City of Cambridge
Community Development Department

Allowing Multifamily Housing Citywide

Housing Committee Discussion
September 13, 2022
Background
Reminder: What is Multifamily?

• Type of residential land use
• “Family” units – internal bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens
• 3+ housing units in a building
• Could be homeownership or rental

NOT multifamily:

• Detached 1-family or 2-family dwellings
  (including multiple dwellings on a lot)
• “Semi-detached” townhouse development
  (1-family or 2-family attached on side walls)
• “Group” housing – lodging houses, dorms
Where is Multifamily Allowed?

Zoning Districts by Multifamily Permissibility
- Only single-family allowed
- Only single-family, two-family, and townhouse allowed
- Multifamily allowed
- Open Space zoning districts
## Allowing Multifamily Citywide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Current Zoning</th>
<th>What needs to change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Residence A-1, A-2, B | • Multifamily use not allowed  
• Density prohibits multiple units on most lots  
• Restrictions on multiple buildings on a lot | • **Allow multifamily housing as a use**  
• **Allow more units per acre**  
• **Consider ways to allow more buildings on a lot** |
| All other districts | • Multifamily uses allowed  
• Density allows multiple units on most lots  
• No restrictions on multiple buildings | • **No changes necessary to allow**  
• Could consider ways to encourage more multifamily housing |
Discussions So Far
Process To-Date

City Council Policy Order (recommended 11/16):

Work with the Planning Board to develop concepts and principles to eliminate single family and two family only zones

CDD + Planning Board Discussions (so far):

• January 4, 2022 – Background Information, Potential Approaches
• January 18, 2022 – Envision Framework
• March 15, 2022 – Zoning Principles and Concepts

➢ April 19, 2022 – Report to City Council
Planning Board Discussion

Goals and Benefits

• A more fair city, not more exclusive in some areas than others
• No reason to exclude multifamily housing, most neighborhoods already have a variety of housing types
• Encourage creation of more housing units – more opportunities in more parts of the city
• Multifamily housing in Cambridge and other transit-served communities serves broader environmental goals
• Statewide, regional policies encourage multifamily housing
Planning Board Discussion

Issues and Concerns

• New market-rate housing will be high-cost, wealthier households
• Increased property values if more development is allowed
• Preserving private open space (backyards) and tree canopy
• Balance between accommodating families with children and higher cost of larger homes
• Competition for residential on-street parking
• Architectural character of neighborhoods, avoiding teardowns
• Unintended consequences
Planning Board Discussion

Suggested Zoning Principles

• Allow an equitable range of housing types and unit sizes in all residential districts (no districts limited to large, 1/2-family homes)

• Allow additional housing units in restrictive zoning districts, to create more housing opportunities in those areas

• Consider impacts on housing cost and affordability

• Encourage preservation of usable open space, trees, and architectural character of building exteriors

• Limit overburdening of on-street parking
Planning Board Discussion

Preferred Approaches

• Change standards in current districts, rather than a complete rezoning

• Aim for incremental, not wholesale change

• Advance some things sooner (e.g., more use types, housing units); others will need more study and discussion (e.g., setbacks, parking)

• Non-zoning strategies are also needed – e.g., affordability will need subsidies, &c.
Planning Board Discussion

Policy Considerations: *What are the Council’s priorities?*

- **Equity** – should the City allow the same types of housing across the City, or different types in different neighborhoods?
- **Housing production** – is more housing density desirable in some areas compared to others?
- **Housing costs** – is it a priority to allow more market-rate units, even if they are higher-priced?
- **Neighborhood impacts** – how to balance housing priorities with needs for open space, trees, and parking?
Changes to Allow More Housing Uses
Changes to Allow More Housing Uses

What’s allowed now in Res. A-1, A-2:

1,250 (+/-) square feet

3,000 (+/-) square feet

6,000 (+/-) square feet

“Detached” (Single-Family) Housing
What range of uses should be allowed in all districts?

