

**City of Cambridge  
Community Development Department**

# **100% Affordable Housing Zoning Overlay Revised Working Draft**

City Council Housing Committee  
April 25, 2019



## 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.

# 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

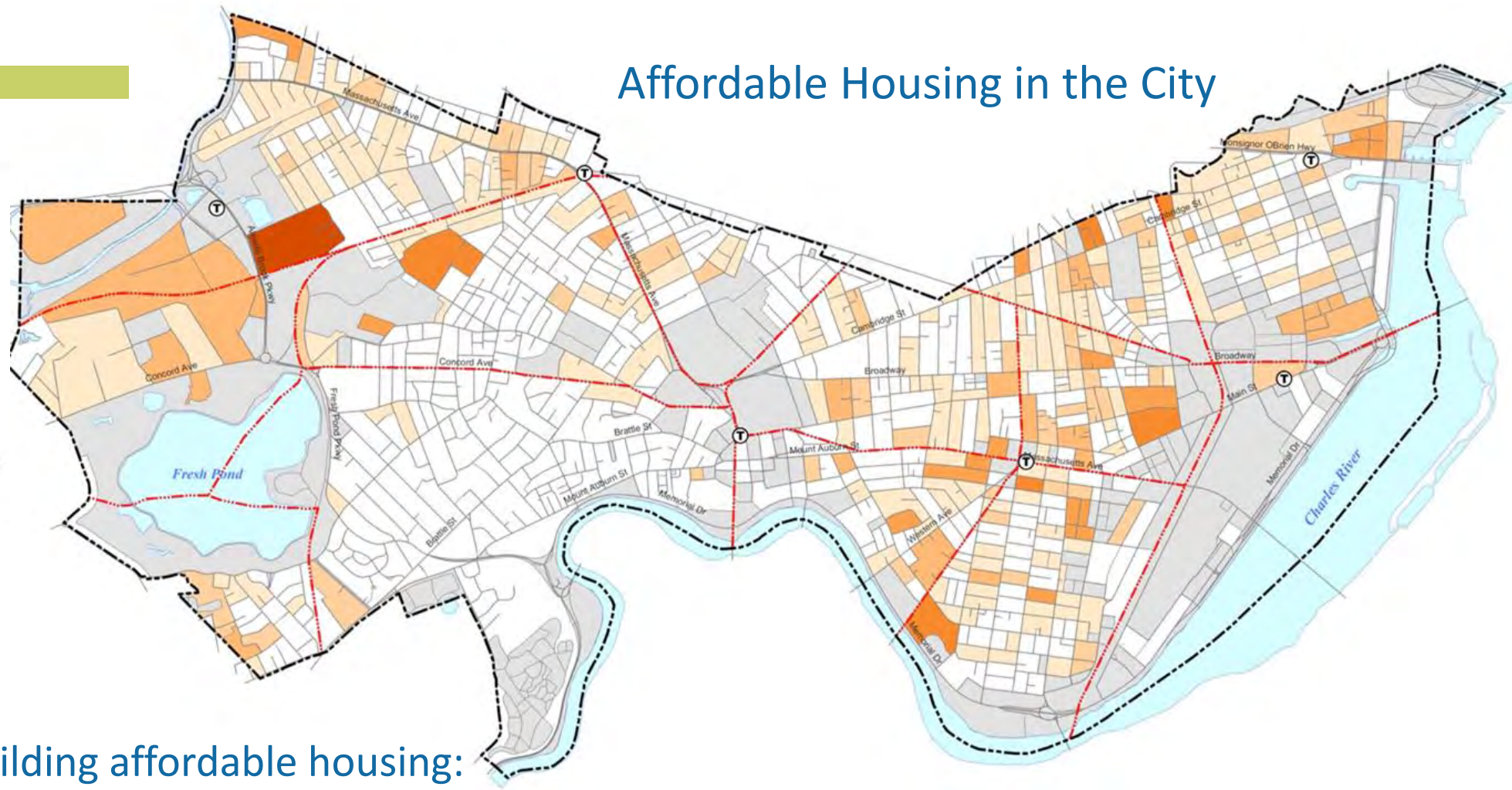
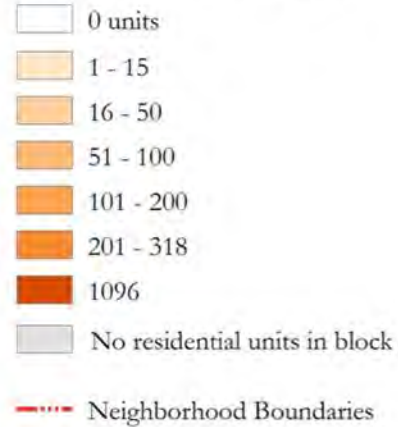


