



Central Square Rezoning

City Council Meeting

Thursday, 10 October 2024

Today's focus

• Context

• Community Engagement

• Preliminary Recommendations

• Next Steps

• Discussion



**CITY OF
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Today's focus

● **Context**

● Community Engagement

● Preliminary Recommendations

● Next Steps

● Discussion



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What do we want to achieve in Central Square?



Central Square – The Heart of Cambridge

**Our
Historic
Downtown,**



**Cultural
District, and**



**Municipal
Center**



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Central Square – The Heart of Cambridge



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The Community's Goals

G2 STUDY (2013)



INCREASED HOUSING STOCK & DIVERSITY

e.g., affordable housing, family housing



RETAIL, CULTURAL, AND NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY

e.g., small businesses, arts and cultural spaces; outdoor dining



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

e.g., outdoor entertainment, pocket parks, programming



A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR CENTRAL SQUARE

e.g., green buildings, tree planting, shade structures



PEOPLE CONNECTED TO THE SQUARE

e.g., pedestrian and bicycle improvements

CENTRAL SQ CITY LOTS STUDY (2023)

HOUSING

Create more housing in Centra Square, Particularly affordable housing

CITY AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Accommodate cultural programs, events, and spaces
- Create high quality community services in Central Square
- Provide opportunities for social services to expand and co-locate
- Address city office and collaboration space needs

OPEN SPACE, PARKING, INFRASTRUCTURE

- Increase parks and open spaces
- Support ongoing infrastructure improvement projects
- Meet parking needs and include transportation demand management



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The Goals for this Project

Outcomes

Update zoning for Central Square to allow for and encourage:



More housing
(incl. affordable)



Diverse retail, cultural
and non-profit activity

Process

Design a community
engagement process that is:



Broad, varied, and
representative

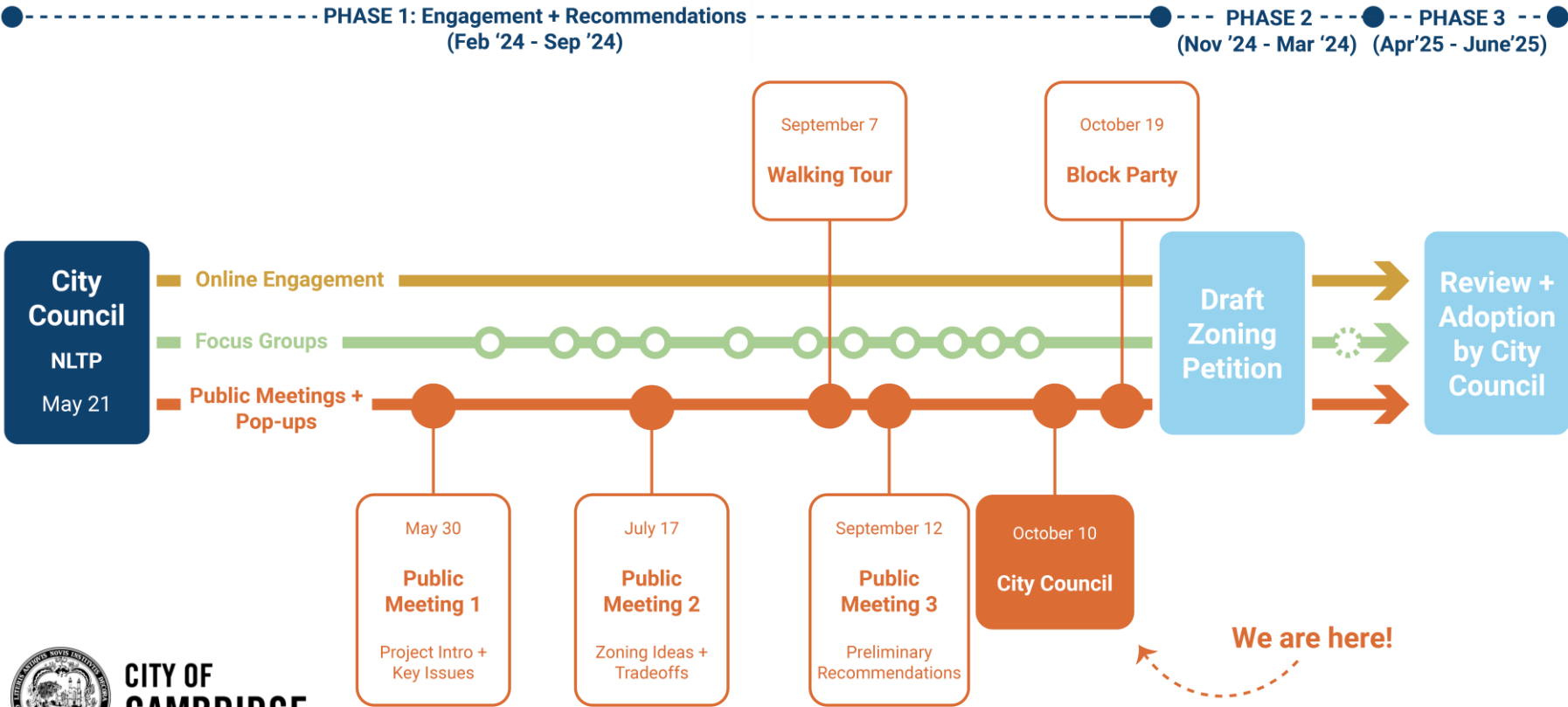


Responsive, iterative,
and participatory



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Project Timeline



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What we did: community engagement in action



The Engagement Plan (6/24)

Community Meetings

- 3 total
- 1-2 hours each,
- 70-100 participants per meeting

Focus Groups

- 6-10 meetings with representatives from relevant groups / organizations
- 1-2 hours each
- 10-15 participants

Pop-ups

- Attend events in Central Square and surrounding neighborhoods
- Number determined through engagement process

Events

- Walking Tour
 - 1-2 hours
 - 15-30 participants
- Block Party
 - 1 day
 - Collaborate with local partners
 - Hosted in the Sq.

Communication

- Social media posts
- City Daily Updates
- Email blasts
- Online / direct correspondence
- Project website
- City & CDD Calendar
- Mailers

CET @ CDD

- 1-2 hours
- 10-15 participants

CET @ CDD

Review of all materials and engagement with targeted communities

The Engagement Plan in Action: What Was Achieved

3

Community Meetings



CET @ CDD

- 1-2 hours
- 10-15 participants

11+

Focus Groups



8

Pop-ups

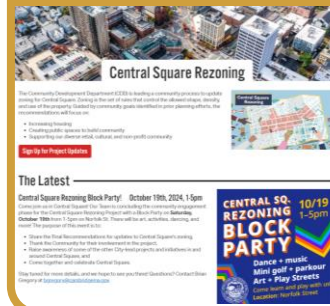


2

Events



Communication



CET @ CDD

Review of all materials
and engagement with
targeted communities



Measuring Success

"We are defining successful community engagement as broad awareness with representative engagement as measured by the metrics below"

Project Goals

Engagement Strategies

Measures of Success

1. Building Awareness

In-person Events

Pop-ups

Communication

Number of people information reaches, including informational conversations about the project. This will increase the number of community members who participate while also honoring the agency of each individual to choose their level of participation.

2. Getting Input

In-person Events

Pop-ups

Communication

Focus Groups

Community Meetings

Attendance at public meetings, number of deep interactions with community members (i.e. conversations, focus groups), review of demographic data collected and shared by stakeholders, number of brief interactions

3. Balancing Priorities

In-person Events

Focus Groups

Community Meetings

Attendance at events and public meetings, comments/feedback on draft recommendations, clear connections between recommendations and community input.

Community Meetings

1. Project Introduction
2. Scenarios and Tradeoffs
3. Preliminary Recommendations

May 30 88 Attendees
July 17 116 Attendees
Sept. 12 97 Attendees

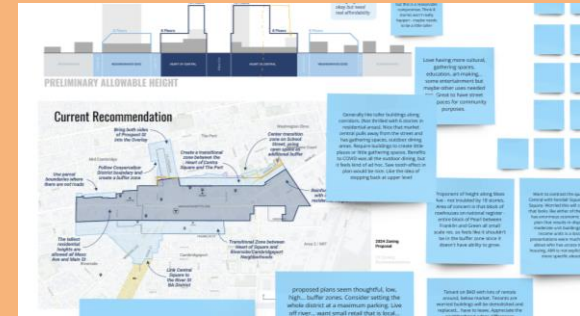
Value of this tool

- Ability to engage with a **broad audience**
- Facilitated **open discussions** between residents and team members
- Provide key **project milestones** and updates to community

What was heard

- **Broad range of viewpoints** on height and density
- Questions about who new housing would be built for
- Different perspectives on value of **affordable vs. market housing**
- Strong feedback on **potential expansions** of the Overlay Boundary
- **Concern over displacement** of existing residents and businesses

Innovative tools:



Join at
slido.com
#1160 317

What cultural uses are you excited to see in Central Square?



How the process adapted:

- Discussion portion of the 2nd and 3rd meetings extended to provide additional time for conversation and feedback.
- In-person watch sessions created at Manning Apts. for the 2nd and 3rd meetings to increase digital accessibility.

