



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff

Date: March 25, 2021

Re: **Missing Middle Housing Zoning Amendments (Fuller, et al.)**

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Overview

Petitioner: Carolyn Fuller, et al. (group of at least 10 registered Cambridge voters)

Zoning Articles: Article 3.000 Zoning Districts, Article 4.000 Use Regulations, Article 5.000 Development Standards, Article 6.000 Parking and Loading Requirements, and Article 11.000 Special Regulations

Amendment Summary: Amend the Zoning Map to reclassify all land currently in Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Residence B, Residence C, and Residence C-1 Districts as a newly-created Residence N District; amend Section 4.30 to allow single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, and multifamily dwellings in Residence N; amend section 5.30 to specify the dimensional standards for Residence N; amend Section 6.30 to require no off-street parking for non-transient residential uses in all zoning districts; among other amendments.

Planning Board Action: Recommendation to City Council

Memo Contents: Summary of the proposed zoning; background information on Cambridge's existing zoning for residential uses; examples of the elimination of single-family-only zoning in other jurisdictions; current planning for zoning changes in Cambridge; and comments on proposed amendment.

Proposed Zoning

The proposed zoning amendment seeks to allow multifamily housing in all zoning districts in Cambridge and to reduce barriers in the Zoning Ordinance to increasing the number of dwelling units that can be constructed on a parcel. To accomplish this, the Petition proposes consolidating the Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Residence B, Residence C, and Residence C-1 Districts into a new zoning district, Residence N. This group of districts constitutes the most restrictive, lowest-intensity residential districts in the current Zoning Ordinance, with a height limit of 35 feet.

Residence N would allow the same range of uses as Residence C and C-1, including single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, semi-detached dwellings. Residence A-1 and A-2 currently allow only single-family, and Residence B allows only single-family, two-family, and townhouse development.

The proposed dimensional standards for Residence N (see table below) would be more permissive than for any of the current districts, including Residence C-1. The height limit would be increased to 40 feet, but would still limit development to three stories above grade. The allowed FAR (the amount of floor area divided by the total area of a lot) of 1.25 would be comparable to the current Residence C-1A district, but the minimum lot area per dwelling unit (a measure of dwelling unit density, with a lower lot area per dwelling unit translating to a higher density) would be 500 square feet, half of the requirement in Residence C-1A. Relative to lot area, the permitted number of units on a lot would be increased by a factor of three in Residence C-1 districts and by a factor of 12 in Residence A-1 districts.

The proposed zoning would also have the following effects:

- Eliminating minimum lot size and lot width requirements in all residential districts.
- Eliminating formula yard requirements in Residence N (currently applicable in Residence C and C-1), which require deeper yard setbacks proportional to the height (“H”) and length (“L”) of the building.
- Permitting required front yard setbacks to be reduced to the average of adjacent lots on either side in Residence N (currently this is permitted in Residence A-1, A-2, and B, with limitations).
- Permitting multiple principal dwellings on a lot as-of-right (currently this is prohibited in Residence A-1 and A-2, and may require a Planning Board special permit in Residence B).
- Retaining the requirement of a special permit for a multifamily or townhouse development of 12 units or more in Residence N.
- Retaining the Institutional Use Regulations (IURs) in the Residence N district – it should be noted that these provisions were established pursuant to state legislation. The question of whether they can be amended without further legislative action is a legal question and we therefore recommend that the Planning Board and/or the City Council seek guidance from the Law Department on that issue.
- Eliminating minimum requirements for off-street parking accessory to any nontransient residential use, in all zoning districts.

	Max. FAR	Min. Lot Size	Min. Lot Width	Min. Lot Area/D.U.	Max. Height	Open Space	Min. Front Yard	Min. Side Yards	Min. Rear Yard
Existing									
A-1	0.5	8,000 SF	80'	6,000 SF	35'	50%	25'	15' and sum to 35'	25'(+)
A-2	0.5	6,000 SF	65'	4,500 SF	35'	50%	20'	10' and sum to 25'	25'(+)
B	0.5	5,000 SF	50'	2,500 SF	35'	40%	15'	7.5' and sum to 20'	25'(+)
C	0.6	5,000 SF	50'	1,800 SF	35'	36%	10' and (H+L)/4	7.5' and (H+L)/5	20'(+)
C-1	0.75	5,000 SF	50'	1,500 SF	35'	30%	10' and (H+L)/4	7.5' and (H+L)/5	20'(+)
Proposed									
N	1.25	0 SF	0'	500 SF	40'	25%	10'	7.5'	10'

Table 1: Comparison of selected development standards under existing and proposed zoning. *Note: This table is a summary only, refer to Section 5.30 of the Zoning Ordinance for details.*

Historical Context

The current Zoning Petition would be a major change to the way the City regulates development in its lower-scale residential neighborhoods. It may be helpful to review the evolution of Cambridge’s zoning for such neighborhoods to place the Petition in context.

