west of the railroad tracks; towards the west, these districts abut the residential areas along Brookline Street. In addition, the guidelines treat the Vassar Street corridor from Massachusetts Avenue to the Memorial Drive riverfront area.

*Types of development subject to review:
All projects requiring Special Permits (for extra height and/or density).

Area-Wide Guidelines

Certain of the city's goals for the Cambridgeport Development Review Areas are applicable to the entire area, while others may be best understood in more specific contexts. Therefore, this section deals with the overall guidelines. The second section gives details of design issues in sub-areas.

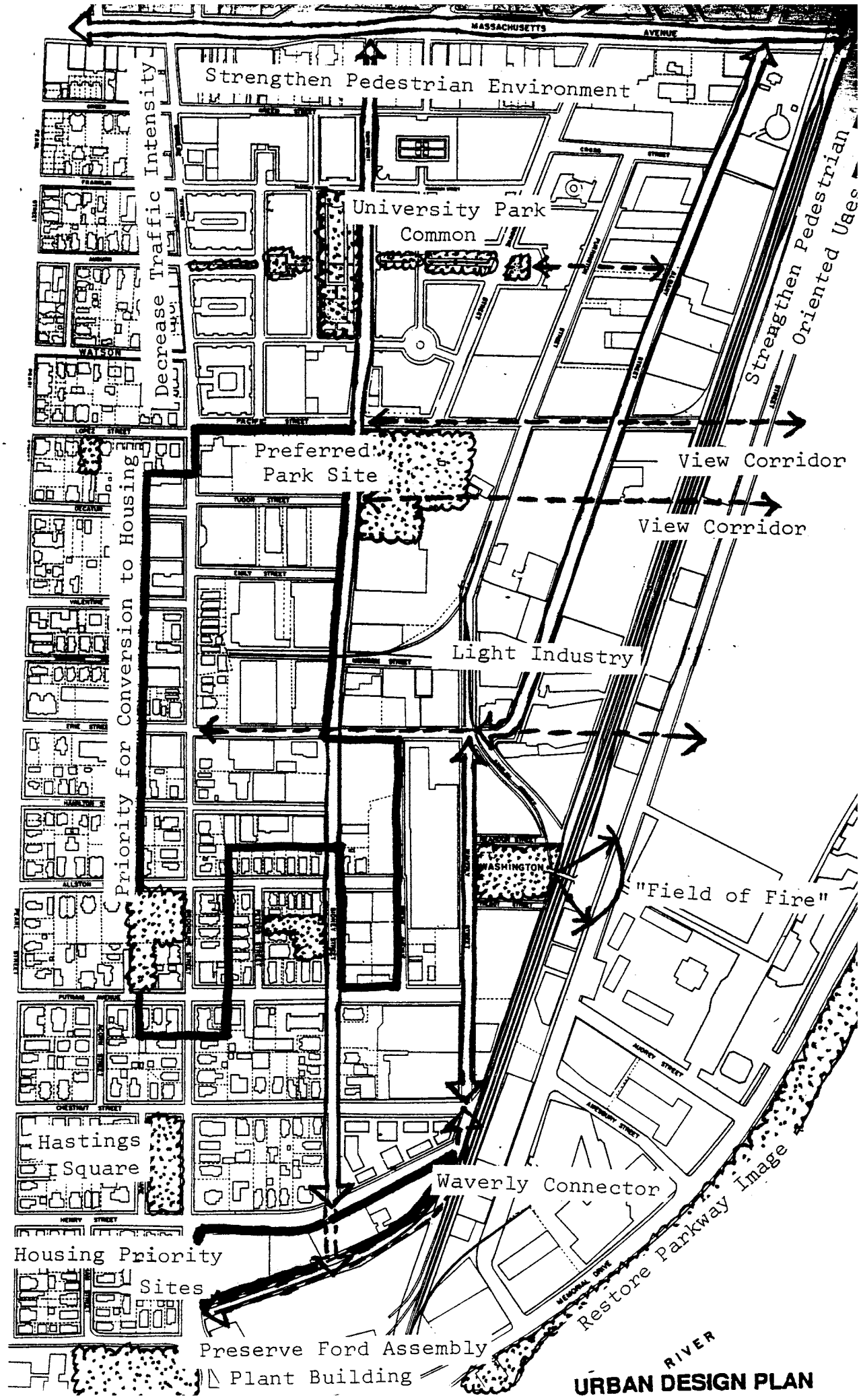
A. Urban Design Plan

The overall goal of the urban design plan is to integrate all new projects into the pattern of streets and squares which make Cambridge a walkable, liveable city. The traditional residential areas of Cambridgeport are made up of small blocks, with tree-lined streets and sidewalks, and a mix of architectural types including single and two family structures, many triple deckers, and brick appartment buildings. The small parks in the area, such as the Old Morse and Fulmore Playgrounds and Hastings Square, are essential open spaces which help organize the pattern of the neighborhood. In more recent development above Pacific Street, the Common of the University Park project will provide the major open space focus for the mix of uses there. The plan calls for this space to be connected to the surrounding areas by landscaped pathways along the major streets.

The South Cambridgeport Area needs to have a way to help orient new development. The Urban Design Plan suggests ways that the open space system may be used to help make this area fit better into the Cambridgeport context. Open space elements can also help to buffer the industrial area between Sidney Street and the railroad right-of-way above Erie Street where industrial uses are expected to remain. The long term goal is to encourage them to continue and expand. This area could be the home of emerging types of light manufacturing/R&D and prototype, contract, and networked manufacturing. Where vacant lots exist, and when building vacancies occur, light industrial uses from areas H_1 and H_2 should be encouraged, with the help of City initiatives, to relocate in this industrial/manufacturing area.

B. Housing Design Strategy

Infill housing will help strengthen the residential character of the areas near Brookline Street. As new development takes place in close proximity to existing housing, it is hoped that additional new



URBAN DESIGN PLAN

residential uses in scale with the traditional patterns will be provided. More dense housing may be anticicapated further away from the existing neighborhood, where impacts may be minimized.

The architectural variety of the Cambridgeport neighborhood underlies the social diversity by servicing a variety of housing needs. Market forces operating in the recent past posed a significant threat to the balance within the neighborhood by putting much of the housing stock financially out of reach for a large portion of the population. Therefore, a significant initiative for more affordable housing is required to conserve the character of Cambridgeport and respond to citywide housing needs.

