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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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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: **Walden/Sherman Business A-4 Rezoning Proposal**

### **Overview**

This zoning petition, filed by the City Council in June, is part of a continued discussion of the small business-zoned area at the corner of Walden and Sherman Streets. These discussions were prompted by a proposal last year to develop a building on the approximately 14,000 square-foot former Masse Hardware parking lot site at that corner. However, the petition would affect several other properties as well, most of which are residential.

### **Background**

In 2014, after neighbors expressed concerns about the proposed residential project, the City Council petitioned to rezone the area from Business A to Residence C-1, which is the designation of the surrounding neighborhood. This petition was heard at the Planning Board and City Council. Staff prepared an analysis of the rezoning, including a summary of the zoning history and the existing uses in the area, which is attached for reference.

The Planning Board did not make a recommendation on that petition, but suggested that the owner and designated developer of the parking lot site continue discussions with interested neighbors to attempt to reach a mutually desirable outcome.

### **Current Proposal and Ongoing Discussions**

The current petition is very different from the previous rezoning proposal. It proposes creating a variation of the current Business A zoning, called "Business A-4," which has dimensional requirements that are more flexible than the current zoning.

However, staff understands that discussions between the project developer and abutting neighbors and property owners are ongoing, with the goal of reaching consensus on a desired development plan for the site. Therefore, there is an expectation that refinements to the current zoning proposal will be brought forward when consensus is reached.

A summary of the requirements under current and proposed zoning is provided on the following page. This memo focuses on the specifics of the zoning petition as it is currently before the Council, and does not comment on the proposed development project or future changes to the petition that might be proposed.

	<b><i>Current Zoning</i></b>	<b><i>Proposed Zoning (PETITION VERSION – JUNE 15, 2015)</i></b>
<b>Districts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business A-4 (new designation)</li> </ul>
<b>Allowed Uses (summarized)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-family, two-family, multifamily residential</li> <li>• Institutional, dormitory</li> <li>• Office, retail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Single-family, two-family, multifamily residential</li> <li>• Institutional, dormitory</li> <li>• Office, retail</li> </ul>
<b>Maximum FAR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.75 for residential</li> <li>• 1.00 for non-residential</li> <li>• Formula to determine FAR limit for mixed-use buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2.0 for all uses</li> </ul>
<b>Minimum Lot Area per Dwelling Unit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 600 square feet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 600 square feet</li> </ul>
<b>Maximum Height</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 45 feet for residential</li> <li>• 35 feet for non-residential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 45 feet for all uses</li> </ul>
<b>Minimum Yard Setbacks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None for non-residential</li> <li>• Formula setbacks for residential (based on height and length of building) – minimum 10 feet front, 20 feet rear – applied above and below grade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 feet front (all uses)</li> <li>• 10 feet side (all uses)</li> <li>• 10 feet rear (all uses)</li> </ul>
<b>Private Open Space</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15% for residential</li> <li>• None for non-residential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None required</li> </ul>
<b>Project Review Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Review Special Permit (Planning Board) for projects of 20,000 square feet or more.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Review Special Permit (Planning Board) for projects of 50,000 square feet or more.</li> </ul>

**General Comments**

The new proposal retains the overall intent of the current zoning to allow a mix of residential and commercial uses at a somewhat higher density than surrounding residential areas. For the Masse parking lot site (along with other sites in the district), it would allow development in buildings of up to four stories with modest setbacks from sidewalks and abutting properties.

One key change is that the proposal removes the current regime that imposes different dimensional requirements on residential and non-residential uses, and instead applies uniform FAR, height, setback and open space requirements regardless of the use. As noted in the attached analysis of the previous petition, the current dimensional requirements in Business A make it difficult to design mixed-use buildings with commercial space on the ground floor and residential uses above, which is often a desired building form for busy streets and intersections. The proposed zoning also removes the unique requirement that residential setbacks must be applied above and below grade, which can make the provision of below-grade parking more difficult.

