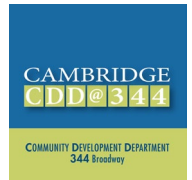




ALEWIFE ZONING WORKING GROUP

MEETING NOTES



Wednesday, August 10, 2022

6 – 8:30pm

Virtual Meeting

Attendance

Working Group Members:
Lizzie Feigunbaum, Jennifer Gilbert, Eric Grunebaum, Suhas Kodali, Mike Nakagawa, Ann Stewart, Ann Tennis (via phone), Jane Carbone, Chris Chandor, Kelvin Moses, Diana Marsh, Joe Sultan
City of Cambridge Staff:
Melissa Peters, Jeff Roberts, Daniel Messplay, Erik Thorkildsen

Meeting Overview

The Alewife Zoning Working Group convened for their second working group meeting.

The purpose and objectives of the meeting were as follows:

Purpose

- Review Alewife District Plan land use and zoning recommendations
- Review development since completion of Alewife District Plan
- Confirm the community's planning priorities on type and amount of development

Objectives

- Confirm community's planning direction and start to discuss zoning strategies

Presentation

Melissa Peters and Daniel Messplay presented an overview of the Alewife District Plan's land use and zoning recommendations; reviewed recent development projects in the study area; and facilitated a discussion on the community's desired priorities on type and amount of development.

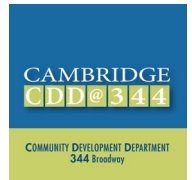
Discussion by Working Group

- Eric Grunebaum
 - Infrastructure should come first: transportation, bike, heat island, stormwater
 - Maybe we should down-zone unless infrastructure is done first?
 - Melissa Peters agreed that while critical infrastructure should be built first, in terms of planning, it's important to start with the land use vision to determine what type of infrastructure is needed and where.
- Mike Nakagawa
 - Agrees that infrastructure is a priority.
 - Planning first – what do we want to see? How much of what uses and where?
 - Concord Alewife plan produced only residential in the triangle – no retail
- Suhas Kodali
 - Commuter rail is crucial
 - Commuter workers are clogging Route 2 in the mornings, maybe reason for more residential



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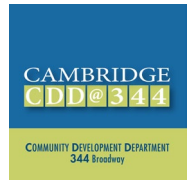
Virtual Meeting

- Need incentives to get retail in the Quad. – more FAR and height for residential projects, (or at least the same as commercial).
- Diana Marsh
 - Infrastructure is important (bike connections, bridge over tracks)
 - Wants flexibility on upper floors
 - Wants retail or light industrial on ground floors
 - Can zoning provide more incentives? – lower the FAR and height unless retail or light industrial is provided
 - Retail needs visibility from cars
 - Vary the zoning as appropriate for the site
 - Schools should be a use
 - Important to have friendly and interesting pedestrian experience
- Ann Stewart
 - Mentioned that a developer reached out to the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance about developing a 500-unit building at “A Street Frame” location.
- Lizzie Feigunbaum
 - Important to create a safe walkable environment. Make it a vibrant neighborhood.
 - Don’t create dead space like on Wheeler.
 - Provide mixed use throughout to avoid dead zones.
 - Need for contiguous open space.
 - Locate retail and residential buildings to draw people to open space
 - Improve and protect Blair Pond – concern about impacts of the additional population.
- Eric Grunebaum
 - Public land use is important – the city is the developer of the public realm – open space, transit, bridges.
 - It’s hard to dictate what type of business goes into ground floor, but we should encourage active use
 - How many low barrier to entry jobs are created by labs? Maybe labs can provide the jobs we’re looking for.
 - Use labs to get the things we want: jobs and public realm.
- Suhas Kodali
 - Wants to prioritize housing
 - We could increase the density limits for housing
 - Suggests to increase the FAR to 2.0 or more. Keep the height in the NW for the Quad at 85’. 6 to 8 stories is fine.
 - Housing shouldn’t be limited to the southwest of the Quad.
- Joe Sultan
 - If we incentivize light industrial, we will get it. 875 Mass Ave is successful.
 - Most of the area’s traffic is just passing through on the way to someplace else.
- Diana Marsh



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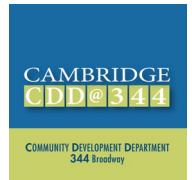
Virtual Meeting

