

# City of Cambridge

Community Development Department

## Cambridge Street Active Use Zoning Petition

Planning Board Hearing

June 2, 2026



**CITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

CDD  
Community  
Development

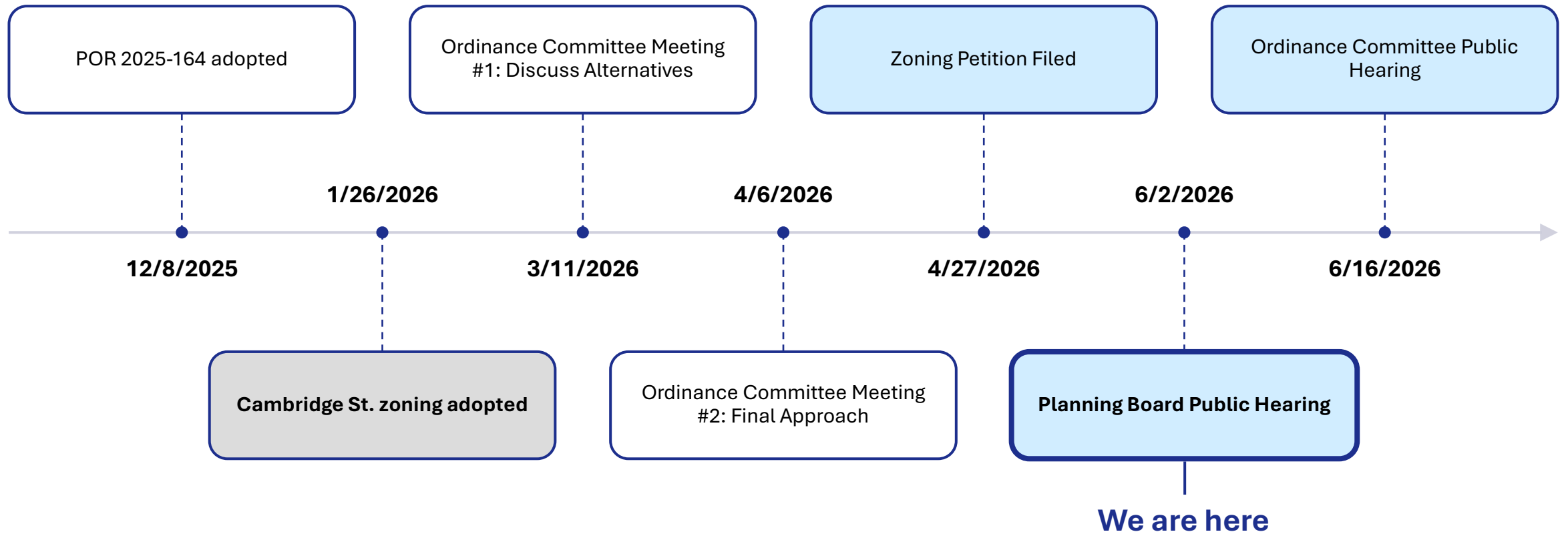




# POR 2025 #164

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to direct the Community Development Department (CDD) and Law Department to **prepare a draft of a separate zoning petition to strengthen Active Use requirements on Cambridge Street and the Porter Square PUD subdistricts** for sites that redevelop as single parcels.

# Process so far





# Zoning Petition Overview

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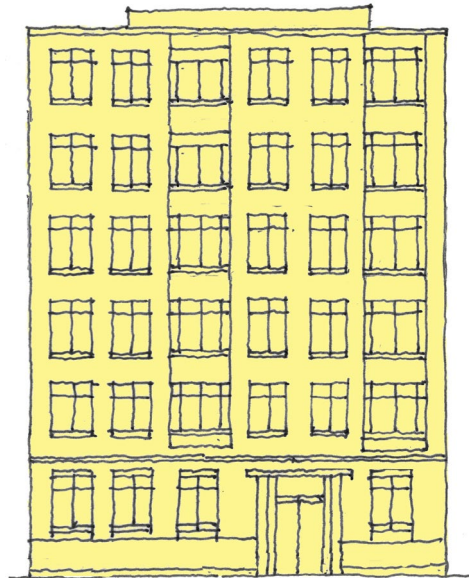
## Five Main Components:

1. Require ground story Active Uses above 3 stories in all CAM districts.
2. Establish a Planning Board special permit to allow minor modifications to Active Use requirements.
3. Clarify requirements only apply to lots abutting a Primary Street.
4. Map changes: rezone Monsignor O'Brien Highway to Business A.
5. Require a special permit for Formula Businesses.

