

To: The Honorable, the Cambridge City Councillors
From: The Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods (ACN) 807
For: Council meeting of Mon, June 19, 2000
Re: Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods' (ACN) first comments on the
ASSOCIATION OF CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBORHOODS
upcoming city-wide growth management zoning proposals to be
presented to the Council at its July 31 meeting June 10, 2000

Summary Comments on City-Wide Zoning Proposals

Over the past 18 months, the Association of Cambridge Neighborhood (ACN) has participated in several community forums on the comprehensive rezoning of the City. ACN has attended numerous meetings of the Planning Board, the Growth Management Advisory Committee (CGMAC) and several City Council Roundtable discussions.

So far we have reviewed drafts of zoning proposals for traffic and design review as well as excellent color-coded maps, both prepared by Community Development staff. As a result, we offer the following conclusions :

1. We endorse the general consensus to preserve and encourage the diversity of our City by supporting the creation of affordable housing, especially affordable units. We note the high-rise housing situation in the Alewife area and support limits on the height and density of housing to establish a proper scale for new housing. We support limits on the undesirable impacts of increased vehicle traffic caused by excessively large commercial developments. We support smaller-scale local businesses catering to neighborhood needs. We support increases in the amount of usable green and open space, especially in areas like East Cambridge.
2. City officials have presented six different "zoning scenarios" as a way to describe how changes in development limits and incentives could cause reductions in future development and traffic. We believe that the "housing scenario" is the best option : it adds to our scarce housing supply and also produces the smallest increase in traffic on our City streets. City officials should write up the zoning language for this housing alternative and should move to add it to the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance.
3. There is only so much *traffic* our City streets can handle. City planners have identified a possible 45 million square feet of new development allowed under current zoning. This increase is 35 times larger than the already huge development proposed for the ComEnergy site in East Cambridge. It would also represent over a quarter of a million additional daily vehicle trips a day in the City of Cambridge. We urge that information on new traffic trips and the effects on existing bottlenecks should be calculated and reported to the public.
4. Recent zoning changes such as the Interim Planning Overlay Petition (IPOP) has shown the wisdom of *traffic review* within a public forum. The current threshold of 50,000 s.f. in new development should be retained, so that a special permit would be required from the Planning Board to cover both traffic and design review of the new development. We oppose any "bypass" provision which would allow a non-public review of projects up to 150,000 s.f. in size. There are currently 5 criteria for evaluation of traffic impacts, and City staff is proposing to delete the one criterion dealing with safety. The safety criterion should be retained or enhanced and not deleted. Segmentation of projects into smaller pieces less than 50,000 square feet should be specifically prohibited. All developments over 50,000 s.f. should also be required to obtain new driveway permits.
5. Under existing rules, developers can build up to the maximum allowed commercial *parking* and often exceed it. The rezoning must emphasize the minimum parking.

6. The current Zoning Ordinance does not include *parking spaces* as part of the allowed floor area for development. These limits are called the "Floor-Area Ratio" or FAR for any zoning district. The lower the FAR, the less the amount of development that can occur and the less the new traffic created. The new zoning should encourage developers to reduce their dependency on auto use and to provide alternate access by transit, ridesharing, walking and bicycling. The new zoning should also give a credit to developers who put parking *underground* and not in surface parking lots or aboveground parking garages. Parking on the first floor of buildings should be absolutely forbidden. Now is the time as we consider City-wide rezoning to reduce the excessive levels of allowed FAR and to include parking spaces in allowed FAR.
7. FAR reductions should be accompanied by a well-enforced city-wide limit on *building heights*. The roof-top mechanical equipment should be included within this limit. Noise limits should be written into zoning to prevent problems of sound pollution in neighborhoods.
8. Zoning should designate areas which are exclusively or almost exclusively *housing*. Any provision for mixed use development should assure that commercial office/retail does not overwhelm any new housing and make any housing contribution mere tokenism.
9. A linkage program should be created to produce more green *open space*, as part of any large commercial or housing development. Recommendations of the recent report by the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee should be included in our new City-wide zoning.
10. Existing *open space* should be protected by reducing its allowed FAR from 0.25 to 0.05. This initiative was included in the Alewife petition of Yoder *et al*. This proposal enjoys wide support in the City. Development should not be allowed in a floodplain.
11. Our universities should be encouraged by zoning to stay within their *existing campus boundaries*. Universities should house as many of their students and faculty as possible inside the campus boundaries. These policies will reduce pressure on existing and future housing stock in the city and allow people to both live and work in Cambridge. University achievements to limit parking and auto trips should be adopted into the new zoning as appropriate.
12. This new zoning should become the beginning point for *improved planning* in every neighborhood of the City. The City Council has approved \$600,000 for a planning study covering the eastern end of the City. As part of an 18-month development moratorium, this planning study will be overseen by the East Cambridge Planning Study Committee, which has a total of 15 members - nine of them neighborhood residents. Similar planning studies should follow for all other areas of the City, with citizen review. The goal should be a more stable, livable city which has a diverse housing supply and is protected from traffic, with accessible open space, protected flood plains, quality schools, and continuing public input into neighborhood planning.

ACN encourages all Cambridge residents, government officials and developers to work together to achieve FAR reductions which will significantly limit traffic congestion on our streets and the diversions of cars through residential neighborhoods. Citizens should be able to see in writing what are the proposals, position papers and traffic calculations of city officials and developers. Under no circumstances should developers try to use issues such as the need for a "vision" to divert our attention from the pressing task to improve our city-wide zoning. Within the next month, a more detailed proposal on city-wide rezoning will be submitted by ACN to the Planning Board, to CGMAC members and to the City Council.

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Consent Communication #3

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A communication was received from the Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods (CAN), transmitting summary comments on City-Wide Zoning Proposals.

In City Council June 19, 2000

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