- In the Quad, allow higher FAR for residential
- And allow more FAR for commercial if residential is also added.
- Consider reducing the open space requirement (increasing allowable coverage) as an option.
- Consider requiring a % of residential in large sites.
- Kelvin Moses
 - It's hard to conceptualize height and FAR. Compare to the Triangle – what is 50 CPD? How much retail does it have?
 - Do we have statistics on housing, retail, and commercial in new projects?
 - Can we analyze the best places for viable retail?
- Lizzie Feigunbaum (speaking for John Chun)
 - Keep the stepdown to the Highlands neighborhood.
 - The mix of different kinds of people is crucial to the feeling of a good neighborhood
 - Include 3BR units.
 - Importance of public open space
- Jennifer Gilbert
 - Agrees about the importance of housing
 - What can we do to get affordable housing? Inclusionary isn't enough.
 - We should accept that light industrial is not likely
- Joe Sultan
 - Agrees that it's hard to retain light industrial
 - Agrees that we will see change (he is open to housing instead)
- Lizzie Feigunbaum
 - It's good to have some light industrial. It makes possibilities visible for kids and strengthens a sense of neighborhood and place.
 - Melissa Peters: proposed as a question that maybe we don't need a separate zone for light industrial, instead just provide light industrial as one of many options at ground floor. But we would still need to ensure sufficient height.
- Joe Sultan
 - Labs also open worlds (not just light industrial). Most of his tenants work in oncology
 - In addition, how much public open space should there be?
- Diana Marsh
 - Don't provide the 20% in front setbacks – better to have a public park or pocket park. Have options to have parks with streets on 2 or more sides.
 - Let the properties along the diagonal park have more height in return for giving space for a wider park.
- Eric Grunebaum
 - We need useful open space, not just setbacks.
 - Assembly Row: Active use and a large park; good street front buildings.
 - Open space shouldn't be just a linear strip.



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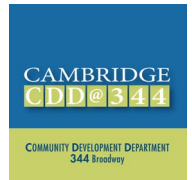
Virtual Meeting

- Locate buildings closer to the sidewalk – more efficient use of space.
- Aggregate the open space to create a big one.
- Plan pocket parks, which can be small.
- Chris Chandor
 - We're proposing widening the diagonal park at 40 Smith.
 - Need to bring jobs to Alewife – to support retail
 - We're still subsidizing the restaurant in 10 Wilson.
 - Need to allow more height to residential buildings to make it competitive with life science.
 - Need to bring paying jobs into the neighborhood so that retail can survive.
- Kelvin Moses
 - The diagonal park is good to connect the Alewife Brook Reservation to the Fresh Pond Reserve.
 - The bridge over the train tracks will augment it. We should encourage it.
 - Pocket parks in addition.
 - Ground floor active space – high bay space: how much should we require? We shouldn't build so much that it remains vacant. What are the priorities for location?
- Eric Grunebaum
 - High bay ground floor spaces could be used by schools, architect offices.
 - If the spaces remain vacant, they're charging too high rent.
 - Need to design spaces that are big enough to work (500 sf is too small)
- Chris Chandor
 - 10 Wilson – 3500sf coffee shop: zero rent is still too high – developers still need to subsidize.
 - 35 CPD restaurant didn't work – people are working elsewhere – need jobs and businesses in the neighborhood.
- Mike Nakagawa
 - If the rent is cheap enough, there will be a tenant that wants the space
 - We shouldn't limit active ground floor to retail
 - More labs mean more luxury housing
 - Light industry instead – better pay than retail jobs
- Diana Marsh
 - Attract a diversity of ground floor uses, not just retail or light industrial (veterinarian, art studio, gymnastics)
 - Have residential or commercial buildings concentrate their internal amenities on ground floor
- Melissa Peters summarized working group comments and asked for the group to confirm she captured it correctly, which they confirmed:
 - We still like light industrial because of jobs and streetscape
 - But other uses are good too – artist space, gyms, libraries
 - People recognize the value of mixed-use district



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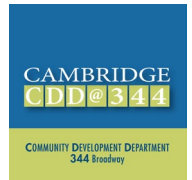
Virtual Meeting

- Housing shortage – we need to incentivize residential development
 - Increase the FAR and height for residential, keep commercial as is
- Eric Grunebaum
 - Jobs don't have to be light industrial
 - We should find out how many jobs in labs are low barrier to entry and well paying?
 - Not against tall buildings but respect the Highlands desire for gradation.
 - Housing is also a transit problem – some of it is in other cities – importance of bike and train station
- Mike Nakagawa
 - Wants buildings short enough to be shaded by trees – 5 stories max
 - Green walls above that height
 - Labs vs housing proposes 1:1 ratio of residents to jobs
- Chris Chandor
 - 70' is limit for low rise residential, above that building code requires steel frame. With steel frame, it is more cost effective go to 10 to 12 stories – 120'. But we should check this, maybe the code has changed.
 - Stay away from the Highlands with the taller buildings, keep them at the east.
- Suhas Kodali
 - 125' is the height the Triangle has for residential
 - Cambridge Crossing has an FAR of 3. Which sounds reasonable here.
- Chris Chandor
 - FAR helps, but you need a big enough site – residential buildings need to be 65' to 70'. Height is crucial.
- Jen Gilbert
 - Agrees. Flexibility on height is important
 - Explain about the benefits of PUDs. Will we have the same recommendations for them as for smaller parcels? What do PUDs make possible?
- Kelvin Moses
 - We should discuss PUD or Master Plan process – discuss with the larger developers in the next meeting.
- Lizzie Feigunbaum
 - Need to understand infrastructure
 - Height limits light – design of streets - not just width of street.
 - We should have open space for wetlands and density
 - Need diversity on ground floors – labs, woodworking, test kitchens
 - Design for a diversity of users – different heights
 - Need incentives for ground floor users
 - Recommends a 1:1 ratio of residents and workers
- Mike Nakagawa
 - Cambridge Crossing: FAR of 3 and 9 story buildings



