



Thursday, 12 September 2024

Central Square Rezoning

Community Meeting 3: Preliminary Recommendations

Central Square – The Heart of Cambridge ❤️

**Our
Historic
Downtown,**



**Cultural
District, and**



**Municipal
Center**



**CITY OF
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Out and About – Walking Tour!

Legend:
● Proposed Heart of Central
● Proposed Neighborhood Edge
▭ National Registry of Historic Places District

Map Labels: Cambridge City Hall, 130 Bishop Allen Dr, 655 Mass Ave, Old Central Square Theatre, 678 Mass Ave, Prospect House Hotel, Oddfellows Complex, Kennedy Building, MASSACHUSETTS AVE, FRANKLIN ST.

Let's explore Central Square!

Take a walk around Central Square to find these historic gems...

Cambridge City Hall	678 Mass Ave	655 Mass Ave	Oddfellows Building
Old Central Square Theatre	Kennedy Building	Prospect House Hotel	130 Bishop Allen Drive



Our team tonight



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CAMBRIDGE**

Agency
Landscape + Planning

Who's in the room?



To ensure that the community members we're engaging represent the diversity of Cambridge, we ask anyone who is comfortable to **fill out the brief survey using the link in the chat.**

No personal or identifying information will be recorded.



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LPWJK3J>



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What brings us here?

? **What** do we want to achieve in Central Square?

? **How** are we going to do it?

? **Where** do we want to achieve it?



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Central Sq. Rezoning:

A community process to update zoning for Central Square to allow for and encourage:



More housing (incl. affordable)



Diverse retail, cultural and non-profit activity



Public spaces to build community

Project Timeline



**CITY OF
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Tonight's focus

● Community Goals

● Preliminary Recommendations

● Discussion

● Next steps



Tonight's focus

● **Community Goals**

● Preliminary Recommendations

● Discussion

● Next steps



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What are the Community's goals?

C2 STUDY (2013)



INCREASED HOUSING STOCK & DIVERSITY

e.g., affordable housing, family housing



RETAIL, CULTURAL, AND NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY

e.g., small businesses, arts and cultural spaces; outdoor dining



PUBLIC PLACES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

e.g., outdoor entertainment, pocket parks, programming



A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR CENTRAL SQUARE

e.g., green buildings, tree planting, shade structures



PEOPLE CONNECTED TO THE SQUARE

e.g., pedestrian and bicycle improvements

CENTRAL SQ CITY LOTS STUDY (2023)

HOUSING

Create more housing in Centra Square, Particularly affordable housing

CITY AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Accommodate cultural programs, events, and spaces
- Create high quality community services in Central Square
- Provide opportunities for social services to expand and co-locate
- Address city office and collaboration space needs

OPEN SPACE, PARKING, INFRASTRUCTURE

- Increase parks and open spaces
- Support ongoing infrastructure improvement projects
- Meet parking needs and include transportation demand management



We are refining the **community goals** in this process

MORE FREQUENT

LESS FREQUENT

Increase Height and Density

Limit Height and Density

Limit Height on Residential Edges

Preserve Human Scale

Create a Vibrant Street Edge

Create Variety in Heights

Height & Density

Mixed views on increasing height and density. Many are comfortable with height **if for housing**, with a preference to contain **tallest development to Mass Ave.**

“

Concerned about visual shadowing, and social impacts of taller buildings, especially if felt disproportionately by lower income residents

“

We need more people living in the Square to support neighborhood businesses.

“

You can also get a lot of housing through smaller projects (in large quantity)

“

I'm personally fine with any particular height

“

Don't think that people will notice the difference between a 16 and 20 story building on Mass Ave.



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We are refining the **community goals** in this process

MORE FREQUENT

LESS FREQUENT

Housing + Affordable Housing

Arts and Cultural Activity

Permanent space for Starlight Square

Small and Local Businesses

Open and Community Space

Retail

Green Space

Social Services and Public Amenities

Use

Strong support for **housing, especially affordable**, keeping a space for **Starlight Square**, and encouraging the **small and local businesses that are key to Central's identity**.

“

All buildings should have ground floor retail to activate a space.

“

Central is a nightlife destination for the whole region... Beyond drinking, we need indoor recreation and human services

“

Affordable homeownership, not just rental. 100% affordable can risk some segregation. Want all levels of income access.

“

If you only looked at the zoning, how would you know this is Cambridge's Cultural District?



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We are refining the **community goals** in this process

MORE FREQUENT

Maintain Cultural Vibrancy

Maintain Income + Community Diversity

Maintain Affordability of Housing + Retail

Avoid Gentrification + Displacement

Avoid Luxury and Biotech (Like Kendall)

Maintain Accessibility and Safety

LESS FREQUENT

Community

Strong support for **supporting existing community and maintaining affordability of housing and retail**

“

I'm more worried about losing cultural spaces... Cantab, Middle East, Man Ray are very vulnerable in single story buildings.

“

Need to restrict biotech so that it doesn't take over Central (like Kendall)

“

Central needs socioeconomic balance; the middle class has disappeared. Let's avoid luxury housing.

“

Concern about development replacing parking on Green St Garage and additional traffic.



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We are refining the **community goals** in this process

1 We need **more homes**, especially affordable ones

2 We want to reinforce Central Square as Cambridge's **historic downtown** and **cultural district**

3 We want places to **gather and build community**



How do we achieve these **goals**?

1 We need **more homes**, especially affordable ones

2 We want to reinforce Central Square as Cambridge's **historic downtown** and **cultural district**

3 We want places to **gather and build community**

*The City-owned
Central Square lots
are very important to
doing this!*



How do we achieve these **goals**?

