

# City of Cambridge

Community Development Department

## Massachusetts Avenue Active Use Zoning Petition

Planning Board Hearing

June 2, 2026



**CITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

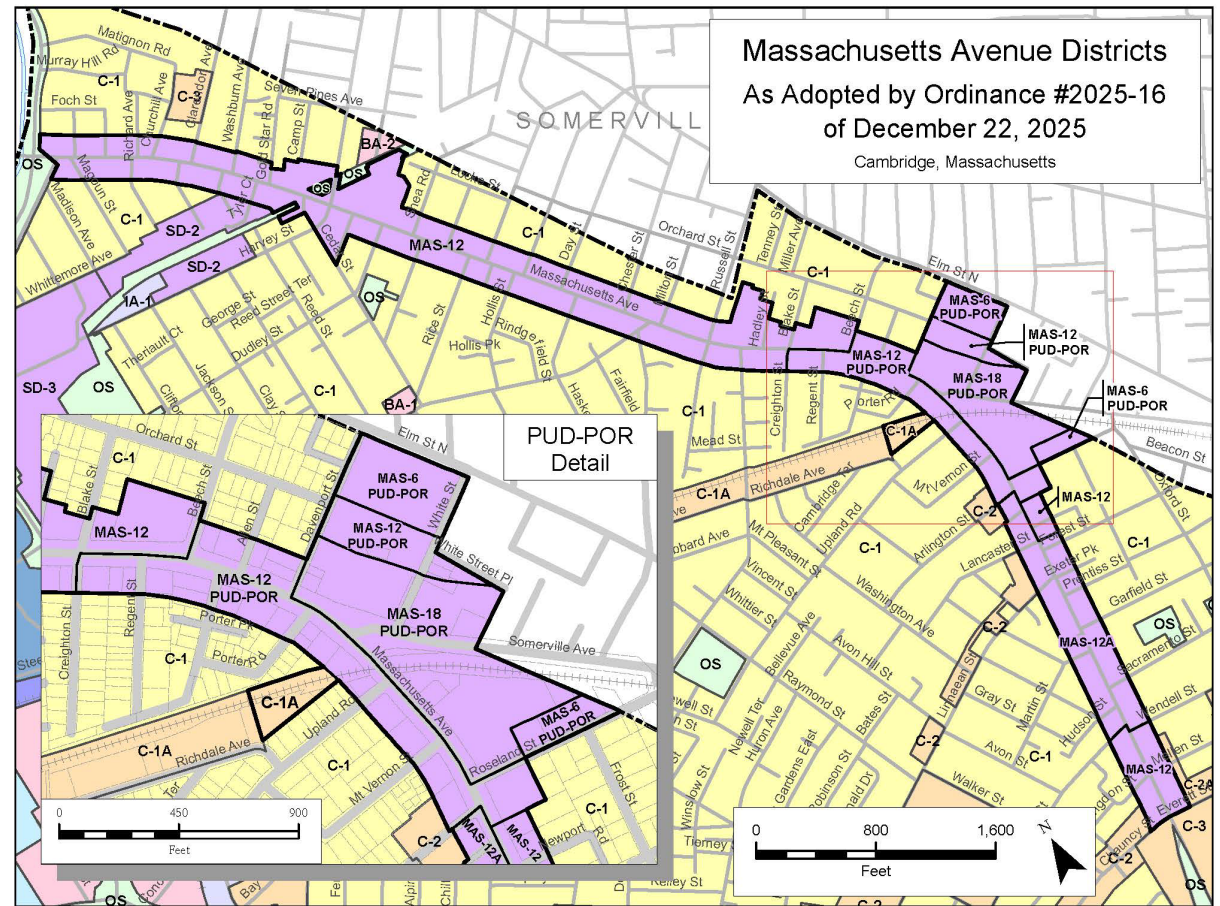
CDD  
Community  
Development



# Massachusetts Avenue Rezoning

## Adopted Dec. 2025

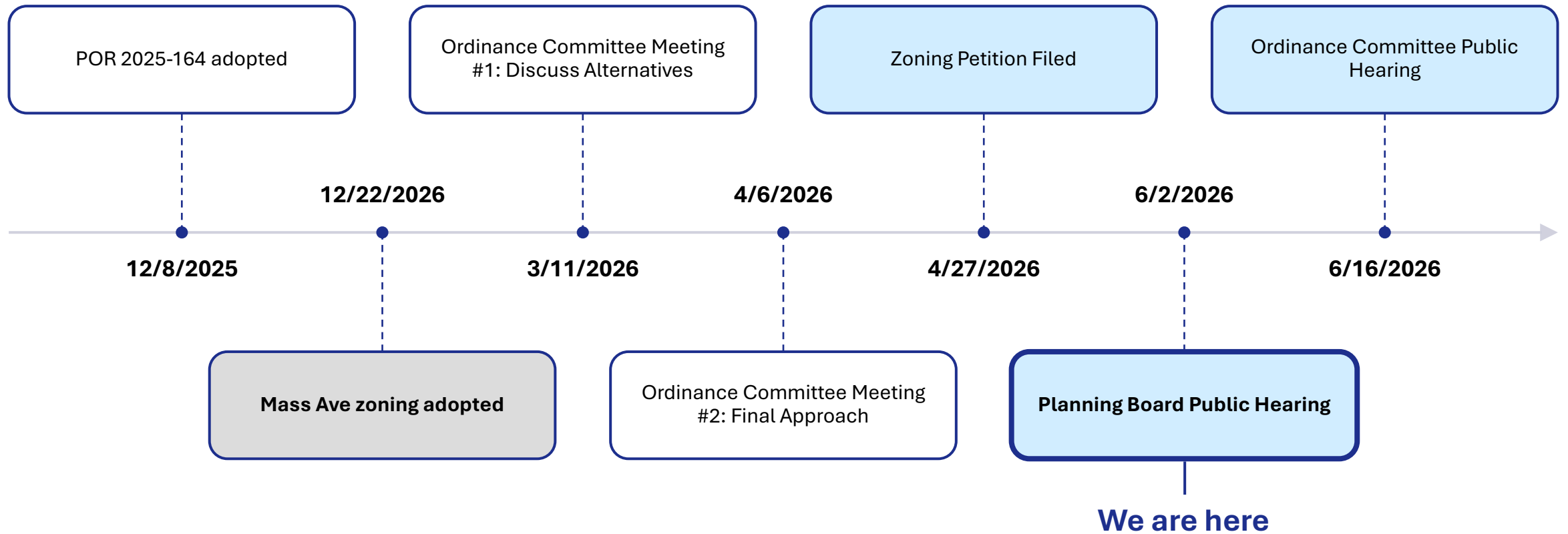
- Implements the recommendations of the *Mass Ave Planning Study* (2025).
- **Allows up to 12 stories of housing throughout Mass Ave.**
- Allows up to 18 stories of housing in Porter Square in exchange for public open space and retail concentration.
- **Incentivizes active ground floor uses like retail and restaurants.**
- Establishes design standards to encourage visually appealing buildings and a vibrant streetscape.



# 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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## Three Main Components:

1. Require ground story Active Uses above 4 stories from Cambridge Common to Linear Park.
  - a) Expand MAS-12A
  - b) Require Active Uses above 4 stories in MAS-18 (Porter Square)
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.

# Existing Active Use Requirements

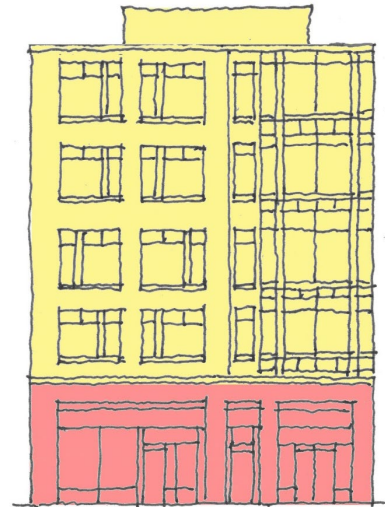
Active Uses required for buildings above a certain height.