Focus Groups

11+ Focus Group Meetings

- **06/05/2024** | Central Square Advisory Committee
- **06/27/2024** | Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association
- **07/09/2024** | Manning Apartments Tenant Assoc. (CHA)
- **07/09/2024** | Community Learning Center
- **08/14/2024** | Nightlife
- **09/05/2024** | Community Engagement Team (CET)
- **09/09/2024** | Arts + Culture
- **09/09/2024** | Property Owners (with BID)
- **09/13/2024** | Washington Elms + Newtowne Court (CHA)
- **09/13/2024** | Nonprofits
- **09/30/2024** | Central Square BID Board
- **TBD** | Port Organizing Group
- **TBD** | Saint Paul Street Residents

Value of this tool

- Builds awareness with **key stakeholders**
- Ability to host **focused conversations** in a smaller setting
- Organized around **critical topics** and/or constituencies
- More **nuanced and directed feedback** around zoning

Examples of what was heard

- Need to **support existing residents and organizations** by growing opportunities, not through replacement
- Prioritize **bringing people to the Square**, both through housing and supporting arts/culture/nightlife/retail
- General support for increased density and height, but only for housing and a focus on **increasing affordability**

How the process adapted

- Dates extended into fall to account for challenges of meeting during summer

Pop-ups

8 Pop-ups at Cambridge Community Events

- 06/11/2024 | Community Learning Center
- 06/15/2024 | River Arts Festival
- 06/15/2024 | Hoops and Health
- 06/28/2024 | Citywide Dance Party
- 07/08/2024 | HRI Neighbor to Neighbor Cook Out
- 08/24/2024 | Port Pride Day
- 10/07/2024 | Washington Elms/Newtowne Court Block Party
- 10/09/2024 | Dance Party at the Cube



Value of the tool

- Meeting people where they are
- Interact with individuals who are not aware of the project
- Capitalizing on the energy and attendance of other events

What was learned

- Greater comfort with height but **only if it provides housing**
- Central needs to be a **“one-stop-shop”** again
- General support for **growing the Overlay Boundary**

Walking Tour



Cambridge
Historical Commission

Saturday, September 7, 2024

- Held in partnership with the Cambridge Historical Com.
- Roughly 1-mile loop between City Hall and Windsor St
- +/- 45 Attendees

Value of this tool

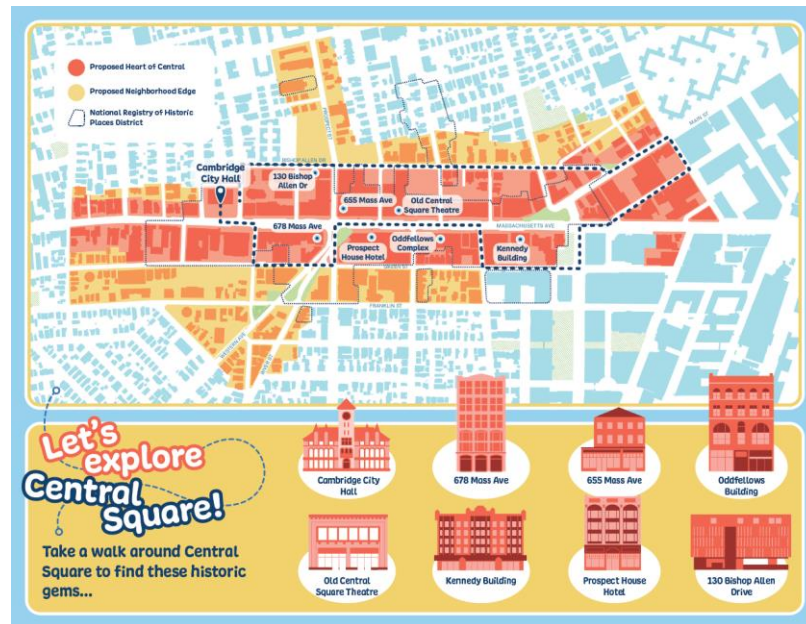
- Connecting with residents in the space
- Learning from **real-world examples**
- Understanding **Central Square's physical evolution**
- Reaching a **wider audience** with different interests

What was heard

- Seeing precedents in-person **aided understanding**
- Surprise over the reduction in height of some historic buildings
- General agreement that **Market Central is a positive** addition
- Concern over **preservation of historic buildings**

How the process adapted

- Date postponed from summer to early fall at resident's suggestions to allow for greater attendance



Block Party

Saturday, October 19th, 2024

We're concluding the community engagement phase with a Block Party on Saturday, October 19th from 1-5pm on Norfolk Street. There will be art, activities, dancing, and more to bring people together in an active and engaging way.

The purpose of this event is to:

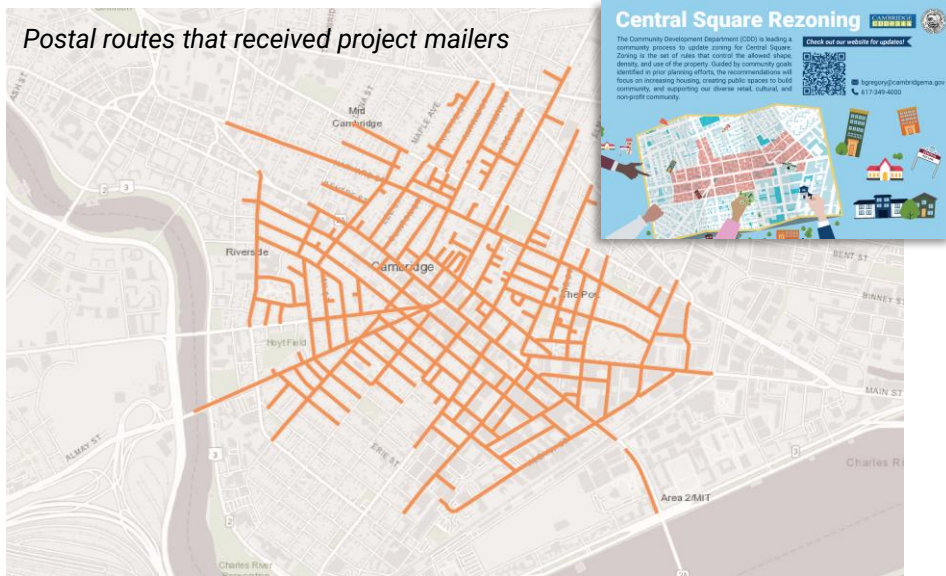
- Share the Final Recommendations for updates to Central Square's zoning,
- Thank the Community for their involvement in the project,
- Raise awareness around other City-led projects in and around Central Square, and
- Come together and celebrate everything that makes Central Square great!



Communications

Strategies to Expand Outreach

- **Physical Mailers**
 - Postcards sent to **10,591 residents and businesses** in and around Central Square with all future community meeting dates
- **Printer Flyers**
 - Posted on community/municipal boards in Central Sq. and handed out to **50+ businesses**
- **Digital Flyers**
 - Leveraged partner networks such as neighborhood associations, some w/ 1,600 ppl.
- **Social Media Posts** | 5 rounds, 20 posts, 5,925 views
 - Instagram • Threads
 - Facebook • X/Twitter
- **City Daily Update** | for 3 days prior to each event
- **City & CDD Calendars** | posted 2-3 weeks in advance
- **Email Blasts** | 1-2 wks. prior to events, 75-80% open rate
- **Direct Correspondence** | 44 unique residents
- **Zoning Newsletter** | mthly to 850 ppl, 76% open rate
- **Project Website** | 2nd most viewed CDD project page



Value of these tools

- Leverage **physical & digital** outreach tools to maximize awareness and remind people of meetings
- Direct **physical notification** of businesses and residents
- Accommodate a wide **range of communication styles** to increase feedback and input
- Ability to learn about the project at **different paces**
- Opportunities for more **in-depth communication**

Communications

Community Engagement Team Outreach

- Focused on reaching underserved, underheard, and historically excluded community members
- Team members represent 6 linguistic communities and American-born Black community

- **Printed Flyering**
- **Social Media Posts**
 - Facebook
- **Facilitated Focus Group**
 - 13 participants
- **WeChat**
 - 390 community members
- **What's App**
 - 270 community members
- **Texts**
 - 15 community members



What have we heard?



We refined the **community goals** in this process

MORE FREQUENT

LESS FREQUENT

Increase Height and Density

Limit Height and Density

Limit Height on Residential Edges

Preserve Human Scale

Create a Vibrant Street Edge

Create Variety in Heights

Height & Density

Mixed views on increasing height and density. Many are comfortable with height **if for housing**, with a preference to contain **tallest development to Mass Ave.**

“

Concerned about visual shadowing, and social impacts of taller buildings, especially if felt disproportionately by lower income residents

“

We need more people living in the Square to support neighborhood businesses.

“

You can also get a lot of housing through smaller projects (in large quantity)

“

I'm personally fine with any particular height

“

Don't think that people will notice the difference between a 16 and 20 story building on Mass Ave.



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We refined the **community goals** in this process

MORE FREQUENT

LESS FREQUENT

Housing + Affordable Housing

Arts and Cultural Activity

Permanent space for Starlight Square

Small and Local Businesses

Open and Community Space

Retail

Green Space

Social Services and Public Amenities

Use

Strong support for **housing, especially affordable**, keeping a space for **Starlight Square**, and encouraging the **small and local businesses that are key to Central's identity**.

“

All buildings should have ground floor retail to activate a space.

“

Central is a nightlife destination for the whole region... Beyond drinking, we need indoor recreation and human services

“

Affordable homeownership, not just rental. 100% affordable can risk some segregation. Want all levels of income access.

“

If you only looked at the zoning, how would you know this is Cambridge's Cultural District?



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We refined the **community goals** in this process

MORE FREQUENT

LESS FREQUENT

Maintain Cultural Vibrancy

Maintain Income + Community Diversity

Maintain Affordability of Housing + Retail

Avoid Gentrification + Displacement

Avoid Luxury and Biotech (Like Kendall)

Maintain Accessibility and Safety

Community

Strong support for **supporting existing community** and **maintaining affordability of housing and retail**

“

I'm more worried about losing cultural spaces... Cantab, Middle East, Man Ray are very vulnerable in single story buildings.

“

Need to restrict biotech so that it doesn't take over Central (like Kendall)

“

Central needs socioeconomic balance; the middle class has disappeared. Let's avoid luxury housing.