1 We need **more homes**, especially **affordable** ones

2 We want to reinforce Central Square as Cambridge's **historic downtown** and **cultural district**

3 We want places to **gather and build community**

Private Property will be critical to achieving these

Zoning helps achieve community goals on private property!

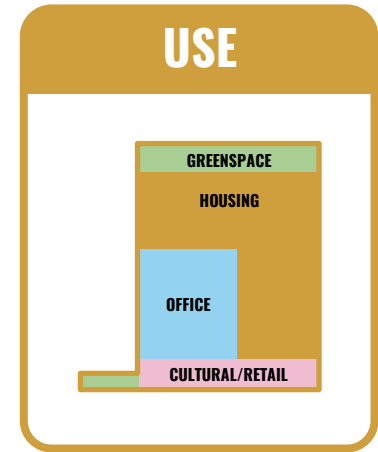
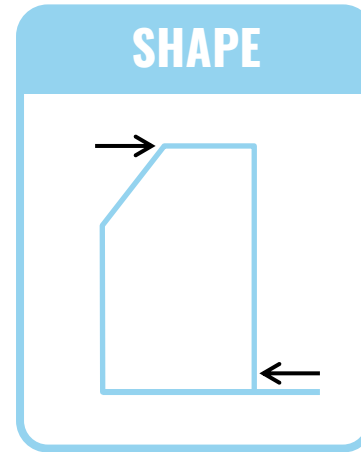
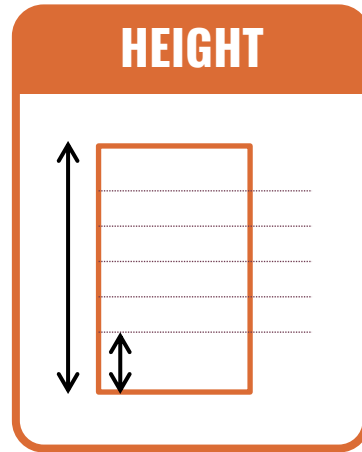


How do we realize the **community's goals** on private property?

What is Zoning?

Zoning is a set of rules that dictate how big a building can be and what uses can be in it.

Zoning Tools



Today's focus

● Community Goals

● **Preliminary Recommendations**

● Discussion

● Next steps



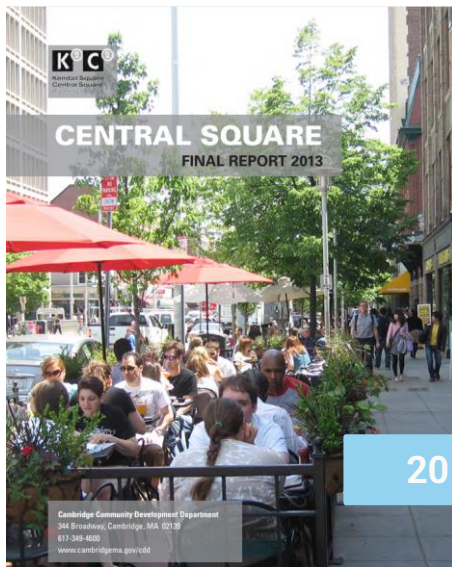
**CITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

How high for housing?



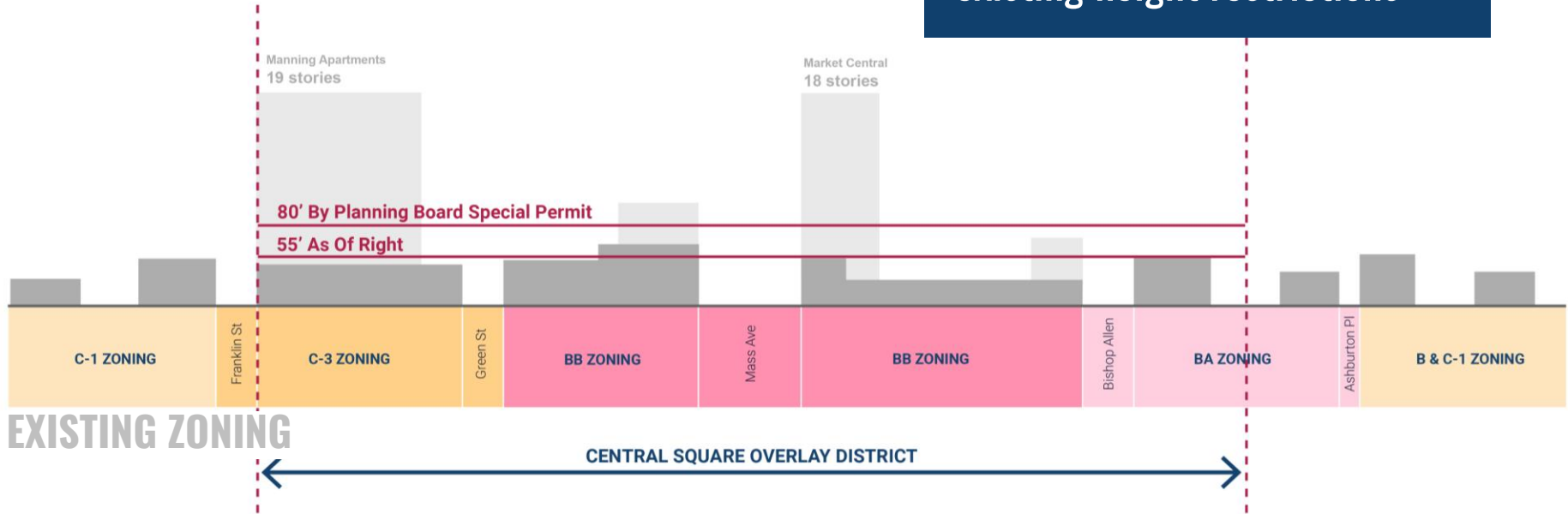
GOAL 1: We need more homes, especially affordable ones

