



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
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Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner
Date: December 2, 2015
Re: **Alexandrov, et al., Zoning Petition**

Overview

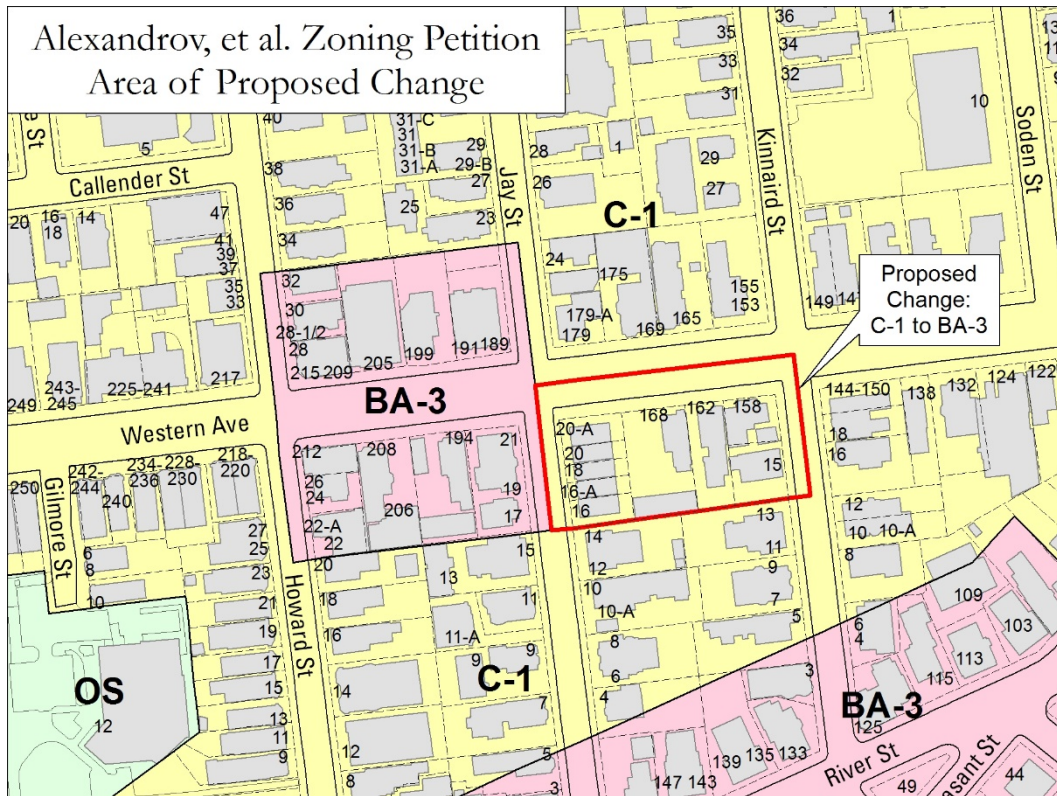
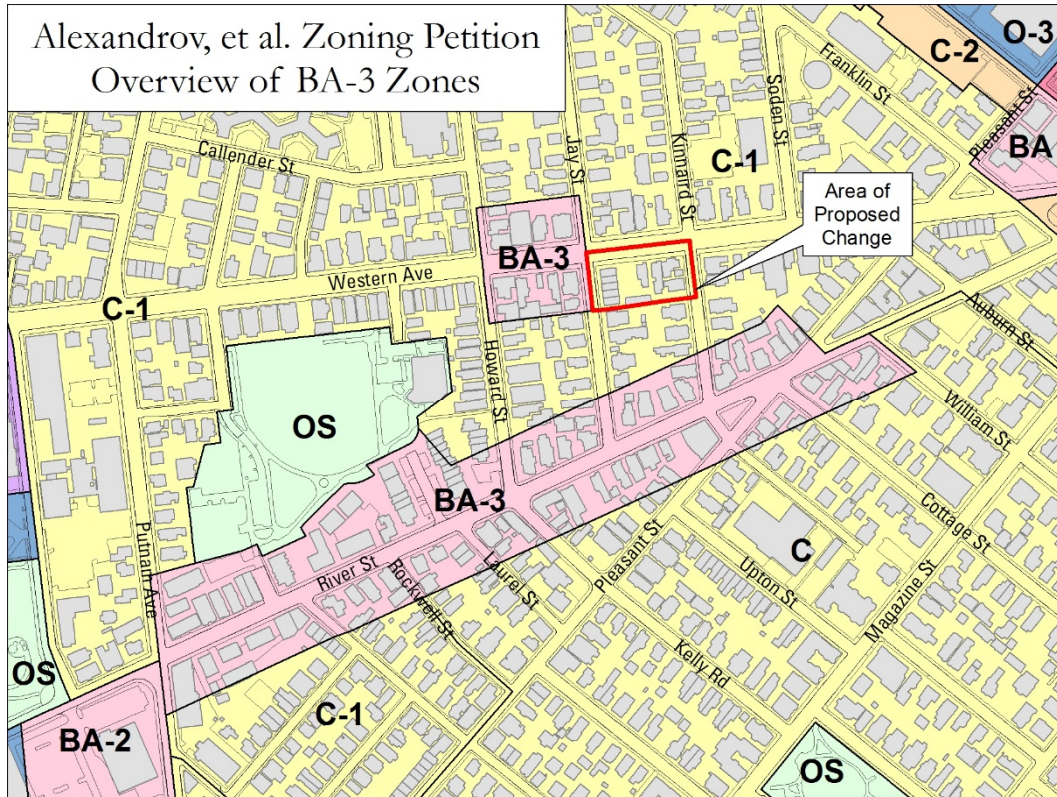
The Kiril Stefan Alexandrov and Catherine Alexandrov, et al. Zoning Petition proposes to extend the current boundary of a Business A-3 (BA-3) district to encompass a small part of the adjoining area currently zoned Residence C-1. The current BA-3 district covers a small section of the Western Avenue corridor between Howard Street and Jay Street, and the proposed change would extend the area one block past Jay Street to Kinnaird Street on the south side of Western Ave. *See map on following page.*

