



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BETH RUBENSTEIN

Acting Assistant City
Manager for Community
Development

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

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

Subject: Council Order #009, dated 4/5/99, Re: Report on a Zoning Analysis of the Mahoney's Site and the Surrounding Area and the Historical Background of the Use of this Site.

Date: April 20, 1999

Site Description

The Mahoney's site is a 97,838 sq. ft. (2.25 acre) site in Riverside owned by Harvard University. It encompasses six lots along Memorial Drive, bounded by Akron Street, Banks Street, Hingham Street, and Western Avenue (refer Map 1). The site is zoned Residence C-3 (Residence Multifamily), and is surrounded by areas zoned Residence C-3 to the North and East and Office-3 (Office and Multifamily Housing) to the South. On the west, the site is bounded by Memorial Drive and the Charles River.

Permitted Uses

The Residence C-3 district is one of the least restrictive residential districts in Cambridge. Residential and institutional uses, including university facilities, are allowed in this district by right. It allows the development of single family, two family, and multifamily dwellings, townhouse development, and elderly oriented congregate housing. Institutional uses, including religious, educational, health care, social service and government facilities, are permitted in this area. Noncommercial research facilities may be allowed on the site by a special permit; otherwise, most office, retail, and industrial uses are prohibited.

The Mahoney's site is not subject to Institutional Use Regulations under Section 4.50 of the Cambridge zoning ordinance. The City has Institutional Overlay Districts in some areas where there has been extensive contiguous development of institutional use. The Mahoney's site lies just outside the Harvard University Institutional Overlay District, which ends at Akron Street (refer Map 1).

Any development on the site will have to comply with off-street parking requirements according to Article 6.0 of the city's zoning ordinance. Parking requirements for the site will vary based on the use.

Dimensional Requirements

The Mahoney's site can be developed to a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of three (3). With a site area of 97,838 sq. ft., this means that a gross floor area of up to 293,514 sq. ft. may be developed on the site. The maximum height allowed here is 120 feet. Table 1 elaborates on the dimensional requirements for the site.

Table 1: Dimensional Requirements

FAR		3.0	
Maximum Height		120 feet	
Minimum lot area per dwelling unit		300 sq. ft.	
Max. number of dwelling units per acre		145	
Minimum Lot Size		5,000 sq. ft.	
Minimum Lot Width		50 feet	
Setbacks	Front	$\frac{H+L}{5}$ * feet	Measured from the center line of the street, but may not be less than 5 feet from the front lot line.
	Rear	$\frac{H+L}{5}$ * feet	Minimum 20 feet from the rear lot line.
	Side	$\frac{H+L}{6}$ * feet	
Usable Open Space		10% of lot area	

* H = Building Height

L = Length of the wall, measured parallel to the lot or street line

Adjacent Areas

Like the site, the area to the North and East is also zoned Residence C-3 and therefore falls under the same zoning regulations as the Mahoney's site. To the South, the site is adjoined by an Office-3 (Office and Multifamily Housing) district. This district permits all the uses allowed on the Mahoney's site. In addition, it allows the development of hotels and motels, offices and laboratories, and auto sales and rental agencies. The dimensional requirements for this district are the same as those for the Mahoney's site.

Attached please find a description of historical uses of the site which has been prepared by Charles Sullivan, Executive Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission.



Cambridge Historical Commission

831 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Telephone 617/349-4683
Fax 617/349-6165, TTY 617/349-6112, E-mail HistComm@ci.Cambridge.ma.us



William B. King, *Chair*, Allison M. Crump, *Vice Chair*, Charles M. Sullivan, *Executive Director*
M. Wyllis Bibbins, Suzanne R. Green, Helen F. Moulton, Robert G. Neiley, Jo M. Solet, *Members*
Jennifer Jones, Anthony C. Platt, *Alternates*

April 15, 1999

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Cambridge Historical Commission *CHS*

Subject: Council Order #009, dated 4/65/99, Re: Historical
Background of the Mahoney's Nursery Site

The two blocks currently occupied by Mahoney's Nursery consist of land that was historically a mixture of upland, mudflat, and river bottom. In 1894, the Cambridge Park Commissioners described the area nearby as follows:

"At the foot of Boylston Street . . . a condition of things exists that demands immediate attention. The marsh lands are of the poorest description, filthy and obnoxious, and the few buildings now upon them are totally unfit for human habitation."

In 1894 City of Cambridge took the entire shore of the Charles River, from the Longfellow Bridge to the Cambridge Cemetery, by eminent domain. Between 1894 and 1914, the Park Department filled the riverbank, created seawalls and rip-rap banks, and laid out the parkway that is now Memorial Drive.

The benefits of the parkway were apparent long before it was completed. In 1897 alone, the assessed value of properties abutting the first completed section increased by 85%. To reinforce this trend, the Commissioners imposed restrictions on properties that had once been taken by the commission or whose owners sought access to the parkway. New buildings could not be used for stables, "or for any mechanical, mercantile, and manufacturing purposes" (1896 Park Report, 12). They could not exceed five stories, or sixty feet in height, and had to be set back twenty feet. The type of development envisioned by the Commissioners was probably best demonstrated by the apartment houses built near Ash Street in 1914-1916.

Privately-held property inland of the parkway was developed at different times. While the Cambridge Electric and

Riverside Press complexes predated the parkway, most development on the river occurred after the completion of the Charles River Dam in 1909 and the opening of the Charles River Road in 1914. However, the two blocks occupied by Mahoney's Nursery have never been fully developed.

In 1913, the Hingham Knitting Company built a two story, reinforced-concrete mill on the block bounded by Akron, Banks, and Hingham streets. This concern failed during the Depression, however, and Harvard University acquired the building for use as a book bindery and for architecture studios. In 1971 the building was occupied by students protesting against Harvard expansion; once cleared, it was demolished to prevent further disturbances.