Not much housing has been created in Central since C2



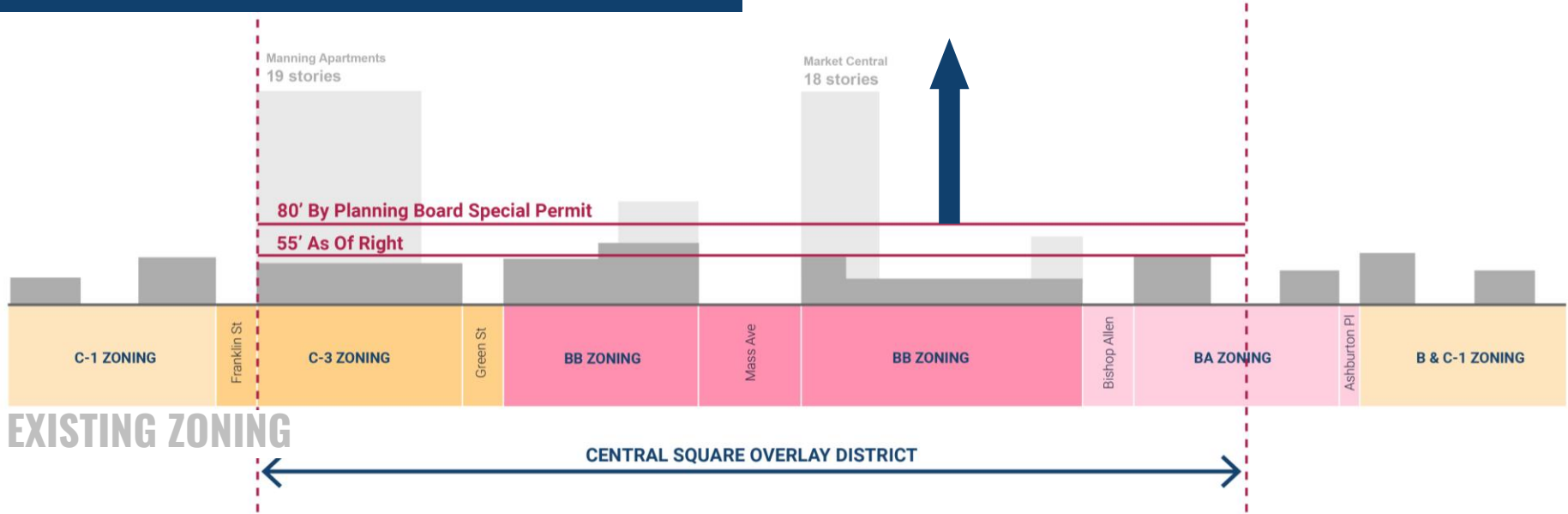
GOAL 1: We need more homes, especially affordable ones

This is due in large part to the existing height restrictions



GOAL 1: We need more homes, especially affordable ones

Raising residential height limits will allow for more housing in Central Square



What should the maximum allowable height be?

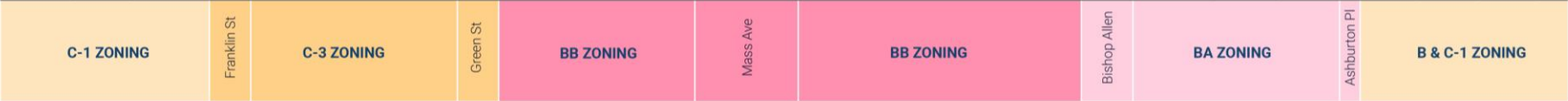
12 Floors
The Smith
Boston



18 Floors
Market Central
Central Square



22 Floors
Proto
Kendall Square



HEIGHT OPTIONS

How should this relate to adjacent neighborhoods?

“Allowing 15-story buildings next to 3-story houses concerns me

“I Support density on Mass Ave

18 Floors
Market Central
Central Square



“Development should be focused in the Heart of the Square, with the Edges scaled down to 5-7 stories

“Bishop Allen gets residential quickly! Could that be a better transition



“HEART OF CENTRAL” AND
“NEIGHBORHOOD ZONES”

How high for housing?

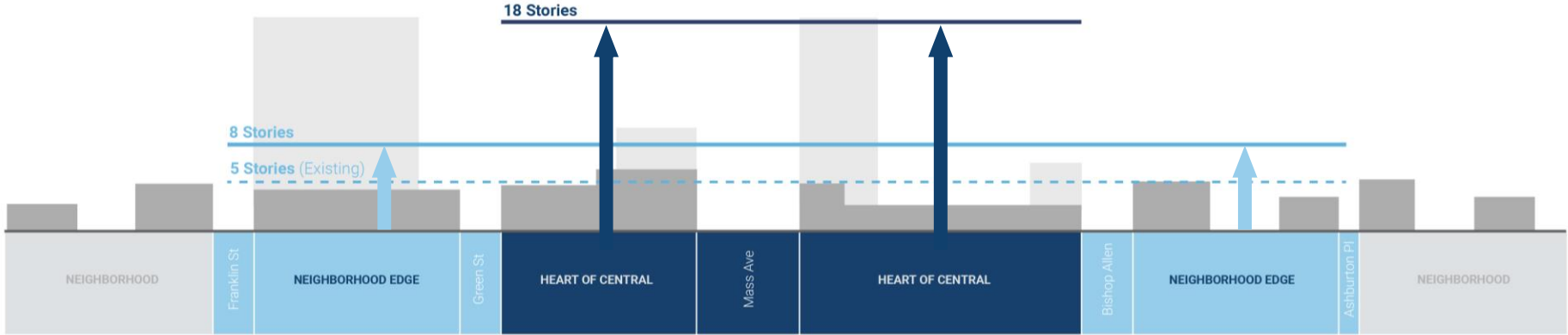
“ Central should be one of the densest neighborhoods in Cambridge

“ Density doesn't always mean height

“ 12 stories or more along Mass Ave is okay

“ I'm fine with any height as long as it's housing

“ We need to come to terms with higher density to mitigate our housing dilemma



RECOMMENDED ALLOWABLE HEIGHTS

Base + Tower

“

On a major Boulevard like Mass Ave, where facades are roughly 100' apart, does zoning limit building to 80' tall?

