



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
Acting Assistant City
Manager for Community
Development

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner
Date: July 31, 2015
Re: **Stern, et al. Zoning Petition – Mass Ave / Richard Ave**

Overview

The Elizabeth Stern, et al. Zoning Petition proposes to change the location of the zoning boundary dividing the commercial-zoned corridor of northern Massachusetts Avenue from the adjoining residentially zoned district. *See maps on following pages.*

Background

Since the earliest versions of the Cambridge Zoning Map, there has been a commercial-zoned corridor north of Porter Square extending 100 feet (typically) on each side of Massachusetts Avenue. The current northern boundaries of that corridor (ending between Richard Ave and Newman Street on the east side, at Cottage Park Avenue on the west side) were established in the 1943 Zoning Map. Since then, the base zoning has remained commercial, though the specific district designation has changed.

In 1986, the current Business A-2 and Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District zoning were enacted, putting in place the current base dimensional standards (see following page) while imposing other design standards and project review requirements.

A change in the requirements for this particular area was then enacted in 2012, when a community-initiated planning process led to the creation of the North Massachusetts Avenue Subdistrict. The new zoning strictly requires ground-floor non-residential uses in new residential developments, while providing some flexibility in FAR and height for mixed-use buildings.

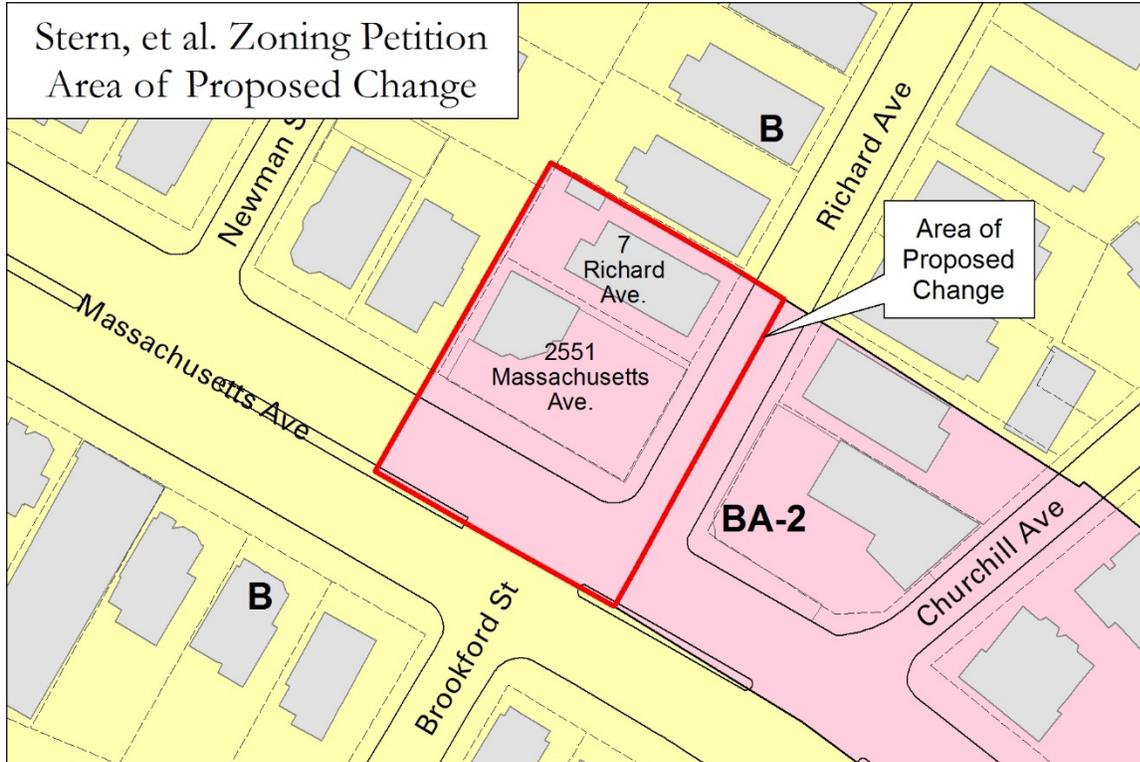
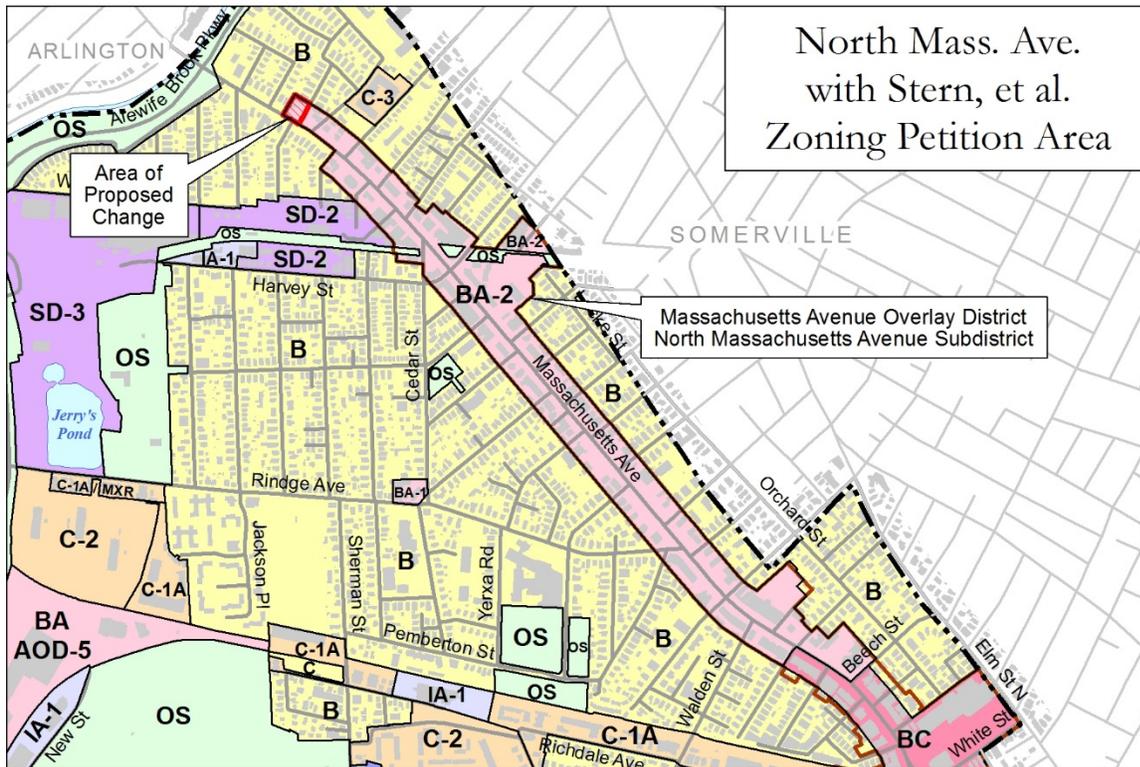
Impacted Properties