Much of the residential growth in Cambridge took place roughly between 1850 and 1930. As a result, most residential neighborhoods were already developed prior to the first zoning laws enacted in 1924, and only a small number of residential neighborhoods were subject to zoning at the time they were developed. As a result, the primary effect of zoning in most neighborhoods has been to regulate how those areas have been allowed to change over the past century.

1924 Zoning

Cambridge’s first “Zoning Law and Building Code” had a different structure and content compared to the current Zoning Ordinance, containing land use controls as well as building controls that are now regulated by the state building code. It zoned the city into “R” (residence), “B” (business), and “U” (unrestricted) types of districts. Within each district type, districts were classified by different use allowances and dimensional requirements. The main dimensional limitation was height, but setbacks and other dimensional standards were also imposed.

District	Allowed Uses	Dimensional Requirements
R-1	Residential, hotel, institutional uses	Max. 100’ height
R-2	Residential, hotel, institutional uses	Max. 6 stories or 80’ height
R-3	Residential, hotel, institutional uses	Max. 4 stories or 60’ height Setback of 5’ / 25’ from centerline
R-4	“Private and two-family dwellings,” institutional uses	Max. 2½ stories or 40’ height Setback of 10’ / 30’ from centerline

Other dimensional requirements were not necessarily based on districts. Rear and side yards were required based on the number of stories in a building, ranging from 10 to 26 feet for rear yards and from 5 to 13 feet for side yards (e.g., a three-story building would have a required 12-foot rear yard and 6-foot side yards). Other requirements were imposed for “outer courts,” “inner courts,” and “vent shafts.” Some standards were more qualitative. For example, a requirement in R-4 was that “Yards must be provided and must be considerably larger than at present.”

There were no explicit requirements for lot area or width, and no “density” limitations such as floor area ratio (FAR) or lot area per dwelling unit. Off-street accessory parking for cars was allowed, with limitations, but not explicitly required.

On the 1924 zoning map, most residential neighborhoods were zoned R-3. West Cambridge neighborhoods south of Concord Ave and on Avon Hill were predominantly zoned R-4. There were other smaller R-4 districts in parts of North Cambridge and Agassiz, and a small area just north of the Cambridge Common.

1943 Zoning Ordinance

The “Zoning Ordinance” adopted in 1943 established the general structure and organization that is still used in the current Zoning Ordinance. There were 10 district types divided into “Residence,” “Business,” and “Industry.” Within each type, districts were classified by their range of permitted uses (religious and educational uses were permitted in all districts) and dimensional standards including building height, minimum lot size and width, and front, rear, and side yard setbacks. The following is a summary of residential district classifications and standards from the 1943 Zoning Ordinance:

District	Allowed Uses	Max. Height	Min. Lot Size/Width	Min. Yards
A-1	Single-family dwellings	2½ stories and 35’	8,000 SF area 75’ width	20’ front 20’ rear 20’ sides
A-2	Uses permitted in A-1	2½ stories and 35’	6,000 SF area 65’ width	20’ front 20’ rear 10’ sides (sum to 25’)
B	Two-family and “attached” (rowhouse) dwellings and uses permitted in A-2	2½ stories and 35’	5,000 SF area 50’ width	15’ front 20’ rear 7.5’ sides (sum to 20’)
C-1	Multifamily and group housing, lodging houses, dormitories, private clubs and uses permitted in B	2½ stories and 35’	5,000 SF area 50’ width	10’ front 20’ rear 7.5’ sides
C-2	Hotels and uses permitted in C-1	60’	5,000 SF area 50’ width	5’ front 20’ rear 7.5’ sides
C-3	Uses permitted in C-2	100’	5,000 SF area 50’ width	5’ front 20’ rear 7.5’ sides

There were additional dimensional requirements in C-1, C-2, and C-3 districts that varied based on building height. For instance, there were limitations on “building coverage,” i.e., the amount of the lot area covered by a building footprint. The limit was 50% in C-1, and varied based on building height in C-2 and C-3 (e.g., a 10-story building had a maximum of 40% coverage, and a 4-story building had a maximum of 60% coverage).

As in the 1924 version of the Zoning Ordinance, there were no density-based limitations and no explicit requirements for off-street accessory car parking, although parking and other auto-related uses were permitted to a greater extent in the 1943 Zoning Ordinance than in the 1924 version.

On the 1943 Zoning Map, most of the neighborhoods that were previously zoned R-3 were zoned C-1; however, parts of Mid-Cambridge along Cambridge Street, Broadway, and Harvard Square, along with

parts of Agassiz and Neighborhood Nine within one or two blocks of Massachusetts Avenue, were zoned C-2. The neighborhoods previously zoned R-4 were generally zoned in the following way:

- A-1: A small area along Highland Street in West Cambridge.
- A-2: Neighborhoods near Brattle Street and Irving Street, and open space or institutional areas surrounding Fresh Pond, Cambridge Cemetery, Concord Turnpike, Memorial Drive, and the top of Avon Hill.
- B: The Cambridge Highlands neighborhood, and neighborhoods near Huron Ave, Porter Square, the northeast side of Avon Hill, and a small portion of North Cambridge near Rindge Avenue.