“

Concern about development replacing parking on Green St Garage and additional traffic.



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Consensus and Differences

Clear Consensus

- ✓ **Concentrate tallest heights along Mass. Ave.**
- ✓ **Transition zones are important to step down to and buffer surrounding neighborhoods**
- ✓ **Zoning should clearly reflect Central Square's identity as the City's downtown and cultural district**
- ✓ **Need to pair zoning with resources and strategies to ensure residents and businesses can remain**



Consensus and Differences



Different Perspectives

- How much height should be allowed for residential
- How to minimize the potential impacts of taller buildings on the public realm
- What the best balance between market rate + incentive zoning vs. all-affordable should be
- How to effectively incentivize additional cultural, nonprofit, and small business spaces



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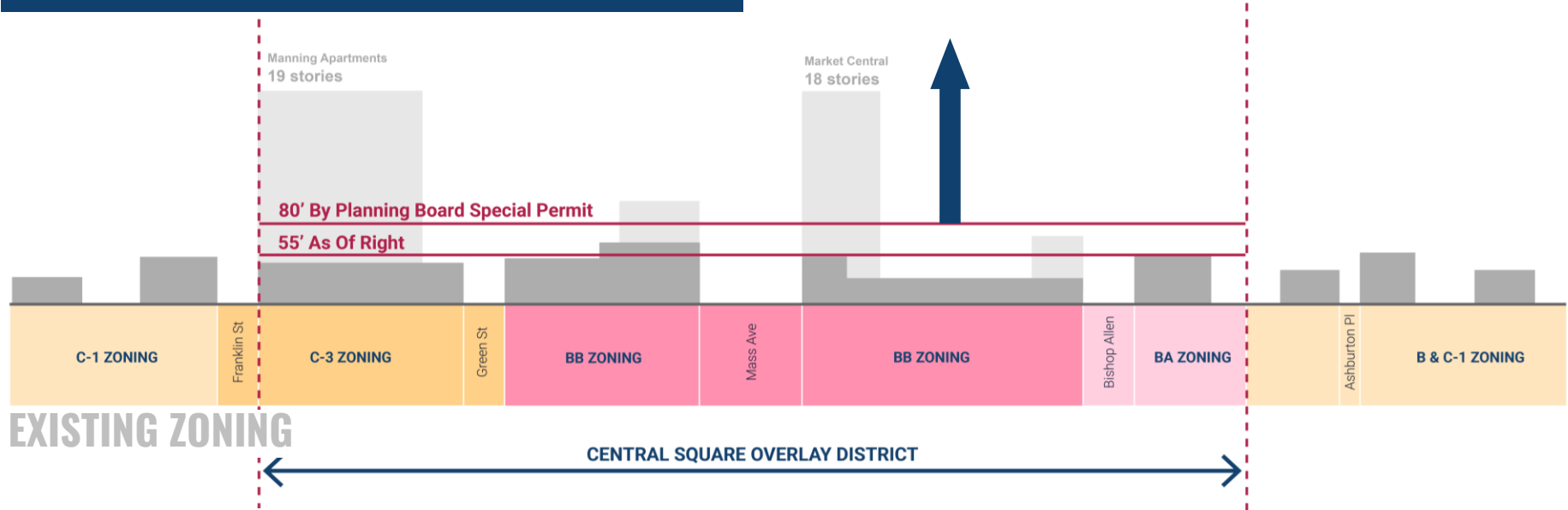
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How high for housing?

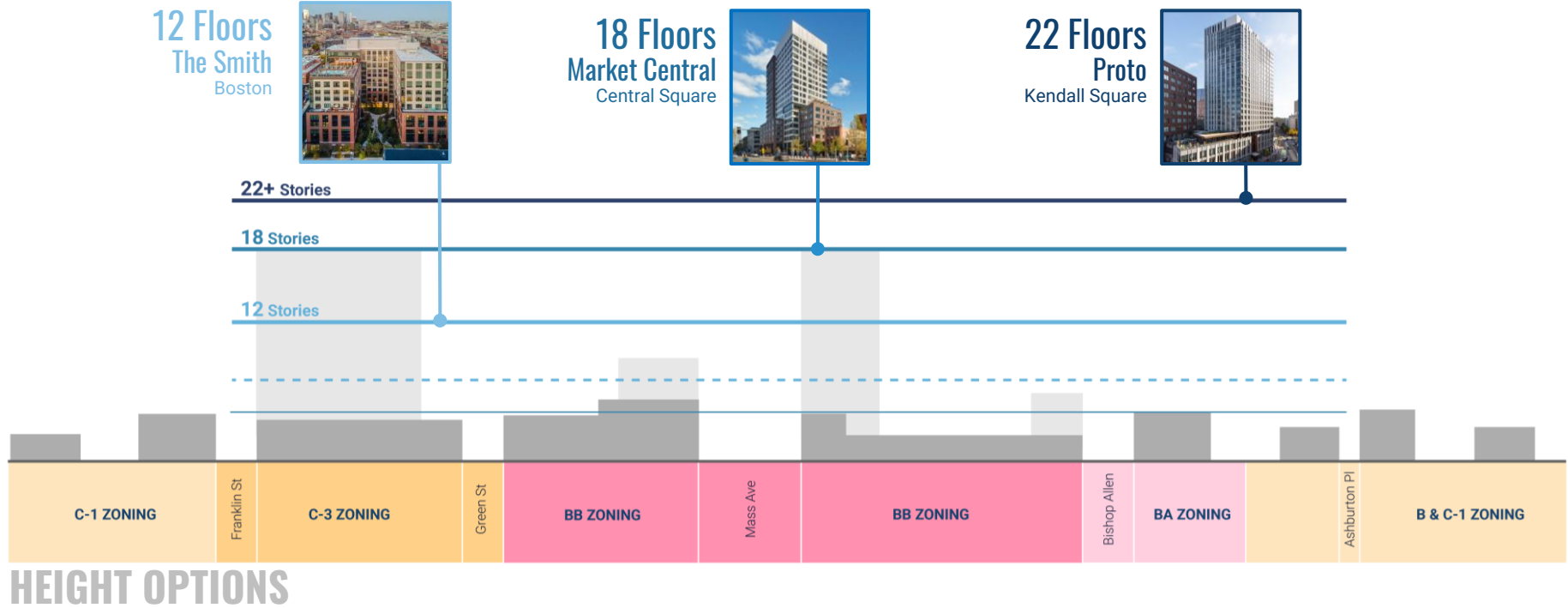


We need more housing, especially affordable

Raising residential height limits will allow for more housing in Central Square



What should the maximum allowable height be?



How should this relate to adjacent neighborhoods?

“Allowing 15-story buildings next to 3-story houses concerns me

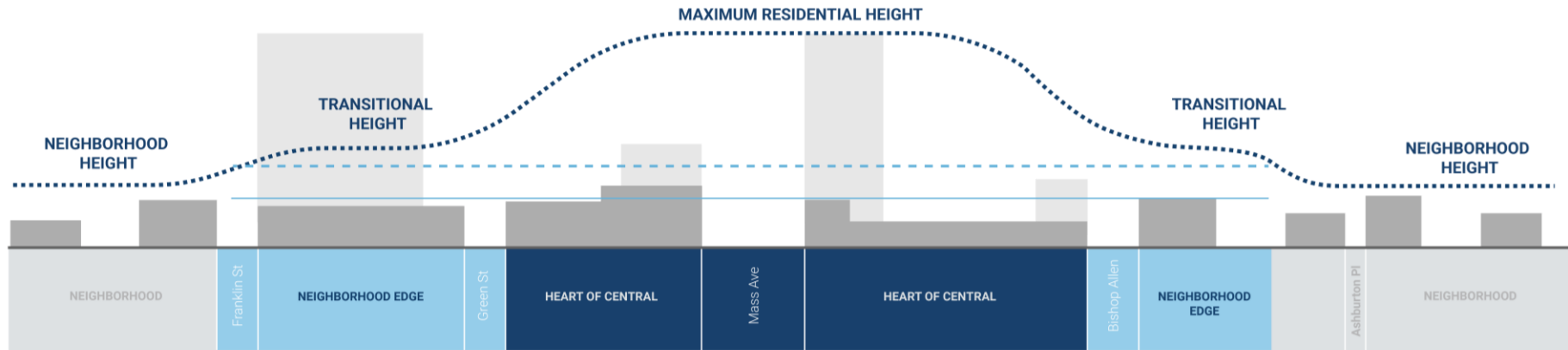
“I Support density on Mass Ave

18 Floors
Market Central
Central Square



“Development should be focused in the Heart of the Square, with the Edges scaled down to 5-7 stories

“Bishop Allen gets residential quickly! Could that be a better transition



“HEART OF CENTRAL” AND
“NEIGHBORHOOD ZONES”

How high for housing?

