



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Director of Zoning and Development
Swaathi Joseph, Zoning Associate Planner
Date: February 19, 2019
Re: **Industry B (IB) Zoning Petition**

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Overview

This zoning petition, submitted by Melissa Grippo, et al., proposes to change the floor area ratio (FAR) for hotel use in the Industry B (IB) district (see map on the last page) near Kendall Square.

The IB district is situated in a single location in the neighborhoods of East Cambridge, Area 2/MIT, Wellington-Harrington, and the Port. It abuts multiple zoning districts, predominantly residential and lower-scale commercial districts to the west, and the higher-density institutional and mixed-use areas of Kendall Square to the east. The proposal seeks to change the FAR for hotel use from 2.75 to 4.0, with no changes to the other dimensional requirements. As noted by the petitioner, the intent is to incentivize hotel development on the few undeveloped smaller parcels in the zone. This memo provides a summary of the effects of the proposed zoning change and issues the Board might consider in their deliberations.

Existing Conditions

There are 28 parcels in the IB district. Most of the parcels are large in scale and developed intensively for office/R&D uses. The few smaller parcels are located near the intersection of Portland Street and Hampshire Street and contain smaller-scale retail buildings or auto-oriented uses. The campuses of Technology Square and portions of One Kendall Square and MIT are part of this district. The Grand Junction rail corridor, planned to include a rail-with-trail path (part of which is built), borders the district to the east.

Current and Proposed Zoning

Allowed uses in the IB district include both residential and non-residential uses, but all allowed residential uses require a special permit from the Planning Board and hotel uses require a special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA). There are only dimensional limitations on Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and building height, with no setback or open space requirements for any uses in the district. Under the current zoning, all residential uses including dormitories but excluding transient accommodations (such as hotel) and trailer parks are allowed at a maximum FAR of 4.0; all other uses (including hotels) have a maximum FAR of 2.75. The petition proposes to increase the FAR for hotel use (4.31.i.2) from 2.75 to 4.0 to increase the development potential for hotels in the area.

Summary of Dimensional Requirements (see Zoning Ordinance for detailed requirements)

	Current	Proposed IB
Maximum FAR (All uses except those listed below)	2.75	2.75
Maximum FAR (Hotel: 4.31.i.2)	2.75	4.00
Maximum FAR (Residential: 4.31.a-h; Dormitory)	4.00	4.00
Maximum Height (All uses)	120 feet	120 feet

Zoning Background

IB is the least restrictive zoning district in the city, allowing a broad range of uses at the highest allowed scale for commercial and residential uses. Historically, many other higher-intensity industrial areas in the city were zoned IB, but all except for this area have been rezoned to districts that are lower in density or more limited in the range of allowed uses. The maximum FAR for all uses in the district was 4.0, until the most recent Citywide Rezoning in 2001 established a lower limit of 2.75 for non-residential uses. In most other districts, hotel uses are subject to the zoning limitations of non-residential uses, though hotels are listed in Section 4.31 of the Table of Use Regulations along with residential uses such as single-family and multifamily housing.

Considerations

The proposed petition is considering relaxing the zoning limitations for the development of a particular use (hotel) in a specific district, which would diverge from most other zoning districts that have different limitations for non-residential and residential uses. Most lots in this district are already developed as higher-intensity office/R&D uses or are likely to be redeveloped for those types of uses in the future. While it is possible that some of the larger commercial or institutional landowners might decide to

convert some land to hotel use in the future, the more likely opportunities for hotel uses would be the smaller lots near the corner of Portland and Hampshire Streets. The stated intent of the petition is to incentivize hotel development on those smaller lots. Otherwise, those lots would likely remain as lower-scale commercial uses or might be redeveloped as housing.

Hotel use has not been a major focus of the City's recent planning efforts. Plans in major redevelopment areas such as Kendall Square, North Point, and Alewife have contemplated hotels as a component of mixed-use developments, but has not made them a priority. A zoning amendment to incentivize hotel development in Porter Square was adopted in 2008, leading to the construction of two hotels in that area. In 2017, the "Central Square Restoration" zoning petition resulted in hotel uses, along with other residential uses, being allowed at an increased FAR of 4.0.

The petition suggests that there is a shortage of hotel rooms in the city and that increased development of hotel use may reduce the impact of short-term rentals in the neighboring residential areas. The petition also states that the current FAR limitations make hotel development infeasible. Increasing the FAR for hotel use would be a reasonable approach if the goal is to incentivize additional hotel uses. The pertinent question is how hotel uses should be prioritized in relation to other uses that might be viable in the district and might have other benefits, such as residential or retail uses. Further, hotel uses might differ from residential uses in characteristics such as traffic impacts, so allowing them at a higher density should be assessed in relation to the City's planning objectives for the area and the city as a whole.

Zoning District Industry B

Cambridge, Massachusetts