1961 Ordinance

A major zoning overhaul was adopted in 1961, based on a City Plan that reflected the modernist movement in architecture and planning and a movement toward urban revitalization at a time when residential and economic growth was expanding to the suburbs. Conceptually, the 1961 Zoning Ordinance contained many of the same elements of the 1943 Zoning Ordinance (e.g., district types, minimum lot size and width, yard requirements) but also made the following major changes:

- In addition to the previous 10 district types above, an “Office” district was created to permit high-intensity professional office development while prohibiting retail and industrial uses.
- Density standards were introduced, such as FAR and lot area per dwelling unit.
- Limits on building stories were removed in favor of absolute height limits in feet, but height limits were also removed in many districts. Districts that previously had a 35-foot height limit retained that limit, and some “intermediate” districts retained a height limit of 85 feet.
- Formula-based yard setback requirements were introduced in many residential and office districts, which calculated the required setback based on the height (“H”) and length (“L”) of the building where it faces the property line.
- Minimum off-street accessory parking requirements were established for most uses. For residential uses, the requirement ranged from 10 spaces per 10 units to 7 spaces per 10 units.
- An amendment adopted in 1967 also introduced “Usable Open Space” (later renamed “Private Open Space”) requirements for residential units, requiring a minimum percentage of the lot area to be dedicated to space that is usable by residents.

The Zoning Ordinance underwent another overhaul in 1977, but the residential district dimensional requirements were the same (with the addition of Usable Open Space requirements, adopted later). The following table summarizes dimensional requirements for Residence districts in the 1977 Zoning Ordinance. The range of permitted uses and required lot size and width remained largely consistent from the 1943 Zoning Ordinance, so the table focuses on density, height, yard, parking, and open space requirements.

District	Max. Height	Max. FAR	Min. Lot Area per Dwelling Unit	Min. Yards	Min. Parking Spaces/Unit	Min. Usable Open Space
A-1	35'	0.5	6,000 SF	25' front 25' rear 15' sides (sum to 35')	10 per 10	25%
A-2	35'	0.5	4,500 SF	20' front 20' rear 10' sides (sum to 25')	10 per 10	25%
B	35'	0.5	2,500 SF	15' front 20' rear 7.5' sides (sum to 20')	10 per 10	20%
C-1	35'	0.75	1,200 SF	10' and (H+L)/4 front 20' and (H+L)/4 rear (H+L)/5 sides	8 per 10	15%
C-2	85'	1.75	600 SF	10' and (H+L)/4 front 20' and (H+L)/4 rear (H+L)/5 sides	8 per 10	15%
C-3	no limit	3.0	300 SF	5' and (H+L)/5 front 20' and (H+L)/5 rear (H+L)/6 sides	7 per 10	10%

Since the 1961 comprehensive amendment, the Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map have been amended over 250 times. Some of these amendments were comprehensive rezoning efforts, such as in 1977 and later in 2001. It is beyond the scope of this review to analyze all of the past changes, but the following is a brief summary of changes that are most relevant to the current petition.

Map Changes

Many areas have been rezoned from one base zoning district to another since the 1943 Zoning Map. An exhaustive review of all such changes has not been completed, but the apparent overall trend has been a shift from less restrictive to more restrictive zoning classifications in many residential areas. Many of these map changes were adopted in a piecemeal way over a long period of time.

A trend that is relevant in the context of this petition is the increase over time in the extent of Residence B districts throughout the City. On the 1943 Zoning Map, few areas were zoned Residence B (see above). By 1961, Residence B zoning had been applied to the Strawberry Hill neighborhood, the northernmost part of North Cambridge (bordering Arlington), and parts of Neighborhood Nine, among other areas. (Meanwhile, parts of Avon Hill had been rezoned from Residence B to Residence A-2.) Today, nearly all residential areas in West Cambridge and North Cambridge, large parts of Agassiz and Neighborhood Nine, and some portions of the Mid-Cambridge, Cambridgeport, and Port neighborhoods are all zoned Residence B.

Townhouse/Multifamily Regulations

A special section of the Zoning Ordinance was created in 1976 with a tailored set of design and development standards for townhouse development, *i.e.*, single-family or two-family dwellings that are attached along vertical party walls. The intent stated in the zoning was “to promote the development of family units, create opportunities for homeownership, and encourage development designs that are compatible with traditional neighborhood development patterns.” It provided some flexibility in height (up to 4 stories, with a cornice line of 35 feet), density (increased FAR in Res. B and C-1 districts), and other dimensional requirements, while requiring more open space and landscaping than the base zoning. This ordinance was motivated in part by a desire to incentivize townhouse-style development as an alternative to multifamily apartment buildings that were typical at the time.

