

# City of Cambridge

MASSACHUSETTS

Agenda # 15 North Mass. Ave. CARD Plan

In City Council

June 1, 1981

198

	YEA	NAY	ABSENT	PRESENT
Mr. Kevin P. Crane	✓			
Mr. Thomas W. Danehy	✓			
Ms. Sandra Graham	✓			
Mr. Leonard J. Russell	✓			
Mr. David E. Sullivan	✓			
Mr. Walter J. Sullivan	✓			
Mr. Alfred Vellucci	✓			
Mr. David A. Wylie	✓			
Mayor Francis H. Duehay	✓			
	9	0	0	



# City of Cambridge

IN CITY COUNCIL

June 8, 1981

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE RESOLUTION  
APPROVING THE

ORTH MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE COMMERCIAL AREA REVITALIZATION DISTRICT (CARD) PLAN

WHEREAS, in accordance with Chapter 40D and 23D, Massachusetts General Laws, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts acting by and through the Secretary of Communities and Development may approve Commercial Area Revitalization Districts Plans (herein referred to as CARD Plans); and

WHEREAS, such approval is a precondition for the use of various state financial incentives for commercial development that would be in the public interest of the citizens of Cambridge; and

WHEREAS, the development of the North Massachusetts Avenue CARD which is situated in the City of Cambridge and which is bounded as described in the attached plan dated June 1981;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

1. That the North Massachusetts Avenue (herein referred to as the CARD) Commercial Area Revitalization District described above is a predominantly commercial geographic area;
2. That implementation of the proposed CARD Plan will serve to prevent and reverse the decay of the area covered by the Plan and will help deter the movement of commercial enterprises into previously non-commercial areas; and
3. That the North Massachusetts Avenue CARD Plan is hereby approved and that said Plan shall be submitted to the Secretary of Communities and Development for approval.

In City Council June 8, 1981.

Adopted by a ye and nay vote:-

Yeas 9; Nays 0; Absent 0.

Attest:- Paul E. Healy, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

*Paul E. Healy*



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COMMERCIAL AREA REVITALIZATION DISTRICT

North Massachusetts Avenue  
Commercial Area Revitalization District

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James L. Sullivan, City Manager

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

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Leonard Russell, Vice-Mayor  
Kevin P. Crane  
Thomas W. Danehy  
Saundra Graham  
David Sullivan  
Walter J. Sullivan  
Alfred E. Vellucci  
David A. Wylie

Submitted to  
The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Edward J. King, Governor

Executive Office of Communities and Development  
Byron J. Matthews, Secretary

June 1981

North Massachusetts Avenue

CARD Administration

Community Development Department

David R. Vickery, Assistant City Manager  
for Community Development

Kathy Spiegelman, Deputy Director,  
Community Development Department

CARD Program Administration

Betty Desrosiers  
CARD Project Director

Peter Smoluchowski  
Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Director

Margaret Michel  
Urban Design Graphics & Research

Additional Participating Community Development Staff

J. Roger Boothe  
Director of Urban Design

Russell Lindquist  
Chief Economic Planner

Connie Perry  
Facade Improvement Designer

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Preface

This application was prepared by the Community Development Department in response to an order of the City Council instructing the Department to investigate the feasibility of creating a Commercial Area Revitalization District (CARD) plan for all or parts of Massachusetts Avenue.



Description of the Area

The northern corridor of Massachusetts Avenue is a linear commercial area of 1.6 square miles comprised largely of small retail and office establishments. The corridor has developed gradually from a 17th century road-junction to a 20th century urban shopping area. Cambridge, unlike most cities, does not have a central business district. Massachusetts Avenue serves as its "Main Street" wherein lies most of the city's business uses including three commercial nodes--Central, Harvard, and Porter Square.

The northern corridor CARD boundaries stretch from Mellon and Shepard Streets (just north of Harvard Square) to Richard Street and Cottage Park Avenue near the Arlington-Cambridge border. The Porter Square Shopping Center, built in 1952, lies midway within the corridor. As Map 1 and Table 1 indicate, 68% of the corridor is commercial, 23% is residential and only 9% is institutional.