Wherever housing for families is being developed, access to open space needs to be assured. Assuming the goal of creating a major new open space is realized, there may be the opportunity to design both the park and proximate new housing so that both benefit -- the park by having neighbors to help make the space active and the housing by having light, air, and green spcae. Even if the housing cannot be coordinated with such a park, adequate open space must be provided. This is an especially serious concern given that the area has for so long been in industrial use, and has been a rather hostile environment that would accommodate residential use only with significant environmental change.

C. Street and Sidewalk Design

An important feature of the street system for lower Cambridgeport will be the realization of the planned Waverly Street connector, linking Waverly to Brookline through the Ford Assembly site towards the BU Bridge. More generally, it will be desirable throughout the area to provide street connections through large blocks, such as the long ones in the area between Sidney Street and the railroad right-of-way, and between Pacific and Erie. This will help break down the scale of new development to be compatible with the historic block pattern. In addition, it will allow for sight lines ultimately connecting the existing residential area to new development and beyond, towards the MIT campus and the River. Whether or not actual new street connections are made, sight lines as suggested on the urban design plan should be respected to the maximum extent possible, given parcelization and other constraints.

On major streets including Sidney, Pacific, Erie, and Waverly, street furnishings, landscaping, etc. should be consistent with the University Park guidelines for Type 2 streets (see document dated 12/22/87). For other less prominent streets, the Type 3 standards would be appropriate. In the industrial/manufacturing area, new development will likely be built to the lot lines. The lack of, or minimum requirement for, setbacks and yards will cause a visual density at street level. Architectural and site development features should be employed which would mitigate the impact of this density.

D. Parking Facilities

Parking lots and garages should be located carefully to avoid negative impacts on residential areas and major public ways. Where parking is in open lots, landscaping should be provided to soften the visual impact; especially important are the edges of such sites, which should be buffered from any adjacent housing and tree-lined along any street frontages. Structured parking should be architecturally treated to have no negative impact upon neighboring uses or streets. Buildings on "stilts" with parking visible are not acceptable.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT REVIEW AREAS

The following outline explains the structure of the guidelines.

Character and Use

Each of the districts, because of the existing pattern of development, previous history, or future regulatory environment, can be expected to evolve a somewhat unique character that should be encouraged whenever a project is subject to public review. That character will be defined in part by the scale and design of the new buildings, the mix of uses developed and the relationship between the public and private realms: it is the appearance, the impression, the feel of the district created by the sum total of density, height, open space, materials, activity that public and private developments should strive to achieve.

