



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff

Date: May 5, 2021

Re: **Missing Middle Housing Zoning Amendments (Fuller, et al.)**

Update

Planning Board

The Planning Board held a hearing on this petition on March 30, 2021. The Board did not vote on a recommendation, but at the conclusion of that hearing directed CDD staff to draft a report summarizing Board members' comments for further review and discussion by the Board. That draft report is attached.

Ordinance Committee

After the Planning Board hearing, the Ordinance Committee held its hearing on April 8, 2021. The Ordinance Committee also did not make a recommendation, but discussed a number of issues and asked that the Planning Board be updated on their discussion. A formal Committee Report has not yet been provided, but CDD staff were present and can discuss further at the Planning Board's continued hearing on May 11. The following are some of the major topics discussed:

- Avoiding an outcome of predominantly larger, more expensive units;
- Limiting the number of units that could be built under the expanded zoning;
- Including provisions for affordability (affordable homeownership and middle-income housing were specific suggestions);
- Concerns about reduced green space and tree canopy;
- Ensuring that removal of parking requirements results in green space.

Petitioners

The Petitioners have recently submitted a set of potential amendments to the Petition for consideration by the Board. CDD staff have met with the Petitioners but have not prepared any additional written information related to the proposed changes at this time. Staff will be available to answer questions from the Board on May 11.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: **DRAFT REPORT – May 5, 2021**

Subject: Missing Middle Housing (Fuller, et al.) Zoning Petition

Recommendation: **DRAFT - TO BE DETERMINED**

DRAFT – FOR PLANNING BOARD REVIEW

On March 30, 2021, the Planning Board (the “Board”) held a public hearing to discuss the Missing Middle Housing Zoning Amendments (Fuller, et al.) Zoning Petition (the “Petition”). Representatives of A Better Cambridge, a housing advocacy group, presented the Petition at the hearing. Staff from the City’s Community Development Department (CDD) also attended the hearing and answered questions from the Board.

The Petition seeks to allow multifamily housing in all zoning districts in Cambridge and to reduce barriers in the Zoning Ordinance to increasing the number of dwelling units that can be constructed on a parcel. To accomplish this, the Petition proposes consolidating the Residence A-1, Residence A-2, Residence B, Residence C, and Residence C-1 Districts into a new zoning district, Residence N, which would allow the same range of uses as Residence C and C-1, including single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, and multifamily dwellings. The Petition also proposes revised dimensional standards for Residence N that would be more permissive than for any of the current districts that it would encapsulate. In addition to changes specific to the proposed Residence N District, the Petition would eliminate the minimum lot size and lot width requirements in all residential districts, and eliminate the minimum requirements for off-street parking accessory to any nontransient residential use in all zoning districts.

Following a presentation by the Petitioners, Board members posed a number of questions to the Petitioners and City staff, and discussed the merits of the Petition. **At the conclusion of the March 30, 2021 hearing, the Board did not vote to make a recommendation, but requested that CDD staff draft a report summarizing the comments made by Board members, to be reviewed by the Board at a future hearing prior to taking a vote.**

The following is a summary of comments made by Board members:

- All Board members recognized the importance of encouraging a diversity of housing typologies in Cambridge, including those that reflect the existing development patterns in the city.
- Many, but not all, members of the Board expressed support for allowing multifamily residential uses in all zoning districts with the appropriate dimensional controls. Some

Board members noted the history of zoning as a tool of race and class exclusion, and questioned why the City should continue to make multifamily housing illegal in many areas given this legacy of discrimination. Some Board members were more comfortable allowing up to three-family residential uses citywide but were concerned about larger buildings.

- Some Board members questioned how well the Petition aligns with the City’s policy and planning objectives. They noted that attention should be paid to studying what we actually need and how to get it. They noted that the scale of change proposed by the Petition requires careful measuring. Other members noted that studies are not always conclusive and can delay action.
- Some Board members were concerned that the outcome of implementing the amendments identified in the Petition would not meet the goals of the Petition. Some Board members were unclear about what the goals of the Petition are. Some Board members believed that the proposal focused more on building size than housing affordability. Others noted that the Petitioners appeared to be interested in reducing the amount of nonconforming buildings and uses.
- Some Board members raised concerns regarding the limited ability for the Petition to provide middle-income housing given the economic realities of the real estate market in Cambridge, and that without affordability restrictions it would likely result in higher-priced market-rate housing. They noted that the creation of additional units of housing could end up satisfying demand from higher-income housing seekers, rather than the middle-income housing seekers that the Petition attempts to target.
- Some Board members raised concerns about whether the proposed dimensional requirements were appropriate. In particular, some Board members noted that the Petition could result in tree loss and rear yard infill development that impacts adjacent residents.
- Some Board members suggested that multifamily residential uses could be allowed citywide by special permit in parallel with a time-constrained study process that analyzes the effect of allowing such uses as-of-right. Other Board members made the counterpoint that the special permit requirement would create additional regulatory hurdles that detract from the production of housing.
- Some Board members were comfortable with eliminating minimum parking requirements, but requested further analysis. Others were concerned about how such an action could impact parking availability in the city.
- Some Board members also raised concerns about the impact of the Petition on the effectiveness of the recently adopted Affordable Housing Overlay, as noted in the CDD memo.

Finally, some Board members expressed that there was too much uncertainty about the unintended consequences of the Petition and suggested that the City conduct a targeted analysis to study the impacts and effects of changing the Zoning Ordinance in these ways. Other Board members noted that the status quo promotes indignity and injustice, which makes action worthwhile even if it is not possible to anticipate the outcomes of that action. These Board

members noted that not acting is as much a decision as doing something, because existing zoning regulations have an impact.

DRAFT - FOR PLANNING BOARD REVIEW