The 70-unit Lincoln Way was approved by a comprehensive permit



## 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



# Citywide Affordable Housing Overlay – Revised Working Draft



The comprehensive permit approved for the 40-unit Temple Place 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

## Why “as-of-right” zoning?

- Zoning regulates what is allowed or not allowed
- Under current zoning, many developments need special permits or variances
- Comprehensive permit process provides flexibility for affordable housing projects, but the outcomes are uncertain

**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 process.**



# How does this zoning help preserve existing buildings?

Current zoning complicates reuse in various ways:	Affordable Housing Overlay can provide flexibility:
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





# Affordable Housing Overlay – Working Draft Revisions

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





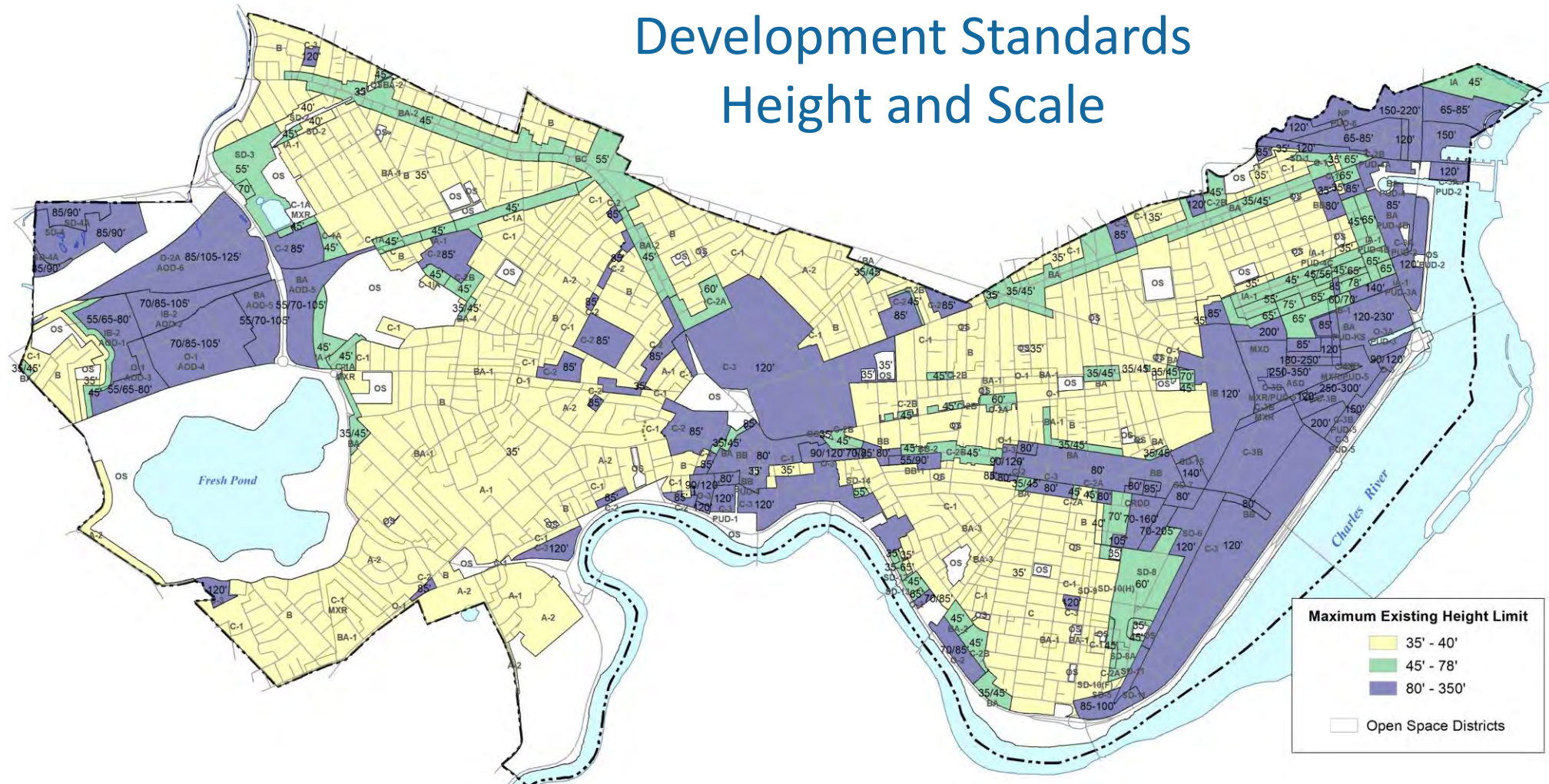
The 40-unit Putnam Green was approved by a special permit by the Planning Board