Dimensional Standards

Those characteristics of building height and setback from public ways and abutting property that should be encouraged as typical and prevailing throughout the district. Exceptions, consistent with the maximum limitations permitted by the applicable zoning, can be expected where the specific context and/or a clearly superior design might suggest alternate approaches.

Open Space

The location, character, size and use of the parks and landscaped areas that might be created to serve the general public or the residents of the private developments newly created.

Design Standards

Special considerations of building design, materials, and orientation on the lot; landscaping; site development; and circulation that are unique to the district and which contribute to the character that is being sought.

AREA H_1 Brookline Street Corridor

Character and Use

This corridor, at the edge of both the older residential neighborhood and the industrial district, has a mixed development history. Residential and industrial uses coexist. There has been new residential development adjacent to industrial sites. This is a pattern that can be accommodated. In the future it is hoped that existing industrial and retail uses will be relocated elsewhrere in Cambridgeport and replaced on redeveloped lots with new housing construction. The ultimate goal is to thoroughly integrate the corridor into the residential neighborhood that surrounds it on three sides. Scattered, small-scale, neighborhood serving businesses may continue to persist (especially at the Putnam Avenue corner) or be incorporated into new development where that can be demonstrated to be appropriate. New construction, whether on vacant lots or on redeveloped sites, should match as closely as possible the small scale, discrete building forms typical of the lower end of the corridor and the abutting neighborhood. The traditional pattern of landscaped front, side and rear yards should be repeated.

Dimensional Standards

New development is most appropriate at a height of 35', matching the prevailing height along Brookline Street. Additional height up to 45' is allowed as a bonus for providing affordable housing. Lower cornice heights or other architectural devices should be employed to create the perception of lower height. The traditional setbacks of the residential neighborhood should be respected and such setbacks should be finished as green space.