“

Take a Parisian approach to density – dense, connected street wall and 6 stories in height

“

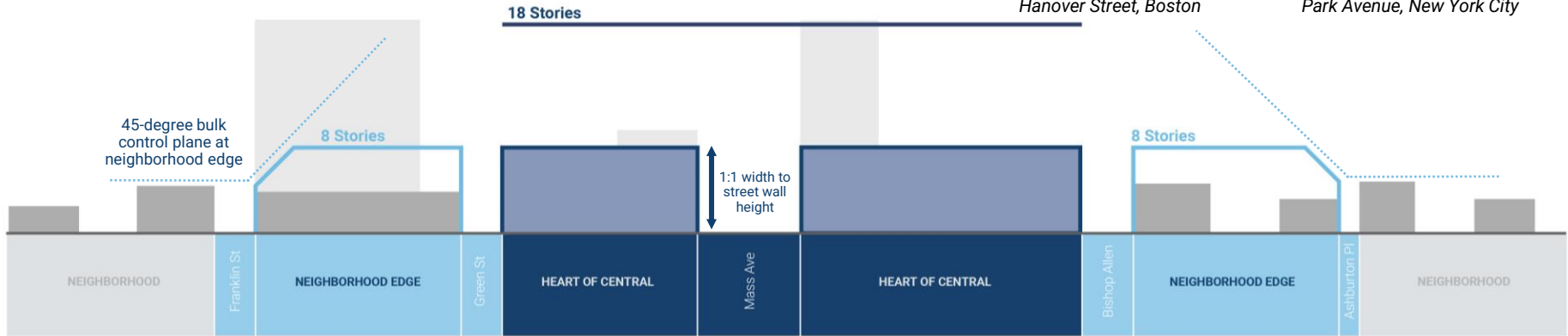
Hopeful some of the C2 vision can come to fruition



Hanover Street, Boston



Park Avenue, New York City



BASE HEIGHT

Base + Tower

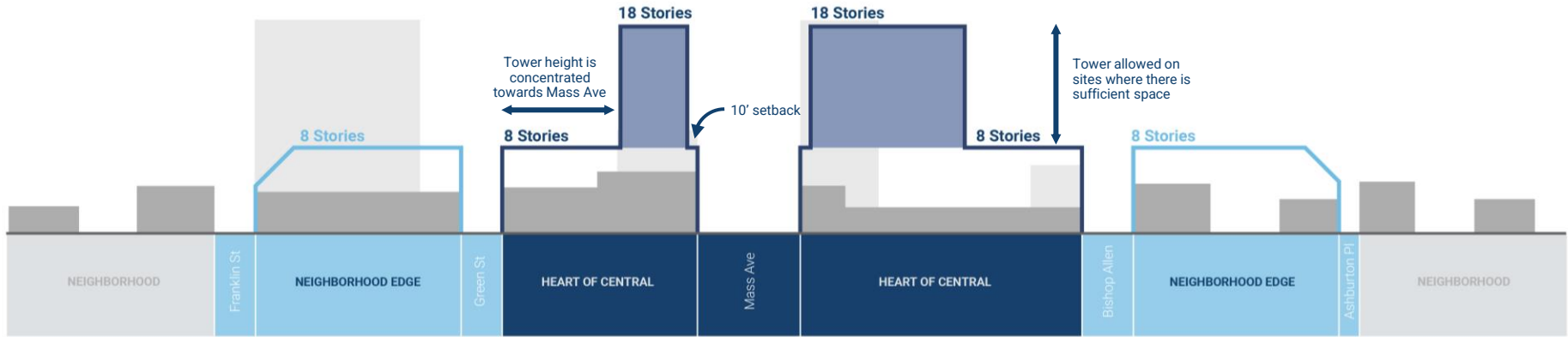
“ Don't think that people will notice the difference between a 16 and 20 story building on Mass Ave.

“ Taller buildings are good because they maximize land use which is the density and efficiency of the land and other environmental considerations

