

Columbia Court Apartments: 100% affordable development which involved a combination of new construction and historic preservation

**City of Cambridge  
Community Development Department**

**Affordable Housing Overlay  
Zoning Petition**

Ordinance Committee  
July 2, 2019





# Background

# Affordable Housing Goals & Strategies

- January 2015 – City Council policy order regarding feasibility of the City committing to creating 1,000 new affordable units by 2020
- Actions & strategies identified by CDD in 2015 to advance this goal include:

Action / Strategy	Status
Maintain the commitment of 80% of CPA funds to affordable housing	Ongoing
Adopt recommended changes to Incentive Zoning Ordinance	Adopted 2015; reevaluation underway
Identify new City funding for affordable housing	New City funds in FY2017 budget; increased in FY2018 & FY2019
Adopt recommended changes to Inclusionary Housing provisions	Adopted 2017
Creating a new zoning standards or an overlay for affordable housing development which would allow additional development density, reduced parking and other relaxed dimensional standards to affordable housing developers	Current discussion
Creating streamlined process for the permitting of new affordable housing developments to allow predictable as-of-right permitting for affordable housing	Current discussion

## What is Affordable Housing Development?

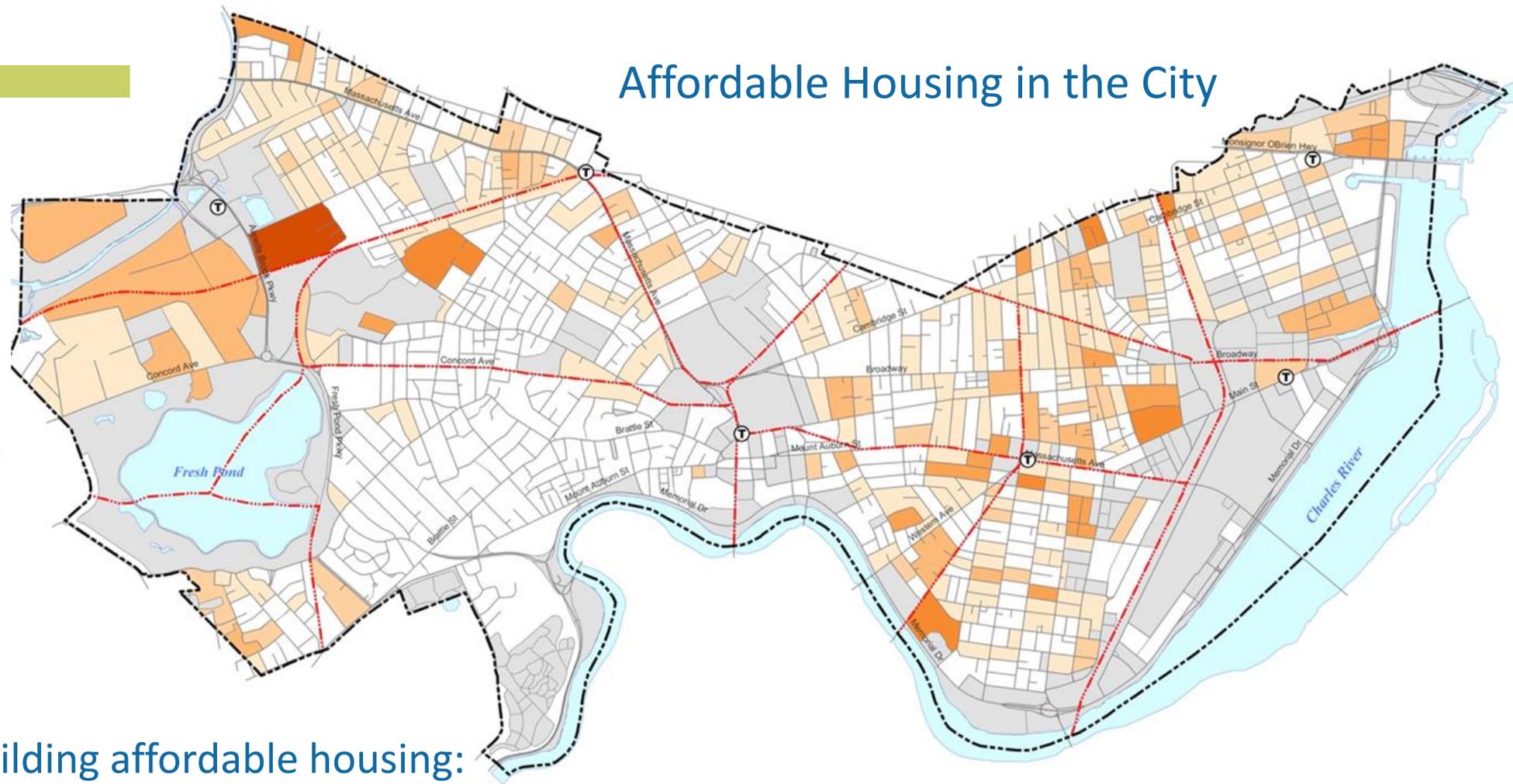
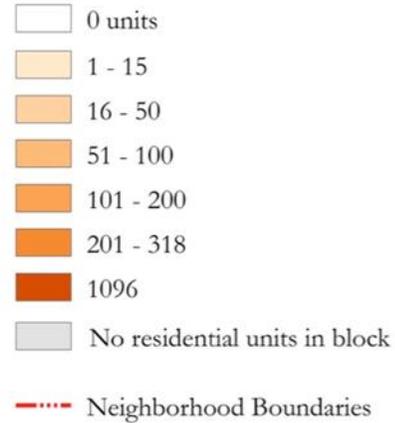
- Typically funded by the City's Affordable Housing Trust
- Affordable housing providers currently developing new affordable housing:
  - Cambridge Housing Authority
  - Just A Start Corporation
  - Homeowner's Rehab, Inc.
  - Capstone Communities / Hope Real Estate
- Affordable housing developers must:
  - Identify properties where affordable housing development is financially feasible
  - Compete in the market for buildings and sites
  - Assemble subsidy funding needed to build new housing from city, state and federal funders, often through competitions for scarce funding
  - Meet affordability, design, construction, management and operating criteria of all funders
  - Put in place long-term deed restrictions to ensure continued affordability of new housing created



