



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BETH RUBENSTEIN
*Assistant City Manager for
Community Development*

SUSAN M. GLAZER
*Deputy Director for
Community Development*

MEMORANDUM

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Beth Rubenstein, Assistant City Manager for Community Development *BR*

Date: December 4, 2003

Re: Council Order #5 dated 11/3/03 regarding proposals for building over the air rights at Porter Square Station

Council Order #16 dated 11/3/03 regarding zoning analysis and planning for the Mass. Ave. corridor from Cambridge Common to Porter Square

In response to the above referenced orders, we report the following:

In June 2003, the MBTA issued an RFP for proposals for development of the air rights over its tracks to the east of the Porter Square T station. There were two respondents to the RFP, Oaktree Development and Lesley University; the MBTA has not made a final decision awarding development rights. The Porter Square Neighbors Association (PSNA) has held several meetings in an effort to better understand the two proposals. At PSNA's October 28 meeting, Community Development Department (CDD) staff presented a description of the existing zoning in the Porter Square area and the Article 19 project review special permit process. The air rights proposals are in a conceptual form at this time; analysis of traffic, parking, urban design and other aspects of the proposals will be done by staff and the Planning Board as part of the Article 19 special permit process.

The Mass Avenue Corridor north of the Cambridge Common to Porter Square is within several different zoning districts. The commercial corridor begins at Wendell Street on the east and Shepard Street on the west. The corridor is zoned Business A-2 from Wendell and Shepard to just north of Forest Street on the east and to Arlington Street on the west. The Business A-2 District is a neighborhood commercial district created specifically for Mass Avenue north of the Cambridge Common. The district permits most retail uses (though not fast order food establishments) as well as office and residential uses. In Porter Square the zoning is Business C, which is a medium density commercial district created specifically for Porter Square. Most retail uses are allowed, including fast order food establishments, as well as office and residential uses. The corridor and Porter Square are also within the Mass Avenue Overlay District, which modifies the dimensional provisions of its base districts, but not the use provisions. The

Overlay District encourages active uses such as retail and office uses on the ground floor, provides design guidelines, and prohibits parking in front yards, all of which are intended to create a lively streetscape. The following table describes some of the dimensional limitations of these districts.

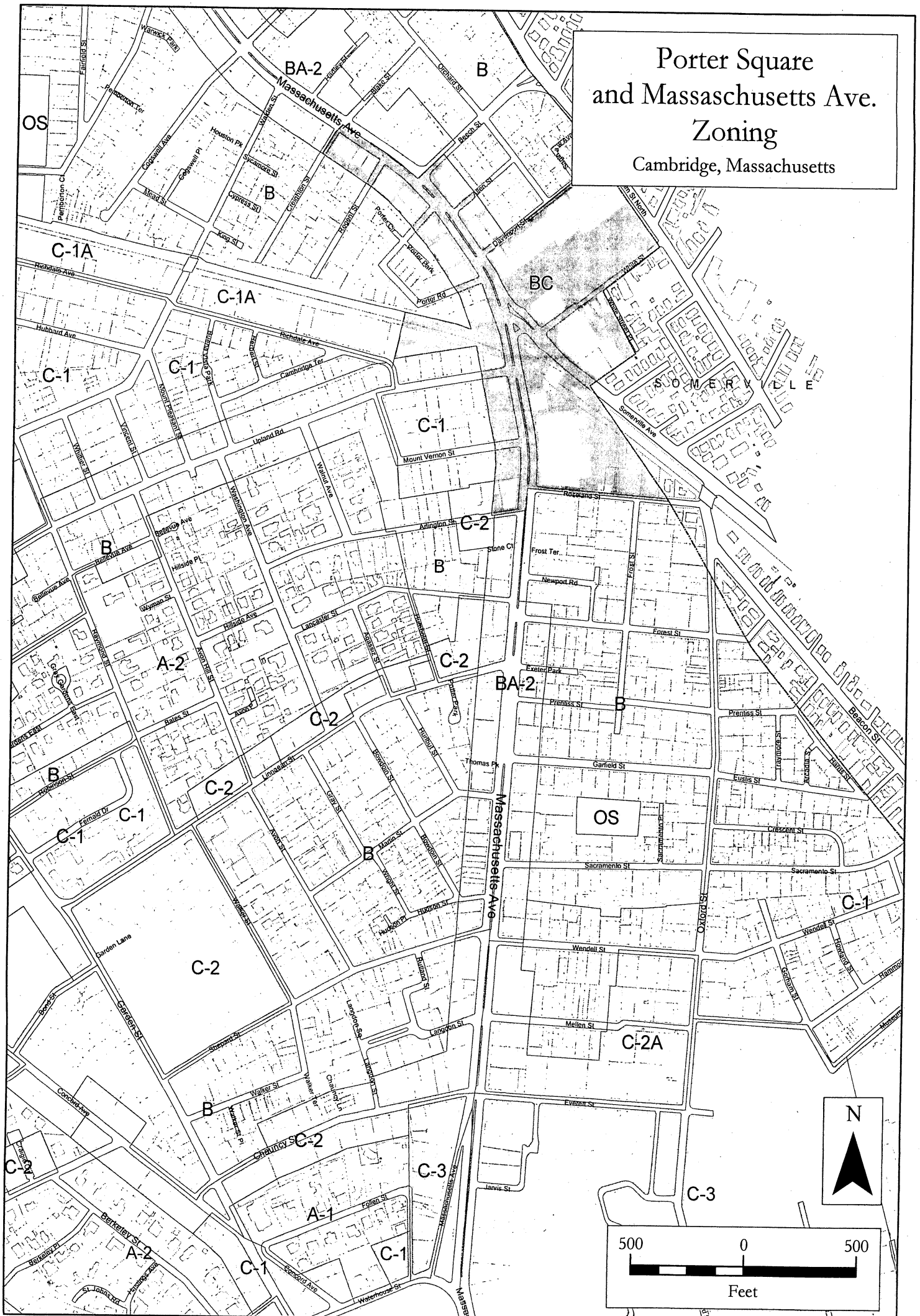
District	Height	FAR	
		Commercial	Residential
Business A-2	45' with setbacks above 35'	1.0	1.75
Business C	55' except 35' within 50' of a residential district	1.25	2.0