## Potential Issues

### Density of Non-Residential vs. Residential Uses

One potential concern is that the proposal makes the maximum FAR for commercial uses the same as for residential, effectively doubling the current 1.0 FAR limit. One of the key provisions of the Citywide Rezoning in 2001 was to allow more density for residential uses than non-residential in mixed-use areas, partly in recognition of their differing transportation impacts. This change could be an issue not just for the Masse parking lot site but for other lots in the district if it becomes desirable in the future to change those properties to higher-intensity commercial uses.

There may be alternative approaches that would allow a maximum FAR of 2.0 for a mixed-use building with housing above ground floor retail, but would not allow an entire commercial building at an FAR of 2.0. The North Massachusetts Avenue zoning changes adopted in 2012 aimed to achieve this outcome, and framed the FAR requirements as such:

*[Paragraph 20.110.31(1), Mixed Use Lots] The maximum allowed FAR shall be 1.75 for any lot that consists entirely of residential or dormitory uses, as listed in Subsections 4.31 (a-h) and paragraph 4.33(b)(7), above the ground floor and includes ground floor active non-residential uses meeting the requirements of Subsection 20.110.21 [which includes certain retail, office and institutional uses].*

Simpler approaches could have a similar effect without strictly requiring non-residential uses at the ground floor. Below are two alternative approaches that could be included as footnotes to the Table of Dimensional Requirements for Business A-4:

*Notwithstanding the Mixed-Use Formula in Section 5.30.12 of this Zoning Ordinance, on a mixed-use lot, the maximum total FAR shall be 2.0, provided that the gross floor area devoted to non-residential uses shall not exceed an FAR of 1.0.*

or:

*The maximum FAR for all uses is 2.0, provided that non-residential uses may not occupy gross floor area above the ground floor of a building.*

