



ALEWIFE ZONING WORKING GROUP

MEETING NOTES



Wednesday, June 29, 2022,

6 – 8:30pm

Virtual Meeting

Attendance

Working Group Members:

Doug Brown, John Chun, Lizzie Feigunbaum, Jennifer Gilbert, Eric Grunebaum, Suhas Kodali, Mike Nakagawa, Ann Stewart, Ann Tennis, Jane Carbone, Chris Chandor, Kelvin Moses, Diana Marsh

City of Cambridge Staff:

Iram Farooq, Melissa Peters, Jeff Roberts, Drew Kane, Daniel Messplay, Erik Thorkildsen

Meeting Overview

The Alewife Zoning Working Group convened for their first meeting.

The purpose and objectives of the meeting were as follows:

Purpose

- Introduce members and discuss role of working group
- Provide an overview of the Alewife District Plan and role of zoning

Objectives

- Discuss a proposed schedule and workplan
- Ensure common understanding of Alewife District Plan’s goals
- Share perspectives and discuss what we’ve learned since completing the Alewife District Plan

Introductions and Working Group Overview

Staff and working group members introduced themselves and reviewed the charge of the committee – to recommend new zoning for adoption based on the community’s planning and urban design priorities; and incorporate lessons learned from zoning and development review processes over the past few years since the completion of the Alewife District Plan.

The proposed schedule and workplan was shared with the committee.

No.	Date	Meeting Topic	Desired Outcomes
1	June 29	Overview of Alewife District Plan (ADP); Zoning Primer	Discuss what we’ve learned since completion of the Alewife District Plan
2	Aug 10	ADP’s Zoning Recommendations and Urban Design Guidelines Overview	Understand plan’s zoning recommendations and discuss specific zoning strategies for

		Zoning Deep Dive: Type and Amount of Development, Urban Form	desired land use and urban design
3	Sept 14	Zoning Deep Dive: Transportation, Open Space, and Community Facilities	Discuss specific zoning strategies for critical infrastructure and community needs
4	Oct 12	Draft Zoning Recommendations	Draft comprehensive set of zoning recommendations
5	Nov 9	Updated Zoning Recommendations	Refine zoning recommendations
6	Dec 14	Final Zoning Recommendations	Finalize zoning recommendations

Working group members introduced themselves and answered the question – what do they hope to get out of this process? The following is a summary of their responses.

- Ann Tennis – Neighborhood Resident, Chair of Cambridge Highlands Neighborhood Association
 - She would like to work with developers, neighborhood, and city to facilitate a vibrant new neighborhood.
- Kelvin Moses - Senior VP - Healthpeak Properties
 - Would like to listen and contribute.
 - Understands the area is a significant priority for the city and is important to building a sense of place.
 - Wants a recommendation to encourage mixed use and activate neighborhood for years ahead.
- Eric Grunebaum – North Cambridge Resident
 - Lives off Rindge - lifelong resident.
 - Cofounder of Friends of Jerry's Pond and Alewife Reservation. He was on the Envision Alewife Working Group.
 - Wants to fix some of the systemic challenges such as transit and connectivity in Alewife.
 - Also concerned about stormwater and sewage, housing, and energy, as well.
- Diana Marsh - Fayerweather School rep
 - Feels the neighborhood is disconnected
 - She is also an urban planner and designer
 - She would like to help make a real neighborhood out of Alewife and guide the change
- Suhas Kodali – North Cambridge Resident
 - Support points made by his fellow working group members
- John Chun – Cambridge Highlands Residents
 - Loomis Street
 - Would like to promote balanced development in Alewife. Wants to create a livable place.
- Jane Carbone – Homeowners Rehabilitation, Inc.
 - Wants a plan for the community that is very diverse
 - Concerned about Alewife looking like a master-planned “mini-mall.”