“ Zoning should enable 4 or 5 more 20-story towers

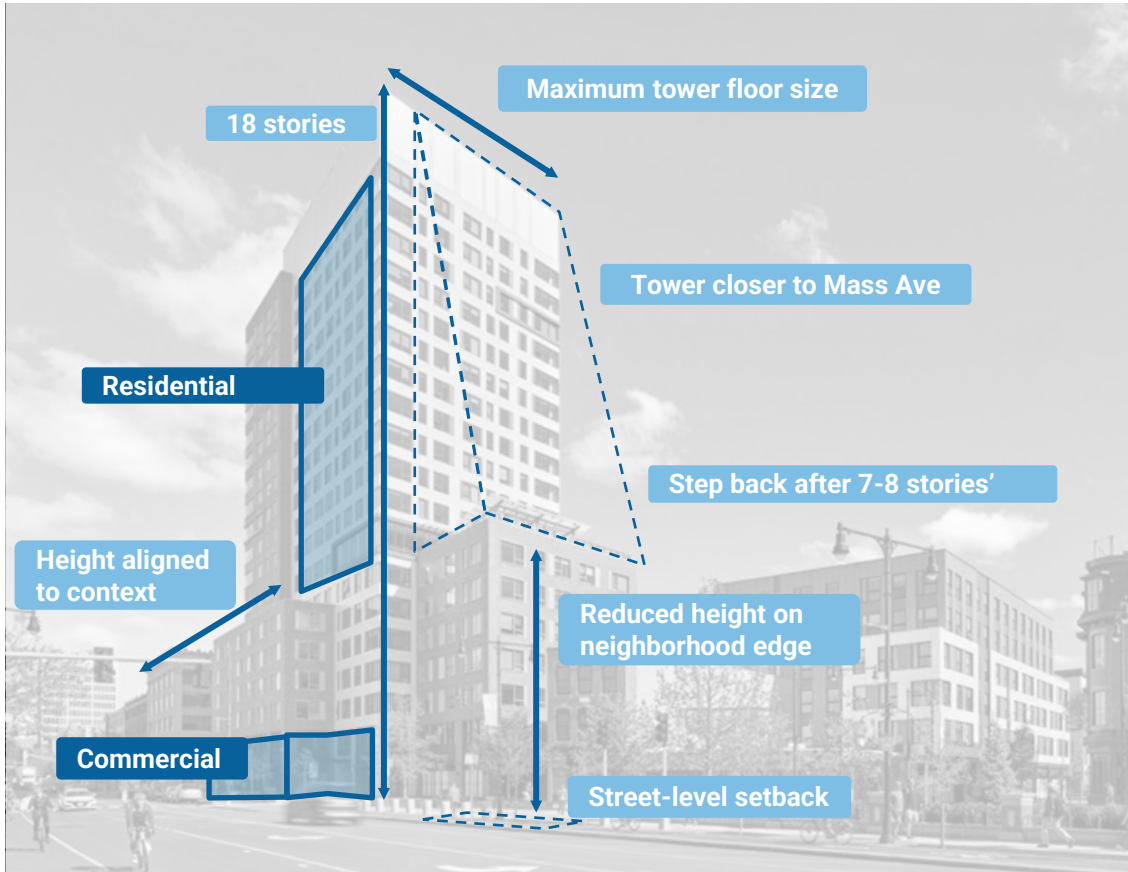
“ Central Sq is a good place for people to live without cars, making high-density housing a reasonable option

“ Okay with any height as long as it's for housing



TOWER HEIGHT

Base + Tower



“
Market Central doesn't really have a negative effect on me (Port resident)

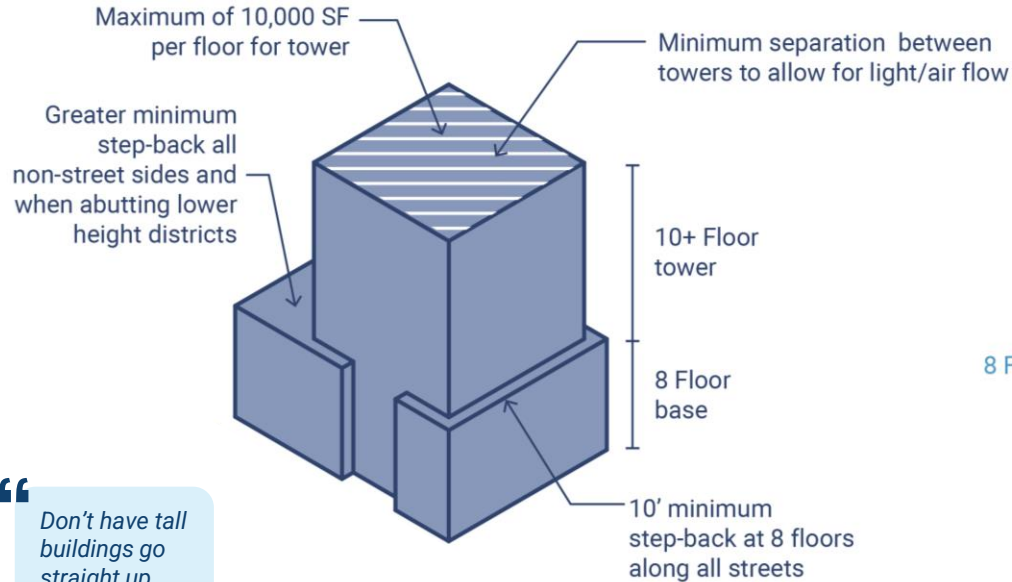
“
It's great having access to the things in all the buildings (LINK resident)

“
I'm concerned about visual shadowing and social impacts of taller buildings, especially if felt disproportionately by lower income residents

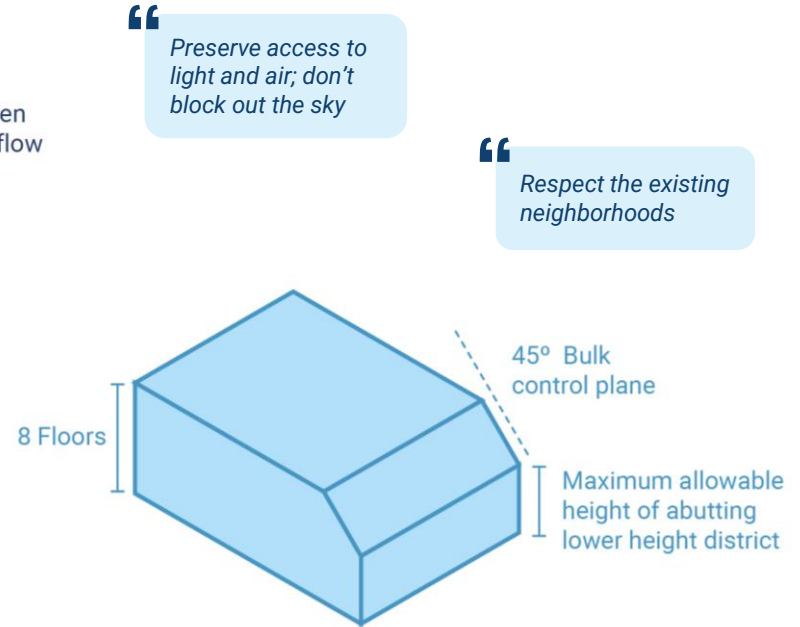
“
Don't go straight up along Mass Ave, make the buildings step back like Market Central so they don't make the sidewalk unpleasant

