



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager
From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Date: September 18, 2024
Subject: Awaiting Report 2024 #117 dated September 16, 2024, regarding draft zoning language based on the proposal discussed at the Housing Committee to eliminate exclusionary zoning and allow up to six stories of multifamily housing in all residential districts

In response to Policy Order 2024 #117 and based on discussions of the Housing Committee over the course of the past several months, we have attached a draft set of zoning changes that would enact the objectives of this policy order.

GOALS

The proposed changes are intended to meet the goals discussed at the Housing Committee:

1. Allow multifamily housing development equitably in residential areas throughout Cambridge
2. Allow more height and density for multifamily housing than currently permitted, with a focus on getting more inclusionary housing units
3. Reduce zoning barriers that add time and cost to multifamily housing
4. Continue support for 100% affordable housing development

DRAFT ZONING

The draft zoning text would reform the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance to facilitate multifamily housing by making the following changes to current zoning requirements.

1. Allow multifamily housing development equitably in Cambridge neighborhoods throughout the city

- Eliminate zoning districts that prohibit multifamily housing (Residence A-1, A-2, and B) and rezone neighborhoods across the city uniformly to Residence C-1 (see attached maps)
- Allow all types of residential use, including multifamily, as-of-right across all zoning districts except Open Space

2. Allow more height and density for multifamily housing than currently permitted, with a focus on getting more inclusionary housing units

- Remove standards that have an exclusionary impact on housing development, including minimum lot area and width and minimum lot area per dwelling unit
- Reform housing standards to be based on building height and stories above grade, not limited by floor area ratio (FAR) standards

- Amend district standards so that housing of up to 6 stories is permissible in all zoning districts
- Reduce front setback requirements to 10, 5, or zero feet depending on the district, and remove required side and rear yard setbacks for housing
- Retain minimum open space ratios, but revise standards so that permeable, green, and publicly beneficial open space can contribute to requirements in addition to private open space

3. Reduce other zoning barriers that add time and cost to multifamily housing

- Remove special permit requirements for townhouse and multifamily development, as well as additional dimensional standards that limit townhouse development
- Increase the threshold for Project Review Special Permits from 50,000 square feet to 75,000 square feet of Gross Floor Area for housing, and require a Planning Board Advisory Consultation (similar to the Affordable Housing Overlay) for housing over 50,000 square feet

4. Continue to support 100% affordable housing development

- Amend the Affordable Housing Overlay to remove requirements that would not apply to comparable housing development under normal zoning regulations
- Incorporate some design standards from the Affordable Housing Overlay into the design standards for all development where they aren't already included

The draft zoning changes are split into two parts that are complementary and intended to be advanced simultaneously as two separate zoning petitions, if desired by the Council. The first part contains zoning changes that we believe, after consulting with the Law Department, can be adopted by a simple majority vote of the Council pursuant to G.L. c.40A, s.5, which was amended by the "Housing Choice" legislation enacted by the state in 2021. The second part contains zoning changes that may not meet the criteria for a simple majority vote under Housing Choice and require a two-thirds vote pursuant to G.L. c.40A, s.5.

In addition to providing the draft zoning text, policy order 2024 #117 also asks City staff to analyze the development impact of two alternative zoning scenarios. This is a significant work effort and staff are now starting work on scoping the analysis. Given the longer timeline needed for this work, we will aim to provide the requested information to the City Council in time for discussion at the initial public hearing on this draft zoning petition at the Ordinance Committee.