- Jennifer Gilbert – North Cambridge Residents
 - Works in affordable housing development
 - She was part of the Envision Alewife Working Group process
 - Felt like Alewife was "unfinished business"
 - Would like to make sure that the plan leads towards developing something positive for the neighborhood.
 - Wants to create a neighborhood that people would like to see.
 - Would like more affordable housing and climate responsive landscape.
- Chris Chandor – The Davis Companies
 - Would like to see the neighborhood as a destination for everyone
- Doug Brown – West Cambridge Resident
 - Involved in Alewife planning and zoning for a decade
 - Served on the Envision Alewife Working Group
 - Co-chair of CRZTF (Climate Resilience Zoning Task Force)
 - Also part of Friends of the Greenway (Watertown greenway)
 - Wants there to be reasons to go to Alewife and ways to get there
 - Challenge to get to destinations
 - Would like to move forward on things that are agreed upon
- Mike Nakagawa – North Cambridge Resident
 - Alewife Neighbors and Fresh Pond Alliance
 - Part of CRZTF and Envision working group
 - Has been working with IQHQ and Conservation Commission on the IQHQ plan
 - Feels like it has been a good outcome at IQHQ
 - Alewife is a complex area. It was the only geographical working group. Pilot for CCPR. Shows significance of Alewife to Cambridge.
- Lizzie Feigenbaum – Cambridge Highlands Resident
 - Live in Cambridge since she was 10
 - Involved since DCR plan for Blair Pond
 - She is Director of Early Childhood Services for Riverside Community Care
 - Interested in process because she's interested in people's health and well-being
 - Wants to foster this in the Alewife plan
- Ann Stewart – Cambridge Highlands Resident
 - Would like to see results of collaboration into a plan that everyone can be proud of
 - Alewife is an environmentally sensitive area.
 - Working group means there should be collaboration and successful outcomes

Alewife District Plan Overview

Melissa Peters presented an overview of the Alewife District Plan (slides [here](#)); followed by working group member discussion.

- Ann Tennis
 - Highlands is not against development, never have been. Wants to work with developers/development to have an agreeable outcome.
 - Would like to have an opportunity to become a master planned area
 - Wants a neighborhood for young kids, parks, retirees, families
 - Would like an urban design plan

- Mike Nakagawa
 - Wants to look at previous results of Alewife plans and see where they are in areas of future flooding
 - Really need to focus on future flooding scenarios when we are designating areas for residential uses.
 - Based on recent land acquisitions there will be high paying jobs in Alewife
 - Need to retain low-barrier-to-entry jobs, not just allow them
 - Learn from and not repeat mistakes of the last zoning
- Suhas Kodali
 - Recent plans prioritized lower amount of residential. But feels that residential should be higher now.
 - District had good ideas, but the actual implementation seemed far off for many of them, such as the Fresh Pond Shopping area
- Eric Grunebaum
 - Major issues have gotten worse since 2019, unfortunately
 - Transit, connectivity, water issues and housing need to be addressed
 - Transit - bridge and rail stop are both critical to success of Alewife
 - Would work to serve current and future residents
 - Feels like private and public capital, as well as citizen lobbying could make a station happen
 - There is a rail line right there. Could expand housing opportunities and reduce traffic
 - Would also be beneficial for folks commuting to Alewife, not just Cambridge residents
 - Would like to meet in person
- Diana Marsh
 - Fayerweather School uses the parks in the neighborhoods - students would like to have better access and walkability.
 - Concerned lab space and biotech are so lucrative that developers would rather build that than housing. Worried that it will become a neighborhood of labs
 - What about vertical mix of uses?
- Lizzie Feigenbaum
 - Feels like there are a lot of competing pressures
 - Quotes Iram about building infrastructure first, such as the bridge across the tracks or open space to then drive development and a creation of a neighborhood.
 - Need a long-term strategy for infrastructure investments
 - Like streets and sidewalks plan
 - Doesn't want an ad-hoc one-by-one approach
 - Need to look at Alewife as a system
 - Climate change is essential for us to focus on. It needs to be a primary driver for how this area develops in the future
 - Stormwater overflow is an issue. Need to address the sewer system
- Kelvin Moses
 - Feels like commercial development will help support and create open space, as well as infrastructure
 - Need to allow for commercial uses to achieve many of the important elements of planning
 - Affordable housing in the area is critical, as well
- John Chun
 - Would like to know how we direct our desired outcome into zoning
 - Would like to see it incorporate initiatives of Net Zero Action Plan (NZAP)
 - Zoning should only allow developments that can meet requirement of NZAP