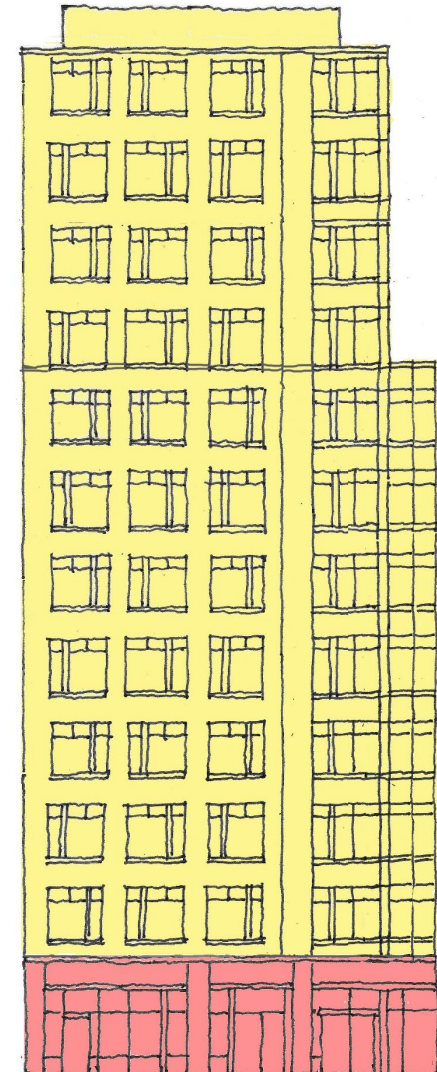
# Existing Active Use Requirements

**Active Uses required for buildings above a certain height.**

- Greater than 6 stories in Lechmere (CAM-10) and Webster/Windsor (CAM-12)
- No requirement on the rest of Cambridge St. (CAM-6)



**6 stories** residential-only  
(all CAM districts)



**12 stories** residential with  
active ground story use  
(CAM-12)

# Ground Story Active Uses

## **Why require active uses only above a certain height?**

- Most new development will want to unlock taller heights (6 stories or more).
- Flexibility for more unique sites and cases where height is not the main goal (e.g., rehab/enlargement).
- Prevent creating new nonconformities for existing all-residential buildings.
- Forcing commercial space where infeasible can lead to undesirable outcomes (e.g., vacancies, unreasonable rents, or making any redevelopment infeasible).

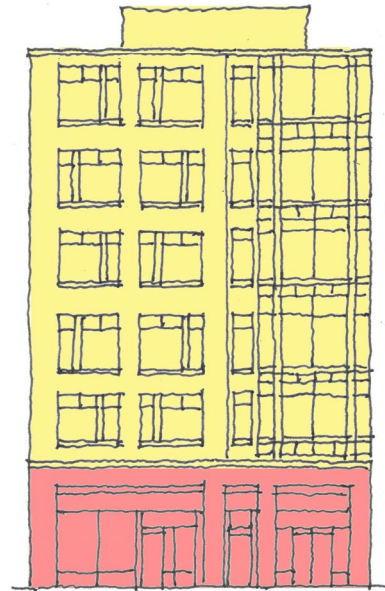
# Proposed Active Use Requirements

Active Uses required for buildings above a certain height.

