



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Director of Zoning and Development
Swaathi Joseph, Zoning Associate Planner
Date: May 29, 2019
Re: **New Street Overlay District Zoning Petition**

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Overview

This zoning petition, by Self Storage Group LLC, would establish a new Overlay District on a section of New Street abutting Danehy Park, with development controls contained in a new Section 20.900. The Planning Board was scheduled to hear a version of this zoning proposal on August 21, 2018. However, the hearing did not proceed and the petition expired with no action by the City Council.

Attached to this memo is the previous staff memo dated August 8, 2018 for the past petition, which contains relevant background information related to the proposal.

The original version of the petition had two major components:

- Adding “self storage facility” to the Table of Use Regulations, which would be permitted as-of-right in all zoning districts with an Industry classification, and would have parking requirements similar to a “wholesale business and storage” use and no explicit requirement for loading or bicycle parking facilities.
- Establishing the “New Street Overlay District” over a portion of the Industry A-1 (IA-1) district abutting Danehy Park, mainly to allow the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to be increased to 3.0 by Planning Board special permit for a self storage facility.

The new version of the petition adds the following new elements:

- An increase in allowed height from 45 feet to 65 feet, by Planning Board special permit, for a self storage facility.
- A requirement of 8,000 square feet of affordable housing, exempt from the calculation of Gross Floor Area, as one of the special permit criteria for a self storage facility.
- Changes to incentivize housing development, including increasing the maximum FAR to 3.0 and maximum height to 65 feet as well as reducing the lot area per dwelling unit to 300 square feet and parking requirements to 0.75 space per unit for residential uses and 0.5 space per unit for affordable housing.

The revised petition continues to propose special permit criteria for approving the increased FAR for a self storage facility, including enhancements and benefits to the use of Danehy Park, sustainability elements of the building, and affordable short-term storage for low income households. Thus far, staff have not met with the petitioner regarding the new petition or reviewed any specific development plan.

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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: August 3, 2018
Re: **Pizzuto Family Limited Partnership Zoning Petition
(Self Storage / New Street)**

This memo provides an overview of the petition and a brief summary of relevant planning and zoning considerations.

Petition Overview

The petition has two major components:

- Adding “self storage facility” to the Table of Use Regulations, which would be permitted as-of-right in all zoning districts with an Industry classification, and would have parking requirements similar to a “wholesale business and storage” use and no explicit requirement for loading or bicycle parking facilities.
- Establishing the “New Street Overlay District” over a portion of the Industry A-1 (IA-1) district abutting Danehy Park, mainly to allow the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to be increased to 3.0 by Planning Board special permit for a self storage facility.

Planning and Zoning Considerations

Area of Rezoning

The proposed New Street Overlay District, as depicted on the map attached to the petition, is a portion of the IA-1 district that abuts Danehy Park. The petitioners appear to own all affected lots. The IA-1 district allows residential, institutional, office, laboratory, and limited light industrial and retail uses, with a height limit of 45 feet and a higher FAR allowed for residential uses (1.50) than non-residential (1.25). The current uses in the proposed overlay district include a fitness studio, auto repair shop, rental car agency, restaurant, and dance studio. The IA-1 district as a whole is characterized by surface parking and low-scale buildings containing a variety of non-residential uses. In the past decade, two larger-scale multifamily residential buildings have been permitted on former commercial sites, one of which has been completed. The character of the area has been evolving to a more mixed-use character since Danehy Park, formerly a City landfill, was created in the 1990s.

The proposed district is within the study area for the Envision Alewife planning process, which is expected to be completed this year. While the recommendations are not finalized, the study anticipates continued growth of residential uses in this portion of the area, with amenities such as ground-floor retail and improved public connections.

The key objective that has emerged is to create an identity and sense of place for the whole Alewife District in the following ways:

- Better integrate the district with the rest of the city through new walking and biking paths, streets, and open spaces.
- Ensure that both new development and existing infrastructure, neighborhoods, and community resources are prepared for climate change, in particular the challenges of flooding and heat.
- Encourage forms of development, a mix of uses, and a range of improvements that will facilitate and encourage walking, biking, and transit use and reduce the growth of vehicular trips.
- Ensure that new development benefits the adjacent residential neighborhoods by introducing new amenities and services and creating neighborhood destinations.

