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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board  
From: Jeff Roberts, Senior Manager for Zoning and Development  
Date: April 26, 2017  
Re: **Third and Cambridge Streets (BA-5) Zoning Petition**

**Overview**

This zoning petition, submitted by attorney James J. Rafferty on behalf of property owner Mark Lechmere, LLC and manager Amadan Management, LLC (represented by Robert Korff, Manager), proposes to change the zoning designation and requirements for the rectangular block bounded by Cambridge Street, Third Street, Gore Street, and Second Street (see maps on following page).

The area of rezoning intersects and abuts several other districts, including the Cambridge Street corridor extending to the west, the Monsignor O'Brien Highway corridor to the north, the interstitial wood-frame residential neighborhood located between those corridors to the northwest, the current site of the Lechmere MBTA station to the east (which is planned, zoned, and permitted for mixed-use redevelopment following the construction of a new station), and the historic complex containing the Middlesex Country Registry of Deeds and Probate Court to the south.

The proposal seeks to change the designation of the block from Business A (BA) to a new designation, Business A-5 (BA-5), which would have the same use and parking requirements but would modify some of the dimensional standards for buildings, including Floor Area Ratio (FAR), height, and required yard setbacks and private open space for residential uses. The change would also affect some project review requirements. As noted by the petitioners, the approach is similar to that taken at the intersection of Walden and Sherman Streets, which was rezoned from BA to BA-4 in 2015.