The block between Hingham Street and Western Avenue has never been developed with permanent structures, although it was acquired by Harvard University before 1916. The site remained entirely vacant until 1941, when the Treeland Nursery built the first structure there. The Western Avenue frontage was briefly occupied by veterans' housing after World War II, but Treeland soon resumed operation and built six structures before 1955. These are substantially the same buildings now occupied by Mahoney's Nursery.

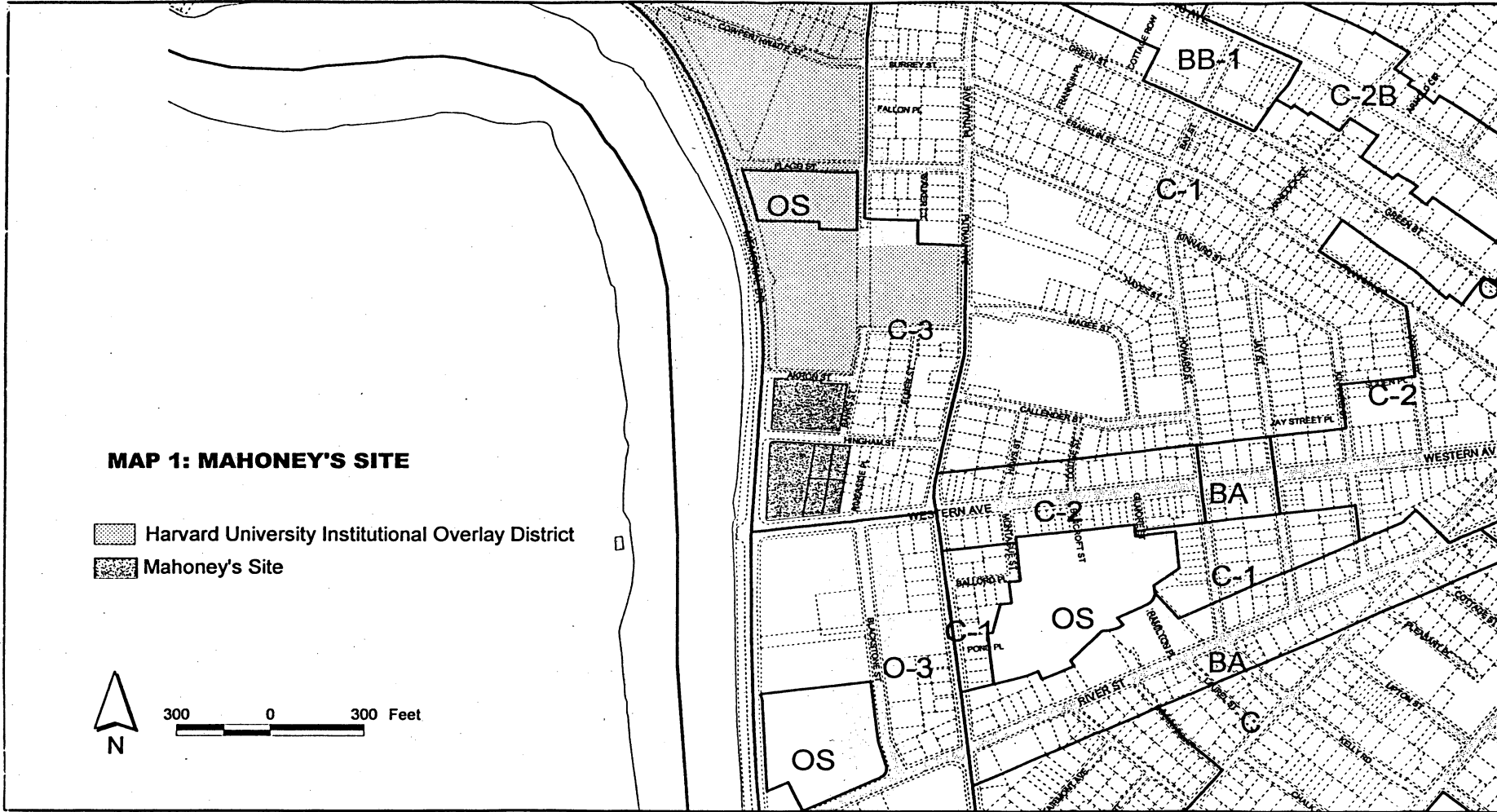
In the late 1960s, Harvard University announced plans to develop the Treeland site for student housing; in one form, the project was to consist of a 278-unit project designed by The Architects Collaborative. This proposal sparked widespread opposition and was a principal cause of the community-led disruption of Harvard's 1970 commencement. As a result of this protest, and subsequent negotiations with the community and the City, Harvard abandoned its development proposals and allowed Treeland to continue in operation. Treeland was replaced as lessee by Mahoney's in about 1990.

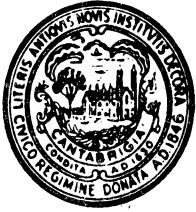
MAP 1: MAHONEY'S SITE

- Harvard University Institutional Overlay District
- Mahoney's Site



300 0 300 Feet





CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL. 349-4300
FAX. 349-4307



11.

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

April 26, 1999

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 99-67, regarding a report on a zoning analysis of the Mahoney's site and surrounding area and the historical background of the use of this site, 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 3235

Cal. 11

Relative to AR #99-67, regarding a report on a zoning analysis of the Mahoney's site and surrounding area and the historical background of the use of this site.

In City Council April 26, 1999

CHARTER RIGHT
BY T. Toomey

5/3/99

PLACED ON FILE

ee