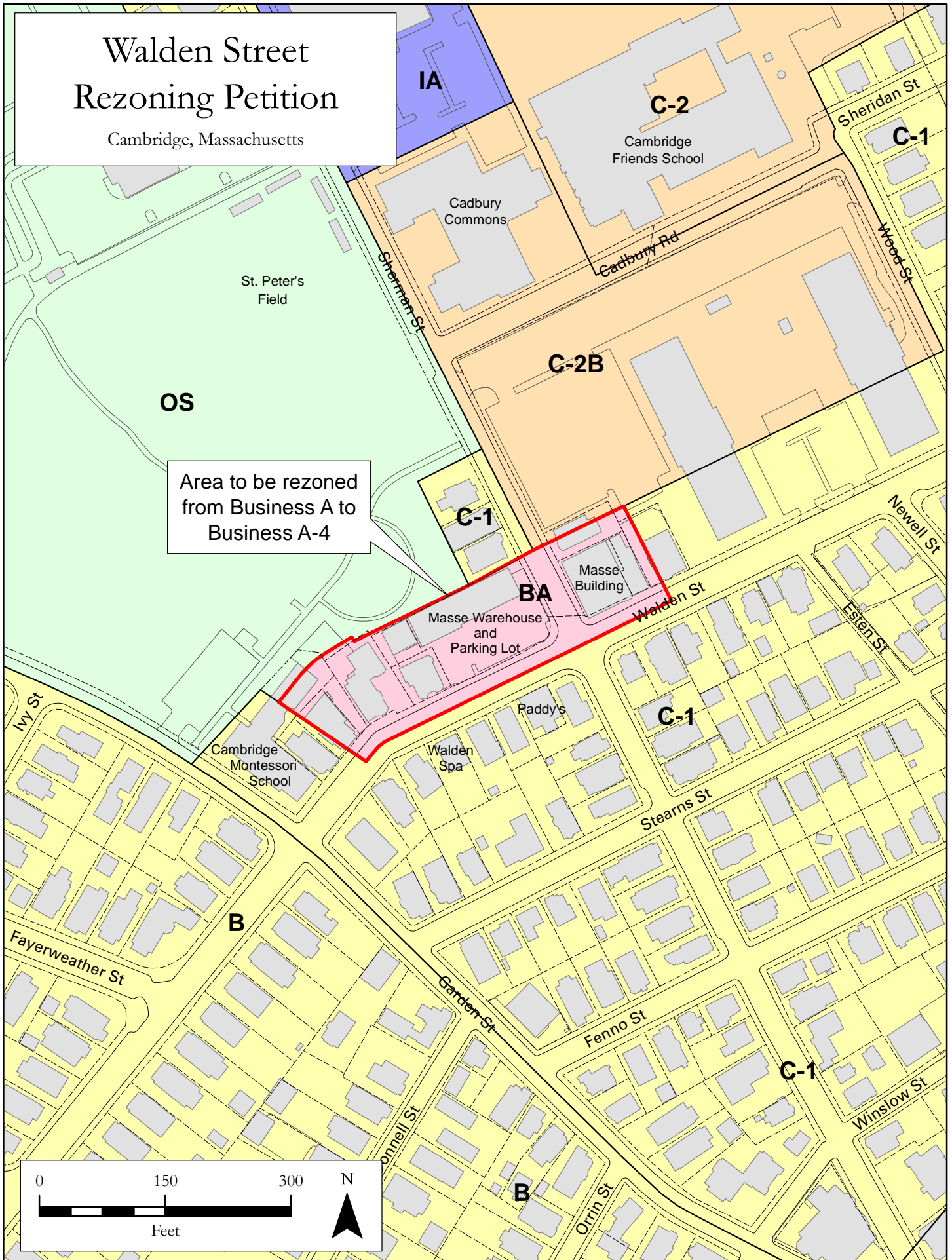
### Project Review Procedures

The proposal would change the way that the project review provisions of Article 19.000 are applied. Currently, the threshold for when a development requires a Project Review Special Permit is 50,000 square feet of gross floor area. In the Business A, Business A-1, and Business A-2 districts only, that threshold is lowered to 20,000 square feet, following a 2007 zoning amendment. It is particularly relevant in this case because development on the Masse parking lot under the proposed requirements would likely fall in the 20,000-50,000 square-foot range.

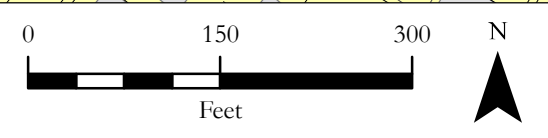
It may be appropriate in this area to apply the same 50,000 square-foot special permit threshold applied in most of the city. If some level of review is desired, an option is to apply the advisory development consultation procedures in Section 19.40 of the zoning, which establishes a non-binding review process in which neighbors and staff can give feedback on a project directly to the developer.

# Walden Street Rezoning Petition

Cambridge, Massachusetts



Area to be rezoned  
from Business A to  
Business A-4





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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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Community Development

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Community Development

To: Planning Board  
From: CDD Staff  
Date: December 10, 2014  
Re: **Walden/Sherman Rezoning Petition**

### **Overview**

The City Council has referred a petition to rezone a small district at the corner of Walden and Sherman Streets from its current designation of Business A to a designation of Residence C-1, which is the predominant zoning designation in the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The following topics are covered in this memo:

- Description of the area to be rezoned
- Summary of current and proposed zoning requirements
- Discussion of impacts from the proposed zoning change
- Charts of current, proposed and alternative zoning regulations
- Map of the current zoning in the area

### **Planning Board Hearing**

When a rezoning is proposed, the Planning Board and City Council must each hold a public hearing before the City Council can act to amend the Zoning Ordinance. After hearing public testimony, the Planning Board can deliberate and vote to send a recommendation to the City Council. If the Planning Board makes no recommendation, then the City Council may take action no less than 21 days after the Planning Board hearing. The City Council must take final action within 90 days of the earlier of the two public hearings. If no action is taken, the public hearing process must be repeated before a zoning change can be adopted. If the Council votes, a 2/3 majority is required to adopt; otherwise, the petition fails and cannot be heard for at least two years.

The Planning Board can recommend that the City Council:

- ADOPT the petition (and thereby amend the Zoning Ordinance as proposed);
- NOT adopt the petition;
- Adopt the petition with suggested modifications;
- Conduct further study of issues related to the proposal or explore other zoning alternatives.