The townhouse ordinance has been amended several times since it was first enacted. Following an amendment adopted in 1979, a Planning Board special permit is currently required for any townhouse or multifamily residential development of at least 12 units in Residence C-1 (as well as C and C-1A) districts and townhouse development of at least 6 units in Residence B districts. Subsequent amendments have all but eliminated the additional density and height incentives, and new requirements were added to discourage the demolition of existing residential structures. There are many existing examples of townhouse development dating to the late 1970s and 1980s, but new townhouse development has been extremely rare in the past 20+ years.

Institutional Use Regulations (IURs)

In 1981, the City adopted IURs (Section 4.50 of the Zoning Ordinance) following the enactment of home rule legislation by the state, because state law restricts the ability of municipalities to regulate educational, religious, health care, government and other institutional uses through zoning. The legislation and zoning were motivated largely by concerns about the expansion of college and university facilities into residential neighborhoods. The IURs establish special provisions for residential districts with a minimum lot area per dwelling unit of 1,200 square feet or more. In those districts, institutional uses are regulated based on whether the lot is located in an Institutional Overlay District and whether the previous use of the lot was residential, institutional, or neither.

Cambridgeport Residence C

In 1987, a community rezoning initiative in the Cambridgeport neighborhood resulted in the creation of the Residence C district, which is similar to the Residence C-1 district but has dimensional limitations between those of Residence B and C-1, including a maximum FAR of 0.6 and minimum lot area of 1,800 square feet per dwelling unit. Most of the residential part of Cambridgeport remains zoned Residence C. The same designation was later considered in rezoning proposals for other neighborhoods, but has only been adopted in one small area along Bellis Circle in Neighborhood Nine.

“Backyard” Protections

A series of zoning amendments adopted in the 1990s changed some of the dimensional standards for Residence A-1, A-2, B, C, and C-1 districts. They are sometimes referred to as “backyard zoning”

amendments because the motivation, in part, was to limit the development of infill residential structures behind existing dwellings.

In 1995, Residence B district standards were amended so that portions of lots exceeding 5,000 square feet would have a lower maximum FAR (0.35) and higher lot area per dwelling unit (4,000 square feet). The result of this change is that lots larger than 5,000 square feet have a lower effective allowed density than lots of 5,000 square feet or smaller. The same zoning amendment also increased the required rear setback to 25 feet and required a Planning Board special permit for secondary principal residential structures that are located more than 75 feet from the front of the lot. The Planning Board has reviewed and approved many “rear unit” proposals on deep lots in Residence B districts.

Zoning amendments adopted in 1999 also changed the following standards for Residence A-1, A-2, B, C, and C-1 districts:

- Rear setback requirements were increased by requiring an extra one foot of setback, in addition to the underlying requirement, for every four feet of lot depth exceeding 100 feet.
- Usable (Private) Open Space requirements were doubled, to a minimum of 50%, 50%, 40%, 36%, and 30%, respectively.
- Minimum Lot Area per Dwelling Unit in Residence C-1 was increased to 1,500 square feet.

Citywide Rezoning

A comprehensive 2001 rezoning was the culmination of an extensive planning process with significant community involvement. Although it was a multifaceted effort, it placed an emphasis on residential development and drew from the city’s 1993 Growth Policy Document, *Toward a Sustainable Future*. In part, this growth policy encouraged maintenance of traditionally residential neighborhoods at their prevailing scale and density, while prioritizing increased housing growth in mixed-use and evolving commercial areas of the City.

Some key components of the 2001 Citywide Rezoning include the following:

- Rezoning of some formerly commercial/industrial areas to residential (e.g., the Residence C-1A district was created as a replacement for some moderate-density industrial districts).
- Permitting multifamily housing as an allowed use in all Office, Business, and Industry districts, with a higher FAR permitted for residential uses than non-residential uses in most districts.
- Creating a streamlined Planning Board special permit process to grant dimensional relief for the conversion of non-residential structures to residential use, including the conversion of larger buildings to multifamily use in lower-scale residential areas.

The 2001 rezoning, along with subsequent area-specific rezoning efforts in areas such as Eastern Cambridge and Alewife, preceded a large amount of new multifamily residential development in the ensuing decades. Most of this development replaced lower-intensity commercial uses or parking. Because the City had adopted inclusionary housing requirements in 1998, requiring affordable units in new residential developments of 10 units or more (with a density bonus in exchange), this growth in multifamily housing also produced over 1,100 units of privately-supported affordable housing in

addition to affordable housing developments created with the support of the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust.

However, there have been some more restrictive zoning amendments adopted since the Citywide Rezoning. For example, in 2007 a zoning petition was adopted that lowered the threshold for Planning Board special permit review in some Business districts, which has added time and procedural hurdles to the development of several moderate-density residential and mixed-use developments. Also, in 2011, an amendment initiated by residents reduced the permissible density and added new requirements in cases involving the conversion of non-residential structures to residential use in neighborhoods.