“

Central should be one of the densest neighborhoods in Cambridge

“

Density doesn't always mean height

“

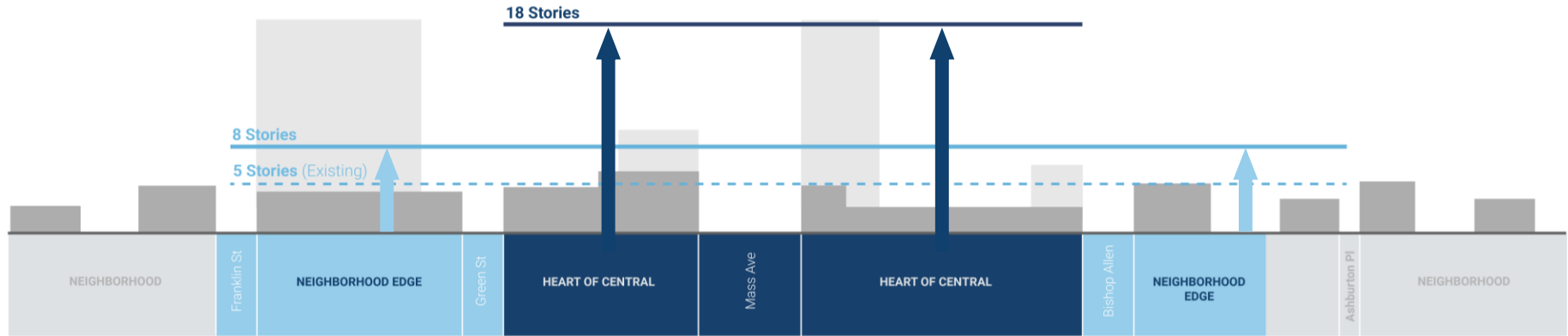
12 stories or more along Mass Ave is okay

“

I'm fine with any height as long as it's housing

“

We need to come to terms with higher density to mitigate our housing dilemma



RECOMMENDED ALLOWABLE HEIGHTS

Base + Tower

“

On a major Boulevard like Mass Ave, where facades are roughly 100' apart, does zoning limit building to 80' tall?

“

Take a Parisian approach to density – dense, connected street wall and 6 stories in height

“

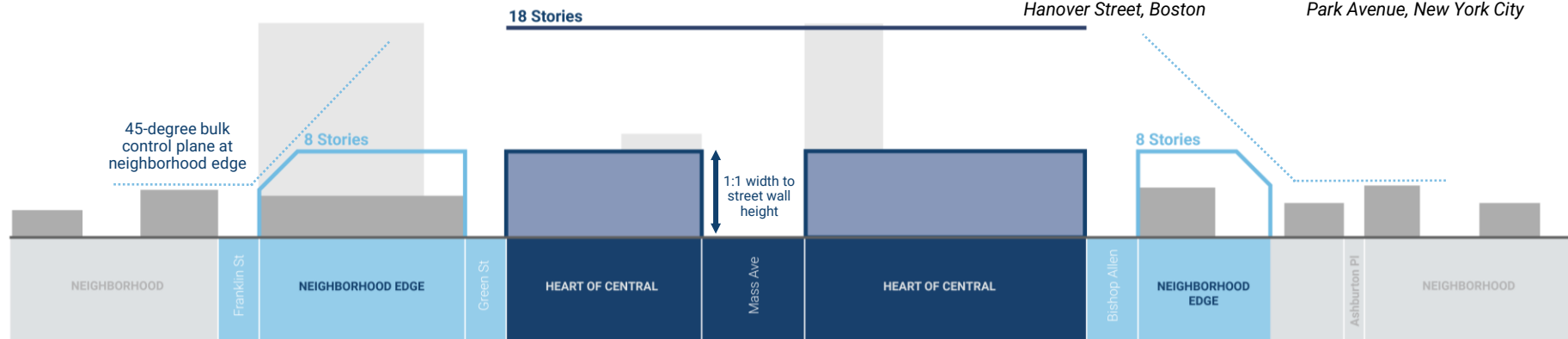
Hopeful some of the C2 vision can come to fruition



Hanover Street, Boston



Park Avenue, New York City



BASE HEIGHT

Base + Tower

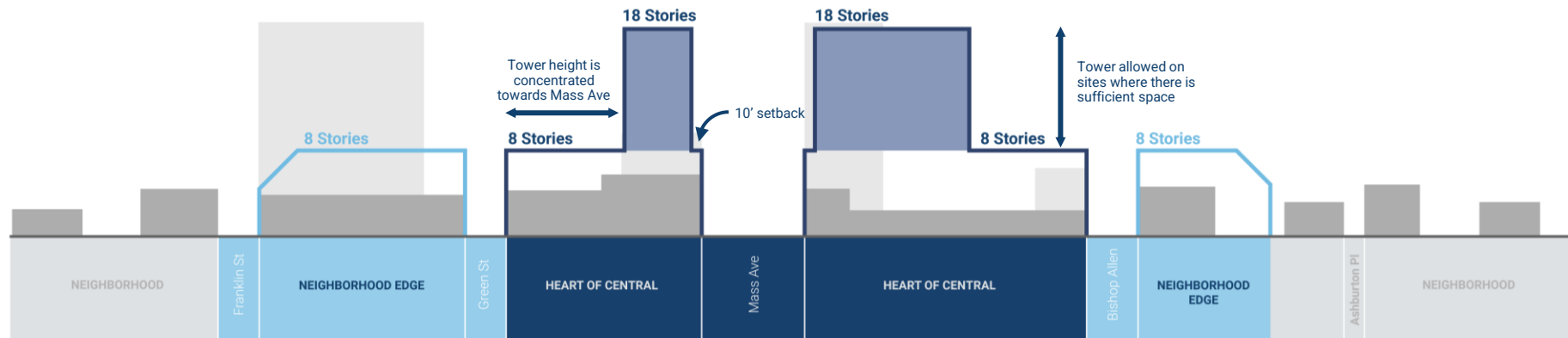
“Don't think that people will notice the difference between a 16 and 20 story building on Mass Ave.”

“Taller buildings are good because they maximize land use which is the density and efficiency of the land and other environmental considerations”

“Zoning should enable 4 or 5 more 20-story towers”

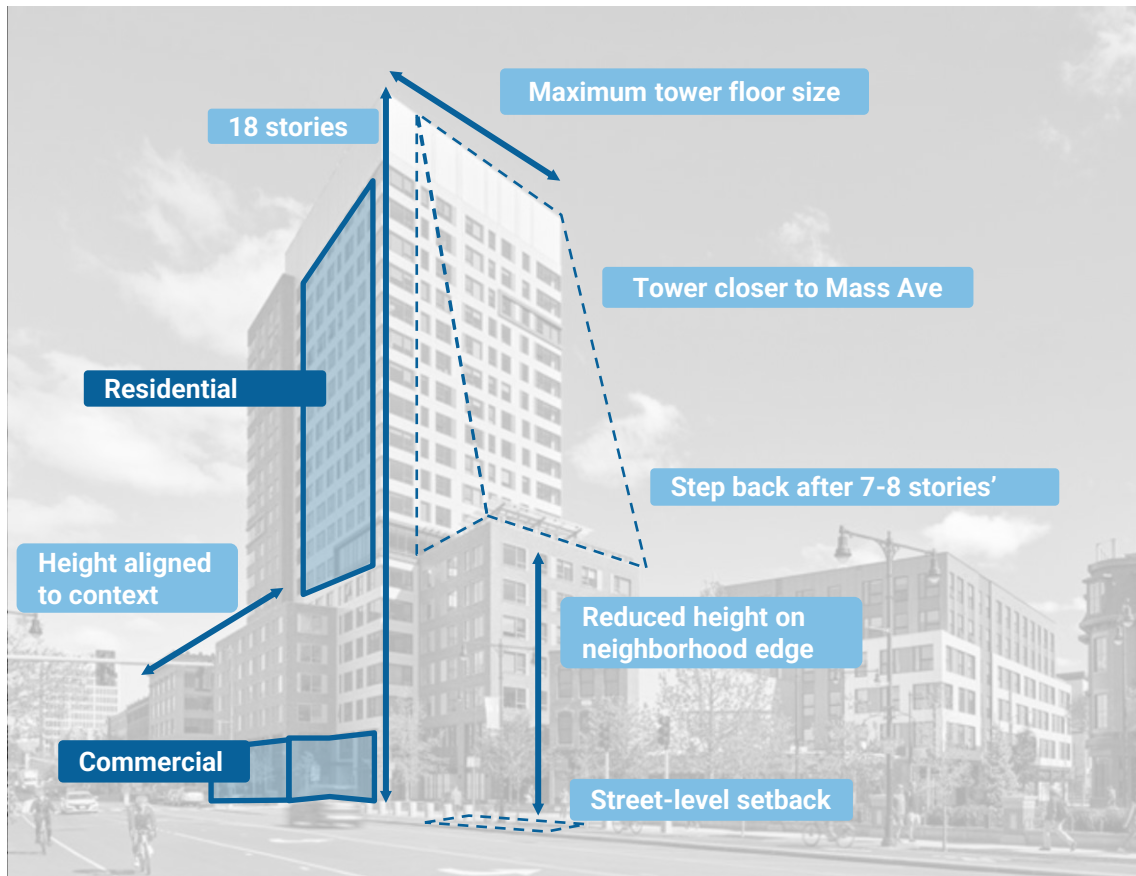
“Central Sq is a good place for people to live without cars, making high-density housing a reasonable option”

“Okay with any height as long as it's for housing”



TOWER HEIGHT

Base + Tower



“
Market Central doesn't
really have a negative
effect on me (Port resident)

“
It's great having access
to the things in all the
buildings (LINK resident)

“
I'm concerned about visual shadowing
and social impacts of taller buildings,
especially if felt disproportionately by
lower income residents

“
Don't go straight up along Mass
Ave, make the buildings step back
like Market Central so they don't
make the sidewalk unpleasant