- Will expect energy demand to rise with additional development. This will require potentially a new substation to be built
- Jane Carbone
 - Also wants NZAP to be incorporated
 - Need services for families nearby, not just restaurants
 - Eversource will be a huge gameplayer as we try to electrify
 - Bus line along Concord Ave is critical and they are considering eliminating one of them
- Doug Brown
 - Feels like incentives have not worked and that this problem is bigger than zoning
 - There are not significant infrastructure investments that zoning cannot accomplish
 - The plan says that the bridge cannot be built without zoning passing - we need to stop talking about what can happen in Alewife and get something done.
 - With climate change this situation will only get worse
 - How do we get there to make this a neighborhood?
 - Perhaps we do need to start with zoning, but we need to do more eventually. Need to start with what we agree on.
- Eric Grunebaum
 - Feels like big property owners could/should contribute to the creation of the bridge just like corporations and universities are doing on the Worcester line in Boston
 - Feels like there should be money put into a trust fund to be used for funding the bridge
- Chris Chandor
 - Likes that the goals are aligned between residents and property owners
 - On-board with need for the pedestrian bridge
 - Agrees that infrastructure investments are needed, such as bridge and electrification
 - Voluntarily contributed to development of the pedestrian bridge and train station, potentially
 - Also wants a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood
- Doug Brown
 - Alewife and Cambridge are “money making machines”
 - Wants the city to be more transparent about where the money is going for future investments
- Mike Nakagawa
 - Feels like the City should take the lead on the infrastructure and then require the property owners to compensate for the cost through fees.
 - The City would be collecting money from developers who need to pay into fund
 - City generally seems to require businesses to build infrastructure
- Suhas Kodali
 - Seems like there has been a lot of talk but no improvements to Alewife, particularly the pedestrian bridge.
 - Recognizes that this is a zoning plan, but feels like there needs to be an action plan for infrastructure
 - Seems like a modest increase in FAR and should be higher if this is a 30-year plan. Feels like we should go bigger and bolder.

Zoning Overview

Jeff Roberts presented an overview of zoning and discussed applicable zoning districts in Alewife (slides [here](#)); followed by working group member discussion.

- Eric Grunebaum
 - Seems like a lot of tools in zoning. When does the Area Plan become relevant?
 - What outcomes are desired and does zoning enable those outcomes?

- Mike Nakagawa
 - Can fees for permits be part of zoning?
 - Roof top mechanicals are exempt from height requirements. Can we limit the heights of them?
 - Concern that special permits have been used for flexibility. We should be careful how those are used
 - We should be thinking about what the desired outcome should be and then see how zoning can be applied. Wants the plan done first and then see how zoning can help achieve that.
- Jeff Roberts:
 - Fees aren't really regulated through zoning
 - A nexus needs to be established between what is being built and what is needed or should be compensated for
 - Worth talking about rooftop mechanicals

Public Comment

- James Williamson
 - Lives in Jefferson Park; it's scheduled for demolition now
 - Concerns
 - Still trying to get clear on what is in the districts and what is not
 - Stretch along Rindge Ave will be impacted by any changes in zoning
 - It will impact the Fresh Pond Apartments - feels like this area is forgotten and ignored
 - There is very little retail in the area, and it is needed
 - People need to walk over the bridge to get to fresh pond mall and it's a dangerous walk
- Joe Poirier
 - North Cambridge resident
 - Worked in quad for many years
 - Two things to consider
 - Parking requirements - important for whatever zoning is developed for the area. Need to reduce amount of parking.
 - Balance of high-paying jobs and homes with more affordable homes. Need affordability

Next Steps

Group members discussed whether these meetings should be in-person or via Zoom. There was a mix of opinions.

- Jennifer Gilbert
 - Really wants a walking tour of the neighborhood to help ground the discussion.
- Kelvin Moses
 - Also, wants to do a walking tour with the group
 - Wants an opportunity earlier on to convene in the quad. It would be a disservice to the plan to not do that.
- Chris Chandor
 - Would be happy to host an event at 10 Wilson Road
 - Can use Kendall Café
- Melissa Peters:
 - Happy to do a walking tour prior to the next meeting
 - Could be a more informal and interim gathering
- Mike Nakagawa
 - Worried about large crowds for a couple meetings
 - Could we do zoom meetings, too?

- Jennifer Gilbert
 - Would advocate for doing these meetings via Zoom
- Diana Marsh
 - Likes the idea of meeting outside for both walking tour and possibly normal meetings

Summary

- The working group supported the idea of a walking group tour in Alewife in July.
- They suggested that a mix of in-person and Zoom meetings makes sense and can be adjusted along the way.
- The next meeting is scheduled for August 10, 2022, at 6pm.