Market Central (2018)
Central Square

Base + Tower

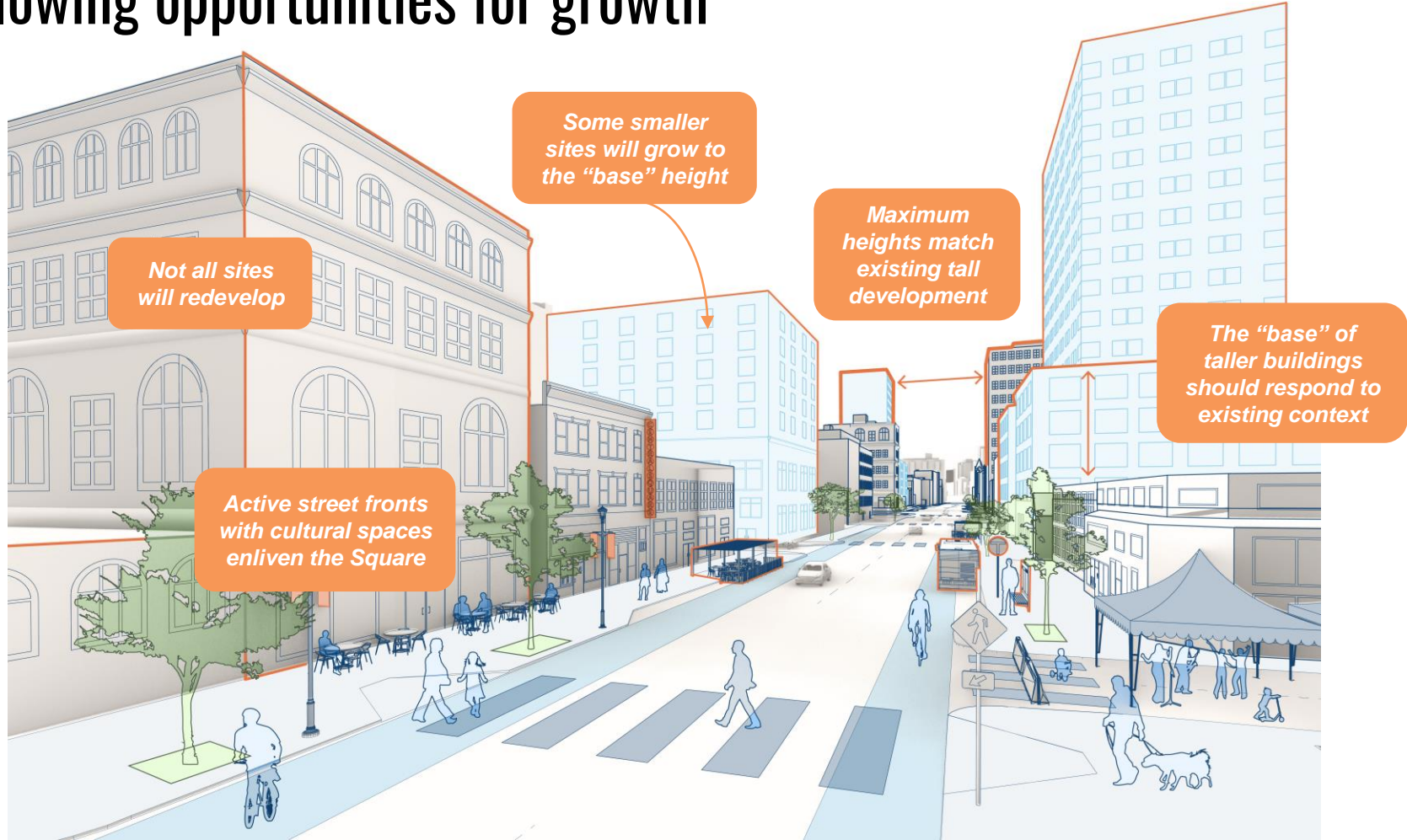


HEART OF CENTRAL



NEIGHBORHOOD EDGE

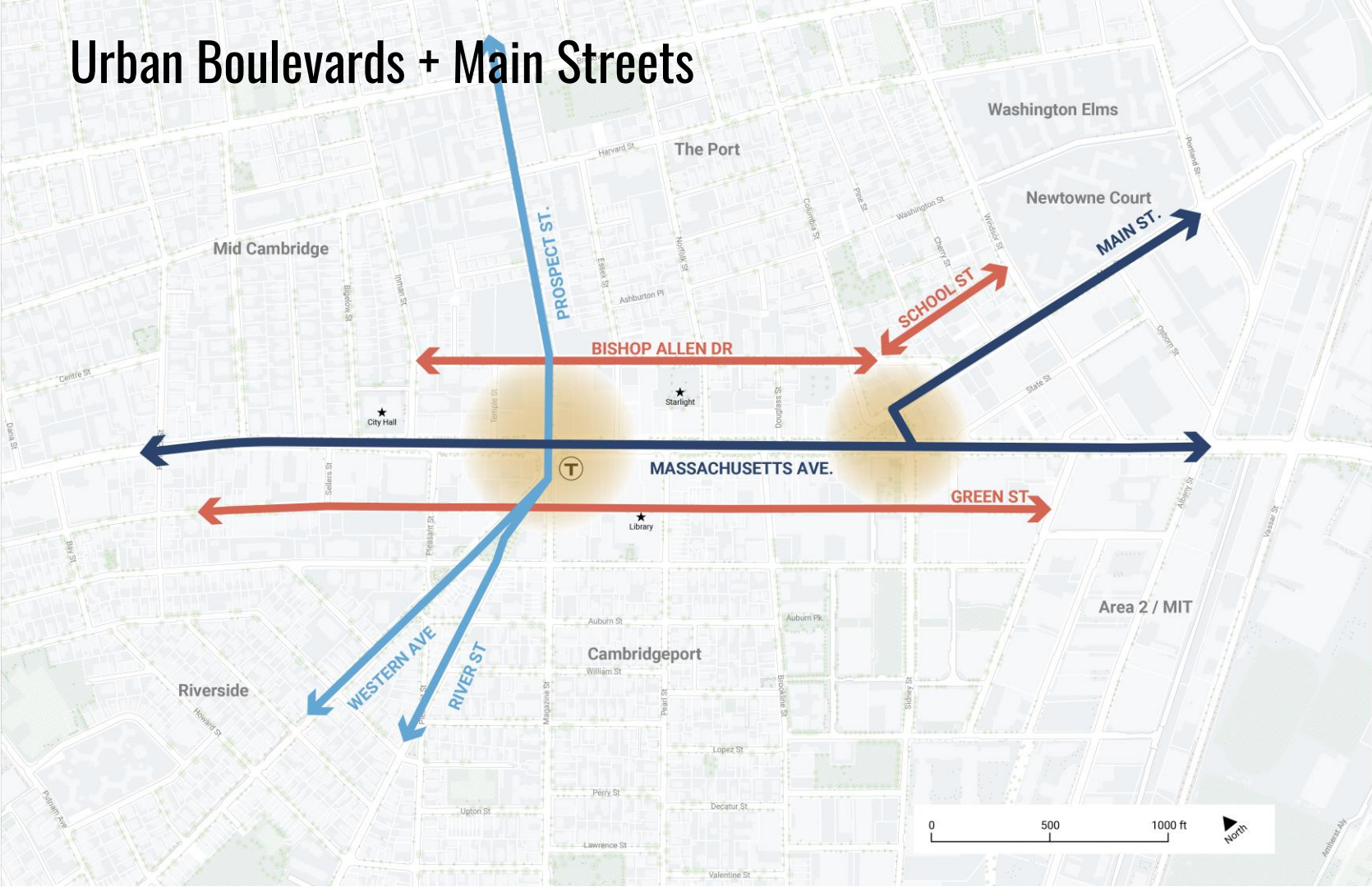
Allowing opportunities for growth



How can we responsibly grow Central Square?



Urban Boulevards + Main Streets



Urban Boulevards:
Main road for traffic and pedestrians. Connects to other major districts. High retail activity.

Neighborhood Main Streets:
High pedestrian activity, connect into residential uses. Some retail activity.

Transition Streets:
Transition from high activity main street and residential neighborhood.