Market Central (2018)
Central Square

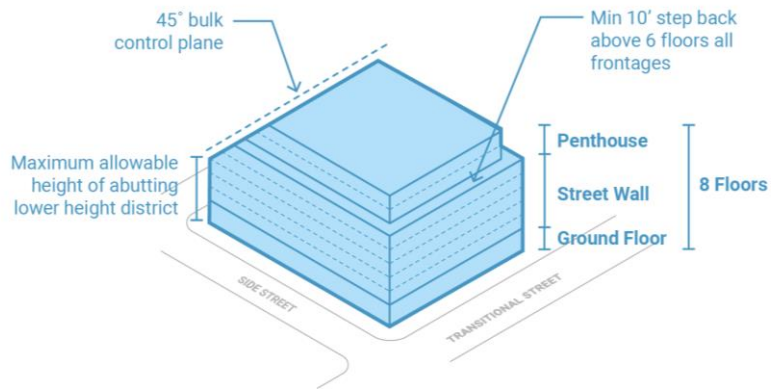
Base + Tower

“

Respect the existing neighborhoods

“

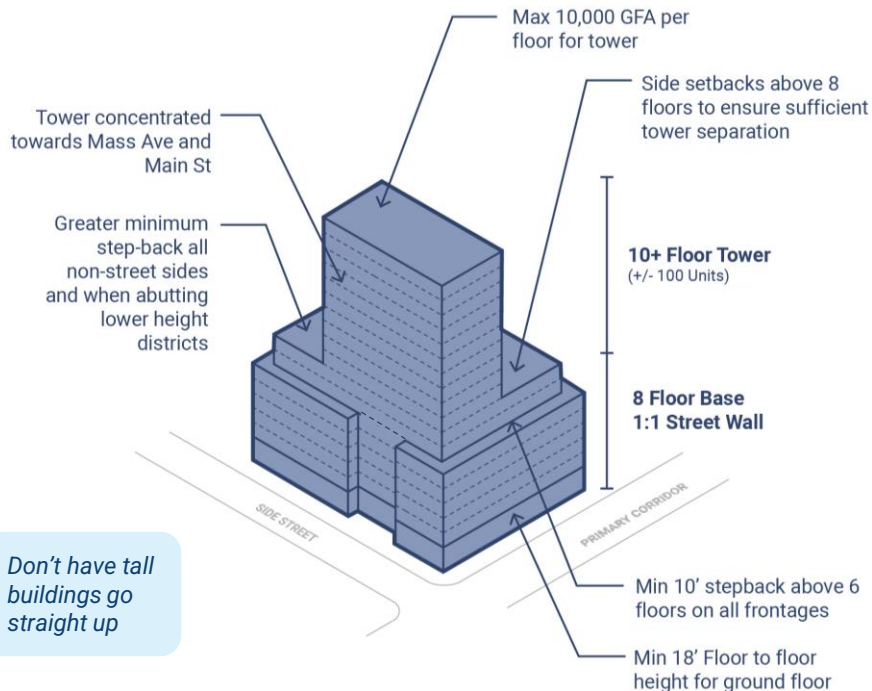
Preserve access to light and air; don't block out the sky



NEIGHBORHOOD EDGE

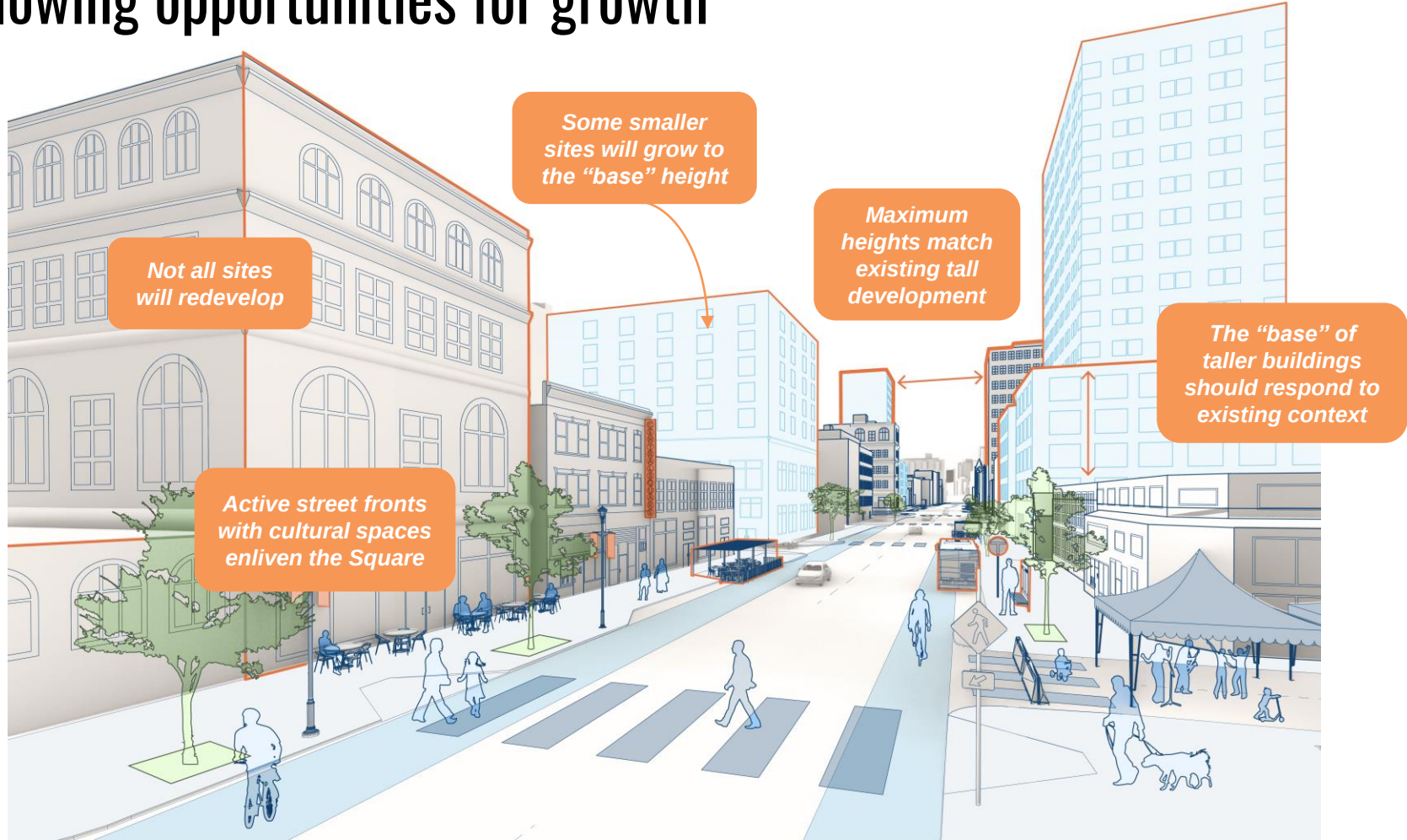
“

Don't have tall buildings go straight up



HEART OF CENTRAL

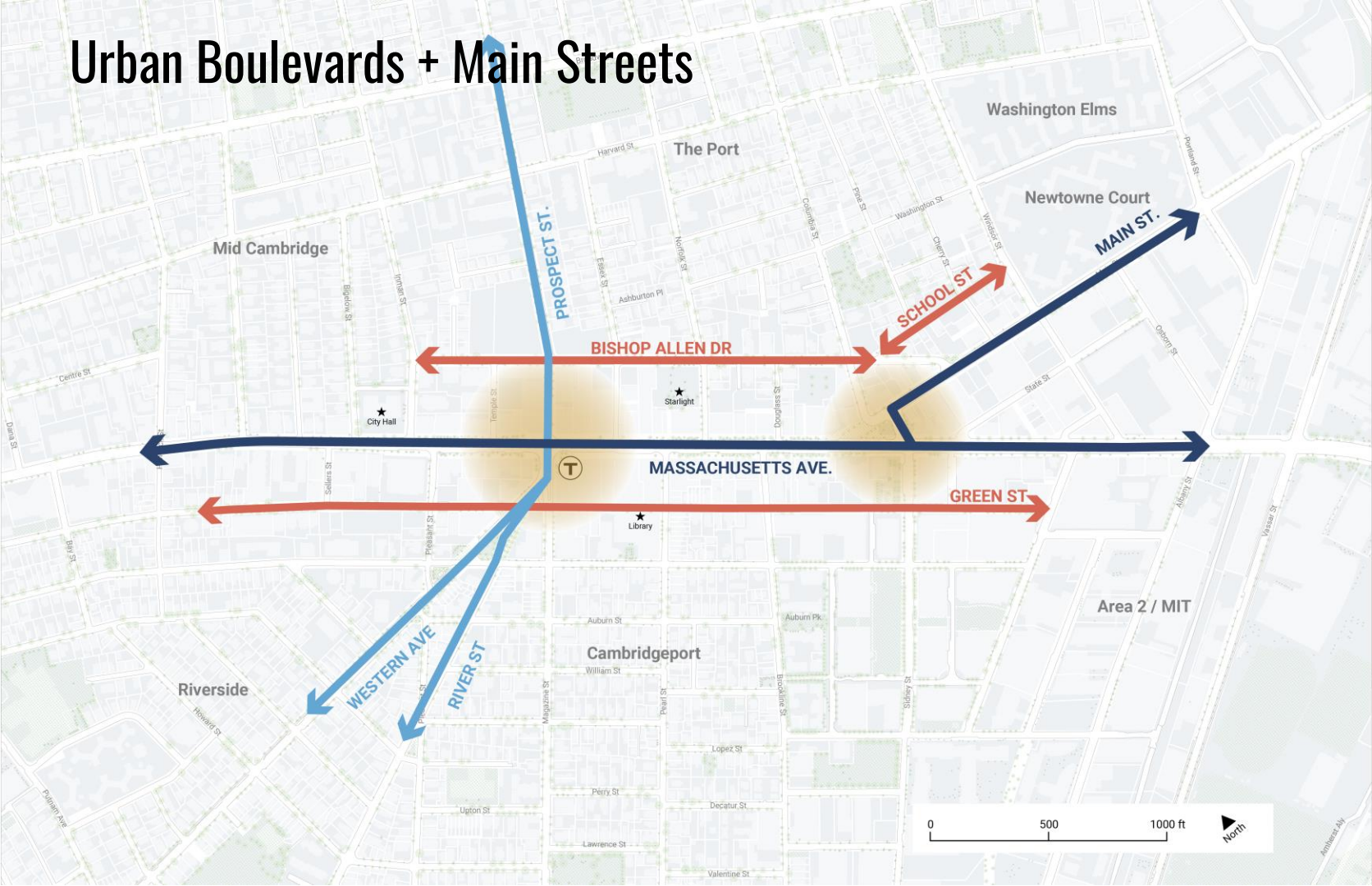
Allowing opportunities for growth



How can we responsibly grow Central Square?



