

MAPOCO RE-ZONING PETITION

Massachusetts Avenue from Porter Square to the Common (“MAPOCO”) does not have the language implemented in 2012 north of Porter Square that promotes ground level, pedestrian-friendly non-residential uses in new construction. Therefore, we ask the Planning Board/CDD/City Council to extend the North Mass Av Overlay Sub-District boundaries south to Chauncy/Everett Streets, and at the same time to make the following slight modifications:

SPECIFIC LANGUAGE WE ASKING FOR

1. Article 20.103.2 should be modified (or a new Article created) to extend the boundaries of the North Mass Av Sub-District (or create a new sub-district) to include Mass Av from the southern edge of the Porter Square Overlay District to at least Chauncy/Everett Streets. This will extend all of the protections of the North Mass Av Sub-District to MAPOCO, the foremost of which is ground floor non-residential uses for new construction.
2. Article 20.110.21(1b) Required Ground Floor Non-Residential Uses allows "fast order food establishment" as a permitted required by-right use. We would like to strike this for MAPOCO to keep our status quo. MAPOCO is a denser area, and we need the opportunity to meet with prospective fast food operators to discuss such things as garbage removal plans, sidewalk use, delivery arrangements, noise and smell mitigation, hours of operation, litter, etc.
3. Article 20.110.21(5) requires separately leased required ground floor non-residential uses to contain not more than 5,000 square feet of Gross Floor Area at ground level including basement or second floor area. In order to promote the maximum number of storefronts providing the widest possible range of services to the 8,000 residents within walking distance, and specifically smaller Cambridge Local First stores that typically can't afford and don't need to rent 5,000 square feet, while at the same time encouraging creative use of basements and second floors, we propose modifying this clause (for south of Porter Square at least) to “not more than 2,000 square feet of GFA at ground level, excluding basement and second story areas.”
4. Article 5.33 Table 5.1 stipulates that the rear setback for Residence B shall be 25' for the first 100' of lot depth, and 1' additional for every 4' thereafter, and for Business A-2 it shall be 20' or two thirds the height of the rear wall, whichever is greater. This is an issue for many lots in MAPOCO because the Business A-2 zoning line was drawn at the 100' depth without regard to the depth of the lots facing Mass Av and so there are developable lots that are Business A-2 at Mass Av and Residence B at the rear. We are not asking for a change, merely clarification that where a lot (or lots being treated as a single site for development purposes) including specifically situations where the lots are zoned differently, the starting point for calculating lot depth shall be the front sidewalk line and the rear set back requirement shall be the greater of the stipulated calculations. The reason is to protect existing neighborhood homes from undue scale without adequate set back.
5. Article 20.106 needs to be clearer that ground floor uses may not include structured or non-structured (i.e. surface) parking unless behind a 40' deep required permitted non-residential use. The purpose of this clarification is to prevent stilt buildings via semantic loophole. HOWEVER,

we need parking, and to encourage a public parking garage without exposing the garage to the street, we would propose to accept (in lieu of the 40' deep non-residential use space) a public space that could be used for pedestrian seating (which we are told will encourage retail), or a drop-off point for pop-up type services (CSA drop-off, Boy Scout Christmas trees, etc.).

6. Article 20.110.62 which lists Lots Containing Identified Historical Structures to be protected from canyoning needs to be expanded to include:

1797 North Congregational Church (Lesley, NR and landmark)

1734 Frederick Worcester (Bentley Publishers, NR)

1654 Dunvegan (NR)

1648 Montrose (NR)

1627 Charles Hicks Saunders I (Park Street Church, landmark)

1626 Charles Hicks Saunders II (Lesley, NR)

1564 Convers Francis (landmark)

7. Article 20.108 references Urban Design Guidelines that are no longer posted on the city web site, are badly outdated, and no longer provide useful guidance. We are not trying to dictate the style of new construction via zoning. What we are trying to do is update the old guidelines and to save developers and architects time and money and ourselves the need to intercept buildings that will not find local support. What we suggest, in the interest of time and cost efficiency, is to create a collection of pictures of successful and not so successful designs, together with pertinent commentary, to give developers and their architects a head start on understanding what will fly in this neighborhood. We are wide open to suggestions for how to do this and willing to help.

8. Article 20.110.34 appears to exempt mixed use buildings facing Mass Av on Mixed Use Lots from bulk control plane requirements of 5.33(k) of the Table of Dimensional Requirements. We are confused by this article. A majority of the lots fronting Mass Av in the MAPOCO area are zoned Business A-2 which means they are zoned for a maximum height of 45' with a setback at the 35' level. We are asking to keep our status quo current zoning in this regard BUT we are open to an article that would allow the height of a new building to increase to up to 50' (and the front set-back to up to 40') corresponding to an increase in the elevation from the first floor to the second floor to enable the desired ground floor non-residential use.

9. Parking is essential to the health of our local merchants, both for their employees and to expand their customer base beyond just a walk-to market. We are asking to keep the status quo zoning, including specifically one parking space per dwelling unit. We point out that this is not an office district, nor an area around a T stop, nor is there any municipal parking. We already have many apartment buildings and institutions without off-street parking.

10. Table 5.3 establishes the front set back requirements for Business A-2 at 5 feet. Note 5.3(m) makes an exception: "Or the setback of the principal front wall plane of any adjacent building facing the same street, whichever is less." The situation on this stretch of Mass Av is that 50 years ago the street was lined with large residences that were set back ~30 feet. When the trolley was introduced, many such homes built storefronts at the sidewalk line. What exists, therefore, is a mix of stately homes set back 30 feet and one story storefronts at the sidewalk line. Over the next 20 years, as these one story storefronts are replaced with new construction, we would like

all new construction to have a 5 foot setback (a) to widen the sidewalk for safe pedestrian use and (b) to reduce the jigsaw effect of the stately homes that are unlikely to be torn down. We would also point out that the Wasserstein Building and the Lunder Center have front set backs of at least 5 feet. We are asking for the 5.3(m) exception to be eliminated in MAPOCO to continue this long term beautification trend.