Given these dimensional parameters, a lot-by-lot analysis of the Business A-2 District from Wendell north to Roseland indicates that there is approximately 75,000 sf. of remaining commercial potential in the corridor or approximately 240,000 sf. of residential potential. This assumes that in most cases small increments of development would be added above existing structures. In many cases such small additions would not be economically attractive.

In the Business C district, a lot-by-lot analysis indicates that there is approximately 182,000 of commercial potential remaining or 370,000 of residential potential. The largest two parcels, the Porter Square Shopping Center and the Sears Building, account for almost half of the remaining allowable residential building out. The Sears Building would face the challenge of relocating surface parking and the Porter Square Shopping Center was very recently redeveloped. Other than these two parcels, the development potential is limited because the lots are small. Additionally, the air rights development being proposed by the MBTA yields the potential for approximately 40,000 square feet of commercial or 60,000 square feet of residential in the Business C district.

In order to further respond to community interest in the Porter Square area, the Community Development Department will study more closely Porter Square and the Mass Avenue corridor south to Wendell Street. (The area south of Wendell has already been the subject of study at the Agassiz Working Group, in many Agassiz neighborhood meetings, and in recent neighborhood studies conducted by the CDD.) CDD staff will hold a series of 2-3 meetings focusing on economic development, urban design, and an explanation of existing zoning and Overlay District guidelines. We anticipate that these meetings would be held in January-March 2004. We will make sure that notice goes to the Agassiz, Porter Square and Neighborhood Nine neighborhoods as well as Lesley University, a major institutional presence in the neighborhood. We will forward a summary of these meetings and any resulting recommendations to the City Council.

Porter Square and Massachusetts Ave. Zoning Cambridge, Massachusetts





CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager

Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager

December 5, 2003

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached a response to Council Order No. 5, dated 11/13/03, regarding proposals for building over the air rights at the Porter Square Station, and Council Order No. 16, dated 11/3/03, regarding a zoning analysis and planning for the Massachusetts Avenue corridor from the Cambridge Common to Porter Square, received from Assistant City Manager for Community Development Beth Rubenstein.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
Attachment

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**A response to Council Order No. 5,
dated 11/13/03, regarding proposals
for building over the air rights at the
Porter Square Station, and Council
Order No. 16, dated 11/3/03,
regarding a zoning analysis and
planning for the Massachusetts
Avenue corridor from the
Cambridge Common to Porter
Square, received from the Assistant
City Manager for Community
Development Beth Rubenstein.**

December 5, 2003