Lincoln Way Apartments: 70-unit 100% affordable development approved by a comprehensive permit

# Affordable Housing in the City

## Number of Affordable Units



## Challenges to building affordable housing:

- High land costs and competition from market-rate developers
- Appeal of discretionary approvals can add significant cost, long delays, and significant risk to affordable housing developers.
- More difficult to build affordable housing in some areas of the city given zoning limitations

# Affordable Housing Development – recent challenges

- City funds used for property purchases; CDD tracks properties analyzed by affordable housing providers
- Approximately 1 in 10 opportunities recently assessed results in a successful purchase
- Often strong market interest makes a competitive offer infeasible;
- Purchase prices that can be supported by affordable housing providers cannot be supported by the amount of housing that can be built
- Affordable housing providers outbid in the market even when offers assumed developing substantially more units than allowed by zoning

	New Opportunities Analyzed by Affordable Housing Providers	Existing Multi-family Housing	Sites for New Development	Offers Made	Properties Purchased
FY2016	14	6	8	7	2
FY2017	13	6	7	2	1
FY2018	15	7	8	3	1
FY2019 to date	9	2	7	0	0

## Goals of Affordable Housing Overlay



Trolley Square: new construction of 40 affordable units in mixed-use development

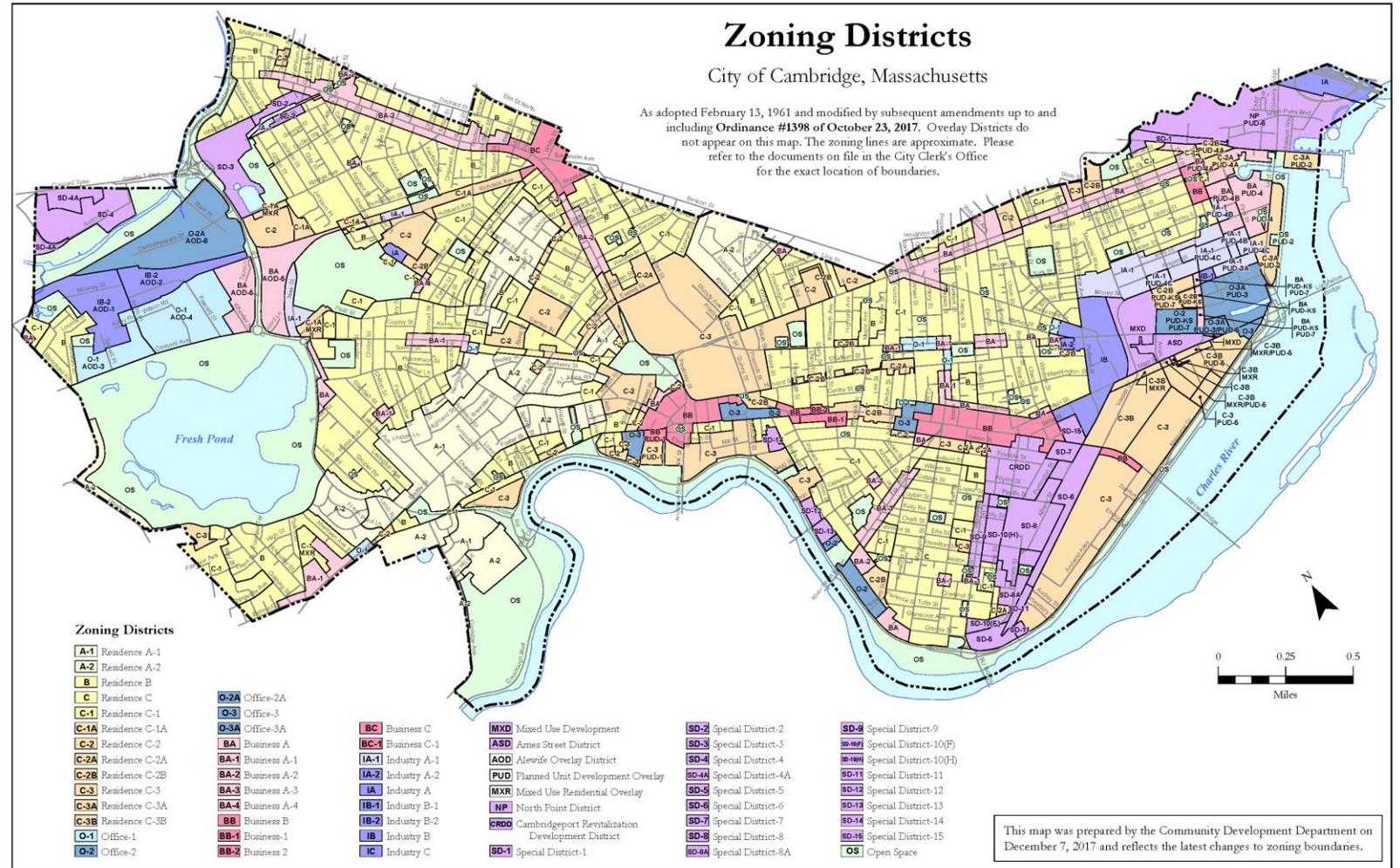
- Help affordable housing providers have more success in purchasing sites to create new affordable housing;
- Foster equitable distribution of affordable housing citywide by expanding the viability of affordable housing in areas where there are fewer affordable units;
- Create opportunities in all neighborhoods for residents of all incomes;
- Make it easier to permit 100% affordable housing developments so that affordable housing developers can build needed housing more quickly; and
- Help reduce costs of building new affordable housing to accomplish more City with affordable housing funds.