TABLE I

<u>Type of Use</u>	<u>Land Area</u>	<u>Percent of Total Area</u>
Commercial	1,623,484 square feet	68%
Residential	538,198 square feet	23%
Institutional, Transportation	217,093 square feet	9%
TOTAL	2,378,775 square feet	100%

Additionally, there are 169,011 square feet of vacant land and 119,938 square feet of developed parking and open space.

Today, the northern corridor appears blighted and run down due to wide-spread physical deterioration and the presence of vacant structures and lots. Many buildings need extensive rehabilitation for code-related interior improvements and upgrading of exterior facades. Several structures are in a state of disrepair that will, clearly, require their demolition. New construction of these parcels and of the existing vacant lots--totally 169,011 square feet--is essential to the revitalization effort for the northern corridor.

Commercial Economy

Over the past eighteen years, the northern corridor's commercial economy has lost manufacturing industries, stagnated in retail growth, and expanded slightly in service-oriented office uses.

Between 1972 and 1980, the number of commercial establishments has increased by 5%. As shown in Table II (below), there has been a notable increase in service and finance/insurance/real estate businesses. During the same period, there was a slight decrease (4%) in retail trade establishments and a significant decrease (83%) in manufacturing industries.

TABLE II  
Business Establishment Inventory

<u>Type of Establishment</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>Percent of Increase/Decrease</u>
Construction	3	3	0
Manufacturing	6	1	-83%
Transportation	1	1	0
Retail Trade	96	92	- 4%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	14	16	+14%
Services	<u>50</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>+32%</u>
TOTAL	170	179	+ 5%

It is evident from the inventory that while there has been little change in the number of retail trade establishments, there has been a swing toward service provision firms along the northern corridor. These firms have located primarily in existing commercial structures. There have been a few instances, however, where residential structures have been converted to office space. No new office construction has taken place within the CARD area during the previous ten years.

As previously mentioned, the number of retail trade establishments along the northern corridor has been relatively stable. However, an examination of the retail sales volume of the Porter Square Shopping Center (as defined by the U. S. Census Bureau) indicates that it has experienced a marked decrease in sales activity. As can be seen in Table 3 (pg. 4), sales volume in the Porter Square Shopping Center when adjusted for inflation decreased by 18% between the period of 1972 and 1977. It is unclear whether this drop may simply reflect the then tight national economy or whether the figures are indicative of a more serious long-term weakening of the retail market within the Center and/or along the northern corridor. Since 1977, however, there has been no marked increase in the rate of storefront turnover within the shopping center and while one prime anchor has since left, it was replaced by a similar department store.

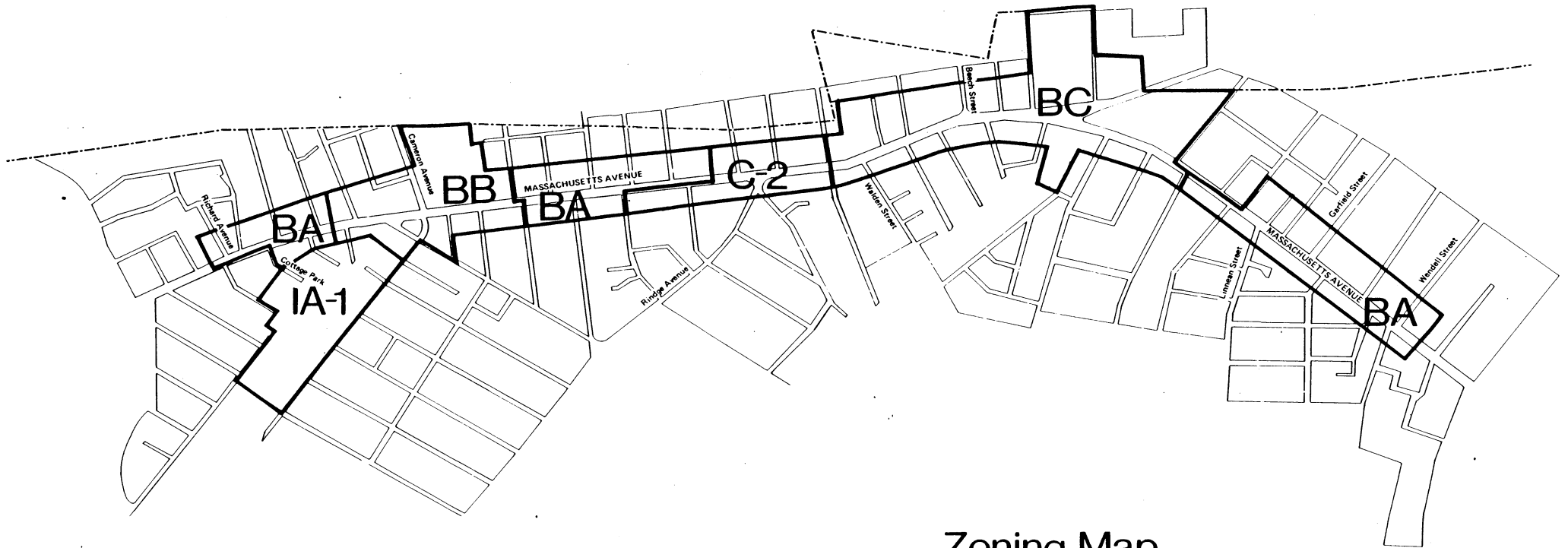
TABLE III  
Porter Square Shopping Center