## Applicability

- A project under the AHO would need to meet the AHO standards as a whole.
- An affordable housing project that doesn't meet all standards is subject to district zoning (including special permit provisions).



# Development Standards Height and Scale

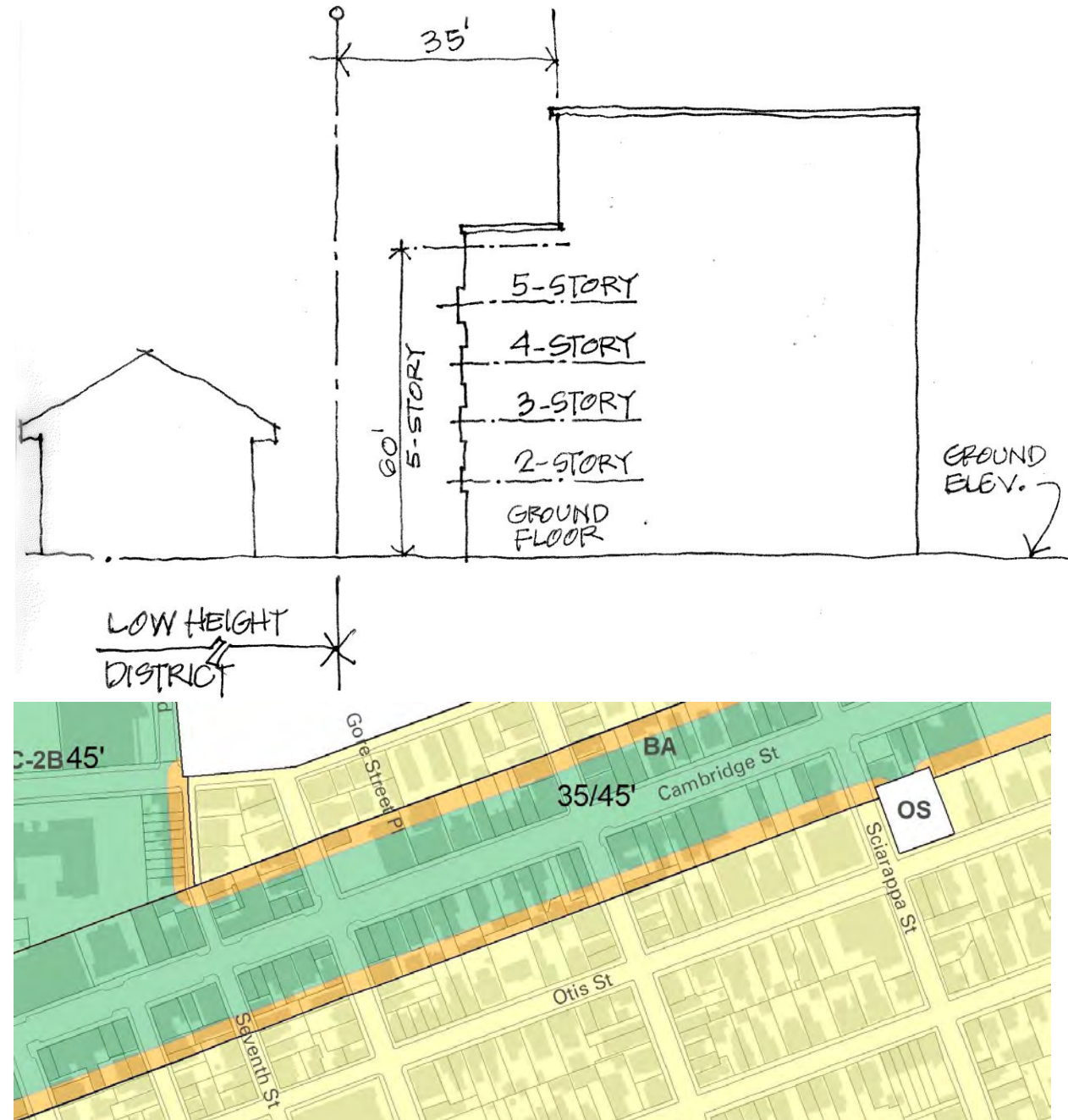