# Zoning Petition

# Our Current Zoning

- Some districts more restrictive than others
- Most districts allow multifamily housing; some only allow single-family or two-family homes



## Our Current Zoning

- Many existing buildings don't conform to current standards (e.g. setbacks, parking)
- Special permit review processes and variances are typical
- Affordable housing projects have the option to seek a comprehensive permit (40B)





Temple Place: the comprehensive permit for this 40-unit affordable development was appealed, delaying the project for almost 3 years, and forcing a re-design of the building which resulted in the reduction of family-size units and the loss of 2 units

## Affordable Housing Overlay Overall Approach

**The intent of an Affordable Housing Overlay is to create clear and predictable requirements for affordable housing projects as an alternative to the comprehensive permit (40B) process.**

- Less restrictive standards to enable 100%-affordable housing projects to be competitive with market housing
- More predictable review and permitting process
- Standards applied citywide to enable affordable housing in areas where it has not been created in the past



## Affordable Housing Overlay – Petition Sections

1. Purpose and Intent
2. Applicability
- 3. Standards for Eligibility, Rent, and Initial Sales Price**
- 4. Use**
- 5. Development Standards**
- 6. Parking and Bicycle Parking**
- 7. Building and Site Design Standards**
- 8. Advisory Design Consultation Procedure**
9. Implementation
10. Enforcement



Putnam Green Apartments: 40-unit affordable development approved by a special permit by the Planning Board

Household Size	80% AMI	100% AMI
1 person	\$62,400	\$79,350
2 persons	\$71,400	\$90,650
3 persons	\$80,300	\$102,000
4 persons	\$89,200	\$113,300

### 3. Standards for Eligibility, Rent, and Initial Sale Price

- **All units** rented or sold to income-eligible households at affordable amounts
- Permanent affordability by covenant
- Rental units:
  - At least 80% of units affordable to households earning up to 80% of Area Median Income (AMI)
  - Rest may be affordable to households earning up to up to 100% of AMI
- Homeownership units:
  - At least 50% of units affordable to households earning up to up to 80% of AMI
  - Rest may be affordable to households earning up to up to 100% of AMI

## 4. Use

- Single-family, two-family, townhouse, or multifamily allowed as-of-right
- Active non-residential use allowed on ground floor consistent with zoning district



The conversion of a historic building on Bigelow Street into 10 studio and 1-bedroom affordable apartments was approved via a comprehensive permit