- Greater than 4 stories south of Porter Square (MAS-12A)
- Greater than 8 Stories everywhere else

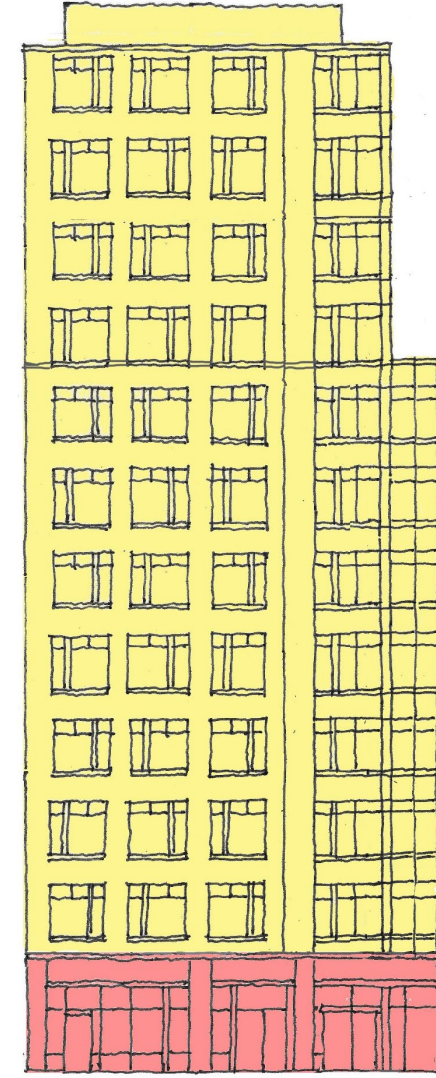
Current  
MAS-12A  
requirements



**4 stories** residential-only



**5 stories** residential with  
active ground story use



**12 stories** residential with  
active ground story use

# Ground Story Active Uses

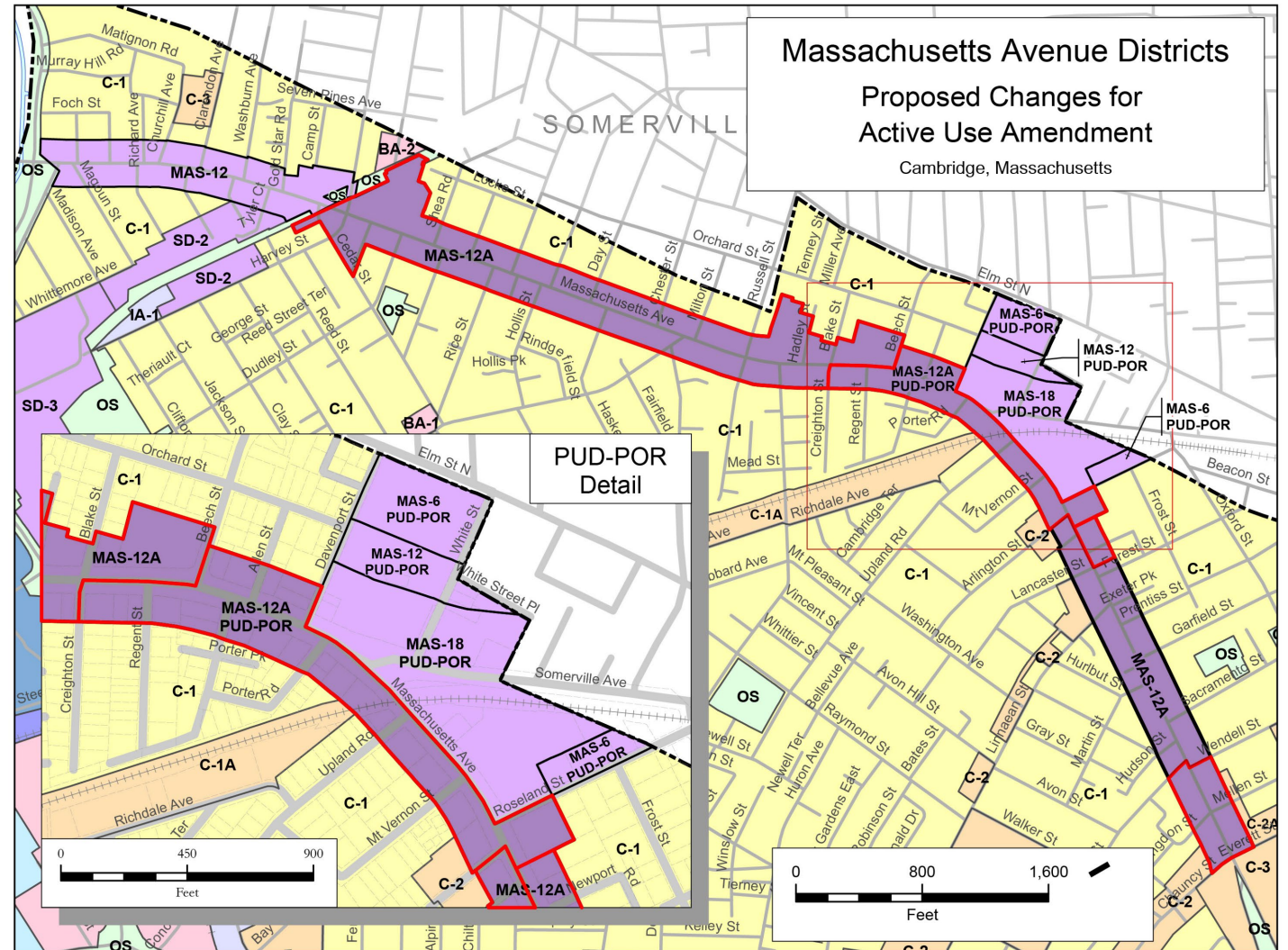
## **Why require active uses only above a certain height?**