<u>Year</u>	<u>Retail Sales</u> <u>Adjusted for Inflation</u>	<u>% Change</u>
1963	\$45,541	----
1967	49,291	+ 8%
1972	50,952	+ 3%
1977	41,569	-18%

There are, however, several indicators of a more positive future for the northern corridor. Construction has recently begun on two commercial development projects. One is a 17,000 square foot office building; the second is a 6,270 square foot retail structure. Additionally, three formerly vacant or underutilized storefront blocks have recently undergone major renovations. During 1980, fifty-six (56) new market-rate residential units were constructed on three sites within the CARD area. An additional fifty (50) townhouses are presently under the public review process and site plans have begun for development of housing for the elderly. Finally, the Red Line Extension, presently under construction along the northern corridor, includes plans for a new \$44 million station at Porter Square scheduled for opening in 1984.

On the other hand, the former Henderson Carriage Manufacturing building, located three blocks from Porter Square and listed on the National Register, has stood vacant since 1979. Owners of the parcel have been unable to obtain financing for a proposed \$10 million mixed-use development of the site. A prime reason is that commercial banks consider the area to be marginal.

Map 2



Zoning Map

June 1981

## Plan Objectives

The northern Massachusetts Avenue CARD would complement the broader Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Project presently being developed by the Community Development Department. The project's long-term goal is the revitalization of the entire Massachusetts Avenue corridor through a coordination of public and private efforts. As a center of activity and a central location with potential for significant development and redevelopment, the northern corridor is key to the Urban Design Project.

The type of commercial development and redevelopment envisioned includes a strong office development initially followed by additional retail development. The City will encourage mixed-use development projects as an effort to foster the existing residential and commercial blend along the corridor.

The office and retail development projection is in line with the existing and developing commercial economy along the corridor described earlier. This forecast is substantiated by a Porter Square Market Demand Study by Gladstone Associates which projected an office space demand ranging up to 200,000 square feet and a potential retail demand of up to 85,000 square feet. As mentioned earlier, there are presently 169,011 square feet of vacant land along the corridor.

Map 2 (pg.5 ) shows the existing zoning districts for the northern corridor. The B-C district in the Porter Square area reflects a new zoning regulation adopted in 1977 and developed through a planning study involving the active participation of local business and community representatives. The Community Development Department will undertake a similar effort in the summer and fall of 1981 for several other zoning districts within the CARD area.

## Public Improvements

The public sector, on federal, state and local levels, has shown its confidence in the potential of the northern corridor through several financial commitments. The Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Study, being conducted by the Community Development Department, is an effort to stimulate a revitalization that will enhance the economic and aesthetic potential of the corridor in a manner that is responsive to the needs of the surrounding community. The Urban Design team will coordinate the projects listed below.

1. Red Line Extension (Porter Square Station)

Project Cost: \$44 million

Description: The new rapid transit and commuter rail station will include two modern pedestrian access plazas, and major streetscape improvements including new sidewalks, lighting fixtures, trees, passive sitting areas, and public art.