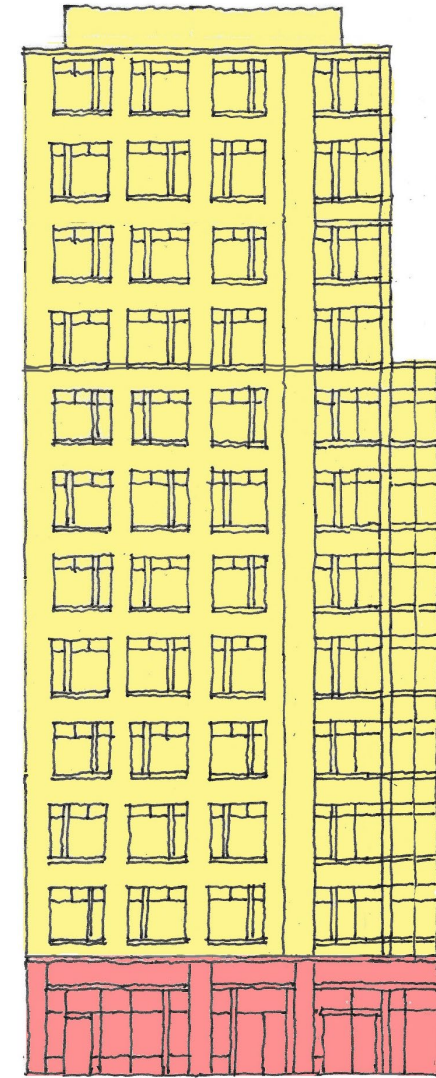
- Greater than **3 stories** in all CAM districts



**3 stories** residential-only  
(all CAM districts)



**6 stories** residential with  
active ground story use  
(CAM-6)



**12 stories** residential with  
active ground story use  
(CAM-12)

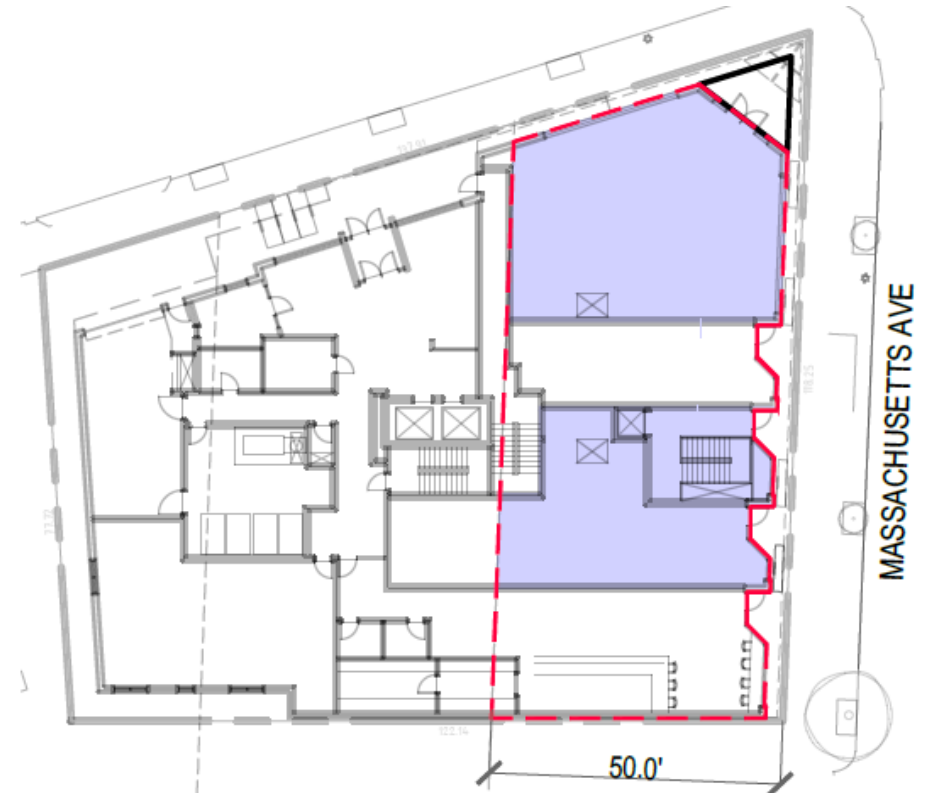
# Ground Story Active Uses

## Active Uses include:

- **All institutional uses** including daycares, libraries, community centers.
- **Some office uses** like a dentist's office, accountant's office, or insurance agency. This does NOT include general offices, banks, or labs.
- **All retail and consumer services uses.**