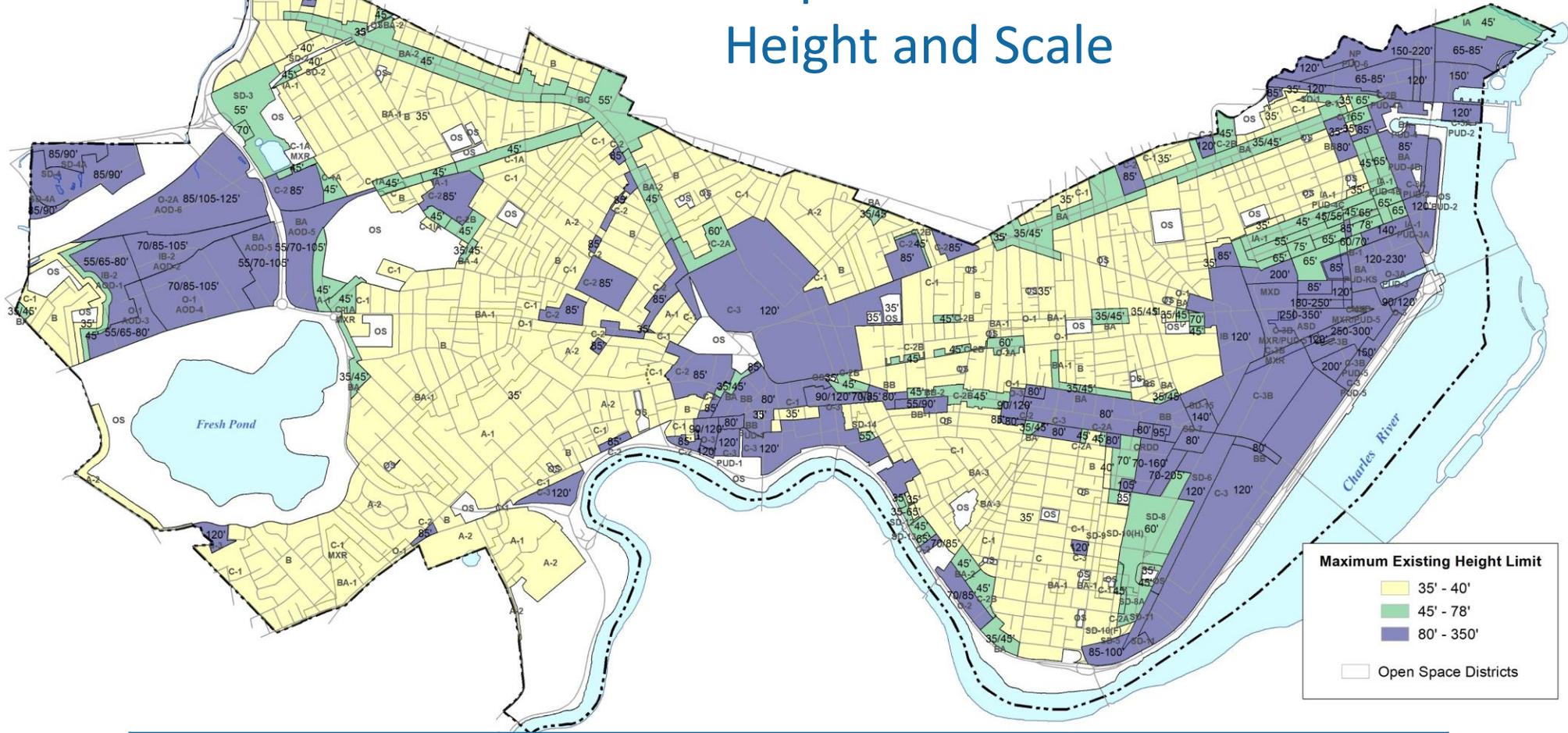
## 5. Development Standards

- Height and Scale
- Yard Setbacks
- Open Space
  
- *District standards apply where they are less restrictive (generally)*
- *Additional flexibility for reuse of an existing building*



Auburn Court Apartments mixed-income development on Brookline Street

# Development Standards Height and Scale



If the district allows:	100% Affordable Housing can be up to:
➤ 40 feet or less	➤ 4 stories and 45 feet max. / 50 feet with active ground floor
➤ 40 to 80 feet	➤ 7 stories and 80 feet max.
➤ More than 80 feet	➤ 7 stories and 80 feet max.

