

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Re: Citywide Growth Management – Zoning Recommendations
Date: July 6, 1999

I. GROWTH MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Cambridge is changing, in ways that many see as inconsistent with the best qualities of the City. Responding to concern over those changes, in fall 1997 the City Council requested that the City Manager appoint a Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee to work with the Community Development Department as it prepared growth management tools to better guide change.

As a result of this ongoing growth management initiative, there is an increasingly clear vision of the desired Cambridge of the future. This emerging vision has grown out of three intensive public workshops convened this spring, as well as the ongoing work of the Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee (CGMAC). In addition, the vision has been informed by input from residents by mail and via the Internet, discussions with the Planning Board and the City Council, analytic studies by staff, and public and Council reaction to various zoning proposals.

The emerging vision provides a framework for the proposals now being developed by the Department. This memo summarizes the overall direction of the Department's and CGMAC's efforts and summarizes proposed actions. Draft text in support of the zoning recommendations is being prepared for consideration at subsequent Planning Board meetings.

An understanding of the changes taking place in the City is critical to guiding the directions being taken. The following trends are especially noteworthy:

- Regional market forces, coupled with the end of rent control, are resulting in rapidly rising housing costs in Cambridge. In turn, the resident population has changed more than it has grown. Typical Cambridge families are becoming smaller, offsetting the population in new housing development. School enrollment is declining, reflecting the evolving nature of Cambridge households. The typical resident is now much better educated, more commonly a manager or a professional, higher income, and less commonly a parent of school-aged children

than in the past.

- Over the past 30 years, the number of jobs in Cambridge has grown more rapidly than the number of the Cambridge residents. Despite that, the number of Cambridge residents holding jobs within the City has not increased proportionately.
- Traffic impacts have grown and have been of increasing concern. Some of the growth in Cambridge traffic is due to pass-through traffic, but more commuting to jobs in Cambridge, more commuting out of the city by Cambridge residents, and more affluent multi-car households in Cambridge have also added significantly to the city's congestion and other traffic concerns.
- The fiscal impacts of the city's economic trends have supported Cambridge's financial strength. The level of services the City provides has remained strong over the past decade, even during a period of severely reduced state contributions, while tax burdens have remained comparable with those of similar communities, and are well within the constraints of Proposition 2 ½.
- The long tradition of Cambridge providing an environment of stable neighborhoods supportive of family life for a rich diversity of people is weakened by the dynamics of the housing market.
- In a city of Cambridge's density, green connections are vital but need increased attention.

II. THE VISION FOR CAMBRIDGE

The changes that are occurring diverge in many ways from the vision that emerged during the workshop process:

- Supporting family life for residents richly diverse in race, class, and preferences is a basic part of the vision. Continuing that support will involve not one but many things, among them facilitating expansion of the housing supply and particularly the amount of affordable family housing. Clearly the City cannot accommodate enough housing to satisfy demand, but more housing, carefully guided, can certainly help serve this fundamental element of the City's vision.
- Providing opportunities for economic development remains an important part of the vision. The powerful attraction Cambridge has for business, if properly managed, is an enormous asset, enabling the City to enjoy selective economic growth, encouraging those businesses that reflect the City's preferences for a self-sustaining economy, small-scale and local businesses, jobs well-suited to the local labor force, and industries drawing special benefit from our heavily knowledge-based economy.
- Providing opportunities for people to both live and work within the City is another key part of the vision. That means continuing the historic pattern of a relatively fine-grained

intermixture of homes and places of work, rather than separating them. Contemporary workplaces are far better neighbors for residents than were many industries of the past. Residences, offices, R & D, and retail services can enjoy the mutual benefits that come from close proximity, especially given careful management of transitions among them.

- Providing a physical environment which encourages walking, biking, taking public transit and other alternatives to the automobile is an important part of the vision. Doing that involves both transportation and land use initiatives, and constant attention to making Cambridge an even more walkable city. The results can be a less congested and more vital city.