2. Linear Park Development

Project Cost: \$1.5 million

Description: The linear park will be developed on the surface level of the Red Line Extension tunnel from the Davis Square to Alewife Stations. This parcel was formerly a B & M rail line. Design plans will begin in the Fall, 1981 and the park is projected to be opened in 1984.

3. Clarendon Park Development

Project Cost: \$500,000

Description: The City opened this 18,731 s.f. park in 1980. A severely deteriorated and largely vacant warehouse was formerly located on this site. The park which includes active and passive uses lies immediately adjacent to a 199-unit housing development for the elderly.

4. Facade Improvement Program

Project Cost: \$50,000

Description: The Facade Improvement Project will improve the imate and physical condition of commercial structures along the northern corridor by providing matching grants for the exterior rehabilitation of commercial structures.

5. Housing Development

Project Cost: \$1.3 million

Description: The City purchased a 22,000 s.f. vacant Massachusetts Avenue parcel in January 1981. The site will be developed for 32 units of housing for the elderly by the Cambridge Housing Authority under the Chapter 667 Program. Site design is already underway.

6. Neighborhood Stabilization Program

Project Cost: \$3.5 million

Description: This is an effort to preserve the existing characteristics of the residential community in North Cambridge. The program provides \$250,000 annually for fourteen years to fund physical improvements in the area. Such programs include homeownership, housing rehabilitation and weatherization and open space, street and sidewalk improvements. Program selection and evaluation is made directly by North Cambridge residents through the establishment of a Stabilization Committee.

## Land Use and Design Controls

The Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Study is an effort to stimulate new development, to upgrade existing commercial establishments, to improve the overall streetscape and visual image of the corridor, and to protect the abutting residential community from encroachment of incompatible new land uses. To this end, the City adopted in 1977 a major down-zoning of the entire residential district in North Cambridge. As mentioned earlier, the Porter Square Shopping Center district was included in this re-zoning. Several industrial parcels abutting existing residential areas were also included in the re-zoning package.

Although both public and private signs do need improvement, it may not be necessary to modify the existing zoning ordinance in regard to signage. The urban design project will set standards for facade improvements, including signage, and the Community Development Department will work on a block-by-block basis to coordinate these improvements.

The Cambridge Historical Commission has placed several structures within the northern corridor on the National Register. Two commercial structures (including the Henderson Carriage Manufacturing site), three churches, and seven residential structures have merited National Register significance.

As has been the case in other Cambridge urban design areas, design review will be an important part of the revitalization effort for the northern corridor. As the local implementing agency for the CARD, the Community Development Department will work closely with developers to insure that changes are positive and compatible with the overall plan for the corridor.

RD Participants

Several members of the local business community have expressed interest in establishing a CARD designation along the northern corridor. A CARD designation could potentially assist in the renovation of the Henderson Carriage Manufacturing site as a mixed use development including 20,000 square feet of retail space and 40,000 square feet of office space; the redevelopment of several vacant and underutilized parcels along the former railroad-right-of-way for retail, office, and light industrial uses; and substantial renovation to existing commercial structures on Massachusetts Avenue whose owners have expressed interest in the revenue bond incentives.

Conformance with other Local Plans

The CARD Plan for the northern corridor of Massachusetts Avenue, as part of the overall Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Project, compliments the existing Central Square CARD Plan. This urban design effort will foster sensitive new development and re-development of this most important linear commercial corridor.

Complimentary with Downtown Development

The CARD does not consist of any areas outside Cambridge's Central business district since, as noted earlier, Cambridge's business district is not "central" in a traditional sense. Rather, it stretches along major corridors in the city, with Massachusetts Avenue and adjacent areas having the clearest definition as a district.

Citizen Participation

Various mechanisms are already in place for securing citizen participation and the involvement of the local business community in the implementation of the CARD Plan. The Community Development Department meets regularly with groups throughout the City to discuss development issues. Meetings with concerned groups will be arranged as appropriate during implementation of the CARD Plan. An important forum for consideration of City plans is the Planning Board, whose staff is the Community Development Department. In particular, any changes to zoning in the CARD must be reviewed in the public hearings of the Board.