## Floor Area and Location Standards:

- 60% of interior floor area within 50' of the street



GROUND STORY INTERIOR AREA 50' WITHIN MASSACHUSETTS AVE

FLOOR	ACTIVE USE	TOTAL	TOTAL
GROUND STORY	*2,972-SF	4,751-SF	63%

# Active Use Modifications

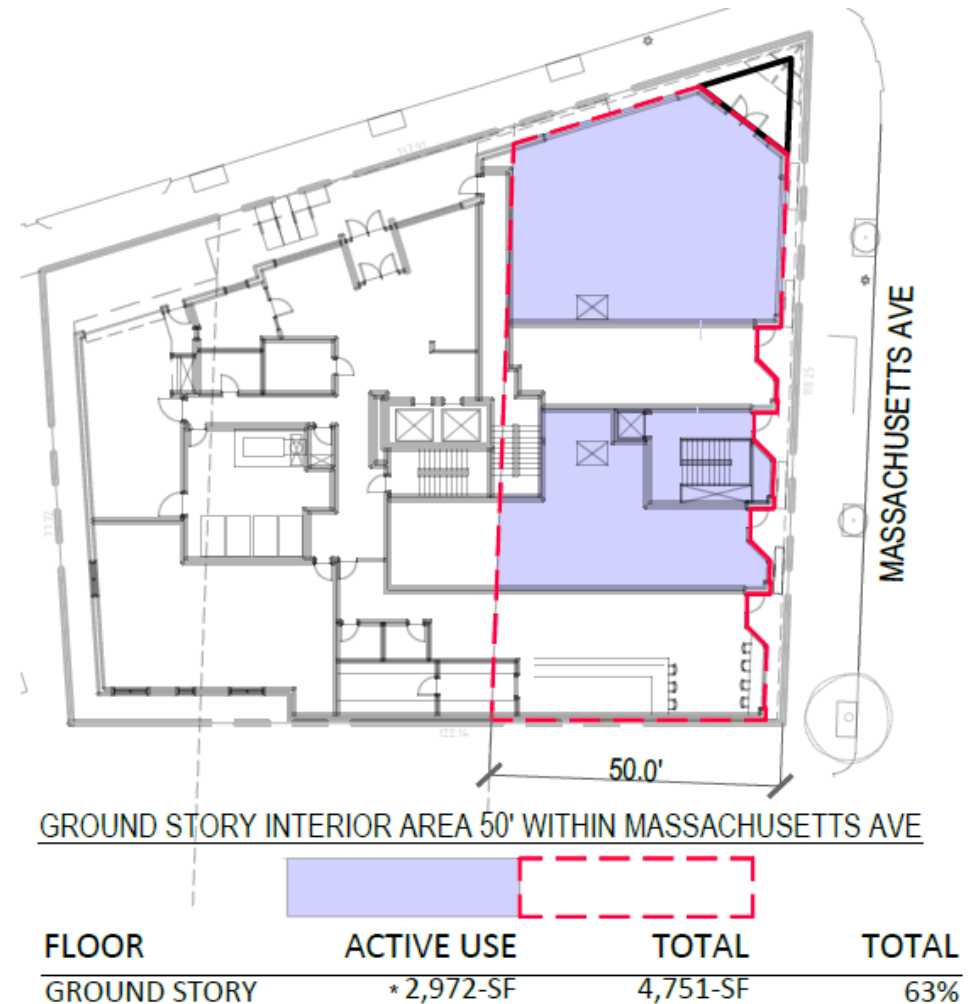
## Modifications by Special Permit:

Planning Board can approve modifications if the intent is being met:

1. Additional non-residential uses
2. *Minor changes in amount and/or location of active use (proposed in current petition)*

## Proposed Floor Area/Location Modification Criteria:

- Modifications generally **meet the intent** to provide continuous active use frontage
- Total floor area is **not substantially reduced**
- Modifications directly **respond to unique site-specific conditions**