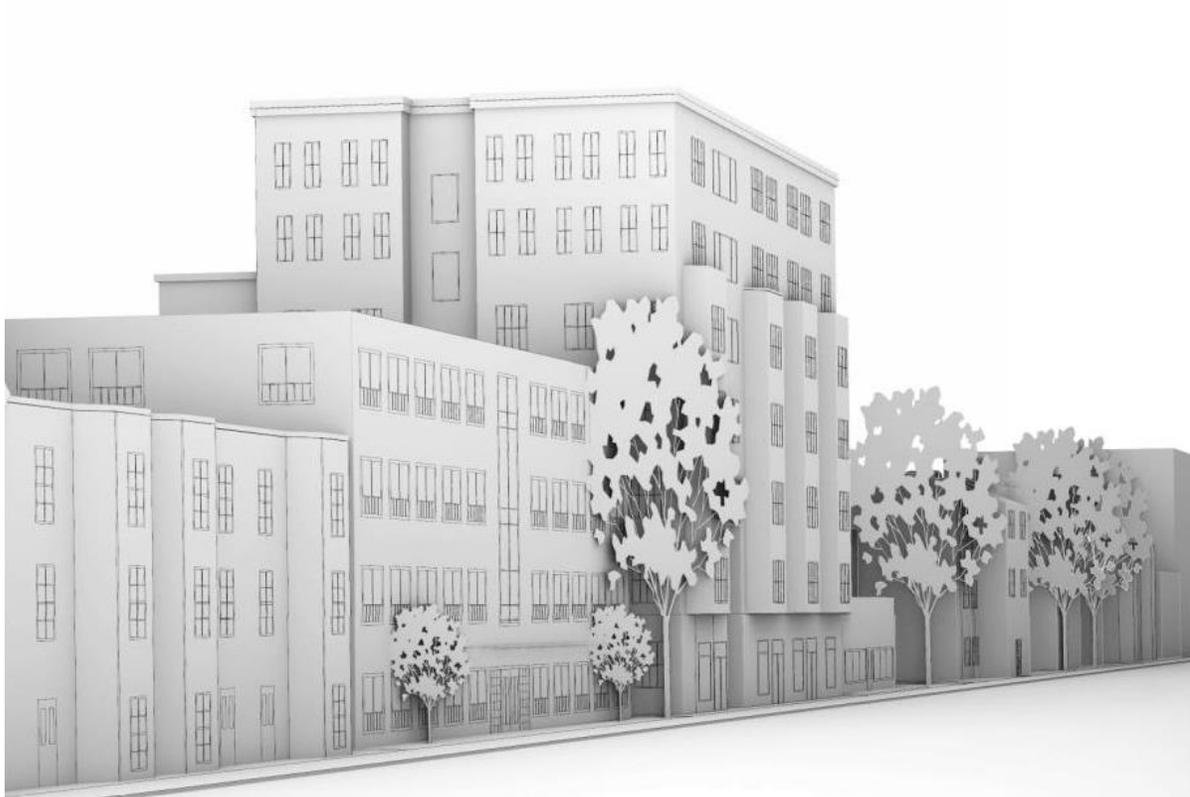
# Height and Scale – Affordable Housing Overlay

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# Height and Scale – Affordable Housing Overlay

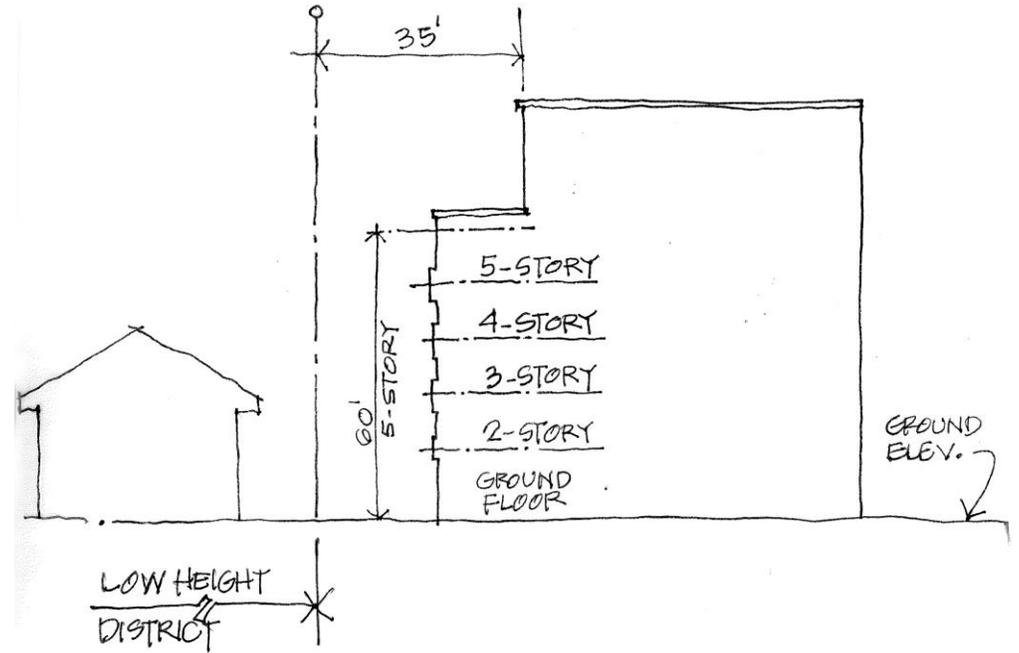
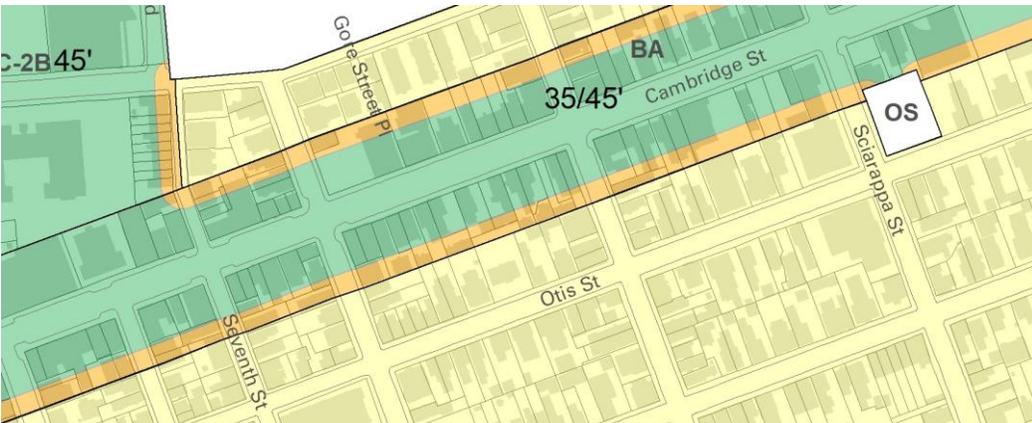
<b>If the district allows:</b>	<b>100% Affordable Housing can be up to:</b>
➤ <b>More than 40 feet</b>	➤ <b>7 stories and 80 feet max.</b>