Northern Massachusetts Avenue CARD Boundary Local Implementing Agency

The Community Development Department will oversee implementation of the northern Massachusetts Avenue CARD plan. Map 3 (p.13) outlines the boundaries of this district. The Community Development Department will work to insure that development through the CARD process is compatible with all community goals for revitalization.

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COMMERCIAL AREA REVITALIZATION DISTRICT

North Massachusetts Avenue  
Commercial Area Revitalization District

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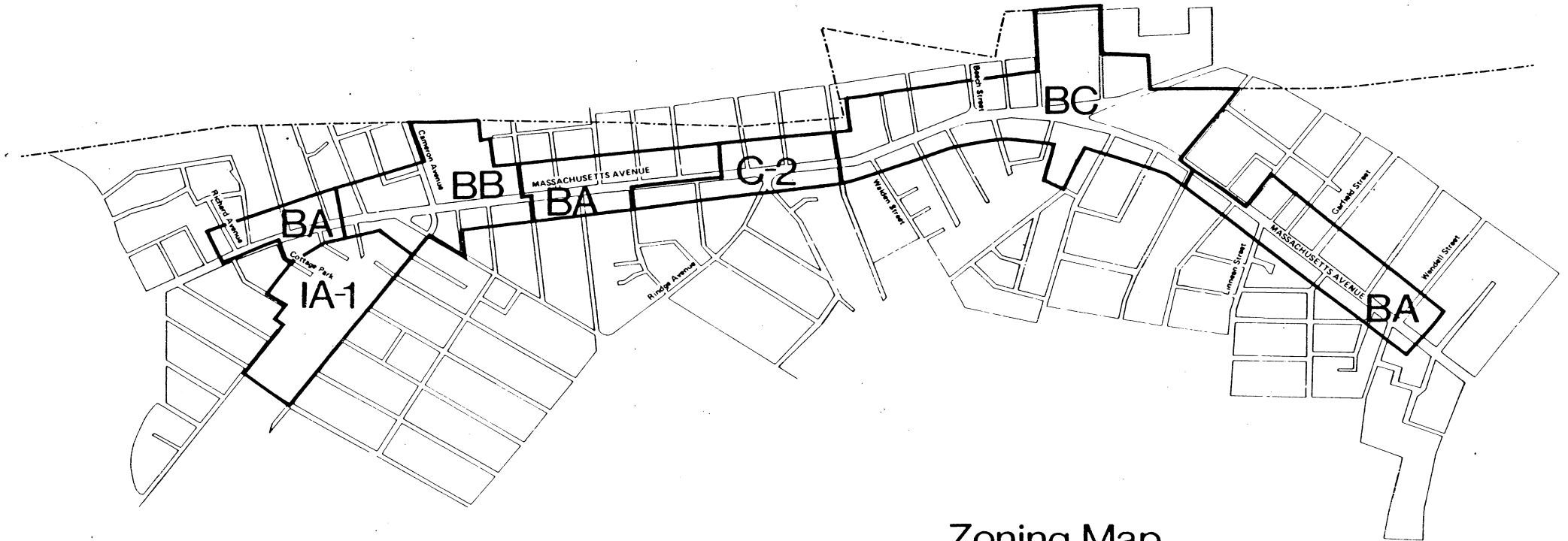
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June 1981

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Project Cost: \$500,000

Description: The City opened this 18,731 s.f. park in 1980. A severely deteriorated and largely vacant warehouse was formerly located on this site. The park which includes active and passive uses lies immediately adjacent to a 199-unit housing development for the elderly.

4. Facade Improvement Program

Project Cost: \$50,000

Description: The Facade Improvement Project will improve the imate and physical condition of commercial structures along the northern corridor by providing matching grants for the exterior rehabilitation of commercial structures.

5. Housing Development

Project Cost: \$1.3 million

Description: The City purchased a 22,000 s.f. vacant Massachusetts Avenue parcel in January 1981. The site will be developed for 32 units of housing for the elderly by the Cambridge Housing Authority under the Chapter 667 Program. Site design is already underway.

6. Neighborhood Stabilization Program

Project Cost: \$3.5 million

Description: This is an effort to preserve the existing characteristics of the residential community in North Cambridge. The program provides \$250,000 annually for fourteen years to fund physical improvements in the area. Such programs include homeownership, housing rehabilitation and weatherization and open space, street and sidewalk improvements. Program selection and evaluation is made directly by North Cambridge residents through the establishment of a Stabilization Committee.