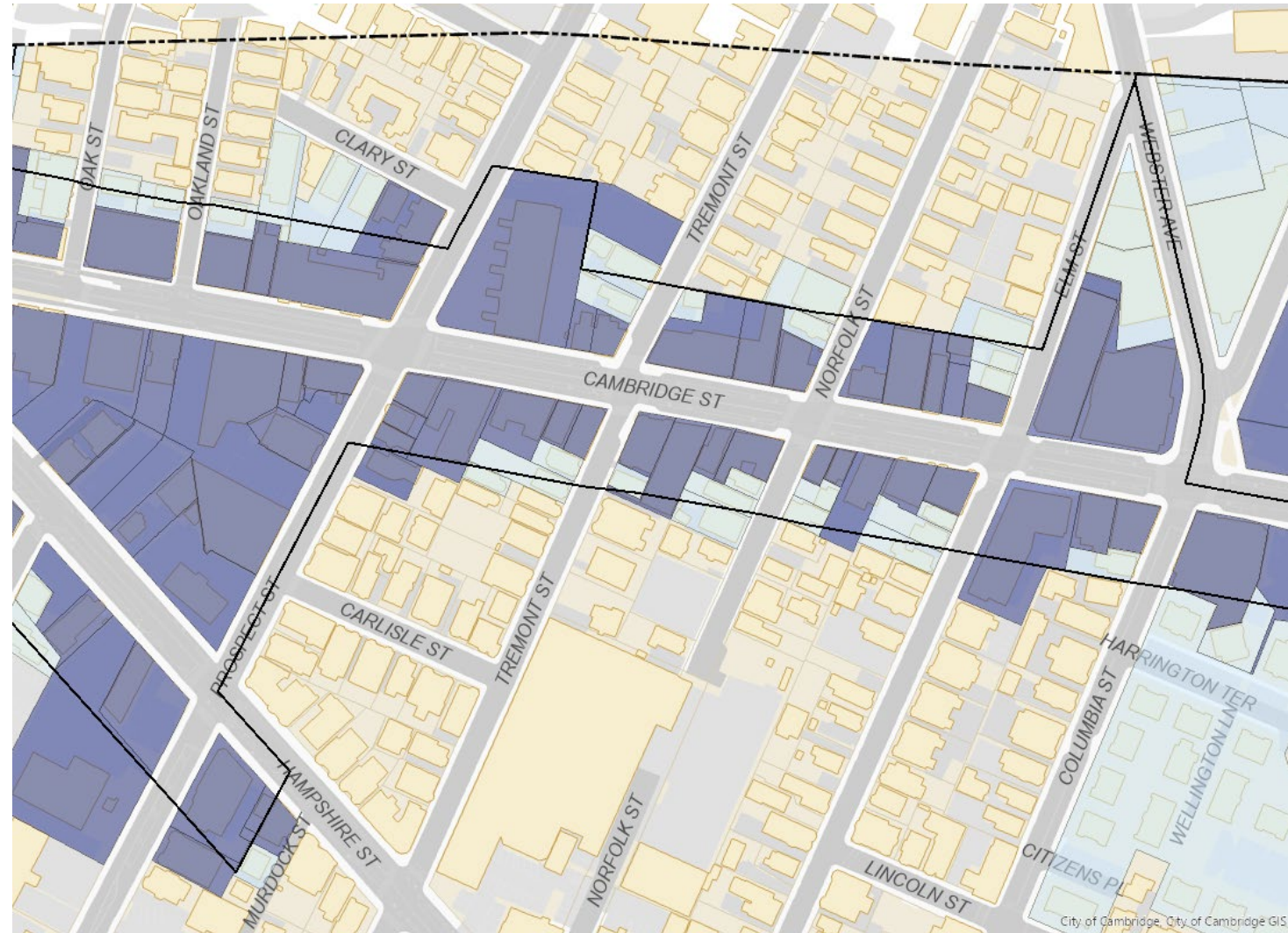


# Lots Not Abutting Primary Streets

## Active uses not required:

- Requirements are intended to reinforce mixed-use character of main streets.
- Do not want to require active uses on lots that only front secondary streets.