Nodes:
Centers of activity

2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

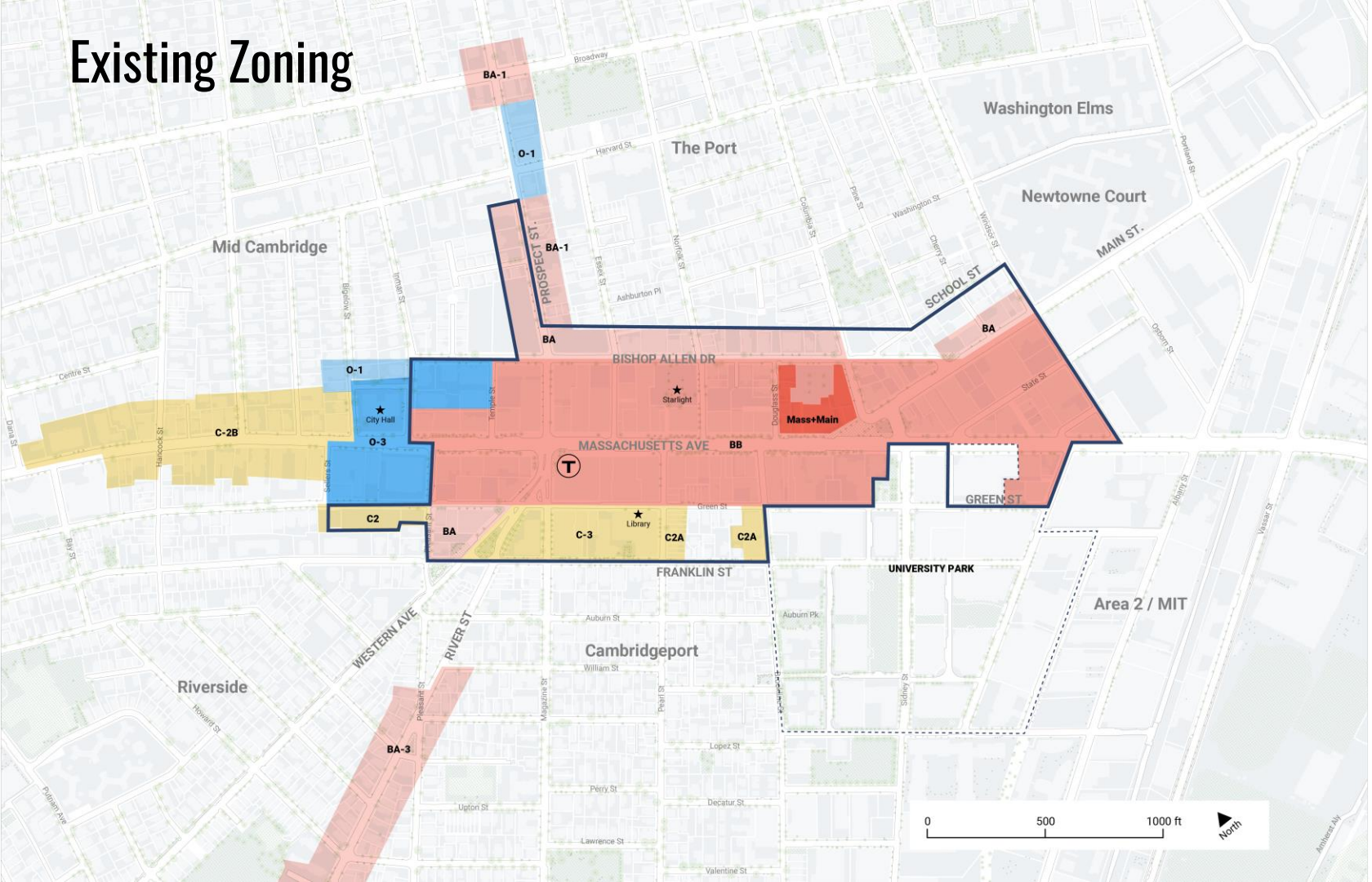
Community input

Current Zoning



Existing Zoning

Existing Central Square Overlay District



2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

Community Feedback

“Worth extending up Prospect St to Harvard at minimum, ripe for neighborhood edge treatment”

“Extending the district to Hancock St makes sense – it's still very near the T station”

“Tall housing along the Mass Ave corridor is fine. It shouldn't go down River St.”

