



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## Community Development Department

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## MEMORANDUM

To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

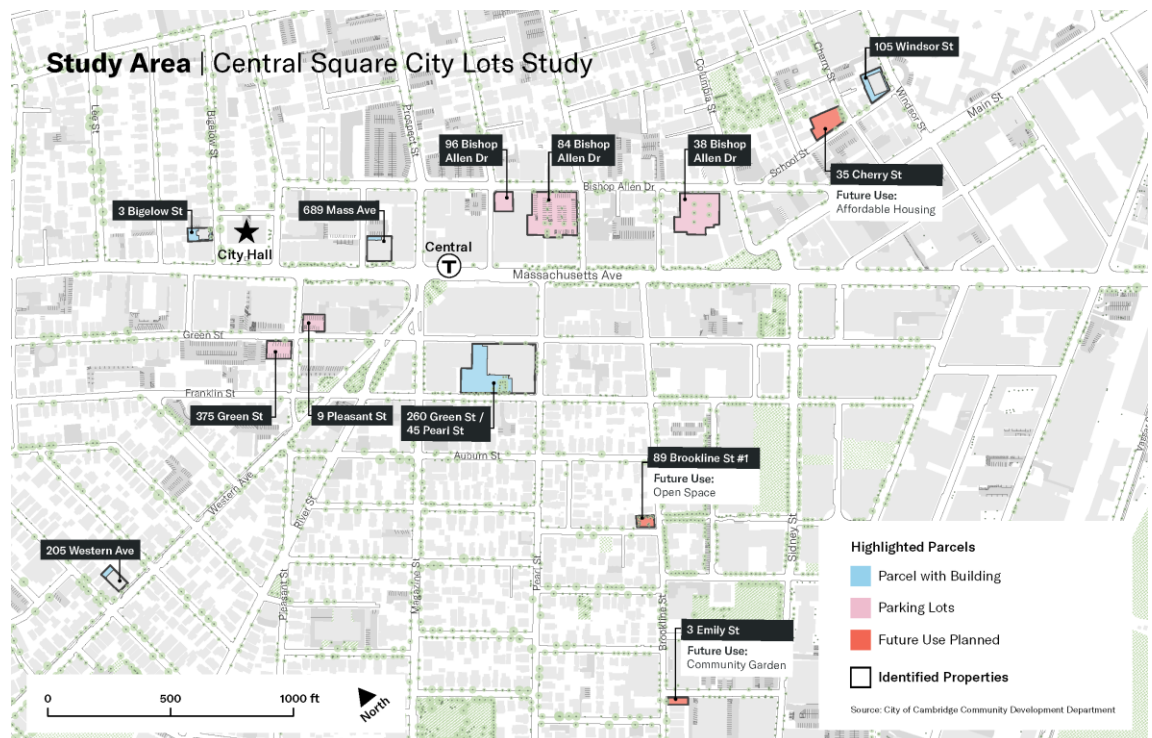
From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: August 3, 2023

Subject: Project Update: Central Square Municipal Property Needs Assessment and Planning Study

The Community Development Department (CDD), in collaboration with other City departments and the Cambridge community, is working on a municipal property needs assessment and planning study for city-owned properties in Central Square. As noted in our response to policy orders provided in November 2022, there are significant demands on City-owned properties. These include affordable housing, public gathering space, infrastructure needs, arts and cultural amenities, human services space, community facilities, and municipal functions and municipal office space. The purpose of this study is to understand the full range of needs to meet the City's programmatic and service goals and analyze how existing municipal properties and facilities can accommodate those needs.

The majority of underdeveloped and/or underutilized municipal properties are located in Central Square and include both buildings and vacant lots, including land. Some, such as 35 Cherry Street, with planned future uses; others have greater flexibility. The study will focus on properties that could be redeveloped for different or greater intensity of uses. The map below identifies the area for the needs assessment and planning study (the Project), including the focus properties.



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## **Project Scope and Progress**

The City hired Agency Landscape + Planning, a planning and design firm based in Cambridge, to assist with this study. Together with interdepartmental staff led by CDD, the team is scoped with assessing and recommending future uses of municipal properties as described below:

### ***1. Research and Analysis***

In June, the team started conducting research on the municipal properties. Research includes a review of the site history, current building use and conditions, and applicable zoning and other land use controls. The team also looked at existing plans and studies, including Envision Cambridge, Central Square Planning Study, Resilient Cambridge, the Open Space Needs Assessment, report of the Mayor's Arts Task Force, Addressing Homelessness in Cambridge report, and the Red Ribbon Commission Report to understand the wide range of district, neighborhood and citywide needs.

The team also conducted an inventory of existing parking and utilization. Specifically, the team conducted parking utilization surveys on different days and at different times of day to assess current demand. This will be used to understand how present and future parking needs can be met in conjunction with future redevelopment of surface parking lots.

### ***2. Needs Assessment and Goal Setting***

The planning team also conducted detailed interviews with City staff familiar with the focus properties and Central Square projects in the pipeline to gather detailed information about their current use, condition, and potential opportunities and challenges. The interviewees include staff from CDD, Public Works, Capital Buildings, Traffic, Parking, and Transportation, Department of Human Services Programs, Cambridge Public Library, the City Manager's Office, and the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority.

The team is currently finalizing its community engagement plan. Community engagement will commence in late summer and run through the fall. Community engagement is intended to ensure that community members are updated and included to meaningfully inform the needs assessment, goals, and recommendations for municipal properties. Engagement will focus on hearing from historically excluded, underserved, and underrepresented communities. The team will partner with CDD's Community Engagement Team (CET) to reach out to underheard communities in Cambridge and the diverse people who live, work, visit, worship, and learn in Central Square. This will include the American-born Black community, immigrant communities, seniors, youth, and other underheard communities. The following is an overview of the plan's different engagement strategies:

- Community meetings and workshops
- Surveying & tabling "pop-up" events;
  - Setting up a table at farmers markets, local events and festivals, community facilities such as Starlight Square, libraries, youth centers, and parks

- Online survey
- Meetings & focus groups:
  - Attending existing group meetings and creating dedicated focus groups to reach underheard communities. Appropriate groups for engagement may include but are not limited to the Central Square BID, Starlight representatives, Central Square Advisory Committee, the Community Learning Center, the Citywide Senior Center, youth centers, community-based organizations, interfaith community, and neighborhood groups
- City Council Updates
- Additional Outreach as Needed

Equitable and inclusive community engagement will give a holistic perspective on community needs, priorities, and goals. Learnings from community engagement, along with input from city staff, will inform the needs assessment and inform future redevelopment.

### 3. *Planning Recommendations*

This stage of the plan will develop recommendations for the future use of municipal properties based on analysis, needs assessment, and continued community engagement.

The team will develop concept plans and development test fits to demonstrate how desired program elements can be accommodated on existing sites and buildings. They will also identify opportunities for public realm improvements, new development, and adaptive reuse projects.

Draft recommendations will be presented to the community and City Council to receive feedback prior to a final report. At the end of the process, the team will prepare final deliverables summarizing the entire process, findings, and recommendations.

### Project Status and Working Schedule

The project is proceeding on schedule. The team has completed its first two months of work, which included project start-up and early data gathering, site analysis, and city staff interviews. The community engagement phase will start later in August and continue through the end of the project. The Project is scheduled to be completed in December 2023.

Project Phase	Month						
	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Research and Analysis							
Needs Assessment and Goal Setting							
Planning Recommendations							
City Council Updates							
Community Engagement							