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- We need open space for flood water, enjoyment, trees, satisfy the goals of the UFMP. Maybe FAR of 3 is too high. Instead, an FAR of 2 and 5 or 6 floor buildings.
- Diana Marsh
 - We should have a height bonus for both residential and commercial if they provide ground floor active space.
- Eric Grunebaum
 - Agrees in diversity for ground floor uses. Don't discount the kinds of jobs in labs
 - Flexibility in height bonus for active ground floors, and for bigger contiguous open space. Higher bonuses in targeted areas.
- Mike Nakagawa
 - Open space on top of buildings – limit roof heights, put connected parks on top of buildings. (Suggestion for Central Square)
 - Transportation limitation in the area – it's a traffic bottleneck. Fresh Pond Parkway is the 2nd most congested street in the state.
 - Need to review alternate transportation ideas, such as bus from Belmont, park farther out on Route 2.

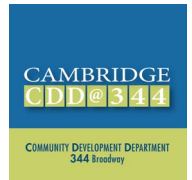
Public Comment

- Gwen
 - Day care is a great ground floor use
 - Need to get rid of CSOs into Alewife Brook
 - MWRA doesn't have addtl capacity
 - Rainwater in the Quad needs to stay in the Quad.
 - Each developer should provide land for stormwater
 - Need to separate sewers
 - Chris Chandor stated that developers need to do I & I, which means 4:1 ratio between water removed from stormwater and water added.
- Lee Farris
 - Many areas on the maps are mixed use
 - But how will we get mixed use on a parcel-by-parcel basis?
 - You can get it by PUD process or annual review of % of housing with light ind. If we're not on track, developer doesn't get the special permit unless its provided.
 - What other ideas can zoning staff suggest?
- Councilor Dennis Carlone
 - The Neighborhood and Long-Term Planning Committee will follow this project
 - Need a UD analysis. Need to see FAR and height.
 - The Council will review and vote on the result of the study.
 - Need to designate A streets and B streets. "Location use factors"
 - Bridge locations and connections to Concord Ave will affect street character.
 - Technical office should be along the tracks because they will pay for the bridges.



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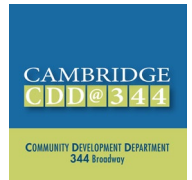
Virtual Meeting

- Labs create 3x the amount of traffic as residential
- Residential is 3x as good for retail and creates safety on weekends.
- Bridge at Wheeler: the MBTA is bankrupt – they won't be funding it.
- Ground floors: schools, childcare
- Need a UD plan – key streets, key locations for users and for parks
- East Cambridge UD plan – the canal is part of the plan
- Mix – on individual sites the developer will decide uses to accommodate. Advantage of PUDs – the mix can be specified.
- 40% commercial should be the max
- The bridge needs to be a shuttle bridge.
- Tech office doesn't make a viable community on weekends. Residential does.
- Alan Sadun
 - Zoning won't define uses if several are allowed.
 - A 1:1 residential to commercial population ratio means a 4:1 ratio of GSF (we should look at population, not only GSF.)
 - Supports FAR of 3.0, height of 125'
 - Cambridge Crossing is a good model
- Rachel DeLucas
 - Important to have residential across the whole site
 - Opportunity to connect - Fresh Pond to Alewife Reservation through Blair Pond, Rafferty Park – tree canopy and trail
 - Native plants, tree canopy, habitat connection
 - Somerville's Tyler Street – Artisans Asylum - Foundry type space – an exciting destination. Amenity for local businesses and residents, a meeting place.
 - Day care for workers – universal Pre-K
 - Shortage of elementary schools
 - Need to create an Innovation District, not just individual buildings.
 - Machine shop that multiple labs can use
- Justin Saif
 - Housing crisis - there are 10K people on the CHA's list – need to build more.
 - Should start with the need for housing – use it to define height and density.
 - Cambridge Crossing has good open space.
- Michael Hidalgo
 - Broad consensus for more housing than shown in the ADP
 - Skeptical that zoning can target things like light industrial
 - Fine with 125', 12 stories
 - Think of the whole city, not just the neighborhoods.
- James Williamson
 - Concern that the AZWG doesn't reflect the community
 - The Triangle is a "monstrosity" – height and scale



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- The market isn't enough – it won't provide affordable housing
- The restaurant in 10 Wilson is only open till 2:00p, – what if it was open in the evenings?
But there is no way to get there.
- Biotech isn't everything

Next Steps

- The next meeting is scheduled for September 14, 2022, at 6pm. It will be held in-person (location TBD).
- It will discuss infrastructure and community facilities as well as ask developers to discuss their future plans.