Conclusions

The history of zoning and development in residential neighborhoods provides some context to the changes that are currently proposed:

- Since the inception of zoning in Cambridge, some residential districts have prohibited multifamily residential development. However, the extent of such areas has increased from a more limited set of districts in 1924 to about one quarter of the city today (see below).
- A three-story height limit has historically been the norm in lower-scale residential districts since zoning was first enacted – except for past instances when development was limited to 2½ stories (preventing flat-roofed three-deckers in some districts). However, some districts currently zoned for 35-foot height had previously been zoned to allow four stories or 60’ height.
- Cambridge’s requirements for lot size and width have not changed substantially since the 1943 zoning. Although the requirements are higher for Residence A-1 and A-2 than other districts, they are generally much lower than the types of “acre zoning” requirements that have been enacted in many suburban communities.
- Cambridge has used density (FAR, lot area per dwelling unit) as one of its main development controls since 1961. It is not necessary to restrict density, and some contemporary trends in zoning have supported moving away from density limitations in favor of other types of development standards. However, the history has shown a trend over time toward more restrictive limitations on density in residential areas, motivated largely by community reactions against infill housing.

Effects of Proposed Zoning

Geographic Extents

Approximately 44% of the total land area in Cambridge is currently zoned in one of the five district types that are proposed to be replaced by Residence N (see attached map). Including the four “Special Districts” (SD-2, SD-9, SD-10, and SD-14) that reference the requirements of one of these five districts, the extent increases to approximately 45%. Taken together, these districts contain approximately 82% of all parcels in the city and approximately 53% of all existing dwelling units. These statistics are further broken down by zoning district in the table below.

	A-1	A-2	B	C	C-1	SD-2	SD-9	SD-10	SD-14
% Land Area	3.4%	5.4%	15.2%	2.9%	17.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%
% Parcels	2.6%	4.8%	29.9%	6.3%	36.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%
% Dwelling Units	0.7%	1.5%	15.9%	4.3%	28.9%	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.4%

Source: Cambridge GIS

This table illustrates that the density of dwelling units is not evenly dispersed throughout the city. For example, districts that only permit single-family dwellings (Residence A-1 and A-2) contain approximately 8.8% of the land area in Cambridge but only 2.2% of total housing units. By contrast, the Residence C-1 district – which covers the most land area of any district type – contains approximately 17.1% of Cambridge’s land area and 28.9% of total dwelling units.

In comparison to other cities in the United States, the percentage of land zoned exclusively for single-family housing is relatively low in Cambridge (8.8%). A *New York Times* article on zoning provides comparative figures of 15% in New York City, 70% in Minneapolis, 77% in Portland, and 81% in Seattle ([Badger and Bui, “Cities Start to Question an American Ideal: A House With a Yard on Every Lot,” *New York Times*: June 18, 2019](#)).

Changes to Development Standards

The main effect of the proposed zoning is to relax limitations on the addition of dwelling units to lots in residential zoning districts in the following key ways:

- Primarily, density limitations would be more permissive than they have been since 1961, when density controls were first enacted. See the table below for a comparison of how allowed development would change on typical lots.
- Off-street parking would not be required for new dwelling units. Under current zoning, the addition of any dwelling unit would require the addition of an off-street parking space, unless relief is granted by special permit from the BZA. Because of the space and cost involved in creating additional parking, that can be a significant requirement.
- Removing “formula-based” setback requirements would relieve many restrictions that tend to limit alterations to existing structures in Residence C and C-1 districts.
- Removing lot area and lot width requirements could permit some types of development activity on currently non-conforming lots, although some development on pre-existing non-conforming lots is already permissible (see Article 8.000 of the Zoning Ordinance). This change could also permit more irregular subdivisions of existing lots to create new development sites.
- In some cases, removing current special permit requirements (such as for rear dwelling development in Residence B districts) would remove impediments to new housing additions.

The table below illustrates how the proposed changes in allowed density affect the amount of gross floor area (GFA) and number of dwelling units on a standard 5,000 square-foot lot. One notable change is that the increase in allowed units is proportionally greater than the increase in allowed floor area,

which could result in smaller unit sizes. Minimum dwelling unit size is not regulated in zoning, but must comply with building code requirements.

District Type	Res. A-2 (Current)	Res. B (Current)	Res. C-1 (Current)	Res. N (Proposed)
Example Lot Area	5,000 SF	5,000 SF	5,000 SF	5,000 SF
Maximum GFA	2,500 SF	2,500 SF	3,750 SF	6,250 SF
Maximum Units	1 unit	2 units	3 units	10 units

Potential Outcomes

At a high level, housing growth in Cambridge over the past couple decades has occurred primarily through the redevelopment of non-residential sites to multifamily residential use in mixed-use areas. Residential neighborhoods have seen only modest housing growth, often through conversion of residual non-residential sites (e.g., former institutional uses and non-conforming commercial uses) to residential use through new construction or conversion, or through small-scale infill such as rear dwellings. The proposed zoning change would enable a shift toward more growth in residential neighborhoods.