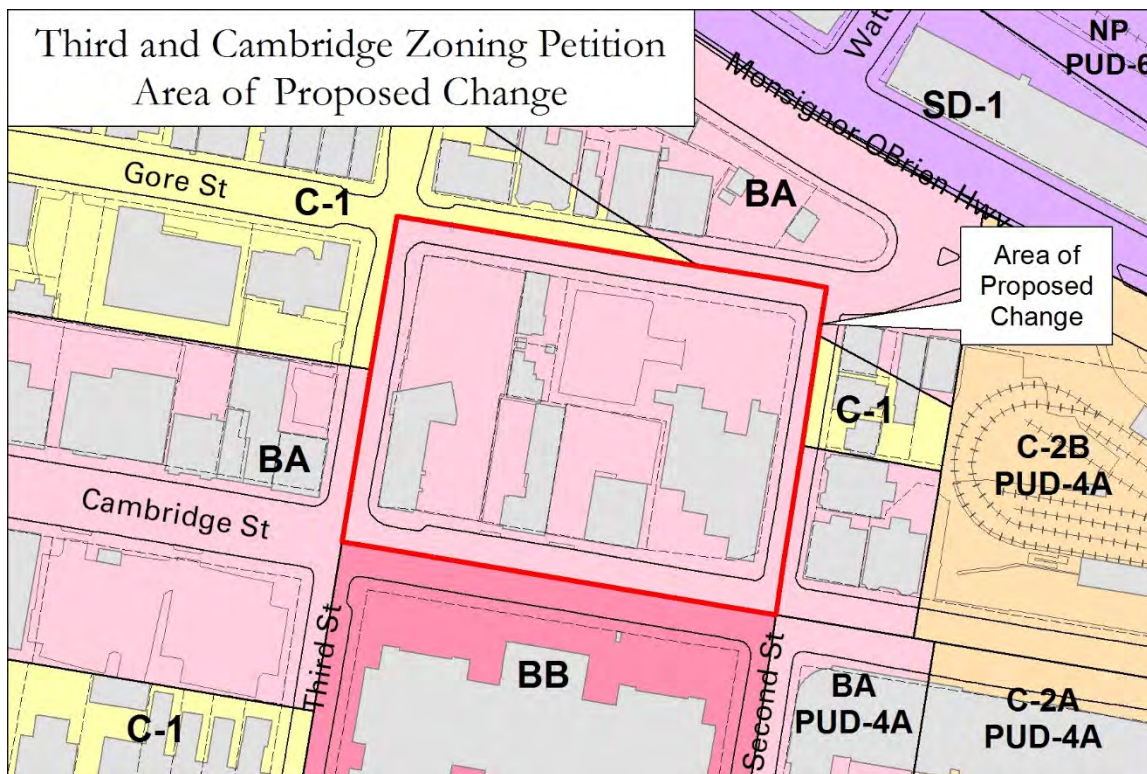
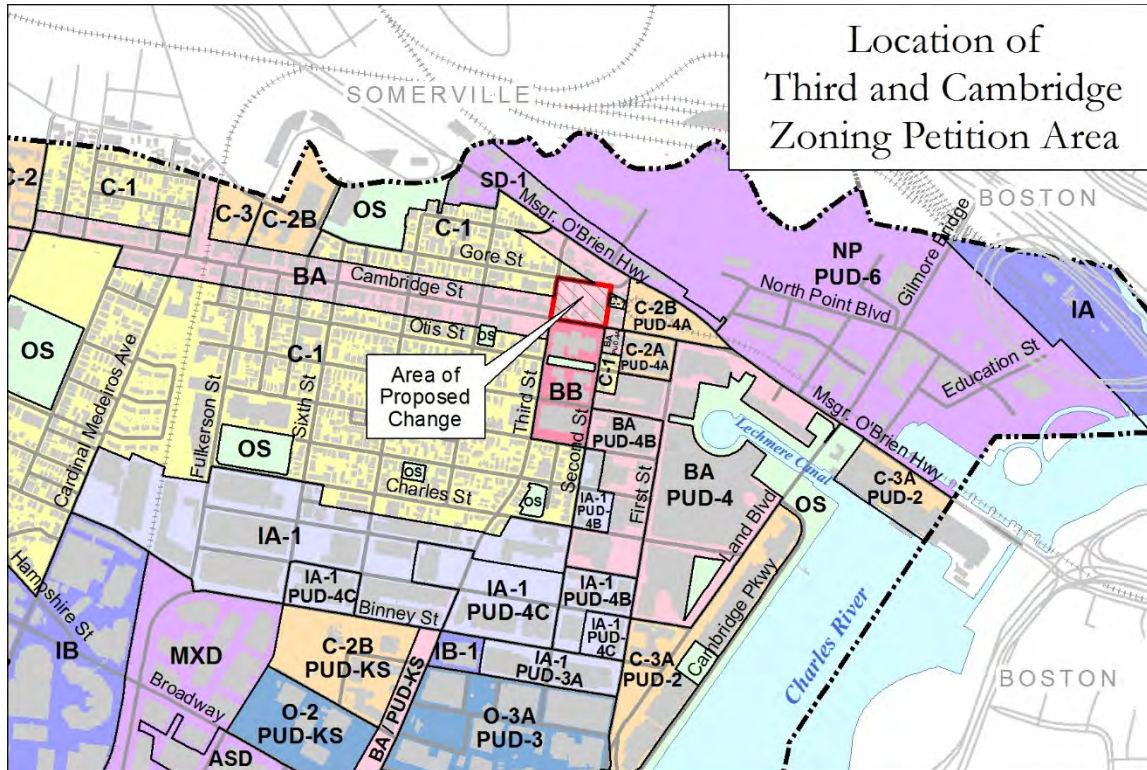
This memo provides a brief review of planning and zoning in the area and summarizes the effects of the proposed change. Some concluding reflections are provided to suggest issues the Board might consider in their deliberations.

*Intent of Proposal*

The petitioner owns a lot that occupies a portion of the proposed rezoning area, fronting Cambridge Street, Third Street, and Gore Street. According to the petitioner, the proposed rezoning would enable a four-story mixed-use development on that lot, with approximately 45,000 square feet of multifamily housing above approximately 10,000 square feet of retail use at the ground floor, and parking provided below-grade. Some illustrations of the intended development outcome were attached to the petition.

**Area of Proposed Change**

The petition would rezone a portion of the BA district bounded by Cambridge Street, Third Street, Gore Street, and Second Street, as shown below.



