



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUSAN B. SCHLESINGER
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

BETH RUBENSTEIN
Deputy Director for
Community Development

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Beth Rubenstein, Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: September 8, 1998

Re: Council Order #155, dated 7/27/98 Re: Report on CDD's Current Schedule
for Considering Reduction in FAR in Commercial Districts

In its 1997 recommendations to the City Council related to the Citizens for Growth Management Petition, the Planning Board proposed a study effort for action on those goals articulated in the petition which had merit but required additional analysis. The Board also recognized the need for additional community process related to each of the goals, especially those that involved both the residential and business communities. A Citywide Growth Management Advisory Committee (CGMAC) was appointed by the City Manager in December 1997 to advise the Community Development Department on problem definition, information collection and public process and outreach throughout the study period, and began meeting regularly in January of this year.

Residential FAR and Open Space

To date, in response to concerns about backyard infill construction and the loss of open space, the Committee has advised the Department on issues relating to residential floor area ratio (FAR) and the amount and definition of backyard open space in the Residence A-1, A-2, B, C and C-1 zones. Following a period of outreach to solicit public input on the backyard infill issue, including wide distribution of *The City Wide Rezoning Bulletin* and a June public meeting held at the Senior Center, the Planning Board has drafted new backyard zoning language which is being forwarded to City Council for consideration at its September 14 meeting.

Transition and Height Zoning

The Committee began its work on transition areas and height zoning in July and plans to seek input from both the business and residential communities during the fall. Because this issue impacts businesses, residents and institutions in the city, we anticipate a somewhat different outreach process compared to the backyard infill issue, including outreach to the business community and institutions as well as to the general public. We expect to distribute a new bulletin on transition zones in October and hold a public meeting in November. The Planning Board should begin discussions on a proposed zoning change in December and have a zoning proposal to the Council early in 1999.

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FAR in Commercial Districts

The format for the work on the third issue, FAR reduction in commercial districts, will follow a similar pattern to the previous items but will involve a more lengthy information gathering and public discussion phase. This will include initial problem definition with the CGMAC and zoning and urban design consultants. Additional consultants may be called on to look at the impacts of FAR reductions on housing, economics and transportation, as citywide FAR reductions in commercial zones will have impacts on the tax base, housing costs and affordability, jobs for Cambridge residents, traffic and city services, and on the character of the city.

The city initiated a citywide cordon count in spring of 1998 to measure traffic volumes at the main roads in and out of Cambridge and to compare these with similar information collected in 1972, 1981 and 1987. Further traffic counts in the city's major squares are planned for fall of 1998. CDD has also carried out an analysis of the buildout potential of all commercial zones in the city. We expect to continue to collect information on the economic impacts of FAR reduction by updating a report prepared for the city in 1997. Additional analysis will also be required of the impacts of FAR reductions on small and local business enterprises. In order to understand the city's role in the region and the impacts of regional actions on the city, we anticipate working with the state Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) which collects and analyzes regional traffic, employment and journey to work information. The Department will continue to make extensive use of the city's Geographic Information System (GIS) system, which has proven to be very useful in understanding proposed changes to the Zoning Ordinance on a neighborhood or even block-by-block basis.

We are also considering a series of informal workshop/forums during this process which will bring outside ideas on these planning issues to the public, with discussions of current professional ideas, academic research, and best practices being used in other communities. Topics may include transit-oriented development, the impact of density on affordable housing, and the desired "look and feel" of the city, among others.

Initial work has begun to gather information for consideration of commercial district FAR. We expect that the Committee's attention will turn to FAR reductions in commercial areas early in 1999, after zoning recommendations on transition zones have been forwarded to Council, and will take most of that year.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL. 349-4300
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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

September 28, 1998

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 23, regarding a report on Community Development's current schedule for considering reduction in FAR in commercial districts, received from Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development Beth Rubenstein.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
Attachment



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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

September 14, 1998

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 28, regarding a report on Community Development's current schedule for considering reduction in FAR in commercial districts, received from Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development Beth Rubenstein.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
Attachment

Consent Agenda #11

5775

Relative to Community Development's current
schedule for considering reduction
in FAR in commercial districts.

In City Council September 14, 1998

No Action Taken

SEP. 28 1998

PLACED ON FILE