Residential areas have well-established patterns of land ownership and development. Because different property owners will make different choices, changes to the patterns of development are likely to play out over a long period of time. The types of changes will depend as much on economic factors as on zoning.

Based on experience, the following are examples of the types of changes that might be enabled by the proposed zoning:

- The creation of new dwelling units from underutilized spaces in existing buildings, such as basements, attics, or garages.
- More intensive rehabilitation of existing buildings to produce a greater number units, with smaller average unit sizes, within the structure.
- Additions to existing structures to add units, either by adding stories to buildings or enlargements to existing buildings.
- New construction of residential structures in unbuilt spaces, such as vacant lots, large yard spaces, or surface parking lots (all of which are rare in Cambridge).
- Demolition of smaller structures and construction of new residential structures on developed sites.

One note is that while the proposed zoning would enable smaller unit sizes, and that might be economically favorable in many circumstances, it is also possible that the zoning could result in larger dwellings if property owners prefer to enlarge existing units or create new larger units instead of adding a greater number of smaller units.

Elimination of Single-Family-Only Zoning in Other Jurisdictions

Several jurisdictions in the United States have taken steps to eliminate single-family-only zoning districts. These initiatives have been motivated by different intersecting issues. In metro areas with limited housing availability and rapidly rising housing costs, restrictive zoning has been viewed as an impediment to the creation of housing to support a growing population. Also, an increasing amount of scholarship has shown a close association between single-family zoning, along with discriminatory practices in mortgage lending and housing policy, and race-based segregation (see, for example, *The Color of Law* by Richard Rothstein). The resulting economic disparities between races has profoundly impacted Black residents in particular and their ability to achieve intergenerational wealth, hold real estate assets, and establish financial equity.

In December, 2018, Minneapolis became the first large American city to commit to eliminating single-family-only zoning districts when the Minneapolis City Council approved the Minneapolis 2040 Plan with the goal of increasing density, creating more housing units, and addressing racial segregation. The City Council voted to approve the proposed zoning in December 2020 and these standards became effective on January 1, 2021. According to the *New York Times*, Minneapolis's new zoning ends single-family zoning on 70% of the city's residential land, or 53% of all land ([Badger and Bui: June 18, 2019](#)).

Seattle initially considered an approach similar to Minneapolis's, but ultimately adopted legislation called Mandatory Housing Affordability (MHA) and related changes in March, 2019, placing affordable housing requirements on 27 urban villages throughout Seattle. Similar to Cambridge's Inclusionary Zoning, the MHA requires new development to include affordable housing units or contribute to a City fund for affordable housing in exchange for zoning that allows larger buildings and more housing units.

In August 2019, Oregon became the first state to effectively eliminate single-family-only zoning districts in its cities. House Bill 2001 requires cities with more than 10,000 residents to allow duplexes in areas zoned for single-family homes. In cities with more than 25,000 residents, and in the Portland metro area, it requires the allowance of the building of housing such as fourplexes and "cottage clusters" of homes around a common yard. A year after the passage of House Bill 2001, the Portland City Council approved the Residential Infill Project, which allows more housing options with limitations on size and scale. It also includes provisions for a "deep affordability bonus" to allow up to six units on a site when half of those units are affordable to households earning up to 60% of the median family income, as well as density restrictions on sites in historic conservation districts where demolition had not been approved through a land use review. The zoning goes into effect on August 1, 2021.

Most recently, in February, 2021, the Berkeley City Council unanimously adopted a resolution to begin a two-year process to change the city's general plan and allow more multifamily housing citywide, though specific rules have not yet been enacted. Other cities and states, mostly on the West Coast, are also in the process of studying the elimination of single-family-only zoning districts. While some tie potential zoning changes to transit hubs, others target wider geographies.

"Missing Middle Housing"

Some of the efforts undertaken by other cities have cited "missing middle housing" as a goal. According to the web site missingmiddlehousing.com, the term was coined by architect and urban designer Daniel

Parolek in 2010 to mean “house-scale buildings with multiple units in walkable neighborhoods,” which might include a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types that would add modest density in neighborhoods with primarily detached, single-family homes. These building typologies include duplexes, triplexes (what Cantabrigians would call a triple-decker or three-decker), fourplexes, townhouses, and medium-sized multiplexes as well as courtyard arrangements and live-work buildings. The name comes from the fact that these buildings are “missing” from the types that zoning allows and that they are in the “middle” of a spectrum defined by a combination of building form, scale, and units.