If the district allows:	100% Affordable Housing can be up to:
➤ 40 feet or less	➤ 4 stories and 45 feet max. / 50 feet with active ground floor
➤ 40 to 80 feet	➤ 7 stories and 80 feet max.
➤ More than 80 feet	➤ 7 stories and 80 feet max.

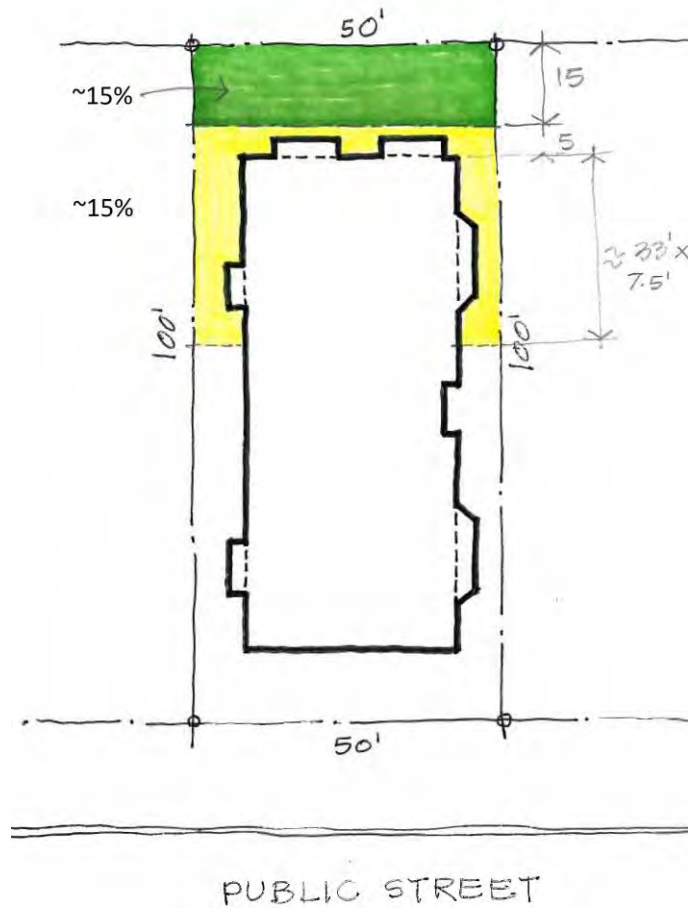
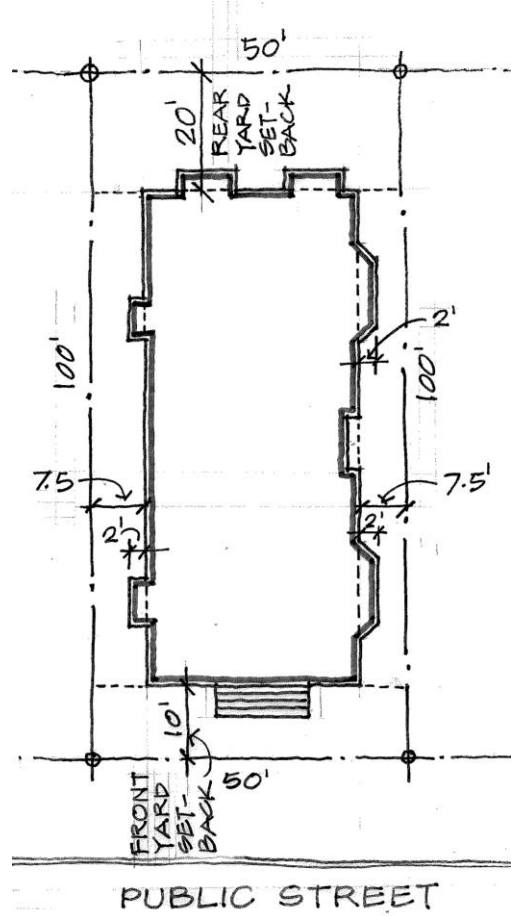
# Development Standards

