



Growth Management Advisory Committee Overheads Presented at January 16, 1998 Meeting

The following information was presented in the form of overheads to the Committee by Phil Herr of Phil B. Herr & Associates at the Committee's January 16, 1998 meeting. The presentation summarized the outcome of the 1997 Cambridge Citizens for Growth Management zoning petition, including changes to the zoning ordinance and topics for further discussion.

CRGM Petition Topics	Actions to Date
Reduce FAR, height and density	Adopted 120' height limit in RC-3, O3, BB, IB; 65' height limit for C-2B residences.
Affordable housing linkage and inclusion	Strengthened linkage. Inclusion deferred.
Establish district transition rules	Deferred.
Enhanced public and design review	Adopted some review refinements, deferred others.
Open space protection	Rezoned 21 locations to OS. Deferred on-lot open space and OS district FAR changes.
Revise nonconformity rules	Deferred.

Incompletely Addresses Petition Purposes

- Prevent congestion
- Scale compatibility, avoid overshadowing
- Minimize disruptive district transitions
- Prevent worsening of flood risk
- Encourage inclusion of affordable housing
- Protect open space

1. Reduce FAR, Height and Density

Purpose: prevent congestion

Prior Proposal: reduce business & residential FARs

Impact Observations:

- Adoption would reduce traffic volumes near development.
- Impact Citywide depends upon:
 - where "displaced" jobs & housing actually locate.
 - how much "outside" traffic would be attracted;
 - how much lower densities would lower transit share.
- Adoption would probably result in:
 - fewer building "tear-downs;"

- more nonconforming buildings (unless special provisions avoid that);
- uncertain impact on housing affordability;
- uncertain impact on job types

Evaluative Observations:

- There are many powerful causes of traffic increases in Cambridge besides development in Cambridge.
 - 14.5% per year auto registration increase in Cambridge;
 - 0.3% per year increase in households;
 - 1.0% per year increase in jobs;
 - 2.0% per year increase in regional traffic potential;
 - Life style changes.
- Simple FAR reduction reduces trips only by reducing future jobs, housing, and taxable floor area.
- Bulk control inexactly addresses traffic: trips vary hugely in relation to floor area among business uses & locations.
- Performance-based zoning controls could more sensitively address congestion and less heavily impact jobs, housing and taxes.

Purpose: scale compatibility, avoid overshadowing

Prior Proposals:

- Reduce FARs
- Reduce heights
- Establish uniform cornice line.

Impact Observations:

- Height reduction consequences vary in complex ways by district.
- Appropriate heights may vary within present districts.

Purpose: prevent worsening of flood risks

Prior Proposals:

- Apply 100-year flood zone rules to 500-year flood zone
- Reduce flood zone FAR to 0.5.

Impact Observations:

- Proposals might result in lower larger footprint buildings.
- Proposals substantially reduce Alewife area building potential.

Evaluative observations:

- Alewife flooding is a real but complex problem, and these proposals don't address real causes.
- FAR only indirectly relates to flood displacement or groundwater recharge.
- 500-year flood zone controls provide small risk reduction at large "cost."

- 500-year flood zone poorly describes the relevant drainage area.
- More effective techniques are available.

2. Establish District Transition Rules

Purpose: minimize disruptive district transitions

Prior Proposal: establish Transition Control Plane

Impact Observations:

- The proposal is highly complex in application.
- Creates large disparities between height and FAR as allowed and that which is feasible.

Evaluative Observations:

- Appropriateness varies among district boundary conditions.
- Likely to increase variance requests.

3. Protect Open Space

Purpose: avoid excessive impervious surfaces, loss of open space

Prior proposal:

- Revise on-lot open space dimensional rules.
- Reconsider Open Space District FAR rules.

Impact Observations:

- On-lot dimensional rules address concerns directly.
- Dimensional rules significantly reduce achievable FAR on some parcels.
- Proposed Open Space District rules may constrain recreational facilities.

Evaluative Observations:

- Housing cost increases resulting from open space rules on small parcels might hurt housing affordability.
- Dimensional proposal is likely to increase demands for relief by variance and for staff interpretation of complex rules.

4. Affordable Housing Inclusion

Purpose: encourage inclusion of affordable units in housing developments

Prior proposals:

- [Petition] Provide 25% density bonus as incentive if half "extra" units are affordable.
- [Department] Require developments over some size to include affordable units, compensated by density increase.

Topics and Items

Topic 1. Reduce FAR, Height & density

- Reduce FAR in Residence A, B, and C-1 zones.
- Reduce FAR in Commercial zones.

Topic 2. Establish district transition rules

- Transition and height rules.

Topic 3. Protect Open Space

- Revise Residential open space rules.
- Reconsider Open Space District FAR rules.

Topic 4. Affordable Housing Inclusion

- Inclusionary zoning

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