Parking Requirements

Cities around the United States have also undertaken efforts to reduce the required amount of parking for residential uses. These efforts have been varied and have involved area-specific reductions or reductions for particular types of development, especially affordable housing. These efforts have been motivated by environmental goals of reduced auto use, impacts on housing production and affordability resulting from the cost of constructing off-street parking, and recognition that shifting patterns of car ownership may result in less need for parking (see: [Jeffrey Spivak, “People Over Parking,” Planning: October, 2018](#)). Similar initiatives have been implemented in areas of Cambridge. It is not clear if any community has eliminated all minimum parking requirements for all residential uses citywide.

Planning Considerations for Cambridge

Envision Cambridge (completed in 2019) is the City’s most recent comprehensive guidance document for long-term planning. While it does not provide specific guidance on all aspects of this Petition, it provides an organizational framework for thinking about how policy proposals relate to the various planning objectives of the City.

The plan is organized around a series of core values and goals associated with six topic areas, which are described below and on the following page along with considerations for how each relates to the Petition.

Envision Cambridge Core Values	Considerations for Petition
<p>Livability: We value a vibrant built and natural environment and support sustainable transportation with affordable and convenient access to daily needs and recreational resources.</p>	<p>Eliminating off-street parking requirements supports lower reliance on auto use, promoting more sustainable transportation such as walking, bicycling, and transit for daily transportation needs. However, it could also result in more competition for on-street parking, a public resource.</p>

Envision Cambridge Core Values	Considerations for Petition
<p>Diversity and Equity: We are a welcoming community that celebrates our diversity and ensures access to affordable housing choices and opportunities to succeed.</p>	<p>Allowing multi-family housing citywide (which is a component of the <i>Envision Cambridge</i> recommendations) promotes a more equitable distribution of housing types across the city, and more housing choices in districts that are currently restricted to higher-cost housing types. The affordability of housing remains a concern overall, as this zoning change would mainly result in market-rate units.</p>
<p>Economic Opportunity: We provide opportunity and stability through access to quality jobs, workforce development and training, and livable wages that support economic security for residents.</p>	<p>The Petition does not directly address wages, workforce development and training. However, residents may benefit economically from more housing choices, particularly if they create homeownership opportunities that are available to a broader range of people.</p>
<p>Sustainability and Resilience: We take responsible action to reduce our impact on the environment and build a resilient city and strong community.</p>	<p>Densely populated neighborhoods with nearby access to transportation and services tend to produce environmental benefits such as lower reliance on auto transportation, more efficient use of energy, and community support systems. However, infill development in residential neighborhoods may have impacts in the form of reduced permeable and planted area. Maintaining a minimum 25% open space requirement and elimination of parking requirements may mitigate some environmental impacts.</p>
<p>Community Health and Wellbeing: We promote healthy and active lifestyles in a supportive, safe community with diverse opportunities to connect with our neighbors and nature and to engage in civic life.</p>	<p>Additional housing in established neighborhoods may result in increased social capital and social resilience. Communities may benefit generally from new neighbors with increased opportunities for personal support systems.</p>
<p>Learning: We embrace lifelong learning and celebrate art and creativity in our culturally rich community.</p>	<p>The Petition does not directly address these values.</p>

The following pages list selected goals from *Envision Cambridge* that are particularly relevant to this Petition, and present some high-level considerations for how the Petition relates to those goals.

Relevant Envision Cambridge Goals	Considerations for Petition
<p>Climate Action: Achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.</p>	<p>As noted above, the elimination of parking requirements may lead to less reliance on automobiles, leading to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Also, new or renovated housing tends to be more energy efficient than older building stock, but neither the current nor proposed zoning would impose new standards (aside from building and energy code requirements) unless the development is 25,000 square feet or more and subject to Green Building Requirements.</p>
<p>Climate Change Preparedness: Protect the lives and livelihoods of the Cambridge community from the impacts of climate change</p>	<p>The Petition does not propose new standards, but the City’s Climate Resilience Zoning Task Force is considering zoning changes that would promote resilience in accordance with Climate Change Preparedness and Resilience recommendations. The impacts of climate change, including increased flood risk and heat, are a particular concern in residential neighborhoods with older existing buildings. One potential concern for the Petition is reduced permeability and vegetation if new housing is developed, although retaining a 25% open space requirement and removing off-street parking requirements may have a positive effect.</p>
<p>Access to Opportunity: Provide access to opportunities for all people regardless of differences.</p>	<p>Areas that currently have restrictive single-family or two-family zoning provide fewer housing opportunities. Additional multi-family housing—depending on levels of affordability—could result in a path towards home ownership or more access to rental units, providing more residents with opportunities to live and work in Cambridge. However, these opportunities may not reach all households if new market-rate housing costs remain high due to the limited regional housing supply and persistent market demand for housing within Cambridge.</p>