The petition includes special permit criteria for approving the increased FAR for a self storage facility, including enhancements and benefits to the use of Danehy Park, sustainability elements of the building, and affordable short-term storage for low income households. It would be helpful to learn more about specific measures that could be taken to meet these criteria, along with other Alewife planning objectives, within the area of the proposed rezoning.

Self Storage Facilities

Storage buildings that rent space for personal use have become prevalent types of new development across the country in recent years, but they have not been built recently in Cambridge. There are some older buildings that serve a similar function, including Cambridge Self Storage on Concord Avenue (close to the area of proposed rezoning), and the U-Haul near Central Square.

The Zoning Ordinance currently classifies storage buildings as “wholesale business and storage in roofed structure” (4.37-j.) or “storage warehouse, cold storage plant, storage building” (4.37-k.), neither of which have an explicit definition. Both categories of use are allowed in Industry-zoned districts, except in the former case a special permit from the BZA is required in IA-1 and IA-2. There is no proposed definition for “self storage facility” and so it is not immediately apparent how it would be distinct from other types of storage buildings.

The petition proposes similar parking requirements to other types of storage buildings, and incorporates language indicating that the special permit granting authority would determine loading and bicycle parking requirements on a case-by-case basis. However, under the proposal, the use would be allowed as-of-right except where a special permit is being sought for increased FAR in the New Street Overlay District, so the requirements would be undefined in an as-of-right scenario. In current zoning, storage buildings are included in “Loading Category A,” requiring one loading bay for a facility with at least 5,000 square feet of GFA, a second bay for a facility with at least 40,000 square feet, and an additional bay for every additional 50,000. Bicycle parking for other types of storage facilities are required at rates of 0.08 long-term spaces and 0.06 short-term spaces per 1,000 square feet of GFA.

Incentivizing Self Storage Facilities on New Street

Because storage facilities have not been identified or discussed through any of the city's planning efforts to date, and have not been considered in planning for the Alewife / New Street area, it is difficult to assess whether it is desirable to significantly increase the allowed density for such a use.

The main benefit of this use would be to provide an amenity to area residents with smaller living areas who need flexible storage space. Regarding transportation impacts, though a self storage facility might be expected to generate fewer overall trips than other non-residential uses (more specific information would be needed for the Planning Board and staff to fully assess transportation impacts), those trips might predominantly favor personal automobile use and provide few amenities to pedestrians, bicyclists, or transit users, which are prioritized in the Envision Alewife planning. Regarding sustainability, more information would be needed to evaluate expectations for energy use, renewable energy generation and/or distribution, flood protection measures, and urban heat island effects.

There are also many urban design issues to be considered. A self storage building typically does not provide activation or transparency along the streetscape in the same way as a residential or commercial use, which is one of the Envision Alewife planning objectives. The proposed increase in density would also affect built form. In IA-1, there is a 45-foot height limit and no required setbacks for non-residential uses, except where a lot abuts a residential or open space use or district (there is a required formula setback based on the height and length of the façade, which may be reduced to 10 feet by the Planning Board). A building with 3.0 FAR would likely have 3 or 4 stories with a footprint occupying most of the lot; if there is a lower floor-to-floor height for a self storage facility, there could be more stories with a smaller footprint. Site design features such as open space, permeability, landscaping, vegetation, and treatment of parking and loading are also potential concerns, as no standards are proposed.

Questions for Further Consideration

Based on the above issues, the following questions may help guide future consideration:

- How is a “self storage facility” defined, and how is it distinct from other indoor storage uses currently listed in the Zoning Ordinance?
- What is the anticipated demand for a self storage facility, and who are the users that will benefit?
- What are the anticipated transportation patterns of a self storage facility? Will there be benefits for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-auto users?
- How will the loading and bicycle parking requirements be determined in cases where a self storage facility is established as-of-right?
- What is the expected urban form of a self storage facility at an FAR of 3.0 and height of 45 feet?
- How will a self storage facility address other urban design objectives such as street-level activation, open space, landscaping, transparency, sustainable design, and overall urban character?
- How does the petitioner anticipate providing public benefits that are suggested in the proposed special permit criteria and the Envision Alewife planning to date?