- Two-family Townhouses/Rowhouses
- Multifamily Group housing (e.g., Lodging House)
- 3 units
- 6 units
- 10+ units

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September 13, 2022
Changes to Allow More Units per Acre
# How Density is Limited – Lot Area per Unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>A-1</th>
<th>A-2</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min. Lot Area/ Unit</td>
<td>6,000 SF</td>
<td>4,500 SF</td>
<td>2,500 SF*</td>
<td>1,800 SF</td>
<td>1,500 SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max. FAR</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50*</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE:** 8,000 SF lot

*2,500 SF lot area/unit and 0.50 FAR for the first 5,000 SF of lot area, 4,000 SF lot area/unit and 0.35 FAR for lot area over 5,000 SF
Current zoning creates unequal unit sizes

What’s allowed now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Max. Height</th>
<th>Max. FAR</th>
<th>Min. Lot Area/Unit</th>
<th>Optimized GFA/Unit Range</th>
<th>Net Units/Acre Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A-1</td>
<td>35 feet</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>6,000 SF</td>
<td>3,000-6,000 SF</td>
<td>3.6-7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-2</td>
<td>35 feet</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>4,500 SF</td>
<td>2,250-4,500 SF</td>
<td>4.8-9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>35 feet</td>
<td>0.50(-)*</td>
<td>2,500(+)* SF*</td>
<td>1,250-2,500 SF</td>
<td>8.7-17.4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>35 feet</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>1,800 SF</td>
<td>1,080-2,160 SF</td>
<td>12.1-24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-1</td>
<td>35 feet</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1,500 SF</td>
<td>1,125-2,250 SF</td>
<td>14.5-29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2,500 SF lot area/unit and 0.50 FAR for the first 5,000 SF of lot area, 4,000 SF lot area/unit and 0.35 FAR for lot area over 5,000 SF
Current zoning creates unequal unit sizes

Typical GFA/unit ratios

Source: Cambridge Assessing Department

NOTE: ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE
What would encourage more equal unit sizes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
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<th>A-2</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Min. Lot Area/ Unit</td>
<td>2,200 SF</td>
<td>2,200 SF</td>
<td>2,200 SF</td>
<td>1,800 SF</td>
<td>1,500 SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max. FAR</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE:** 8,000 SF lot

- District A-1: 3 units allowed (2,200 SF x 3 = 6,600 SF GFA)
- District A-2: 3 units allowed (2,200 SF x 3 = 6,600 SF GFA)
- District B: 3 units allowed (2,200 SF x 3 = 6,600 SF GFA)
- District C: 4 units allowed (1,800 SF x 4 = 7,200 SF GFA)
- District C-1: 5 units allowed (1,500 SF x 5 = 7,500 SF GFA)

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Changes to Allow More Site Configurations
Changes to Allow More Site Configurations

What’s allowed now:

Residence A-1, A-2
- Detached dwellings only
- Lots below a certain size can’t be subdivided
- One principal structure per lot

Residence B
- Detached, two-family, townhouse
- Lots < 10,000 SF in area or < 100 feet wide can’t be subdivided
- Multiple structures per lot, special permit if second structure is > 75 feet from street
What other site configurations should be allowed?


Detached subdivision

Townhouse subdivision

Multiple dwellings per lot

Considerations:
• Allowing multiple structures can provide infill opportunities without altering existing buildings
• Larger multi-unit buildings can result in more efficient development, usable open space, and/or consistency with neighborhood development patterns
Other Considerations
## Options for Further Study

*These would not change under the concepts presented:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoning Requirements</th>
<th>Issues and Considerations</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| FAR and Height               | • More FAR could raise land values, result in larger units  
                               • 3-story height is typical across neighborhoods; more height could promote open space               |
| Setbacks and Open Space      | • Takes more study to know how requirements interact with each other and with existing conditions                                                        |
| Parking                      | • Zoning petition currently in review  
                               • CDD study to hear community views, review regulations                                                                                             |
| Affordability Requirements   | • Current zoning has “mandatory inclusionary” at 10+ units, “voluntary inclusionary” at < 10 units  
                               • Changes need careful legal and economic study                                                                                                     |
Evaluating Preferred Options

Additional study could be done on:

• **Comparison to Existing Conditions**: Map existing vs. allowed units across districts

• **Design Outcomes**: Model building and site designs on example lots

• **Economic Outcomes**: Model effects on development value, property value, home prices for example lots; compare with affordable housing opportunities

• **Planning Goals**: Evaluate according to Envision Cambridge metrics of livability, diversity & equity, economic opportunity, sustainability & resilience, community health & wellbeing, learning
Discussion