Urban Boulevards + Main Streets



Urban Boulevards:
Main road for traffic and pedestrians. Connects to other major districts. High retail activity.

Neighborhood Main Streets:
High pedestrian activity, connect into residential uses. Some retail activity.

Transition Streets:
Transition between high activity main street and residential neighborhood.

Nodes:
Centers of activity

2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community input

Current Zoning

 Existing Central Square Overlay District

Current Zoning

Central Square 41

Community Feedback

Existing Central Square Overlay District

“Worth extending up Prospect St to Harvard at minimum, ripe for neighborhood edge treatment

“Extending the district to Hancock St makes sense – it's still very near the T station

“Tall housing along the Mass Ave corridor is fine. It shouldn't go down River St.

“It makes sense to have shops down [River] street

“Might be good for clarity to just fully include partially covered parcels

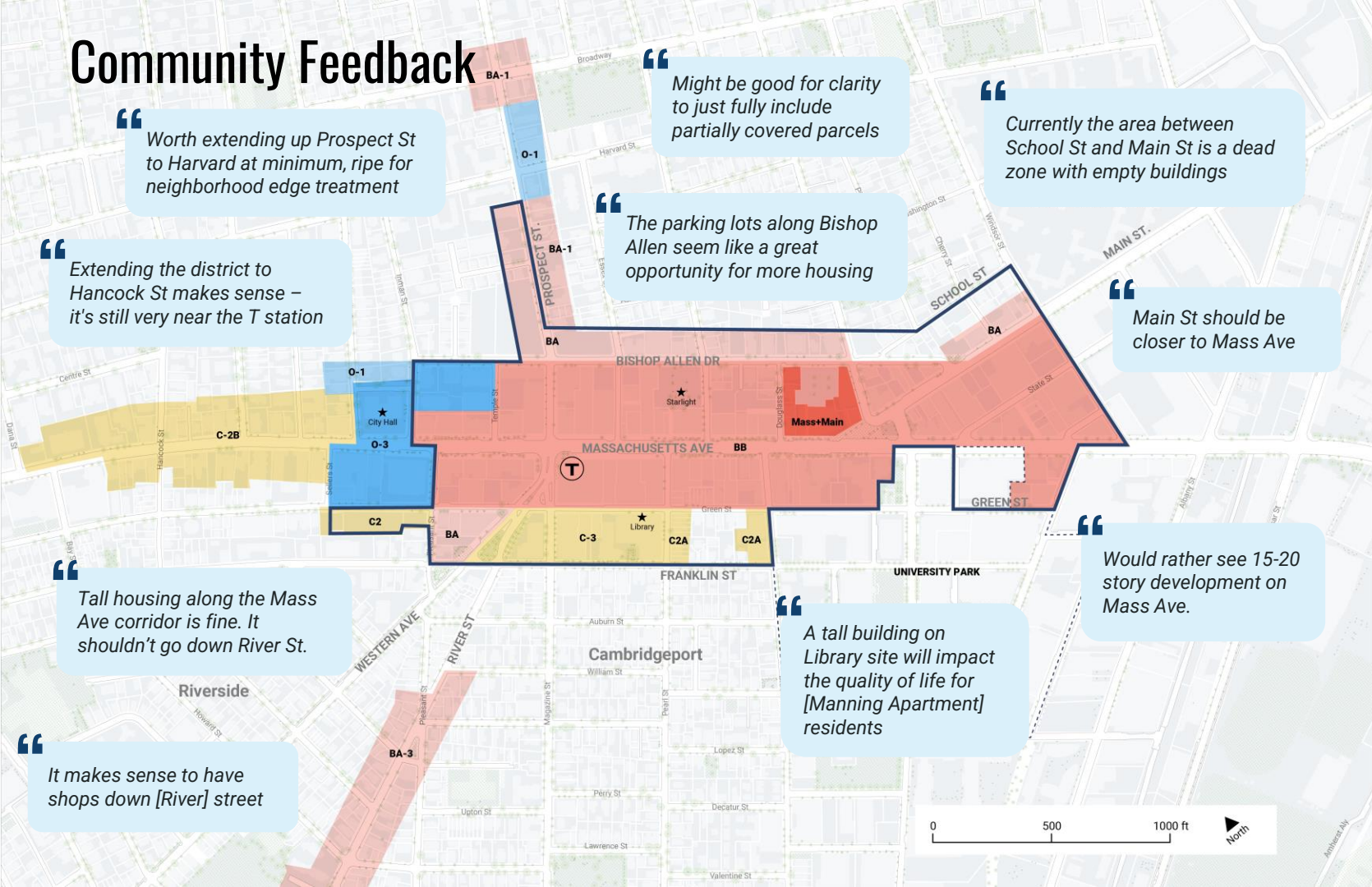
“The parking lots along Bishop Allen seem like a great opportunity for more housing

“Currently the area between School St and Main St is a dead zone with empty buildings

“Main St should be closer to Mass Ave

“Would rather see 15-20 story development on Mass Ave.

“A tall building on Library site will impact the quality of life for [Manning Apartment] residents



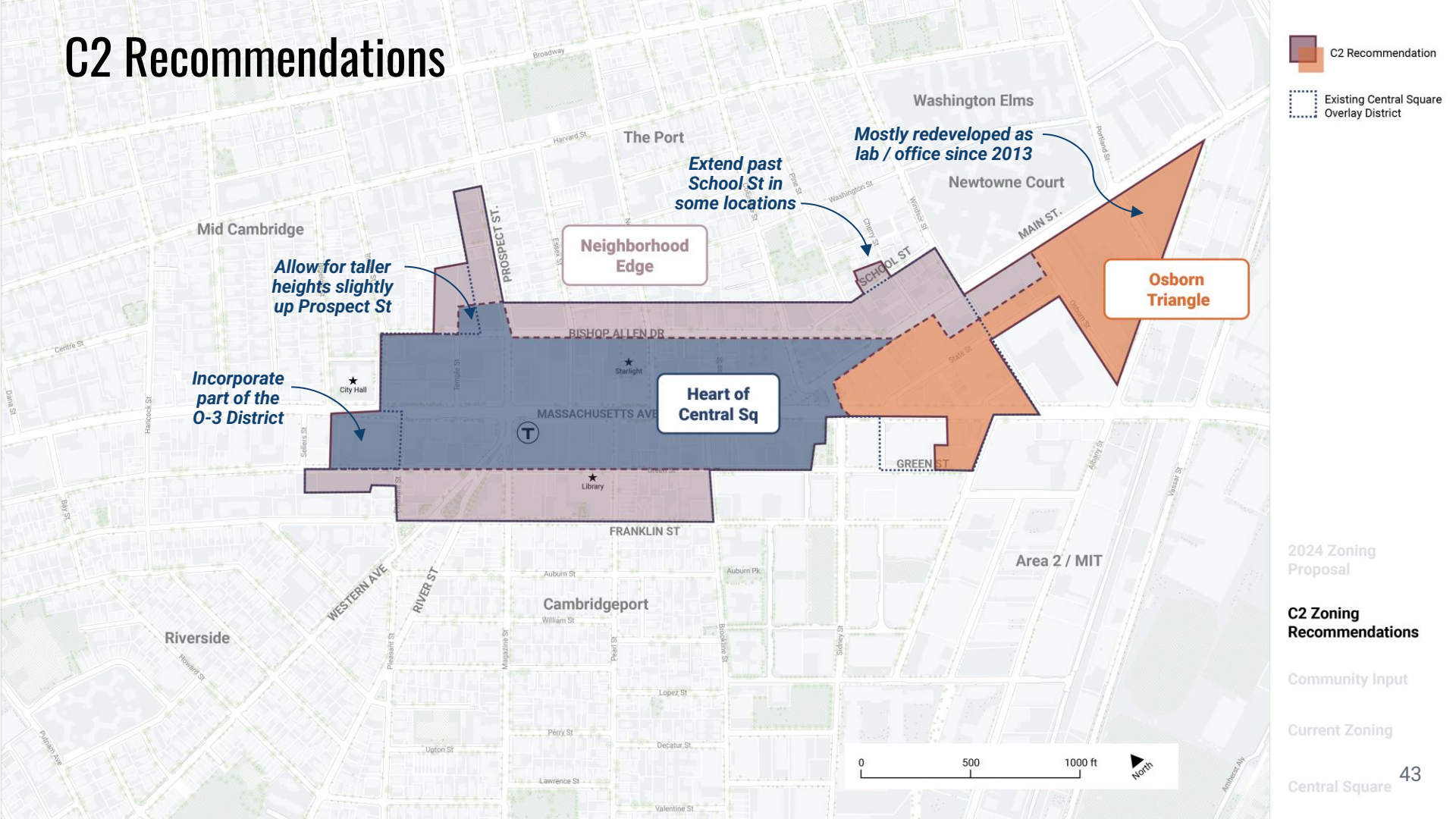
2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