These 1999 visions are similar to those articulated in the 1993 Growth Policy Document, *Toward a Sustainable Future*. The outreach efforts of the past year have largely reaffirmed those earlier policies, placed special emphasis on some of them, and have now led to the framing of explicit actions towards their implementation. The first phase of these recommendations is described below.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

FACILITATING HOUSING (ITEMS 1-3)

Intention: to enable residential use to better compete with commercial and other uses for limited land opportunities, resulting in a small-scale intermixing of uses. In the long run this is likely to result in a higher ratio of housing units to jobs across the city than would otherwise have been the case, providing benefits in reduced peak hour traffic, affordable housing, and city vitality.

1. Pro-Residence Rules in Business Districts and Buildings

A. Allow housing in districts that presently do not allow residential use (Industry A, Industry B, Industry B-1, and Industry B-2).

Insert housing as an allowed use in the Table of Uses for non residential districts (Industry A, Industry B, Industry B-1, Industry B-2). All dimensional requirements for those districts, such as height and FAR, will remain the same. Unit densities will be as per the most similar residence district:

- IA (FAR 2.0) as per C2 (1 unit/600 s.f.)
- IB (FAR 4) as per C3 (1 unit/300 s.f.)
- IB1 (FAR 3.0) as per C3 (1 unit/300 s.f.)
- IB-2 (FAR 1.5) as per C2 (1 unit/600 s.f.)

B. Facilitate conversion of existing commercial buildings to housing use (in residential districts).

Many buildings that are candidates for residential reuse have more floor area than can be reasonably used by the number of units allowed. Thus, developers generally seek zoning relief to facilitate conversion of these buildings to residential use.

To allow such conversions, this change would base the unit count on area of building, which would increase the number of permitted units, rather than area of lot, as is the current rule. These conversions would be allowed by special permit, rather than by variance, as is the case today. The special permit process would provide a more flexible standard for granting approval for conversions to housing, while still providing an opportunity for neighborhood review.

To fully accomplish this change, the following changes to the dimensional standards should be considered:

Gross Floor Area	Useable Open Space Requirements
Number of Dwelling Units	Conforming Additions
Yard Requirements	Development Consultation
Maximum Height	

2. Facilitate Small-Scale Mixed Use Development

Eliminate any requirement for special permits for residential use in districts where no special permit is required for other uses (Office 1, Office 2, Office 3, Office 3A, Business A-1, Business A-2, Industry A, Industry A-1, Industry A-2, Industry B, Industry B-1, Industry B-2).

3. Rezone Selected Business Zones to Residential

As part of the “idiosyncratic” initiative, CDD will continue to work to identify business districts that would be appropriate to rezone to residential, where both property owners and neighbors support the rezoning. Property owners and neighbors from such areas are invited to contact the CDD for assistance.

IMPROVING LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION RELATIONSHIPS (ITEMS 4-6)

Intention: to guide land use to improve access for residents, workers, and others in the City and to promote all modes of transportation, while reducing traffic impacts below what they otherwise would be.

4. Parking Limits through Zoning

The zoning ordinance establishes minimum and maximum parking requirements for the city’s commercial districts. Currently, relief from the minimum parking requirement is provided by a

special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeals; developers are also allowed to exceed the maximum parking as of right, with parking in excess of the maximum counting towards FAR. This proposal recommends two ways to address the development of parking in the city to control traffic impacts.

A. Simplify the procedure for providing less parking than the minimum requirement.

Currently, a special permit is required for any project seeking to reduce parking below the minimums established by the Zoning Ordinance. As an alternate to that process, if the proponent can demonstrate lower demand for on-site parking spaces, then reduction below the minimum would be permitted administratively through a technical review by City staff.

The following factors could go into such a determination:

- Characteristics of the activity that differ from the norm for that category of use, such as age of occupants or unusually large floor area per employee;
- Parking shared between uses due to peak parking demand at different times;
- Characteristics of the location that differ from the norm for that zoning district, such as proximity to MBTA stations, high level of bus service, and/or availability of nearby public or commercial parking facilities;
- Committed efforts towards reduced parking demand by site occupants, such as subsidized T-passes, preferential parking for carpools, special provisions for bicyclists, parking fees, or participation in van pooling or shuttle efforts and other TDM measures.