**Primary Streets:** Cambridge St, N. First St, Hampshire St, O'Brien Hwy, and Prospect St.



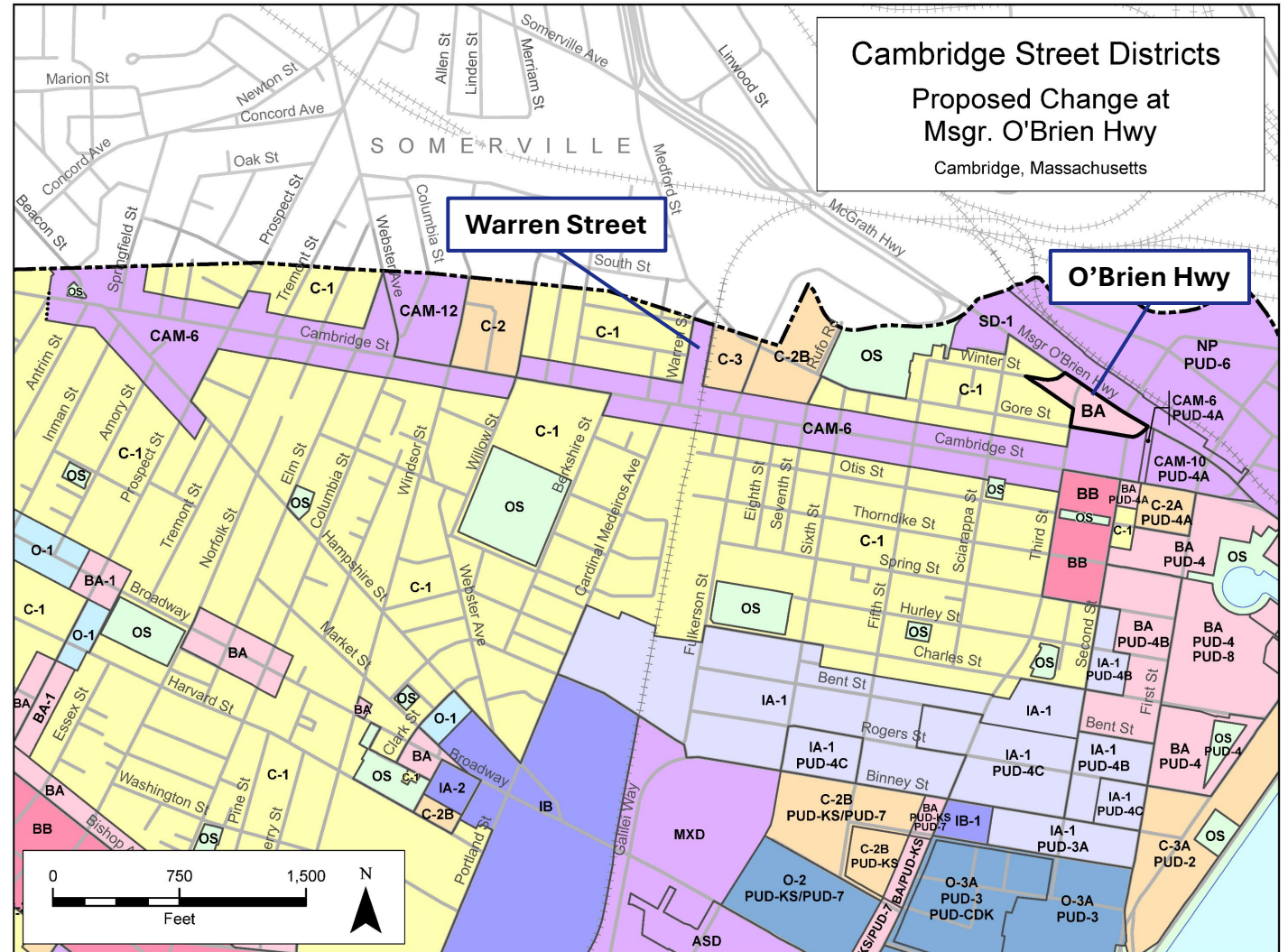
# Map Changes

## O'Brien Highway

- Rezone O'Brien Hwy edge to BA where Cambridge St. planning principles are less relevant.
- Incorporate corner of Gore St. and Third St. to include existing retail use.

## Warren Street

- Keep Warren St. in CAM-6 – only require active uses on lots abutting Cambridge St.



Map prepared by Brendan Monroe on April 7, 2026. CDD GIS C:\Projects\Zoning\MassAveCambridgeSt2026\CambridgeStActiveUse\_Proposed\_8x11.mxd

# Formula Business Special Permit

- **Formula Business:** a retail or consumer service establishment that shares a **trademark, logo, architecture, signage, and/or color scheme** with 20 or more establishments or 10 or more establishments within Massachusetts.
- Special permit conditions are used to ensure the design is compatible with the unique, historic character of the district.
- Same rules currently apply in Central Square.
- Effect has not been to limit chains or promote local business, but to mitigate aesthetic impacts of branding.