- Most new development will want to unlock taller heights.
- 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

Require Active uses for buildings greater than 4 stories From Cambridge Common to Linear Park.

- Expand MAS-12A
- Active uses required for buildings greater than 4 stories in MAS-18



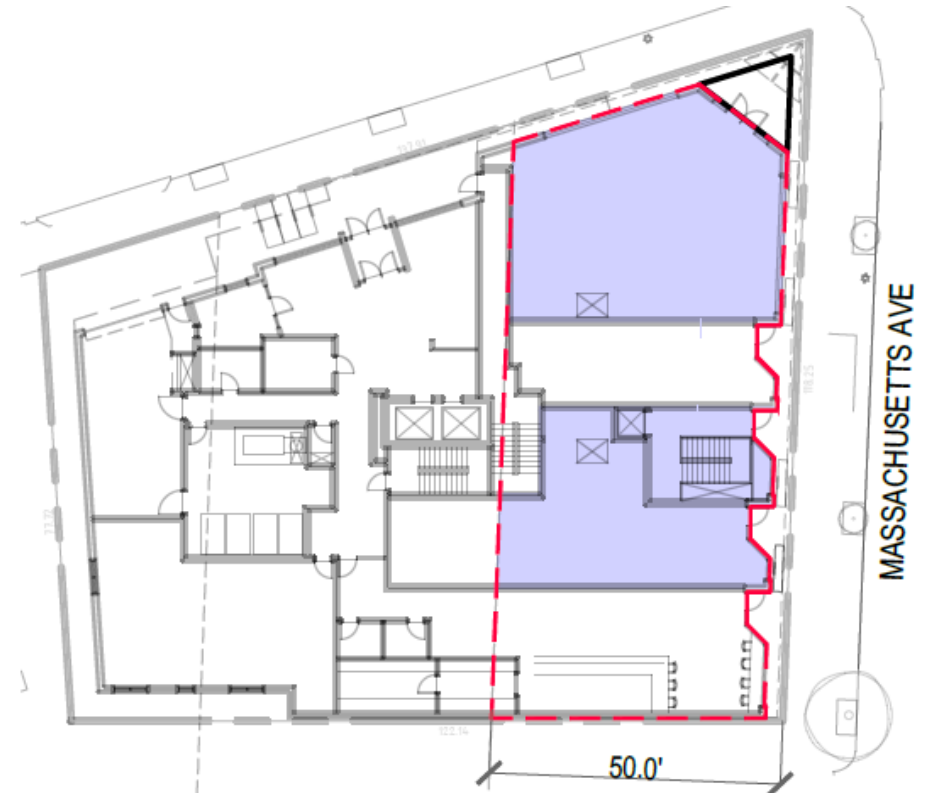
# Ground Story Active Uses

## 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

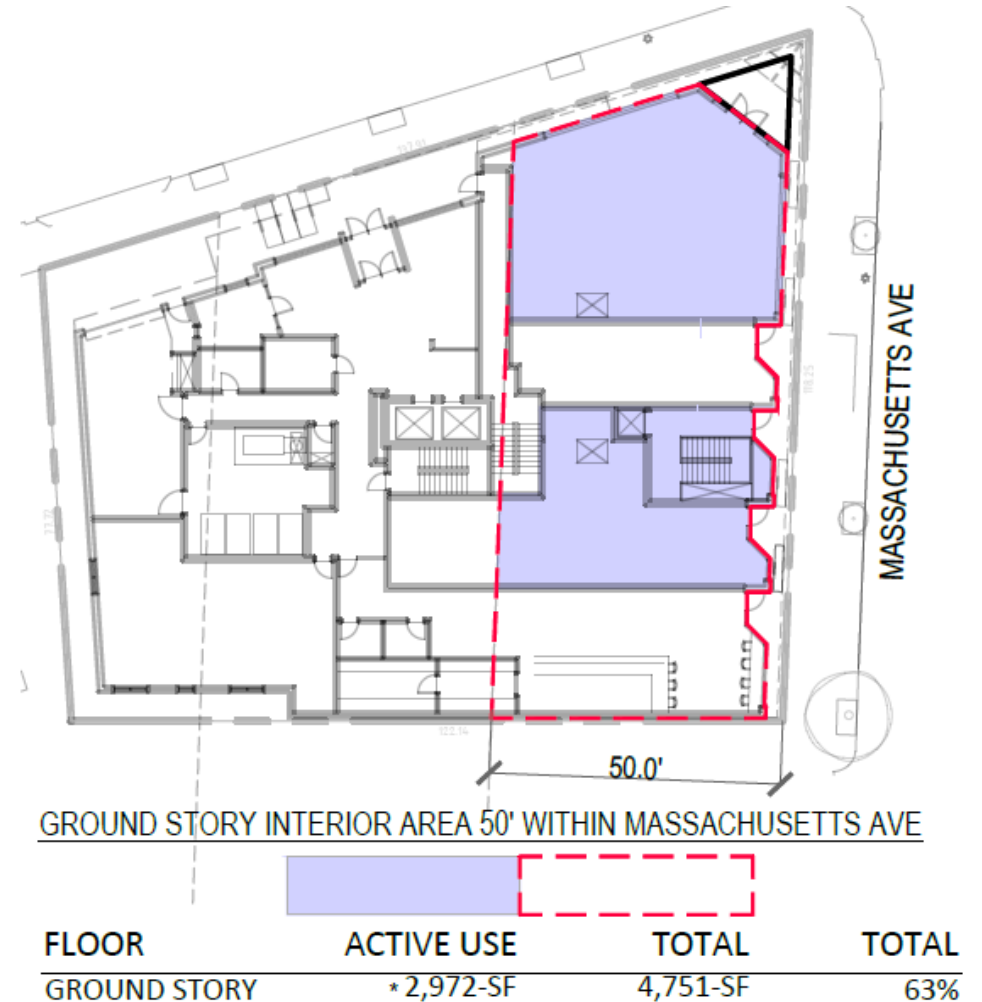
## Modifications by Special Permit:

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**

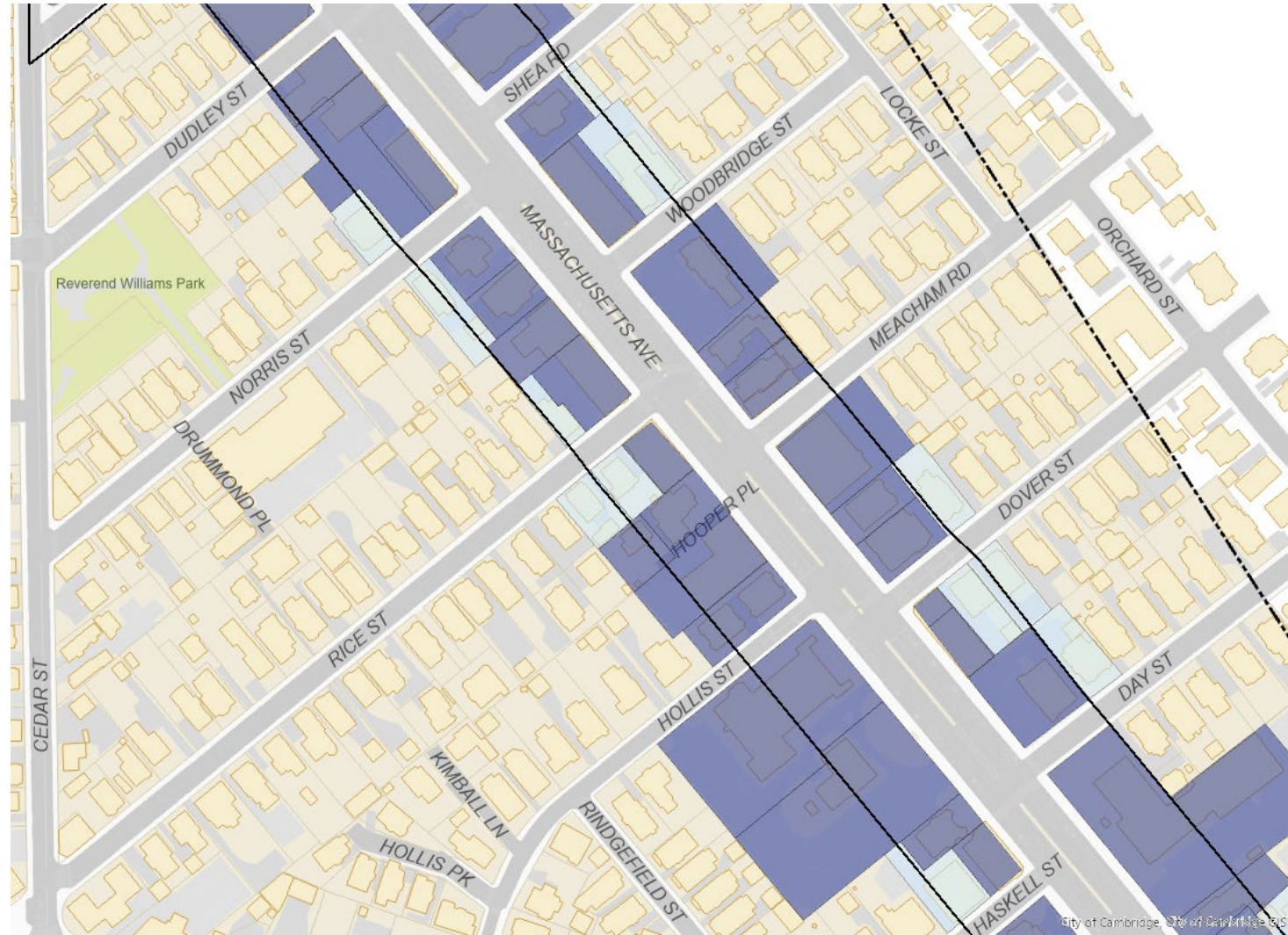


# Lots Not Abutting Primary Streets

## 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:** Massachusetts Avenue, Somerville Avenue



# CRA Project – 2326 Mass Ave

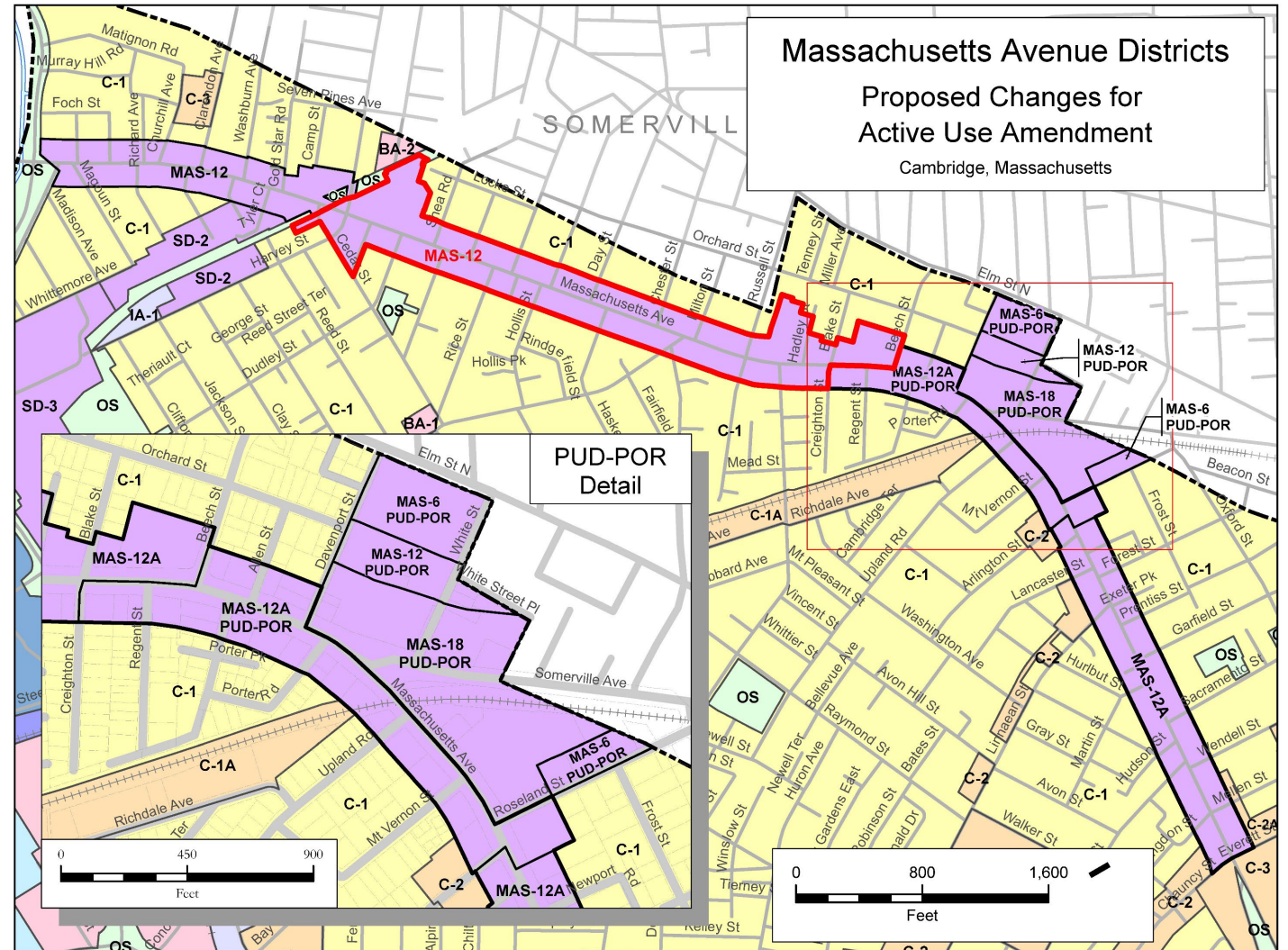
- The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority is proposing 6-story, 16-unit all-residential building on North Mass Ave.
- The proposed amendment would impose an active use requirement.
- Council asked City staff to meet with CRA to discuss.
- **Project exemplifies tradeoffs between housing development and active use requirements.**



# Potential Modifications

Could consider the following approaches:

1. Make no change north of Porter Square (keep MAS-12).
2. Allow smaller projects without active use - only up to 6 stories.
3. Delayed effective date to not impact immediate proposals.



# Considerations

## **1. Make no change north of Porter Square (remain in MAS-12).**

Active uses required for development above 8 stories – would prioritize active use in Porter Square and to the south, allow more flexibility for residential north of Porter.

## **2. Exempt smaller projects from active use requirements.**

Would provide flexibility for smaller residential projects where active uses might not be supportable – similar to existing height-based approach.

## **3. Delayed effective date.**

Would enable otherwise desirable housing development already in the pipeline to move forward, future development would have stronger active use mandates.