Relevant Envision Cambridge Goals	Considerations for Petition
<p>Racial Justice: End race-based disparities and achieve racial equity.</p>	<p>As discussed earlier, communities across the country have become increasingly aware of the connection between restrictive single-family zoning and forms of race-based discrimination that have resulted in economic disparities, profoundly impacting Black residents’ ability to achieve intergenerational wealth, hold assets, and establish financial equity. Zoning neighborhoods across the city more equitably would respond to this history, although it is not clear if it would directly result in greater racial equity.</p>
<p>Affordable Housing: Maintain and expand long-term, deed-restricted affordable rental and homeownership opportunities to allow Cambridge to thrive as a mixed income community.</p>	<p>The Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), adopted in 2020, provides a more permissive set of requirements for residential development that is entirely and permanently affordable to low, moderate, and in some cases middle-income households. This Petition would create more permissive requirements in residential neighborhoods for all housing, which would not be required to be permanently affordable unless it is in developments of 10 units or more (in which case Inclusionary Housing would require 20% of the development to be affordable). The proposed dimensional requirements are still more restrictive than the Affordable Housing Overlay, but would reduce the net additional benefit to affordable housing developments provided by the AHO compared to market-rate development. The Petition could make development sites more attractive for market rate housing, resulting in more competition for sites that might otherwise be acquired for affordable housing and potentially fewer opportunities for affordable housing development in residential neighborhoods.</p>

Relevant Envision Cambridge Goals	Considerations for Petition
<p>Housing Diversity: Provide a variety of housing options for individuals and families of different socioeconomic levels, life stages, and physical needs.</p> <p>Housing Stability: Support the ability of Cambridge residents to remain in Cambridge. Maintain a range of housing options to enable households to transition to units best suited to meet their needs.</p>	<p>Allowing different housing typologies, such as triple-deckers, townhomes, and four-plexes, could provide a greater range of housing options that currently do not exist in some neighborhoods. It could also provide options for homeowners to remain in place while accommodating life transitions. Affordability would still be a concern with new privately-built housing, although different housing types with smaller units would likely be less costly in comparison to larger single-family homes. On the other hand, smaller unit sizes might be less suited to accommodate families with children, which is a housing priority for the City.</p>
<p>Market Affordability: Support overall market affordability and lead the region in mitigating housing cost increases.</p>	<p>Market affordability is a regional issue, and will require a large amount of housing to be produced across the Greater Boston area and beyond. Creating new market-rate housing in Cambridge will contribute to mitigating the region-wide shortage, but the high demand for housing in Cambridge will likely keep housing costs high relative to the rest of the region. This Petition could result in more housing production in currently less-dense residential neighborhoods, but it likely will not be produced as quickly as larger multifamily development in mixed-use areas, and may not be produced at a rate that would materially impact housing prices.</p>
<p>Opportunity Neighborhoods: Foster communities of opportunity by providing housing in diverse neighborhoods close to public transit, places of employment, and social services.</p>	<p>Allowing additional density in primarily single-family neighborhoods with access to transit, places of employment, and social services could provide more residents with access to those same amenities and services.</p>
<p>Equity and Accessibility: Ensure a diverse set of travel options that meet the access and mobility needs of people of all ages, abilities, and incomes.</p>	<p>As discussed earlier, removing minimum off-street parking requirements would support less reliance on car ownership and increase reliance on existing sustainable modes of transportation, but could also result in increased demand for limited on-street public parking.</p>

Relevant Envision Cambridge Goals	Considerations for Petition
<p>Transitional Development: Where redevelopment occurs at the edges of well-established districts, shape new development to complement the prevailing pattern of adjacent districts, accommodate variations in use and scale, and add greater density to areas well-served by public transit.</p> <p>Development Patterns: Maintain the existing patterns of the city where they are well-established and advance the city’s values through a mix of preservation and complementary infill development.</p>	<p>Much of Cambridge’s traditional housing stock is characterized by two-family, three-family, and townhouse dwellings. The Petition would allow modifications that are consistent with these patterns in terms of scale and style, such as complementary infill development and conversions of larger single-family homes to multifamily dwellings. However, it would also allow larger apartment or condo buildings with more small units, which would differ from the prevailing development patterns in most residential neighborhoods. This could result in greater conflict between the goals of providing more housing and preserving the types of residential development patterns that are desired where they currently exist.</p>

General Considerations

As always, if the Planning Board recommends adoption of this zoning petition, staff would suggest that the Board direct City staff to conduct a careful review of the language and recommend any revisions to make it more consistent with language otherwise used in the Zoning Ordinance. Because there may be some unusual legal issues, we also think guidance should be sought from the Law Department with respect to such issues. Also, in this case, because the Petition would make significant amendments to base zoning districts, it is likely to cause some inconsistencies throughout the 500-page Zoning Ordinance that are difficult to foresee. One example mentioned earlier is that several Special Districts have zoning requirements that are based on a Residence B or C-1 zoning district, which would also need to be amended if those base districts were deleted.