



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026-218
IN CITY COUNCIL
August 3, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached communication from Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, regarding edits to the Massachusetts Avenue Active Use Zoning Petition.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: July 24, 2026

Re: **Revised Massachusetts Avenue Active Use Zoning Petition**

We are pleased to transmit the attached revised Massachusetts Avenue Active Use Zoning Petition for the Council's consideration. This revision comes at the end of the required public hearing phase for the petition, which included a hearing at the Planning Board on June 2, 2026, and two meetings of the Ordinance Committee on June 16 and July 7, 2026. The Planning Board voted to forward a report with no recommendation to the City Council, which was transmitted on June 22, 2026. The revisions reflect the changes discussed and approved by the Ordinance Committee at its meeting on July 7, 2026.

Summary of Revisions

- Revised Zoning Map and Map Description to maintain existing MAS-12 zoning designation north of Porter Square, requiring ground story active uses in new buildings taller than 8 stories above grade.
- No ordinance text amendments needed.

Next Steps

If the City Council chooses to accept the proposed changes, it can vote to amend the petition by substitution before passing it to a second reading at the August 3, 2026 meeting, which would allow the Council to take final action on September 14, 2026. The petition will expire on September 14, 2026.

Petition: To amend the Zoning Map and Article 17.000 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance as follows with the intent of strengthening active use requirements on North Mass Ave.

Amendments to the Zoning Map.

See attached Zoning Map and descriptive text.

Amendments to Article 17.000.

Amend Section 17.804.2.1 to read as follows:

- 17.804.2.1** ~~Additional Height for Ground Story Active Uses. The following limitations shall apply in addition to the Table of Height Limitations below: As set forth in the Table of Height Limitations, greater height shall be permitted for portions of buildings containing Residential Uses if the Ground Story is occupied by one or more Active Uses, as defined in Section 17.803.3, comprising at least 60% of the interior portion of the Ground Story that is within 50 feet of a Primary Street.~~
- (a) ~~On lots abutting one or more Primary Streets in a MAS-12A or MAS-18 district, residential uses shall be limited to 4 stories above grade and 45 feet above grade if the Ground Story is not occupied by one or more Active Uses, as defined in Section 17.803.3, comprising at least 60% of the interior portion of the Ground Story that is within 50 feet of a Primary Street.~~
 - (b) ~~On lots abutting one or more Primary Streets in a MAS-12 district, residential uses shall be limited to 8 stories above grade and 100 feet above grade if the Ground Story is not occupied by one or more Active Uses, as defined in Section 17.803.3, comprising at least 60% of the interior portion of the Ground Story that is within 50 feet of a Primary Street.~~
 - (c) ~~Upon granting a special permit, the Planning Board may approve modifications to the Active Use floor area and location standards in paragraphs (a) and (b) above to permit residential heights up to those set forth in the Table of Height Limitations if the Board finds that all of the following criteria are met in addition to those in Section 17.807.2 and may impose conditions to ensure ongoing conformance:~~
 - ~~(i) Active Uses shall be provided in a manner that generally meets the intent of the requirement to provide for reasonably continuous active ground floor frontage along the Primary Street, and~~
 - ~~(ii) the total floor area of required Active Uses is not substantially reduced, and~~
 - ~~(iii) the modifications directly respond to unique site-specific conditions that make the application of paragraphs (a) or (b) infeasible.~~
 - (d) ~~Lots that do not directly abut a Primary Street shall not be subject to the additional limitations of paragraphs (a) and (b) above; however, (i) within 50 feet of the street line of a Primary Street, the permitted residential heights shall not exceed the applicable limitations set forth in paragraphs (a) and (b) above, and (ii) the limitations set forth in paragraphs (a) and (b) above shall apply to the entire area of any lot that abuts a Primary Street on April 27, 2026, including any lots or portions of~~

lots that are later subdivided so that they no longer abut a Primary Street.

(e) The additional limitations of this Section shall not apply to an AHO Project.

Amend Section 17.804.3 to read as follows:

17.804.3 Table of Height Limitations

	MAS-6	MAS-12	MAS-12A	MAS-18
Non-Residential Uses (Section 4.30 except 4.31 a-j. & 4.33.a)	45 feet and 4 stories above grade	45 feet and 4 stories above grade	45 feet and 4 stories above grade	45 feet and 4 stories above grade
Non-Residential Uses (Section 4.30 except 4.31 a-j. & 4.33.a) within the PUD-POR District	55 feet and 5 stories above grade	55 feet and 5 stories above grade	55 feet and 5 stories above grade	55 feet and 5 stories above grade
Institutional Uses (Section 4.33) except Religious Purposes (Section 4.33.a) within an Institutional Use Overlay District	60 feet and 6 stories above grade	60 feet and 6 stories above grade	60 feet and 6 stories above grade	60 feet and 6 stories above grade
Residential Uses (Section 4.31 a-j.)	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	100 feet and 8 stories above grade	45 feet and 4 stories above grade	45 feet and 4 stories above grade
Religious Purposes Uses (Section 4.33.a)	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	100 feet and 8 stories above grade	100 feet and 8 stories above grade	100 feet and 8 stories above grade
Residential Uses (Section 4.31 a-j.) with Ground-Story Active Uses (Section 17.803.3)	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade
Residential Uses with a Porter Square PUD Special Permit (Section 17.808)	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade	220 feet and 18 stories above grade

Description of proposed district boundaries based on the maps submitted with petition materials for the August 3rd, 2026 City Council Meeting:

Massachusetts Avenue Active Uses

MAS-12A District – Legal Description

Modify an existing Massachusetts Avenue-12A (MAS-12A) district on the Zoning Map of the City of Cambridge with the following new boundaries:

Beginning at the northernmost point of the existing MAS-18/PUD-POR District where it meets the street centerline of Massachusetts Avenue, and proceeding in a southeasterly direction along the boundary of the MAS-18/PUD-POR District; thence continuing along the MAS-18/PUD-POR boundary to the intersection of the street centerline of Roseland Street; thence turning in an easterly direction and proceeding along the southern boundary of the MAS-18/PUD-POR District to the intersection of with the C-1 District boundary within the Roseland Street right-of-way; thence turning in a southerly direction and proceeding along the C-1 District boundary to the intersection with the southern boundary of the C-1 District and the northern boundary of the C-2A District; thence continuing in a southerly direction along the western boundary of the C-2A District to the intersection of the southern boundary of the C-2A District and the northern boundary of the C-3 District within the Everett Street right-of-way; thence turning in a westerly direction and proceeding along the boundary of the C-3 District to the intersection with the eastern boundary of the C-2 District within the Chauncy Street right-of-way; thence turning in a northerly direction along the eastern boundary of the C-2 District to the intersection with the southern boundary of the C-1 District; thence continuing in a northerly direction along the eastern boundary of the C-1 District to the intersection with the southern boundary of the C-2 District within the Linnaean Street right-of-way; thence continuing in a northerly direction and proceeding along the eastern boundary of the C-2 District to the intersection with the boundary of the C-1 District within the Lancaster Street right-of-way; thence continuing in a northerly direction along the eastern boundary of the C-1 District to the southern boundary of the C-2 District; thence turning in an easterly direction and proceeding along the boundary of the C-2 District to the intersection with the boundary of the PUD-POR District within the Arlington Street right-of-way; thence turning in an westerly direction and proceeding along the boundary of PUD-POR District to the point of beginning.

Massachusetts Avenue Districts

Proposed Changes for Active Use Amendment

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Massachusetts Avenue Districts

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