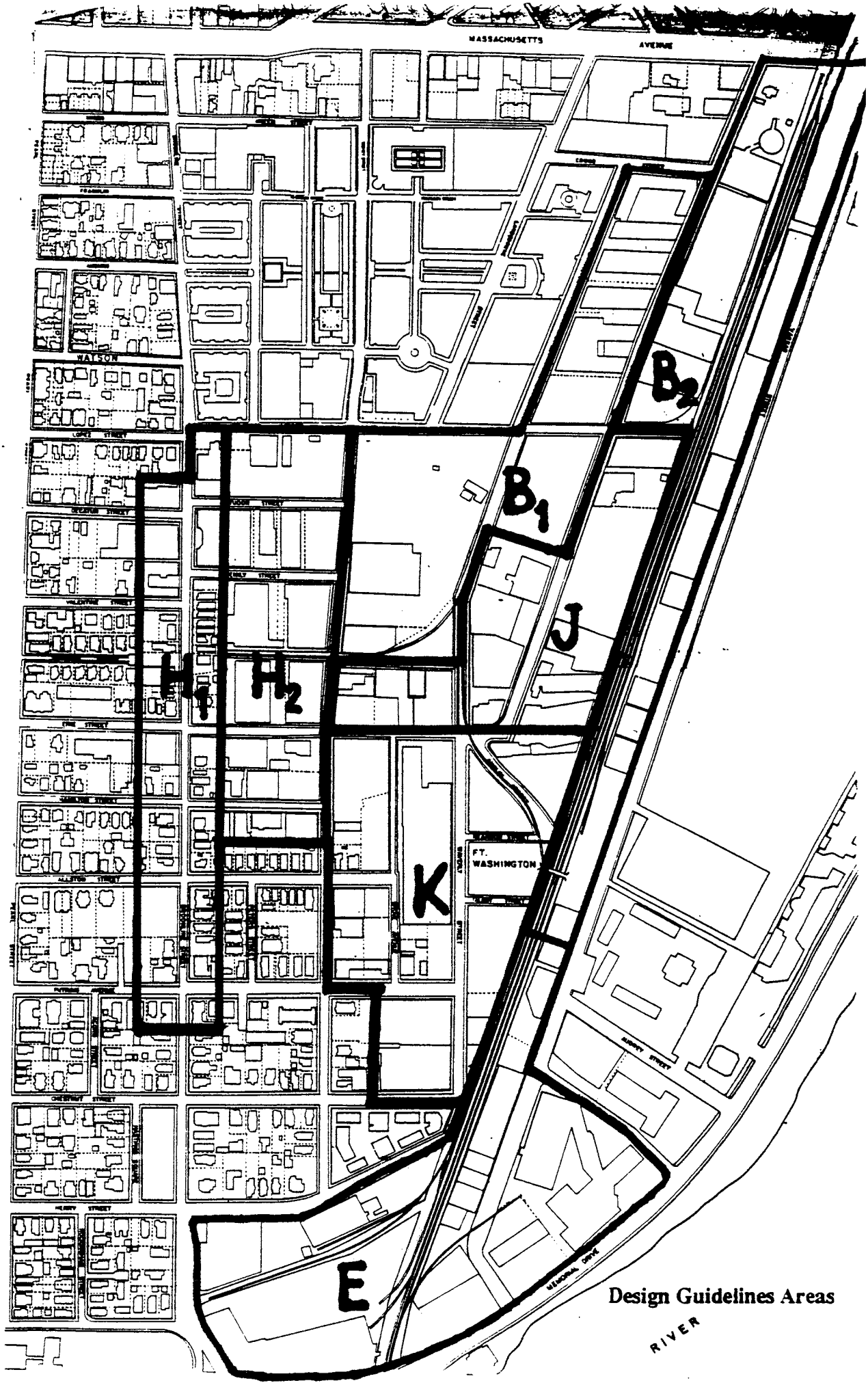
Open Space

A landscaped presence along Brookline Street is desirable and a preferred location is the upper section of Area H_1. Where small-scale open space features can be created, well landscaped passive parks or gardens should be emphasized. Play areas for very small children and their parents may be apppropriate.

Brookline Street, in particular, needs to be more consistently lined with trees. Additional street tree plantings on cross streets leading into Area H_2 will be important to help knit the two areas together as Cambridgeport evolves.

Design Standards

Small wood-framed and brick structures repeating the diversity of development patterns and materials common in the residential neighborhood should be encouraged. Only a very limited number of existing non-residential structures are worthy of retention and possible conversion to residential use. Dwellings adjacent to a street should generally face the street in the traditional manner with entry porches, stoops, windows, gates and pathways facing and/or leading to the street.



Design Guidelines Areas

AREA H_2 The Industrial Area between Brookline and Sidney Streets

Character and Use

This area is heavily devoted to light industrial and research and development uses. Those uses are expected to remain and may expand modestly but the long term goal is to encourage the conversion of the district to residential use, initially on vacant lots and ultimately through the assisted relocation of industry to Area J and the subsequent redevelopment of developed lots.

Townhouses and two and three family housing forms are preferred. Individual sites might be expected to be developed to more intense apartment style housing forms.

Whatever the housing form, transformation of the district to a better landscaped residential neighborhood is the long term objective. Scattered small scale neighborhood retail uses might be incorporated into new developments in limited circumstances.

Dimensional Standards

Height in the 40'-45' range is desirable. Residential development to a maximum of 60' may be appropriate in specific circumstances where significant beneifits can be achieved, for the provision of affordable housing. However, a consistent three or four story cornice line along streets is important to maintain. The creation of open space at ground level and effective means of shielding parking from view are desirable goals and are especially important where 60'heights are attained.

Where the area abuts the existing residential neighborhood on its southwest border, heights over 45' should be excluded from a 100' buffer zone.

Maintenance of setbacks is important in this area to facilitate its transformation from an industrial district to a residential district. Setbacks should generally be landscaped to that same end. Nevertheless, flexibility and innovation should be encouraged in providing those setbacks to best reflect the specific conditions applicable on any particular development site.

Open Space

The large size of the area and the variety of individual sites located therein are likely to result in different sizes and types of open space. Both active recreational and more sedate gardent parks are appropriate to serve both the new residents of the area as well as the existing neighborhood. Innovation in the style, configuration and location of open space and landscaping should advance the objective of transforming the area's industrial character into a more friendly residential environment. Additional street tree plantings on cross streets will be important to help knit Area H_2 into the rest of residential Cambridgeport.

Design Standards

The basic intent of the yard requirments, to impart a residential quality to the district over time, should be respected but the actual shape can be modified to reflect the potential of each development site.