# Development Standards

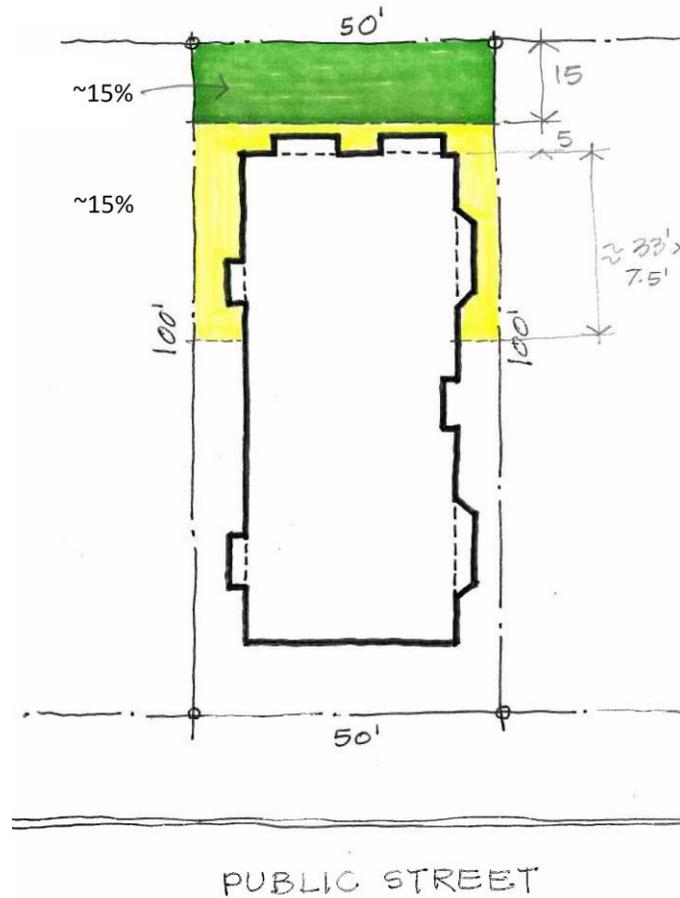
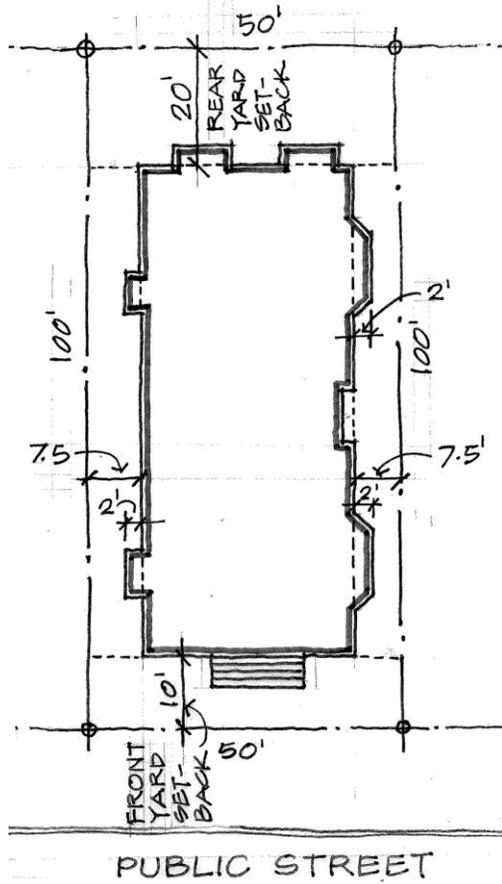
## Transition Buffers

- Step-down where taller height districts abut lower-height districts
- From 7 stories to 5 stories within 35' of an abutting district line
- Creates a “sky plane” – closer to the building, the top stories become less visible
- Not required where abutting site is non-residential