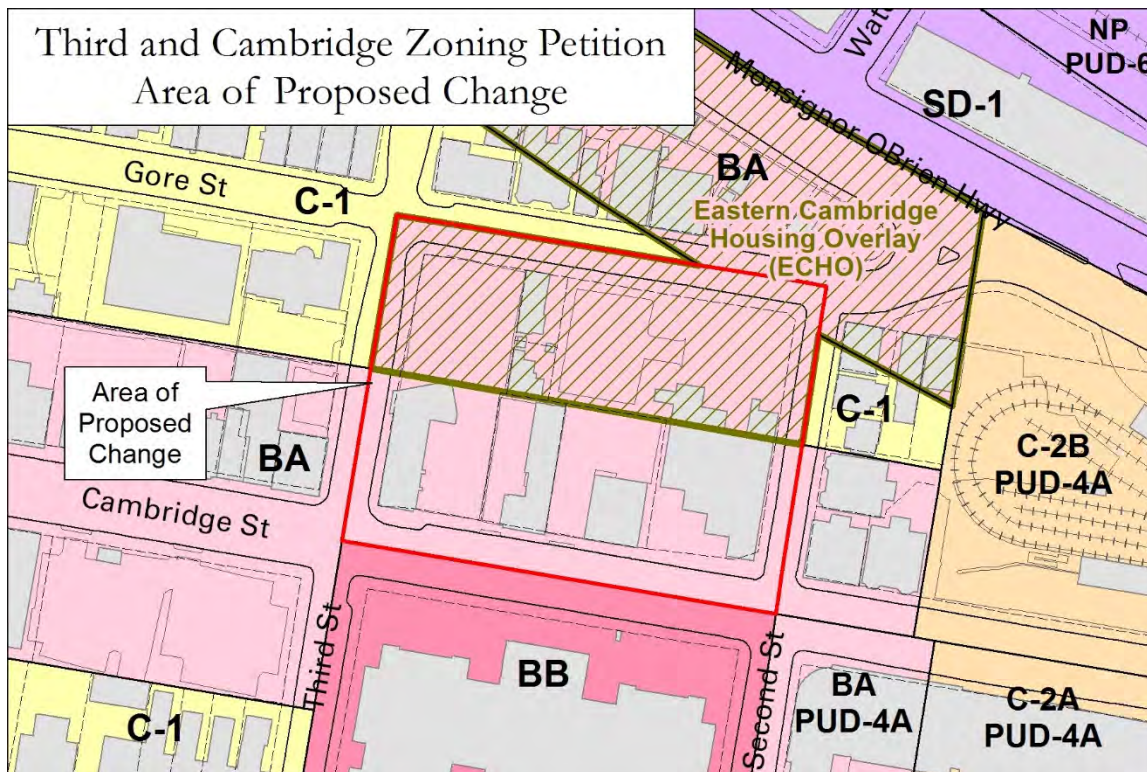
*Planning and Zoning History*

The zoning designation of this block has changed several times. In the earliest versions of the zoning map (dating from 1924), the block was split into two districts, with the side fronting Cambridge Street zoned “Business 1” (which later became BA) and the side fronting Gore Street zoned “Business 3” (which later became Business B or “BB”). The Gore Street side was later rezoned from BB to Residence C-1.

In 1968, the entire block was rezoned to BB (Ordinance #762), to be the same as the county-owned lots on the other side of Cambridge Street. (A vestigial outcome of this change was the small, irregularly shaped Residence C-1 district to the east of Second Street.) In 1973, the block was rezoned again to BA (Ordinance #828), leaving the block opposite Cambridge Street zoned BB. This block and the surrounding districts have had the same base zoning since that time.

This area was included in the 2001 Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (“ECaPS”), which led to a set of planning goals and design guidelines for the larger area. The goals included expanding housing opportunities for a wide range of residents, addressing the needs of small businesses, shifting transportation patterns toward more walking, transit use, and bicycle use as opposed to automobiles, enhancing the character of residential neighborhoods, and supporting the creation of more lively pedestrian-friendly areas in mixed-use districts.

This study led to the creation of the Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay (ECHO) district, which allows residential uses to be built to a density that is twice what is allowed by the base district for non-residential uses. As shown on the map below, the Gore Street side of the area to be rezoned is contained within the ECHO district.



*Existing Conditions*

The existing uses on the site are varied and do not form any clear prevailing pattern. Along Cambridge Street, the following uses are found from west to east: a one-story bank building with a partial second story, built in 1970 but with an architectural style suggesting an earlier historical period; a three-story building with residential apartments above a ground-floor office and a large attached garage at the rear; a four-story brick office building; and a City fire station with paved aprons on both the Cambridge Street and Gore Street frontages. The tallest of these buildings is the four-story office building, with a height of approximately 45 feet. On the Gore Street side, sandwiched between parking lots, are two single-family homes, one fronting Gore Street and another to the rear, with vary narrow setbacks to abutting lots.

Probably the defining characteristic of the block is pavement, as each lot is dominated by surface parking or other vehicular access. The expanses of open pavement contrast with most of the Cambridge Street and Gore Street corridors, which have more continuous street frontages of commercial, residential, or mixed-use buildings.