AREA B_1 Industrial Area between Sidney and Albany Streets, north of the Light Industrial Area J

Character and Use

New development will transform the character of this district, since large areas now are vacant. While existing technical office and research activities will remain and possibly expand, housing is a desired use as well (especially around the park). In addition to other building types, larger scaled multi-family buildings are suitable here provided courtyards, yards, and other open space are integral elements of the design. As suggested in the urban design plan, introduction of new roads or pedestrian ways should be considered, whether public or private, to reduce the scale of the developed blocks and more closely reflect the texture and scale of the adjacent neighborhood street layout. Wherever possible, view corridors which visually connect Area B_1 to surrounding spaces are important to counteract the currently isolated character of this area.

Dimensional Standards

This area should provide a transition between the existing residential neighborhood (and its continuation into adjacent Area H_2 and the more intensively developed areas to the north at University Park and eastward toward the MIT campus.

Heights in Area B_1 are allowed at 45' (although transfer of development rights could push them much higher). A height of 45' should be encouraged along all major east/west streets, existing and newly created, as a means of visually reducing the impact of the additional height where it would be visible down a street corridor from the neighborhood. Discretion should be used in reviewing building setbacks and open space in each development respecting, however, the intent of the base district requirements.

Importantly, parts of this area can be expected to receive additional development rights through transfer of development potential from other parts of this area. The appropriateness of the increased density (as evidenced by requests for added height, additional floor area) should be measured in part by the benefits achieved in such transfers: more open space, better site design, affordable housing, etc.

Open Space

Because of its large size unbroken by streets and the large parcels it contains, Area B_1 provides perhaps the best opportunity to incorporate a major recreational facility as part of a larger development scheme. The preferred location for a major open space is at the southwest edge of Area B_1 -- the block between Sidney and Purrington Streets and south of Pacific Street. If this site were to be developed as active playing fields, it could help create a positive edge between University Park and development below Pacific. Open spaces of all kinds, as recreational facilities and as an element of the urban setting, becomes increasingly critical as the density increases; flexibility, however, should be used in reviewing each proposal to ensure the optimum mix of open space and other uses for each particular development program.

Design Standards

As the scale of building increases, architectural and site development features should be employed which would mitigate the visual impact of the increased density. The tallest elements of a development, where possible, should be set back from public ways such that they will not terminate or dominate the view down public streets, particularly as viewed from the existing neighborhood.

AREA B_2 The Vassar Street Corridor

Character and Use

The upper section of Area B_2 is rather heavily developed and not likely to change radically in the near future, except for the Massachusetts Avenue site. However, the middle section of the Vassar Street corridor opposite the MIT playing fields is seen by MIT as an important area for development of academic housing. Housing could help make this street a better place for people, with green plantings and a well-designed residential edge.

Dimensional Standards

The height of new structures along Vassar Steet should follow the typical pattern of development at MIT, with a predominance of mid rise structures, only broken by occasional and very carefully-sited higher elements. Such higher structures should not block any view corridors which maay tie acreoss the railroad right of way. Of particular importance are the views aligned with Pacific and Erie Streets. Nor should they be perceived as a wall. A particular concern is that any higher elements not visually impact the Fort Washington district across the railroad right-of-way.

Importantly, parts of this area can be expected to receive additional development through transfer of development potential from Area B_1 . The appropriateness of the increased density should be measured

mainly by the benefits achieved in increased size and better site location for the playing fields in Area B_1.

Open Space

The new housing development should have adequate open space, perhaps in the form of courtyards with landscaped edges along the sidewalk. Such courtyards can help make the street a friendly place for pedestrians.

Design Standards

Area B_2 is different from any of the other subdivisions treated in the Guidelines in that it is perceived as an extension of the MIT campus. As such, the design standards applicable elsewhere on the campus are appropriate here. As noted above, the generally mid rise character of the campus housing should be followed to establish the basic residential pattern, with exceptional high-rise structures located to avoid shadows on the open space, etc.

AREA K Industrial Area Surrounding Fort Washington Park

Character and Use

This area is likely to remain very much a mixed district of existing office, research and development, and industrial uses in combination with the same plus residential use in new construction. As in Area H_2, every effort should be made in site and building design to assure the compatibility of new development with the adjacent residential neighborhood or any possible new residential use within the area. The base district yard requirements should, in this regard, be respected in spirit, if not in detail for all new land development. The existing AS&E complex is a useful model for the kind of site development pattern the zoning regulations hope to encourage, witht exception that the block it is on has been developed as a long wall impeding pedestrian flow from the neighborhood towards Fort Washington.