## Description of Area

### Location

Walden and Sherman Streets form a moderately busy intersection within the predominantly residential Neighborhood Nine. The corner is located just over a half mile from Porter Square in one direction and about the same distance from Huron Village in the other. It is directly adjacent to St. Peter’s baseball field and less than a quarter-mile from the entrance to Danehy Park.

### Existing Buildings and Uses

The BA district covers a very small area, about 400 feet of linear frontage along the north side of Walden Street. It includes all or part of 11 lots, most of which are residential buildings, with some exceptions discussed below. Across Walden Street is a neighborhood of mostly 3-story residences, although there are two non-conforming businesses, a bar (Paddy’s) and a convenience store (Walden Spa). The surrounding area is similarly residential, with some larger-scale apartment buildings nearby along Walden Street and some commercial and institutional uses further up Sherman Street. A portion of the Cambridge Montessori School is within the western end of the BA district.

The two most significant lots in the district are directly at the Walden/Sherman corner. At the northeast is a three-story mixed-use building that formerly had the Masse Hardware Company at the ground floor and has four apartments above. The Masse company has recently closed, and it has been proposed to convert the ground floor space to two additional residential units (see discussion further below). The lot at the northwest corner was most recently used as a surface parking area and warehouse for the Masse company. Previous to that, it was a gas station.



*Northwest corner of Walden/Sherman*



*Northeast corner of Walden/Sherman*

## Summary of Current and Proposed Zoning

### Current Zoning

This district has been zoned Business A (BA) since the Cambridge Zoning Map was established in its current form in 1943. BA districts are found throughout the city in low-scale retail or mixed-use areas such as Cambridge Street, sections of Fresh Pond Parkway and part of Memorial Drive. BA is one of a “family” of BA designations including BA-1, BA-2 and BA-3, each having somewhat different requirements.

Since 1943, the allowed uses in BA districts have generally included residential, office, retail and restaurants. For non-residential uses, the maximum floor area ratio (FAR) is 1.0 and the maximum height is 35 feet, permitting either one-story commercial buildings covering most of the lot or 2-to-3-story buildings on smaller footprints.

The dimensional requirements for residential uses are different than for business uses and have evolved over the years. In the 1962 version of the Zoning Ordinance, residential development was required to follow the Residence C-2 district regulations, which allowed an FAR of 1.75, minimum 600 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit, and heights up to 85 feet, but required significant yard setbacks based on a formula calculation. Since a 1997 zoning amendment, residential development in BA is required to follow the Residence C-2B requirements, which are similar but restrict heights to 45 feet and impose some stricter setback requirements.

The Residence C-2B requirements have made it challenging to design housing in BA districts, especially on smaller lots where it is difficult to meet the setback requirements. It has been especially challenging to design mixed-use buildings, given that the different design standards for commercial and residential development must be applied separately to commercial and residential sections of the building.

#### Proposed Zoning

Residence C-1 is one of the most common zoning districts in Cambridge, covering many of the city's traditional residential neighborhoods including East Cambridge, Area Four, Mid-Cambridge, Riverside, and significant parts of Agassiz, Neighborhood Nine and Strawberry Hill.

Residence C-1 allows multifamily housing at a maximum FAR of 0.75, height of 35 feet, minimum 1,500 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit, and minimum front, side and rear yard setbacks determined by formula. On a typical 5,000 square-foot house lot, C-1 zoning would allow a 3-story residence with up to three dwelling units, yard setbacks, usable open space and parking. The most significant recent change to the C-1 requirements was a 1999 rezoning that increased lot area per dwelling unit and open space requirements in response to the construction of new dwellings in the yards of larger house lots.

#### **Impacts of Proposed Zoning Change**

##### Existing Residential Lots

A review of records from the City's Assessing Database helps to provide a sense of the size, scale and use of existing buildings and how they relate to current and proposed zoning requirements. However, the information is not perfectly accurate for zoning purposes and should be treated as approximate.