C2 Recommendations



2024 Zoning Proposal

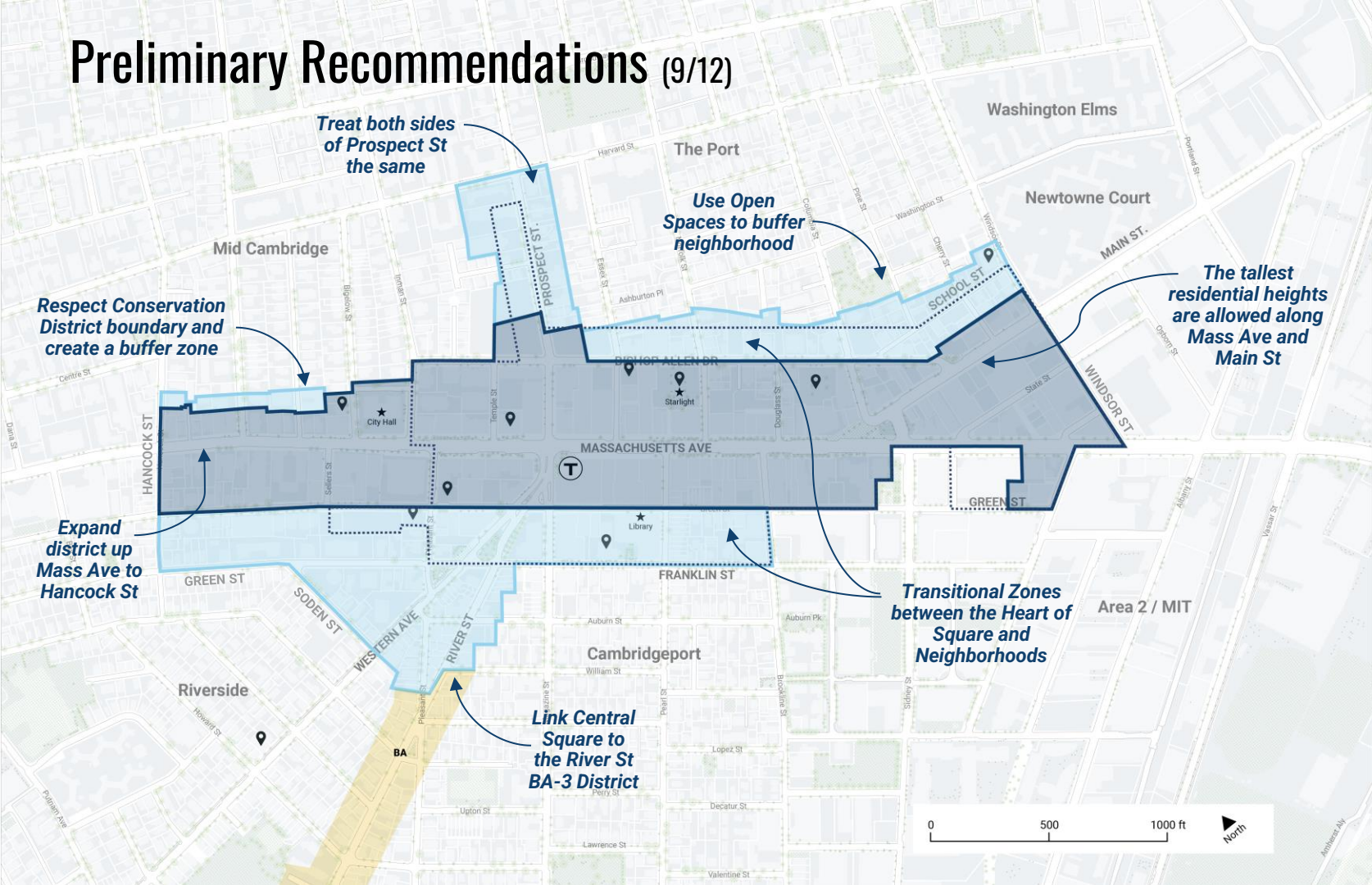
C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

Central Square 43

Preliminary Recommendations (9/12)



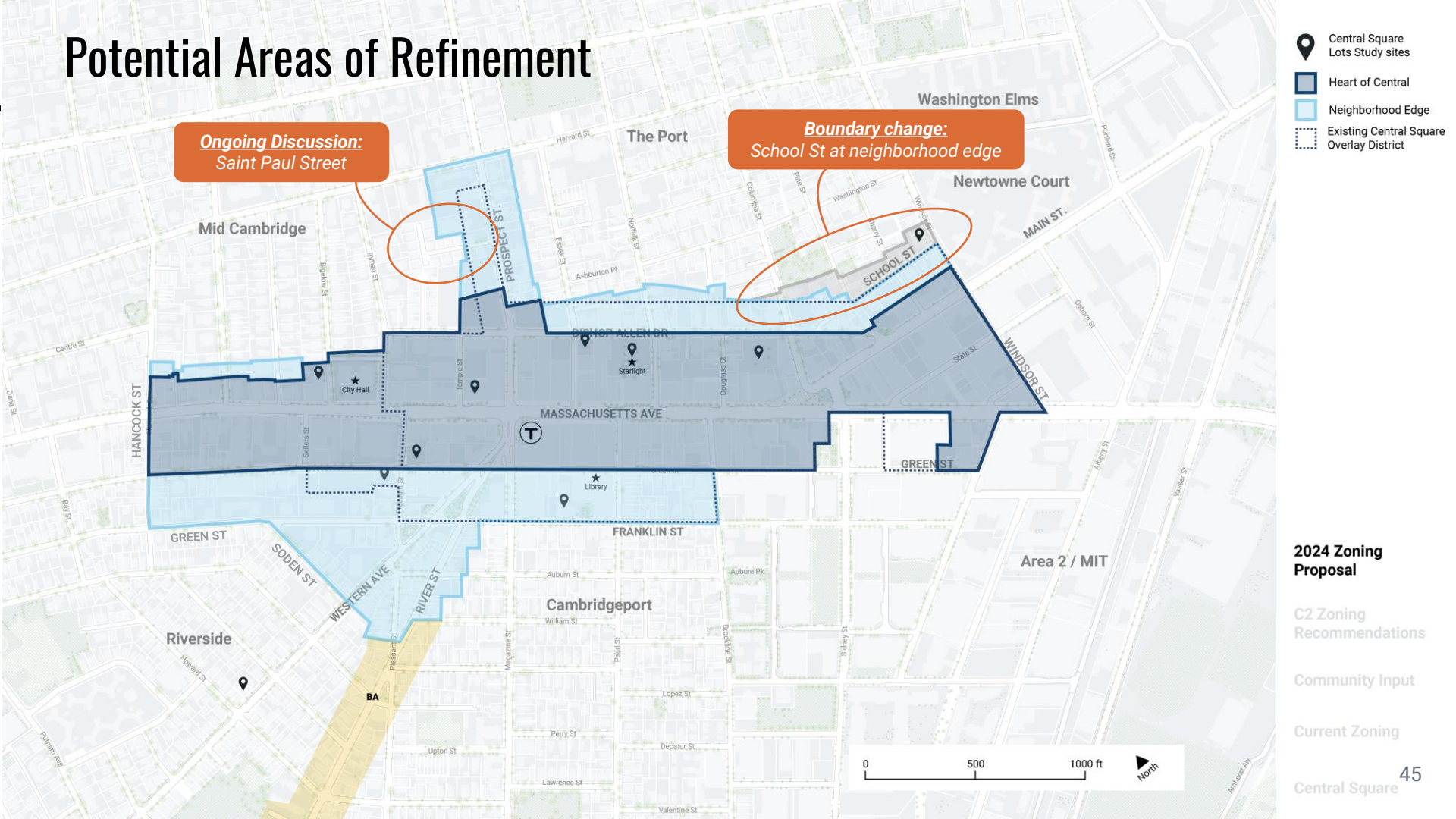
2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

Potential Areas of Refinement



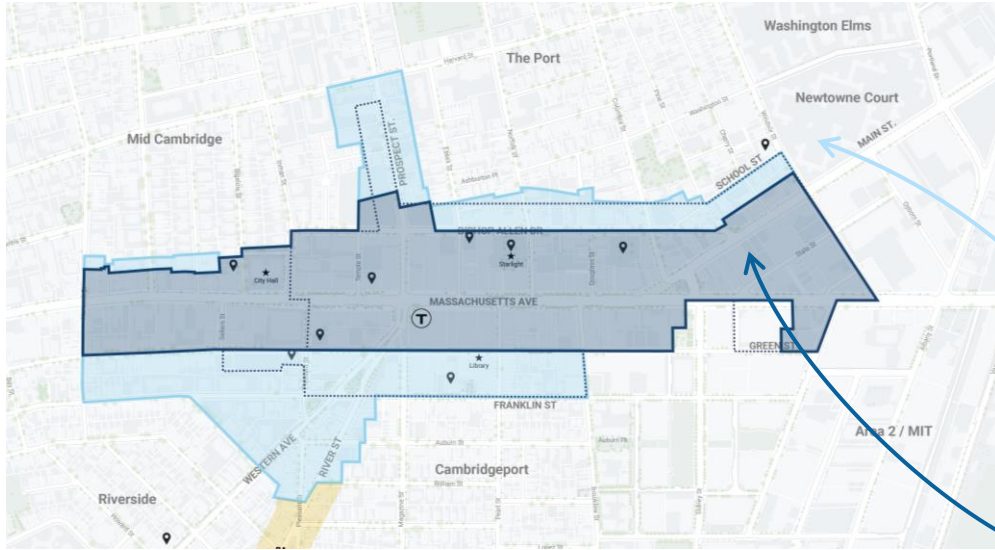
2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

What does this mean for the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO)



Growing the Central Square Overlay Boundary will allow for a **greater area to qualify** under the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO).

The **Neighborhood Edge** zones would **preserve the AHO's height advantage**, which allows for 15 stories versus the proposed 8 stories (almost double).

In the **Heart of Central Square**, AHO projects would be allowed to **match the proposed 18 story height**. Allowing AHO projects additional height beyond this limit is unlikely to yield larger projects, as 100% affordable high rise is often more challenging to finance.



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How can zoning strengthen the Cultural District?