B. Require a special permit to exceed the maximum parking requirement.

Such determination would be based on considerations, such as:

- Thorough efforts have been made to reduce parking need, including shared parking and Travel Demand Management (TDM) efforts such as subsidized T-passes, preferential parking for carpools, special provisions for bicyclists, parking fees, or participation in van pooling or shuttle efforts, and parking demand in excess of maximums can still be demonstrated.

5. Design Rules To Encourage Alternate Transportation Modes

The way buildings are designed and located on the site can have a major impact on the convenience and attractiveness of their being accessed by means other than personal auto, in turn having significant impact on the amount of auto traffic that development generates. The following are four such design rules, recommended for inclusion in the Zoning Ordinance.

A. Parking Location

Require that in all districts in the city, off-street parking be located

so that it does not separate the building it serves from the abutting sidewalk, as this disadvantages every mode of access except auto driving and interrupts street character and continuity. Similar rules exist in the North Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District and the Parkway Overlay District. The provision would include appropriate means of accommodating special circumstances, such as sites surrounded by roads.

B. Building Entrances

Require all new buildings to have entrances located for the convenience of pedestrians, especially those walking from public transportation. Two simple design rules can assure better service to transit-users and others arriving at the site on foot. First, a principal entrance oriented to facilitate access to public transport, if it is nearby; and second, buildings on corner lots to be designed to facilitate access by people crossing the street to get there, promoting both convenience and safety.

For example, the North Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District requires the principal building entrance to be oriented to Massachusetts Avenue, if abutting it. The Parkway Overlay District has a similar provision.

Additionally, for buildings on corner lots, the requirement would be to have at least one building entrance close to a pedestrian crossing, being within a specified distance from the intersection or a mid-block pedestrian crossing, if there is one. Both these rules would be implemented through a design review procedure.

C. Building Transparency

Windows at the ground level create visual interest and make walking more attractive. Empirical studies have documented that pedestrians are willing to walk further to their destinations given such a context. The North Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District, the Central Square Overlay District, the Parkway Overlay District, and Special District 1 already establish a minimum percentage of facade area that on certain streets, for certain uses, must be made transparent. Ground level windows would be required in all new non-residential development in commercial districts, with a special permit for exemption.

D. Bicycle Parking Design

While the Zoning Ordinance identifies the number of bikes that must be accommodated on a site, this change will establish performance criteria for bike rack design, assuring security and convenience, and helping to promote bicycle use. Safe parking is essential for fragile and often valuable bikes.

6. Traffic Impact-Limited Development I (Extension and Amendments to the IPOP Ordinance)

Extend the IPOP ordinance by six months with the following changes:

A. Applicability

Raise the applicability threshold for residential projects and for mixed-use projects with a residential component. This could encourage developers to include a residential element into

their plans. IPOP review will not be required for:

1. New construction of less than 300 dwelling units; or
2. Mixed-use development involving less than 300 dwelling units and less than 50,000 square feet of non-residential development.

B. Review Time

Increase the time allowed for review and certification of the traffic study to thirty (30) days.

IV. FUTURE STEPS

The subsequent phase of work is expected to be addressed in Fall/Winter 1999-2000. This includes:

PURSuing TARGETED HOUSING OBJECTIVES to guide housing development so that it better serves the city's goals, such as production of more affordable housing for low, moderate and middle income families.

IMPROVING LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION RELATIONSHIPS to promote all modes of transportation, while reducing traffic impacts below what they otherwise would be. This would include traffic-related performance standards for new development projects, further consideration of parking minimums and maximums, and further development of design rules to encourage alternate modes of travel.

ZONING DISTRICT REVISION to reduce density in areas not well served by transit, encourage mixed use development, and selectively reduce FAR.

FEES AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO ON-SITE REQUIREMENTS to provide additional flexibility in reconciling individual property circumstances and City objectives, through use of fees in lieu of on-site performance in particular cases. Fees could be related to transportation and other impacts and could be targeted to open space acquisition and other city goals.

Later studies are intended to follow through with other suggestions, either advancing them or determining that their purpose is being served by other actions in the effort. These include:

CITYWIDE FAR CAP

FAR REDUCTIONS

TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR)

UNIVERSITY HOUSING INCENTIVES