The following list summarizes the approximate conformity of the six existing residential lots that are partially or entirely in the BA district.

- **LAND USES:** All are two-family or multifamily residential, allowed in both BA and C-1.
- **HEIGHT:** Most buildings are three stories, and comfortably below the 45-foot limit in BA but probably closer to the 35-foot limit in C-1. If an existing building has a height that is just above 35 feet, the proposed change to C-1 would result in a nonconforming height.

- DENSITY: Most lots are relatively dense in terms of floor area ratio (FAR), which ranges from about 0.9 to 1.2, and lot area per dwelling unit, which ranges from about 900 square feet to 1,400 square feet. These figures conform to BA requirements, but most likely none would conform to C-1 density limitations (see chart on last page).
- YARDS AND OPEN SPACE: It is very difficult with available information to determine the conformity of yard setbacks and open space, but given the small size of the lots is it likely that many would be nonconforming under either BA or C-1 requirements.

#### Montessori School

A small portion of the Cambridge Montessori School is located in the BA district. There is also a small adjacent lot that appears to provide driveway access to the school from Walden Street. If the zoning were changed to Residence C-1, it would make the school subject to Cambridge's Institutional Use Regulations, which provide some limitations on institutional development in residential areas. Because the use exists, and because the majority of the school is already in a Residence C-1 district, this change would probably not have a significant impact, but it should be noted.

#### Existing "Masse" Building

One of the lots most impacted by the proposed change to Residence C-1 would be the existing mixed-use building that was previously home to Masse Hardware (including an attached one-story commercial building, which is under common ownership). That building has an existing FAR greater than 2.0, which exceeds both current and proposed zoning limitations, but contains only 4 dwelling units, which conforms to both current and proposed zoning. There are no yard setbacks or open space on the lot.

Any commercial space at the ground floor would become nonconforming if the zoning were changed to Residence C-1. Recently, the owner had proposed to convert the ground-floor space into two residential dwelling units (the owner applied for relief from the Board of Zoning Appeal, but the application was withdrawn in September, 2014). While that would bring the lot into greater use conformity with Residence C-1, it would exceed the number of dwelling units allowed under C-1 zoning.

#### Existing "Masse" Warehouse/Parking Lot

The only site with significant redevelopment potential under current or proposed zoning is the parking lot and warehouse at the corner opposite the Masse building. This lot is about 14,000 square feet, the largest in the district, and has dimensions suitable for construction of a multifamily residential building. The proposed rezoning was prompted by a buyer expressing interest in redeveloping the site for housing.

The chart on Page 7 provides a summary of the zoning allowances for that site under existing and proposed zoning. Although redevelopment would still be possible if the district were rezoned to Residence C-1, such a rezoning would reduce the allowed gross floor area and units by about 60% as well as reducing the allowed height from 45 feet to 35 feet. Any retail or office uses, if they were desired, would not be allowed if the zoning were changed to Residence C-1.



Parking is another complicating factor if the site were redeveloped, whether under current or proposed zoning. The requirement for housing (regardless of the zoning district) is to provide one parking space for every dwelling unit created. Because the parking currently on the site is accessory to the Masse building across the street, parking may need to be provided for the existing building as well as any new housing that is created. Also, under the Residence C-2B dimensional requirements, enclosed parking must adhere to required yard setbacks whether it is located above or below grade. As a result, parking tends to be located on surface lots or open areas that are partially covered by buildings.

### **Conclusions**

The existing character of development in the Walden/Sherman BA district is mostly residential, with a density that is somewhat less than what is allowed under Business A zoning but somewhat greater than what would be allowed under Residence C-1 zoning. For those residential lots, an intermediate zoning such as Residence C-1A might be more appropriate (see rightmost column on the following page).

The more interesting challenge is to determine what is the desired character of the lots at the immediate Walden/Sherman intersection that were recently vacated by the Masse company, which will need to transition to some new use. A change to Residence C-1 would indicate a desire for the corner to transition to housing of a moderate scale surrounded by yards and open space, with parking potentially on the surface or partially covered by the building. This option would result in stronger uniformity with the surrounding district and probably result in the least impact on traffic. However, the reduction in development potential could also inhibit or delay the redevelopment of the parking lot and warehouse site so that it remains in its existing condition.