The allowed scale and dimensional requirements for buildings in BA-3 are the same as in Residence C-1. The major impact of the change would be to expand the range of allowed non-residential uses. BA-3 allows commercial uses including offices, retail stores, restaurants and arts/crafts studios, provided that all non-residential uses meet the following limitations (Zoning Ordinance Section 4.40, Footnote 1):

- Permitted nonresidential uses must be located in a building containing residential uses.
- Permitted nonresidential uses may not occupy more than 40% of the Gross Floor Area in the building; all remaining GFA must be devoted to permitted residential uses.
- The permitted nonresidential uses may only be located on the first floor or basement of the building.
- No accessory parking shall be provided for any nonresidential use.

Background information on the BA-3 district, along with the existing conditions in the current BA-3 district and the proposed expansion, are provided on the following pages.

Context Maps



Maps prepared by Brendan Monroe, CDD GIS.

Context Images



158 Western Ave.

162 Western Ave.

168 Western Ave.

20-A Jay St. (from Jay Street)

Business A-3: Background and Requirements

The BA-3 designation was created in the “Riverside Rezoning” in 2003. All of the districts zoned BA-3 are in the Riverside neighborhood, along Western Ave. and River Street. Those areas were previously zoned Business A (BA), which allowed buildings at a higher density and height as well as a broader range of commercial uses.

The zoning change was an outcome of the *Riverside Neighborhood Study*, conducted in 2003 by CDD, a resident study committee, and a consultant team led by Stull and Lee, Inc. The new BA-3 district was intended to be the “retail analog to the Residence C -1 residential district and the Office-1 district.” The report provides the following explanation for the rezoning of areas from BA to the newly created BA-3:

The Committee has made its recommendation in order to preserve the significant inventory of housing and freestanding buildings that characterize the areas, while offering the opportunity to expand small neighborhood-serving commercial activity along the streets. The proposed regulations are intended to allow retail activity at a neighborhood scale without encouraging the transformation of the street from a residential extension of abutting blocks to a full fledged retail district of streetwall buildings and large stores.

	Current Zoning	Proposed Zoning
Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residence C-1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business A-3
Allowed Uses (summarized)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family, two-family, multifamily residential • Limited institutional uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single-family, two-family, multifamily residential • Limited institutional uses • Limited office, retail, restaurant
Maximum FAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.75 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.75
Minimum Lot Area per Dwelling Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,500 square feet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,500 square feet
Maximum Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 feet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35 feet
Minimum Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 feet front (or more by formula) • 7.5 feet side (or more by formula) • 20 feet rear (or more by formula) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 feet front (or more by formula) • 7.5 feet side (or more by formula) • 20 feet rear (or more by formula)
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Min. 30% of lot area (private) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Min. 30% of lot area (private)

Existing Conditions

The current BA-3 district on Western Ave is characterized primarily by residential wood-frame buildings of 2-3 stories, with the exception of two small ground-floor retail spaces that are attached to residential buildings on opposite sides of the corner of Western Ave and Howard Street (212 and 215 Western Ave.). Another atypical lot in the district is the building that was formerly home to the Riverside Health Center at 205 Western Ave.

The area that is proposed to be rezoned includes only wood-frame single-family, two-family and townhouse buildings along Western Ave., Jay Street and Kinnaird Street. One of the houses has been used as a rectory for a religious institution, but otherwise the uses are residential.

Impacts of Proposed Change

The proposed zoning change is not likely to impact the patterns of development in the area, because it will not change the allowed scale, height or other dimensional aspects of the zoning requirements. Also, the areas currently zoned BA-3, which are similar in character to the subject area, have not experienced much change over the past twelve years.

The main effect of the proposal is that existing homes could be converted to provide small office or retail spaces at the first floors or basements. Given the small size of existing buildings, the size of any commercial establishment created would be roughly 1,000 square feet or less; even if buildings were enlarged to the largest allowable extent, commercial spaces would be limited to about 2,000 square feet. Parking for commercial uses would not be provided. Given that the current BA-3 zoning along Western Ave. and River Street has not resulted in a drastic expansion of commercial uses, it is not clear how attractive this option would be to property owners in the area of proposed change.

As described by the petitioners, the intent of the proposal is to provide additional opportunities for small businesses to find space in Cambridge. This proposed change could provide those opportunities, though at a very modest level and for only a handful of properties. One potential concern with this proposal is that because it does not increase the capacity for development, any new commercial space would displace existing space that is used for housing, or potential space that could otherwise be used to expand housing. Again, because the scope of the change is so small and the BA-3 allowance for commercial space is limited, this effect would be very modest from a citywide perspective.