Cambridge Housing Policy Debrief

- Introduction
- Background: what is zoning?
- Housing Policy Roundup
- Q&A
Volunteer group, founded in 2013

We fight for a better Cambridge - more affordable, more sustainable, more vibrant - with enough housing for everyone who wants to live or stay here

We educate the public, advocate for policies at the city (and sometimes state) levels, and participate in City Council elections

http://www.abettercambridge.org/
The Housing Crisis in Cambridge

- From 1980 to 2019, Cambridge created 45,000 jobs, but only built 13,000 homes
- There are over 21,000 people on Cambridge Housing Authority waitlists
- Over half of Cambridge residents are rent-burdened (paying >30% of income)
- Median 3BR rent in 2016 was $3500/mo - three times higher than in 1996
- Over half of Massachusetts CO2 emissions - and rising - are transportation emissions

Supply
Cambridge must build more units of housing

Stability
Cambridge must protect tenants from displacement

Subsidy
Cambridge must preserve and expand affordable housing

Sustainability
Cambridge must champion denser, transit-oriented development
Real Faces of the CHA Waiting List
How You Can Help

1. **Most important - spread the word:** share news articles, ideas, and resources with people you know, and especially with communities or groups you’re involved with.

2. **Publicly comment:** Email the City Council or Planning Board when housing issues come up. Watch for action alerts but also for lower-priority opportunities!

3. **Volunteer:** help us table, flyer, or canvass.

4. **Participate:** Attend social events, become a member, discuss policy on our Slack and Google Group, organize activities, make our community stronger
Background: zoning is the main way Cambridge blocks housing
Background: however, upzoning is slow to cause change

- **Construction is expensive** - in most cases, it’s probably not worth it

- **Property owners are idiosyncratic** - if they don’t wanna build, they don’t wanna build

- **Affordable housing requires coordinated public investment** from state, federal, and local sources including the Affordable Housing Trust
Background: changing zoning requires a detailed, lengthy process
Housing Policy Roundup

- **Parking minimums** - removed ✔
- **Linkage fee** - raised ✔
- **Alewife study** - looking good
- **Cambridge St study** - not looking good
- **Multifamily housing** - not drafted, in committee
- **AHO amendments** - drafted, in committee
- **FY24 budget funding for affordable housing** - unclear, one hearing has been held

- **And more:**
  - BZA appointments?
  - North Mass Ave study?
  - Climate resilience zoning?
  - Inclusionary tenant experiences?
  - Affordable homeownership?
  - Central Square city-owned properties?
  - The big picture?
New policy is: you can build/pay for off-street parking spaces if you want to, but you don’t have to.
Linkage Fee - raised

Table 23
Adjusted Amount of Subsidy Required Per Square Foot of Projected Non-Residential Development based on Cambridge CAHT Share

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Units</th>
<th>Low Income</th>
<th>Moderate Income</th>
<th>Middle Income</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rental Units</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Amount of Subsidy Required per SF</td>
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<td>$20.57</td>
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<td>CAHT Share of Subsidy Required (^{1/})</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>Adjusted Amount of Subsidy Required per SF</td>
<td>$14.09</td>
<td>$5.45</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>All Units</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Amount of Subsidy Required per SF</td>
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<td>43%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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<td>Adjusted Amount of Subsidy Required per SF</td>
<td>$33.34</td>
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"Linkage" fees for big developers leap upward, while smaller projects are given an exemption

By Marc Levy
Tuesday, October 18, 2022

Construction at a Cambridge side mixed-use project in East Cambridge in December. New commercial construction helps pay for affordable housing in Cambridge. (Photo: Marc Levy)
CDD is making a plan guided by a Zoning Working Group

Area is currently under-developed, and meaning change could actually come more quickly

CDD’s plan is to allow density but only if you provide “neighborhood uses” (infrastructure, library/school, open space, etc.) as judged by a Planning Board special permit process
HEALTHPKEAK ILLUSTRATIVE BUILD-OUT

- Pedestrian Connection from Blair Pond / Highlands to Quad
- Light Industrial / Neighborhood Uses at Street Edge
- Green / Public Use Roofs
- Civic / Light Industrial Uses & DPW as a Buffer
- Street Facing Public Open Space
- Multi-Use Community Space
- Commercial along tracks w/ step back from Highlands
- Additional Bike / Ped Connections
- Tree Canopy
- Pocket Parks with Street visibility
- Bike / Ped Bridge
- Street Facing Public Open Space
- Multi-Use Community Space
- Walkable / LRT / Green Streets
- Housing Proximate to Open Space
- ‘Main Street’ w/ Neighborhood Uses at Ground Floor
- Setbacks against Wheeler Street
- Redesigned Mount Auburn Outpatient Patient & Physician Parking
- Green Pathways

ELKUS MANFREDI ARCHITECTS

DECEMBER 14, 2022 | ALEWIFE WORKING GROUP, CAMBRIDGE, MA
Cambridge St Study - not looking good

A substantial amount of new development is underway near Cambridge Street - a mix of retail, residential and office/R&D space. Proposed large developments are projected to continue adding new employment and residents in affordable and market rate housing.

13m+ square feet of development including

3,313 new residential units are recently constructed, under construction or planned within a 10-minute walk of Cambridge Street

PLANNED DEVELOPMENT SITES
City of Cambridge Development Log, October 2021

- 5-Minute Walkshed
- 10-Minute Walkshed
- Green Line
- Green Line Extension
- Multi-Use Path
- Multi-Use Path Extension
- High Impact Development
- Total Development in Square Feet (SF)
Cambridge St Study - not looking good

- No proposed changes to side streets
- Most of the street zoned for only 6 stories max
- Will not lead to much new housing (IMO); but renovations/rent hikes will continue
Multifamily housing - not drafted, in committee

- **Exclusionary zoning** keeps new middle-class housing out of neighborhoods citywide
  - The wealthiest neighborhoods have especially exclusionary zoning

- **CDD is working with Councillors Azeem and Simmons on a proposal**; we’re not officially at the table

- Our priorities:
  - Should treat neighborhoods fairly - no more exclusion
  - Should actually result in significant new multi-family housing soon

(Figure: examples of new single-family housing built in ostensibly multi-family districts.)

(Figure: examples of small-scale multi-family housing that should be used as benchmarks for assessing zoning proposals.)
AHO amendments - drafted, in committee

- The original AHO (passed in 2020) created a predictable, streamlined permitting path for affordable housing … but it’s mostly only worked on “easy sites”

- Since then, more ambitious proposals like 2072 Mass Ave have foundered and we’re still short of our affordable housing goals

- Amendments would allow larger affordable housing buildings, unlocking more sites citywide at the scale we need
AHO amendments - drafted, in committee

- Amendments would allow:
  - More height along major streets (up to 13 stories)
  - Much more height in squares (up to 25 stories)
  - A “height for open space” trade citywide

- Amendments would unlock more potential sites and house more people per site - but affordable housing pace of development would remain constrained by available funding (i.e. 1-2 buildings per year?)
FY24 budget funding for affordable housing

- In *Envision Cambridge*, Cambridge planned to build ~288 affordable homes a year, but *we’re building at less than half of that rate*

- The Affordable Housing Trust needs a *more stable and substantial funding stream*
  - Currently it gets money (i.e. from linkage), but in an ad-hoc, unpredictable manner, and costs are only going up

- One idea (from Councillor McGovern): *10% of the city budget, every year?*
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<th>Persons</th>
<th>HUD 50% of Median</th>
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<th>HUD 80% of Median</th>
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