### Land Use and Design Controls

The Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Study is an effort to stimulate new development, to upgrade existing commercial establishments, to improve the overall streetscape and visual image of the corridor, and to protect the abutting residential community from encroachment of incompatible new land uses. To this end, the City adopted in 1977 a major down-zoning of the entire residential district in North Cambridge. As mentioned earlier, the Porter Square Shopping Center district was included in this re-zoning. Several industrial parcels abutting existing residential areas were also included in the re-zoning package.

Although both public and private signs do need improvement, it may not be necessary to modify the existing zoning ordinance in regard to signage. The urban design project will set standards for facade improvements, including signage, and the Community Development Department will work on a block-by-block basis to coordinate these improvements.

The Cambridge Historical Commission has placed several structures within the northern corridor on the National Register. Two commercial structures (including the Henderson Carriage Manufacturing site), three churches, and seven residential structures have merited National Register significance.

As has been the case in other Cambridge urban design areas, design review will be an important part of the revitalization effort for the northern corridor. As the local implementing agency for the CARD, the Community Development Department will work closely with developers to insure that changes are positive and compatible with the overall plan for the corridor.

CARD Participants

Several members of the local business community have expressed interest in establishing a CARD designation along the northern corridor. A CARD designation could potentially assist in the renovation of the Henderson Carriage Manufacturing site as a mixed use development including 20,000 square feet of retail space and 40,000 square feet of office space; the redevelopment of several vacant and underutilized parcels along the former railroad-right-of-way for retail, office, and light industrial uses; and substantial renovation to existing commercial structures on Massachusetts Avenue whose owners have expressed interest in the revenue bond incentives.

Conformance with other Local Plans

The CARD Plan for the northern corridor of Massachusetts Avenue, as part of the overall Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Project, compliments the existing Central Square CARD Plan. This urban design effort will foster sensitive new development and re-development of this most important linear commercial corridor.

Complimentary with Downtown Development

The CARD does not consist of any areas outside Cambridge's Central business district since, as noted earlier, Cambridge's business district is not "central" in a traditional sense. Rather, it stretches along major corridors in the city, with Massachusetts Avenue and adjacent areas having the clearest definition as a district.

Citizen Participation

Various mechanisms are already in place for securing citizen participation and the involvement of the local business community in the implementation of the CARD Plan. The Community Development Department meets regularly with groups throughout the City to discuss development issues. Meetings with concerned groups will be arranged as appropriate during implementation of the CARD Plan. An important forum for consideration of City plans is the Planning Board, whose staff is the Community Development Department. In particular, any changes to zoning in the CARD must be reviewed in the public hearings of the Board.

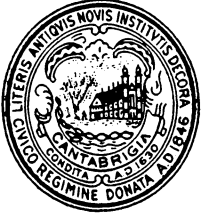


Northern Massachusetts Avenue CARD Boundary Local Implementing Agency

The Community Development Department will oversee implementation of the northern Massachusetts Avenue CARD plan. Map 3 (p.13) outlines the boundaries of this district. The Community Development Department will work to insure that development through the CARD process is compatible with all community goals for revitalization.

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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139  
Tel. 498-9011

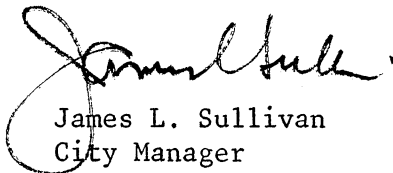
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT  
JAMES L. SULLIVAN  
City Manager

June 1, 1981

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Enclosed for your approval is a copy of the North Massachusetts Avenue Commercial Area Revitalization District (CARD) Plan and an order providing for same.

Very truly yours,

  
James L. Sullivan  
City Manager

JLS/mbf  
Enc.

North Mass. Ave. CARD Plan.

In City Council,

~~June 1, 1981~~

June 8, 1981

*LWJ*  
*A*

*6-8-1981*

*Adoption*

*9-0-0*

*copy sent to Betty  
Desrosiers 6/8/81 (cc)*