**Current and Proposed Zoning**

The proposal is to create a new zoning district, Business A-5 (BA-5), whose requirements are similar to BA except for specific dimensional modifications outlined in the petition and summarized in the table below. There would be no change in the allowed uses or required amounts of parking. Inclusionary housing provisions, which require residential projects to provide an affordable component in exchange for an allowed 30% increase in density, would continue to apply to projects with 10 or more units.

	<b>Current BA (Residential)</b>	<b>Current BA (Non-Residential)</b>	<b>Proposed BA-5 (Residential)</b>	<b>Proposed BA-5 (Non-Residential)</b>
Maximum FAR	1.75 *	1.00	2.15 **	1.00
Maximum Height	45 feet	35 feet	48 feet **	48 feet **
Minimum Lot Area per Dwelling Unit	600 square feet	600 square feet	600 square feet	600 square feet
Minimum Front Yard Setback	$(H+L) \div 4$ at least 10 feet	None	None	None
Minimum Side Yard Setbacks	$(H+L) \div 5$	None	None	None
Minimum Rear Yard Setback	$(H+L) \div 4$ at least 20 feet	$(H+L) \div 5$ at least 20 feet	$(H+L) \div 5$ at least 20 feet	$(H+L) \div 5$ at least 20 feet
Minimum Private Open Space	15% of lot area	None	None	None

\* Under Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay (ECHO) zoning, which applies to a portion of the block, the FAR may be increased to 2.00 for residential uses.

\*\* FAR greater than 1.75 is allowed only where parking is located entirely below grade. Additional height is allowed only when retail uses are included at the ground floor, and only allowed to exceed 45 feet so much as the ground floor height exceeds 10 feet.

One of the more consequential requirements in the BA district is that any residential development is required to follow the same dimensional requirements as the Residence C-2B district (Section 5.28.1). Residence C-2B includes requirements, such as formula-based front and side yard setbacks and requirements for ground-level private open space, that are more suited to stand-alone residential development. These varying dimensional requirements for residential and non-residential development have made mixed-use development, with residential above commercial, difficult in the BA district. A change to BA-5 would allow mixed-use developments with a consistent frontage, not requiring setbacks at the front or sides, which is more typical of historic mixed-use development along Cambridge Street.

Creating a new zoning designation would also change the Project Review Special Permit threshold. Under current zoning (adopted in 2007), projects of at least 20,000 square feet in the BA district must receive a special permit from the Planning Board. With a change to BA-5, that threshold would revert to the citywide standard of 50,000 square feet.

## Conclusions

The subject area is somewhat difficult to characterize, given its location at the confluence of several different districts of different types, its multiple changes in zoning over the years, its discontinuous urban character compared to surrounding parts of East Cambridge, and its underdeveloped condition despite being very close to a transit station.

The proposed zoning approach targets specific dimensional modifications, which are relatively modest compared to current zoning standards, that could only be applied to mixed-use development with housing above ground-floor retail and parking below grade. The most applicable planning work done so far, which includes ECaPS and other citywide planning efforts, encourages the creation of new housing, economic development opportunities for small businesses, pedestrian and bicycle friendly development patterns, and urban design approaches that are responsive to the established and anticipated character of the area. Therefore, a zoning approach that is unique to this area may be worthy of consideration if it has the effect of incentivizing development forms that are consistent with the City's planning goals and compatible with the historic patterns of development in the area.

It is also the case that some issues raised by the petition are not unique to this area. The current BA zoning is typical throughout the city, and contains development standards that would theoretically enable four-story mixed-use buildings. However, development proposals and zoning initiatives in recent years have revealed that the zoning in BA (or similar districts) has often not led to developments that are consistent with the desired character of the area. Examples have included the aforementioned Walden/Sherman Streets site (Masse Hardware lot) and proposals on Massachusetts Avenue that prompted the "Friends of MAPOCO" zoning petition, adopted in 2016. Community members have objected to proposals that rely on above-grade parking or exclude retail uses where they are desired at the ground floor, while developers and designers have cited onerous residential setback requirements, heights that do not allow for viable ground-floor commercial space, and insufficient density to offset the cost of below-grade parking as constraints. A future phase of the Envision Cambridge process aims to study the city's major mixed-use corridors (including Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street) to establish a vision and strategies for how they might evolve.