# Development Standards

## Setbacks and Open Space



### Yard Setbacks

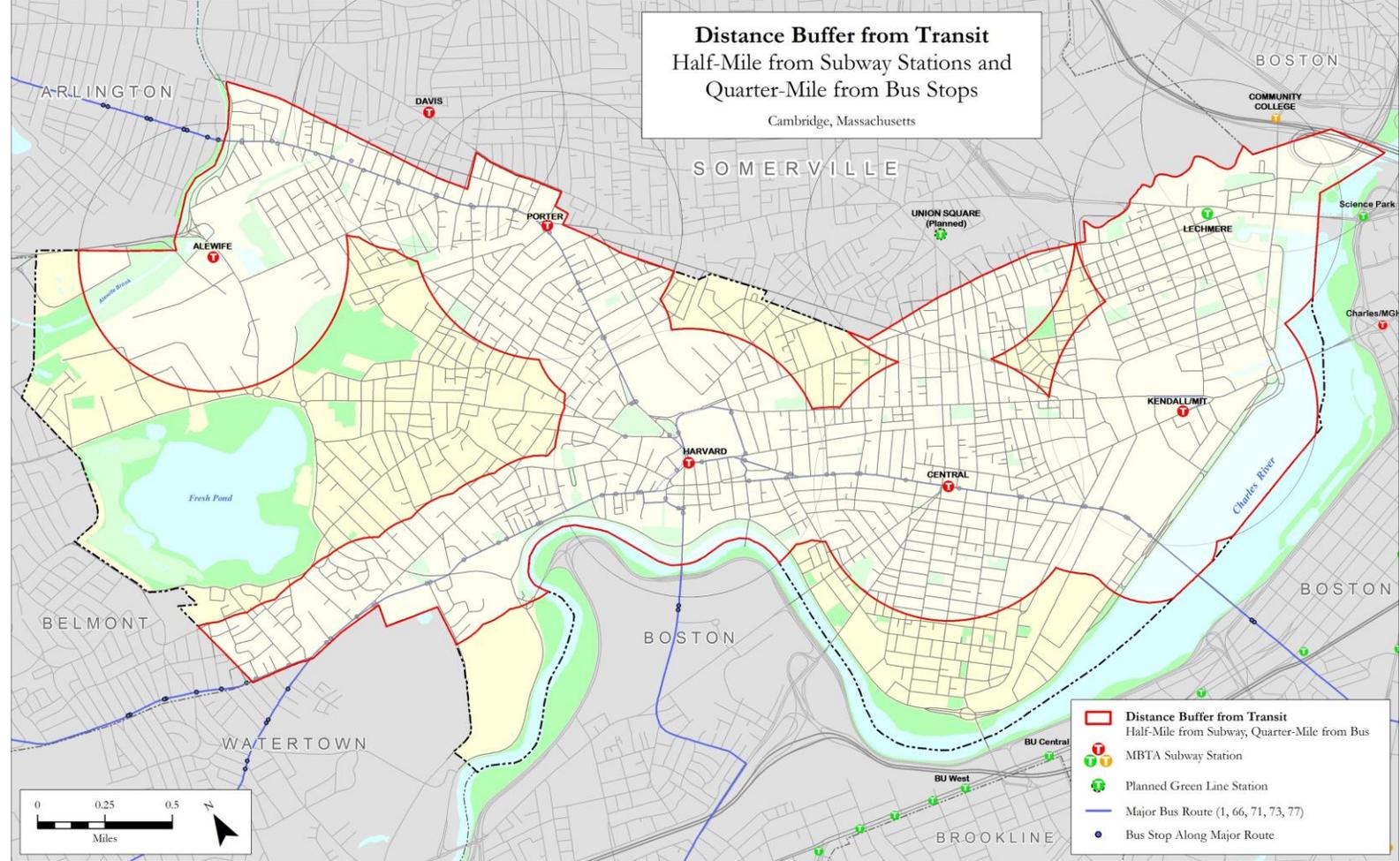
- 10-foot front (or reduced to average of buildings on either side)
- 7.5-foot sides
- 20-foot rear
- District setbacks apply if less restrictive

### Open Space

- Minimum 30% open space (or district, if less)
  - Half required to be permeable
  - Doesn't include upper-story balconies or decks
  - Parking/driveways NOT open space (current zoning definition)
- Reduction to 15% allowed for:
  - Providing surface parking
  - Preserving historic building

## 6. Parking

- Ratio of 0.4 space/unit
- Not required for:
  - Projects near transit
  - Existing buildings
  - Additions to historic buildings
  - Projects requiring  $\leq 4$  spaces
- Off-site parking within 1,000 feet
- Flexibility for tandem parking, shared driveways, layout/location
- Bicycle parking provided, flexibility in location
  - Reduction for Bluebikes
  - Waiver for existing buildings
- Transportation demand management if parking waived



### Parking utilization survey for affordable housing

Properties	24	
Units	1,076	
Spaces provided	623	0.58 space/unit
Cars Parked	425	<b>0.39 car/unit</b>

# How does this zoning help preserve existing buildings?

<b>Current zoning complicates reuse in various ways:</b>	<b>Affordable Housing Overlay can provide flexibility:</b>
Adding to the interior could require variance for added density (FAR, dwelling units)	Form-based approach would allow greater density inside the existing envelope
Additions and exterior alterations to a non-conforming building could require special permit or variance	Allow additions and alterations as-of-right within form-based limitations
Conversion of non-residential building creates setback, open space issues even if structure not changed	Existing setbacks and open space allowed to be maintained, with flexibility for minor alterations
Meeting parking requirements can require significant site alterations	Parking waived when existing building is reused