Given past use patterns and the relative prominence of that intersection, it may be desirable to encourage a more mixed-use form with neighborhood-serving retail space at the ground floor and a residential density that is incrementally higher than the surrounding residential neighborhood. This might be accomplished by retaining a base zoning that allows some commercial use, or by applying an overlay zoning such as the Mixed Use Residential (MXR) Overlay used in some other parts of the city. Some setback and open space relief might also be desired to provide flexibility in designing a mixed-use building form.

CDD staff will be present at public hearings and can discuss options in response to the direction sought by the community, the Planning Board and the City Council.

**Summary Chart of Current and Proposed Zoning Regulations**

	<b>Current Zoning (BA)</b>	<b>Proposed Zoning (C-1)</b>	<b>Alternative (C-1A)</b>
Allowed Uses	Residential, institutional, office, retail	Residential, limited institutional	Residential, institutional (potential for limited commercial through MXR overlay)
Maximum FAR (Gross Floor Area / Lot Area)	1.75 residential * 1.00 non-residential	0.75 *	1.25 *
Minimum Lot Area Per Dwelling Unit	600 square feet *	1,500 square feet *	1,000 square feet *
Maximum Height	45 feet residential 35 feet non-residential	35 feet	45 feet
Front Yard Setback (feet)	Residential formula: (H+L)/4 ** Minimum 10 Non-residential: none	Formula: (H+L)/4 ** Minimum 10	Minimum 10
Side Yard Setback (feet)	Residential formula: (H+L)/5 ** Non-residential: none	Formula: (H+L)/5 ** Minimum 7.5	Formula: (H+L)/7 ** (may be reduced to 10 min. by special permit)
Rear Yard Setback (feet)	Residential formula: (H+L)/4 ** Non-res. formula: (H+L)/5 ** Minimum 20	Formula: (H+L)/4 ** Minimum 20	Formula: (H+L)/5 ** (may be reduced to 10 min. by special permit)
Required Private Open Space	15% of lot area (residential only)	30% of lot area (residential only)	15% of lot area (residential only)

*\*Does not include Inclusionary Housing bonus, which allows an as-of-right increase of up to 30% in floor area and dwelling units for a project of at least 10 units or 10,000 square feet.*

*\*\* In yard setback formulas, H=building height, L=length of building fronting that particular side of the lot.*

**NOTE: This is a partial summary and does not include all applicable zoning requirements.**

**Zoning Summary: Masse Warehouse/Parking Lot Site**

- Lot Area: 14,000 square feet (approx)
- Walden Street Frontage: 140 feet (approx)
- Sherman Street Frontage: 100 feet (approx)

	<b>Current Zoning (BA)</b>	<b>Proposed Zoning (C-1)</b>	<b>Alternative (C-1A)</b>
Maximum Gross Floor Area (square feet)	24,500 residential * 14,000 non-residential	10,500 *	17,500 *
Maximum Dwelling Units	23 units (29) *	9 units (13) *	14 units (18)*
Front Yard Setback: Walden (feet)	10-46 residential** None non-residential	10-44 **	10
Front Yard Setback: Sherman (feet)	10-36 residential** None non-residential	10-34 **	10
Side/Rear Yard Setbacks (feet)	Up to 46 **	Up to 46 **	Up to 37 ** (may be reduced to 10 min. by special permit)
Required Private Open Space	2,100 square feet (residential only)	4,200 square feet (residential only)	2,100 square feet (residential only)

*\*Does not include Inclusionary Housing bonus, which allows an as-of-right increase of up to 30% in floor area and dwelling units for a project of at least 10 units or 10,000 square feet. Number in parentheses indicates the maximum number of dwelling units if inclusionary housing bonus is applied.*

*\*\* Depending on exact height and building length, and determination of side and rear yard locations.*

**NOTE: ALL FIGURES APPROXIMATE**