Cambridge's Historic Downtown and Cultural District



Zoning for Cultural Use

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL SPACE

- Museum
- Gallery
- Art Studio
- Production Studio
- Theater
- Entertainment or Music Venue
- Social Club
- Night Club
- Maker Space
- Community Gathering Spaces
- Community Center



Central Square has a rich history of cultural spaces

Zoning for Cultural Use

To create more of these uses, we can allow them through zoning and incentivize the uses we really want to see

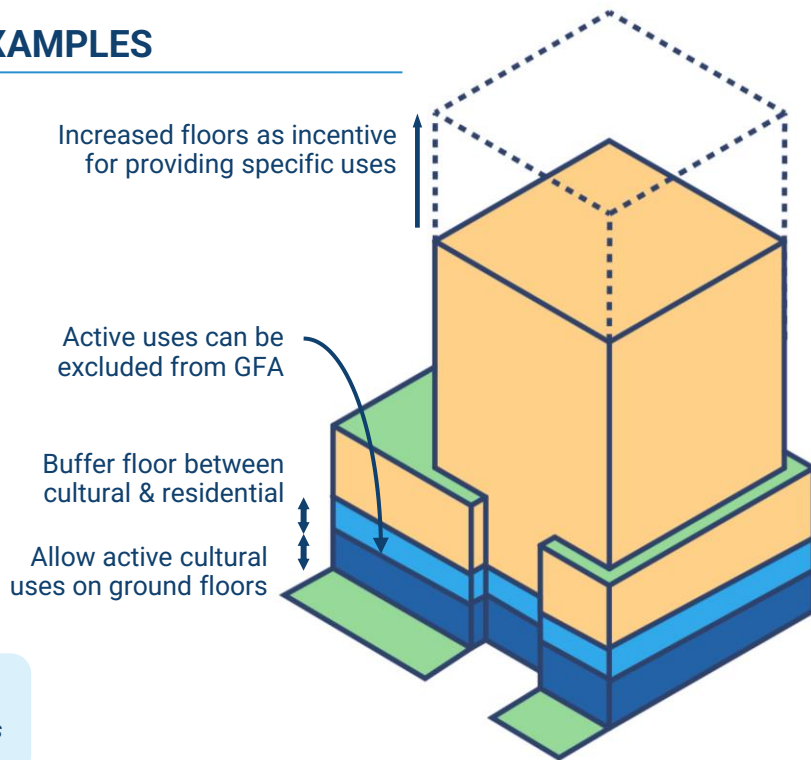
“

It can be challenging having housing directly above louder cultural spaces. You need some sort of buffer between them

“

Okay with slightly taller heights if it gets us more arts and cultural spaces

EXAMPLES



How do strategies differ between Central Square's core and edges?

Heart of Central

Allow all cultural uses as-of-right

Require active uses on the ground floor of larger projects

Incentivize cultural uses through development bonuses:

- additional non-residential space, and/or
- additional floors of housing

Neighborhood Edge

Allow all cultural uses as-of-right except for more impactful uses

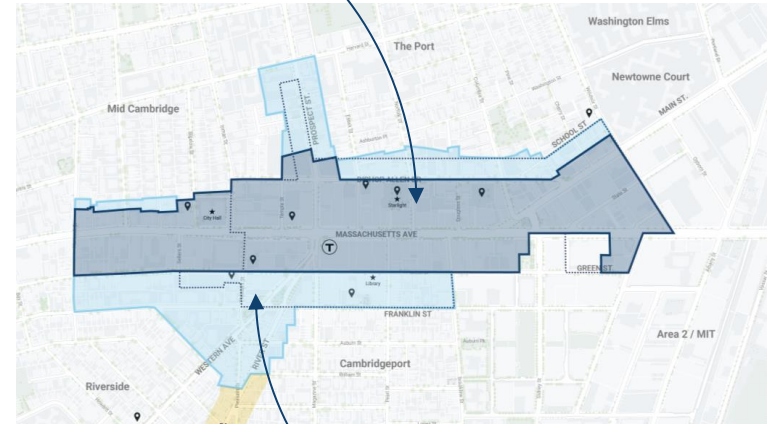
Incentivize cultural uses through development bonuses:

- additional non-residential space, and/or
- additional floors of housing

This creates a busier ground floor within the Heart of Central Square

“

It would [be unfortunate] to have someone put a loud night club in a transition zone, right next to residential housing



Impactful uses (such as music venues, nightclubs, and theaters) would need to go through special permit and review

Additional Recommendations to Explore



Create an **Arts & Cultural Fund**: New projects could be allowed the flexibility to contribute to a cultural fund in lieu of including cultural spaces, with the goal of supporting and growing existing organizations and resources within the district to prevent displacement. It would be a similar approach to the transportation fund employed in Alewife.



Facilitate Connections: As new Arts & Cultural Spaces are created, the City will leverage newly developed digital tools to help link developers and organizations to ensure any that are looking for space are aware of new opportunities.



Explore the potential for **Transferable Incentives** to encourage the preservation of Historic and Culturally significant properties.



Build awareness about available **Resources for Small Businesses** with the Economic Opportunity and Development Division and the Central Square BID, and help identify new spaces for existing businesses displaced during redevelopment.



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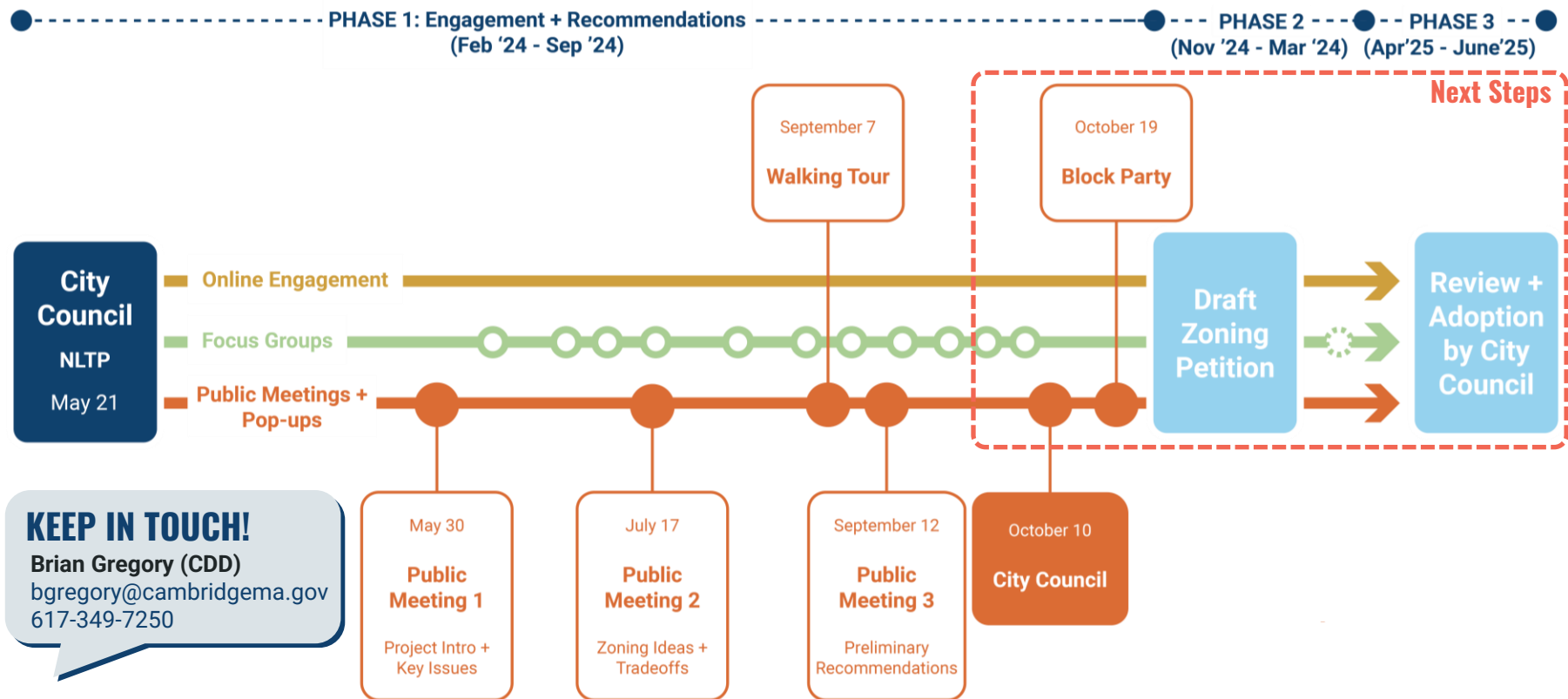
Next Steps

Discussion



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Next Steps



Block Party!

When:

Saturday, October 19th, 1pm-5pm
(please consult project website)

Where:

Norfolk St between Bishop
Allen Drive and Mass Ave

Why:

To share final recommendations
and celebrate Central Square!



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A blue poster for a 'Block Party' event. The title 'CENTRAL SQ. REZONING BLOCK PARTY' is written in large, bold, white and orange letters. To the right, the date '10/19' and time '1-5pm' are in yellow. Below the title, the activities 'Dance + music', 'Mini golf + parkour', and 'Art + Play Streets' are listed in white. At the bottom, the text 'Come learn and play with us!' and 'Location: Norfolk Street' are in yellow. A rainbow-colored chevron graphic is on the right side, and a circular seal is at the bottom left.

**CENTRAL SQ.
REZONING
BLOCK
PARTY**

**10/19
1-5pm**

**Dance + music
Mini golf + parkour
Art + Play Streets**

**Come learn and play with us!
Location: Norfolk Street**

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Discussion

If you only read the zoning for Central Square, would you know this Cambridge's Mixed-use Downtown and Cultural District?



More housing
(incl. affordable)



Diverse retail, cultural
and non-profit activity

Increased floors as incentive
for providing specific uses

Active uses can be
excluded from GFA

Buffer of nonprofit,
commercial, & cultural

Active retail & cultural
uses on ground floors