## 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

#### Open Space Clarifications:

- Parking/driveways NOT Open Space
- Permeable Open Space (current zoning definition) can be green, planted, stone pavers (pedestrian only)

#### For the purpose of the Affordable Housing Overlay:

- Upper-story balconies/decks not counted toward open space requirement
- Outdoor bicycle parking not counted as Permeable Open Space



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

## Building and Site Design (prev.)

### Site Design

- Pedestrian-oriented frontage
- Breaking of long building footprints

### Ground Floors

- Grade level or above
- Parking screened
- Limit on “blank walls”
- 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

### Environmental Design Standards

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





Auburn Court Apartments on Brookline Street

## Building and Site Design Façades

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



Bellevue, WA



# Building and Site Design Façades

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



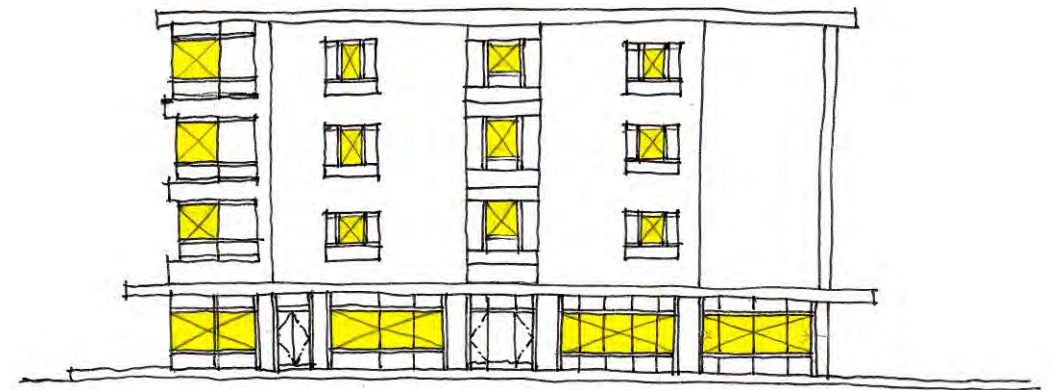




Trolley Square, Cambridge

## 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