The lots affected by the proposed zoning change are 7 Richard Ave, a three-family residence built in the 1920s, and 2551 Massachusetts Ave, a paved lot with a very small commercial building that was built in the 1930s and was most recently used by a laundry business. Since Residence B allows only single-family and two-family residential dwellings, both lots would become nonconforming by use with the proposed change.

A proposed mixed-use project with 5 residential units and ground-floor retail space at 2551 Massachusetts Avenue is currently under consideration by the Planning Board, seeking modifications to the design requirements in the North Massachusetts Avenue Subdistrict. That proposed development would also be non-conforming to the proposed Residence B zoning, and would be subject to the new zoning if it is adopted.

	Current Zoning	Proposed Zoning
Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business A-2 • Massachusetts Ave Overlay • North Mass Ave Subdistrict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residence B • No zoning overlay
Allowed Uses (summarized)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family, two-family, multifamily residential • Institutional, dormitory • Office, retail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family or two-family residential
Maximum FAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.75 for mixed-use (residential above ground-floor non-res.) • 1.00 for single-use residential (only allowed by special permit) • 1.00 for non-residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.50 for first 5,000 sq. ft. of lot area, 0.35 for additional lot area
Minimum Lot Area per Dwelling Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 600 square feet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2,500 sq. ft. for first 5,000 sq. ft. of lot area, 4,000 sq. ft. for additional lot area
Maximum Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 feet for mixed-use (residential above ground-floor non-res.) • 45 feet for single-use residential • 35 feet for single-use non-residential <p><i>(Reduced to 35 feet within 50 feet of a lower-scale residential district)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 feet
Minimum Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 feet front • 10 feet side • 20 feet rear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 feet front • 7.5 feet side (sum to 20) • 25 feet rear
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requirement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Min. 40% of lot area (private)
Urban Design Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-residential use on ground floor for minimum 75% of frontage, 40 feet depth, 15 feet height (may be modified by Planning Board) • Parking not allowed between building and public street • Building entrances must face Mass Ave • Ground-floor office and retail spaces must have individual entrances • Front facades must have 25% clear glass, 50% at ground floor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No specific urban design requirements

Context Maps



Maps prepared by Brendan Monroe on July 24, 2015. CDD GIS.

Context Images



2551 Massachusetts Ave



7 Richard Ave

Comments

The rational objective of the proposed change would be to make the zoning for this corner consistent with the residential areas surrounding it. Further up Massachusetts Avenue, and on the other side of Massachusetts Avenue, the pattern of buildings is predominantly residential houses, although there are some commercial buildings interspersed and some residential buildings that have been converted to commercial use. Across the street, the residential pattern includes some commercial spaces that “bump out” on the ground floor.

However, this rationale is complicated by the fact that this corner has a long history of being zoned for commercial and multifamily residential use, and that the proposed change would affect only two lots, both of which would become nonconforming uses with the proposed change. On the 2551 Massachusetts Avenue site, the options for redevelopment would be limited – due to the lot size being less than 5,000 square feet, only a single residential unit would be allowed under Residence B requirements. If the existing building were retained, any future change to another type of commercial use would require a use variance.

Although the 7 Richard Ave site has little potential for redevelopment, the zoning change would create additional nonconformities, including a use nonconformity because multifamily residential is not allowed in Residence B. If any future change to the property is considered to be an expansion or change of a non-conforming use, it may also require a use variance.

A secondary outcome is that the proposed change would remove the Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District zoning, which creates some requirements and incentives meant to improve the urban design of the Massachusetts Avenue streetscape. Most projects within the overlay district are required to at least have an advisory public review meeting, and in cases where relief from the urban design requirements is needed, projects would seek special permits from the Planning Board (as in the current 2551 Massachusetts Ave case). Except in unique circumstances, there would not be public review for development under the Residence B requirements.