Dimensional Standards

While it can be expected that a maximum height of 45 feet would prevail, variations should be expected. At Fort Washington heights in a somewhat lower range would be appropriate along Reardon and Talbot Streets (35-40') with greater height more removed from the park frontage. Greater height to sixty feet for residential use is acceptable elsewhere in the area where other objectives are achieved (more open space, affordable housing, manufacturing or R&D space generating significant employment). The setback requirements of the base district should be respected in any development proposal. Where the area abuts the existing residential neighborhood on its southwest border, heights over 45' should be excluded from a 100' buffer zone.

Open Space

Innovation in the style, configuration, and location of open space and landscaping is encouraged. However, all open space and landscaping should advance the objective of transforming the area's industrial character into a more friendly environment.

Design Standards

Fort Washington is the preeminent feature of Area K and should receive special consideration. Development should:

(1) recognize its significance, historically,
(2) protect and enhance its use and enjoyment, and
(3) articulate it as a well-defined urban park.

Active uses are important for the street level of buildings facing the park along Reardon and Talbot Streets. Service to any development at these edges, including parking, should be provided from Waverly Street or other locations away from the park. Pedestrian entries should be frequent along both street facades. Whatever uses are ultimately located here should be contained in buildings that are domestic in scale and detail.

All parking should be hidden from view, screened by active uses along the park edges and elsewhere to the maximum extent possible, or placed underground.

AREA E Henry Street, the Ford Assembly Site, and Memorial Drive to the Hyatt Hotel

Character and Use

Proposed long-range road improvements will significantly alter the environment in this area in the future. New development will of necessity have to adjust to significantly increased traffic volumes which can be expected to influence the design of new construction. Housing is the preferred long term use, with a phasing out of the existing industrial and research facilities. However, it is recognized that the building does not lend itself easily to residential use, in particular given the very large floor plate and the impact of the Memorial Drive bridge on the riverfront facade. The highest priority is for preservation of the building: if other uses as allowed in the zoning are brought into the building, the reuse of the structure should be conceived with care in regard to the relation to nearby residential uses. Throughout Area E, developemtnt should continue the scale and character of the adjacent neighborhood, including the occurrence of small parks located to help buffer the residential areas from heavy traffic and visual impacts of other new development in the area.

An important concern is to preserve the park-like feeling along Memorial Drive and the Charles River. Parking lots should be located or landscaped accordingly. Under no circumstances should a parking garage be allowed to be built on an existing lot facing the River.

Dimensional Standards

Along Henry Street the requirements of the residential base district should be observed generally with minor adjustments to accomodate difficult sites or to encourage creative solutions to the grade conditions--there is a precipitous drop from the street down to the existing parking lot behind the Ford Assembly building.

On the Ford Assembly Site, it will be important to preserve the historic structure. Additional, new development on this parcel should be compatible in scale and character with the original building. The large vertical space which was formerly used for industrial purposes should be carefully integrated into the project, perhaps as an atrium connecting new and old, if feasible.

Along the riverfront, the setbacks long established by the Metropolitan District Commisssion should be respected. These include a minimum of 25 feet of landscaping from the property line, and stepping back of building heights from there.

Open Space

Tree-lined edges will help tie this area into the local street system. In particular, the housing along Henry Street should have adequate setbacks and landscaping. The design of this housing should take into account the presence of Hastings Square: the massing should be arranged to avoid shadows or visual intrusion onto the park. Further, the section of the Waverly Connector separating this housing from the Ford Assembly building reuse needs to be appropriately landscaped.

The pleasant character of the Memorial Drive landscaping breaks down around the BU Bridge intersection, mainly because of the bridge approaches and spatial confusion resulting from the bridge. Over time, any new development should be conceived to help mitigate this problem to the extent possible through landscaped front yards, etc.

Design Standards

New construction as clusters of discrete buildings is preferrred, replicating the scale if not the use of the homes that make up the immediately adjacent neighborhood. Townhouse and multi-family forms might also be appropriate provided an effort is made to reflect the rhythms of the adjacent neighborhood. Larger multi-family structures may be appropriate at the eastern end of Henry Street. Along Henry Street between Brookline and Sidney, the housing should relate to the street in the traditional way with multiple entries, walks, frontyards, etc.

Service and parking should be accessed fromthe rear of the lots, off of the Waverly street extension when it is created, or parking should be screened and preferably enclosed. However, every effort should be made to minimize the treatment of the Waverly Steet Extension as the back side of any development; generous landscaping, careful design, pedestrian oriented features (entries, wide sidewalks, and as much occupied space as possible) should be employed.