## Additional flexibility means:

- Economics can make reuse preferable where feasible
- Options to develop while preserving significant buildings



Bigelow Street: 11 affordable units approved by comprehensive permit



Frost Terrace: 40 affordable units approved by comprehensive permit, currently under construction



Main and Cherry Condos: 10 affordable units approved by comprehensive permit

## 7. Building and Site Design Standards

- Site design
  - Front yards, pedestrian entrances
  - Breaking of long building footprints
- Building façades
  - Transparency
  - Surface relief
- Ground floors
  - Grade level or above
  - Parking screened
  - Limit on “blank walls”
  - Additional height, depth, transparency for active uses
  - Active uses required in Business Districts with existing retail on site and abutting site

### Mechanicals, Refuse, Loading

- Setbacks
- Screening
- Noise compliance

# Building and Site Design

- “Courtyard” breaks for massing longer than 250 feet



- Non-residential ground floor spaces to maintain storefront continuity



# Building and Site Design Façades

- Projecting/recessing elements to avoid unbroken, flat facades
- Flexibility at lower and upper floors for distinct approaches



Auburn Court mixed-income development on Brookline Street

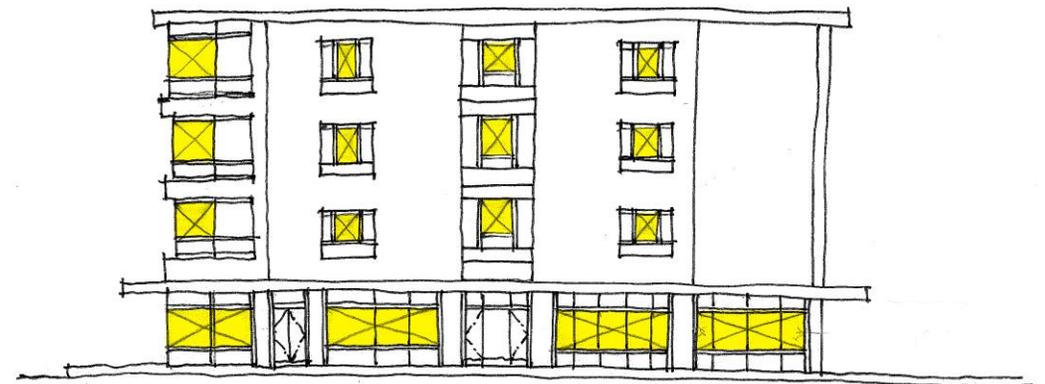




Trolley Square: 40-unit affordable development with ground floor retail

## Building and Site Design Façades

- Minimum window amount to promote transparency
- Architectural elements with depth, relief, shadow



SOLID OR OPAQUE



CLEAR GLASS  
15% MIN. REQD.  
25% MIN. REQD. @ BA, BA-2, BB & BC ZONING DISTRICT

FACADES FACING A PUBLIC STREET OR PUBLIC OPEN SPACE



Auburn Court mixed-income apartments on Brookline Street

## Building and Site Design Façades

- Minimum standards to address typical concerns, allow flexibility for a variety of approaches



Bellevue, WA

# Environmental Performance Standards

- Green Building Requirements apply
- Flood plain performance standards
- Lighting shielded
- Other environmental laws/ordinances apply



Rendering of Concord Highlands Apartments, a 98-unit affordable development approved by comprehensive permit and currently under construction



Temple Place: the comprehensive permit for this 40-unit affordable development was appealed, delaying the project for almost 3 years, and forcing a re-design of the building which resulted in the reduction of family-size units and the loss of 2 units

## 8. Advisory Design Consultation Procedure

- Required community meetings
- Submission of plans to Planning Board
- Presentation at public meeting, public has opportunity to comment
- Planning Board comments on compliance with development guidelines and urban design objectives, suggests improvements
- Developer revises and submits plans for second review meeting
- Planning Board makes final, non-binding report

## Summary of Affordable Housing Overlay Zoning Proposal

<b>Eligibility: “100%-Affordable Housing Projects”</b>	All units subject to long-term affordability restrictions, occupied by income-eligible households, rent or initial sale price is affordable to eligible households
<b>Existing Buildings</b>	Non-conforming buildings can be adapted for reuse
<b>Height and Scale</b>	Districts allowing ≤ 40 feet: up to 4 stories Districts allowing > 40 feet: up to 7 stories
<b>Dimensional Standards</b>	Fixed setbacks rather than formula; minimum open space with permeability standards, flexibility in open space arrangement
<b>Parking</b>	0.4 space/unit; waivers for existing buildings, sites near transit, small sites; off-site parking allowed
<b>Building and Site Design Standards</b>	Ground floors, facades, massing, screening of parking and mechanicals
<b>Environmental Standards</b>	Green building, resilience, noise and lighting control, trees and vegetation
<b>Design Consultation</b>	Non-binding process involving neighborhood, staff, Planning Board, Affordable Housing Trust



**Thank You**