“It makes sense to have shops down [River] street”

“Might be good for clarity to just fully include partially covered parcels”

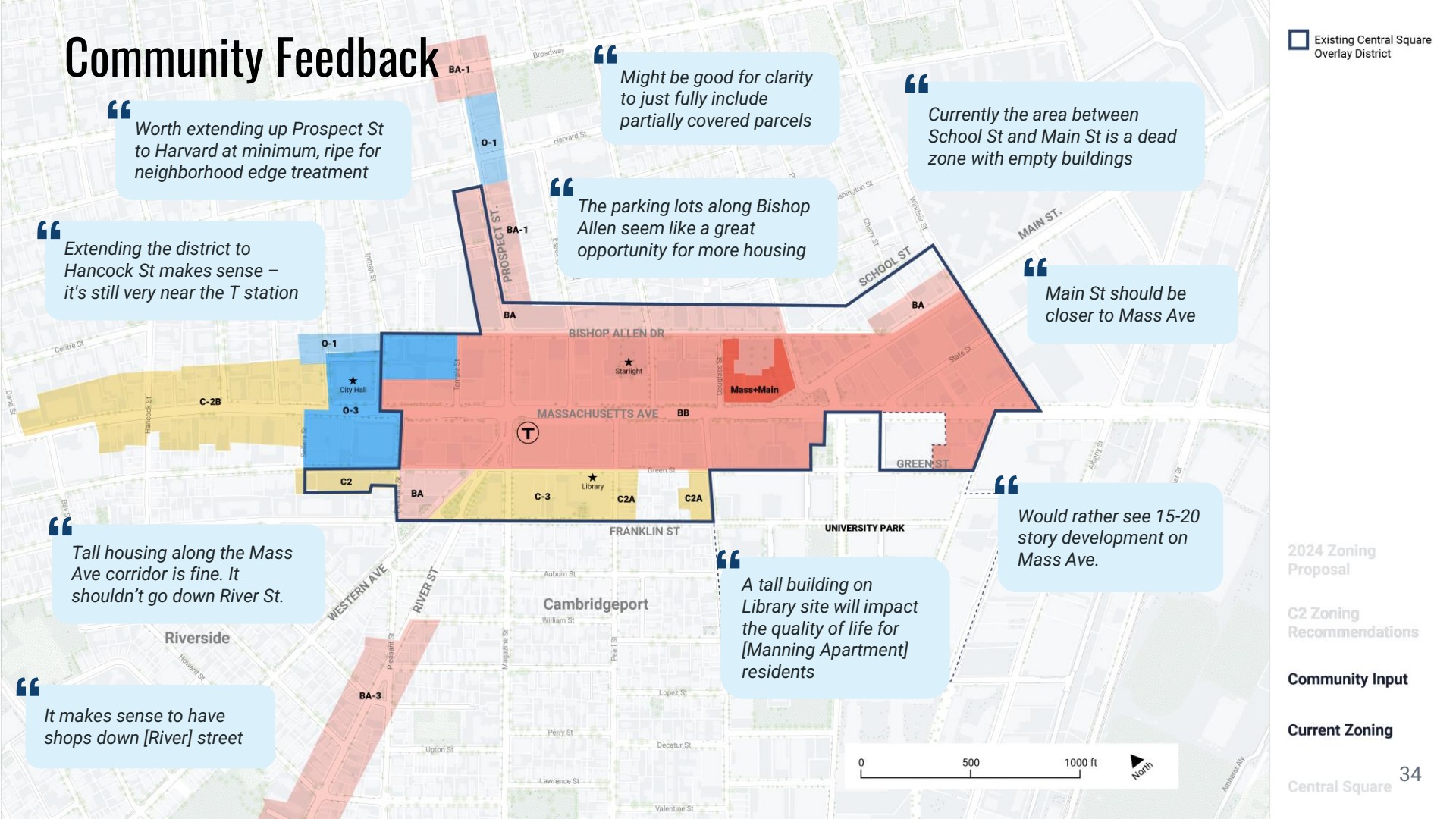
“The parking lots along Bishop Allen seem like a great opportunity for more housing”

“Currently the area between School St and Main St is a dead zone with empty buildings”

“Main St should be closer to Mass Ave”

“Would rather see 15-20 story development on Mass Ave.”

“A tall building on Library site will impact the quality of life for [Manning Apartment] residents”



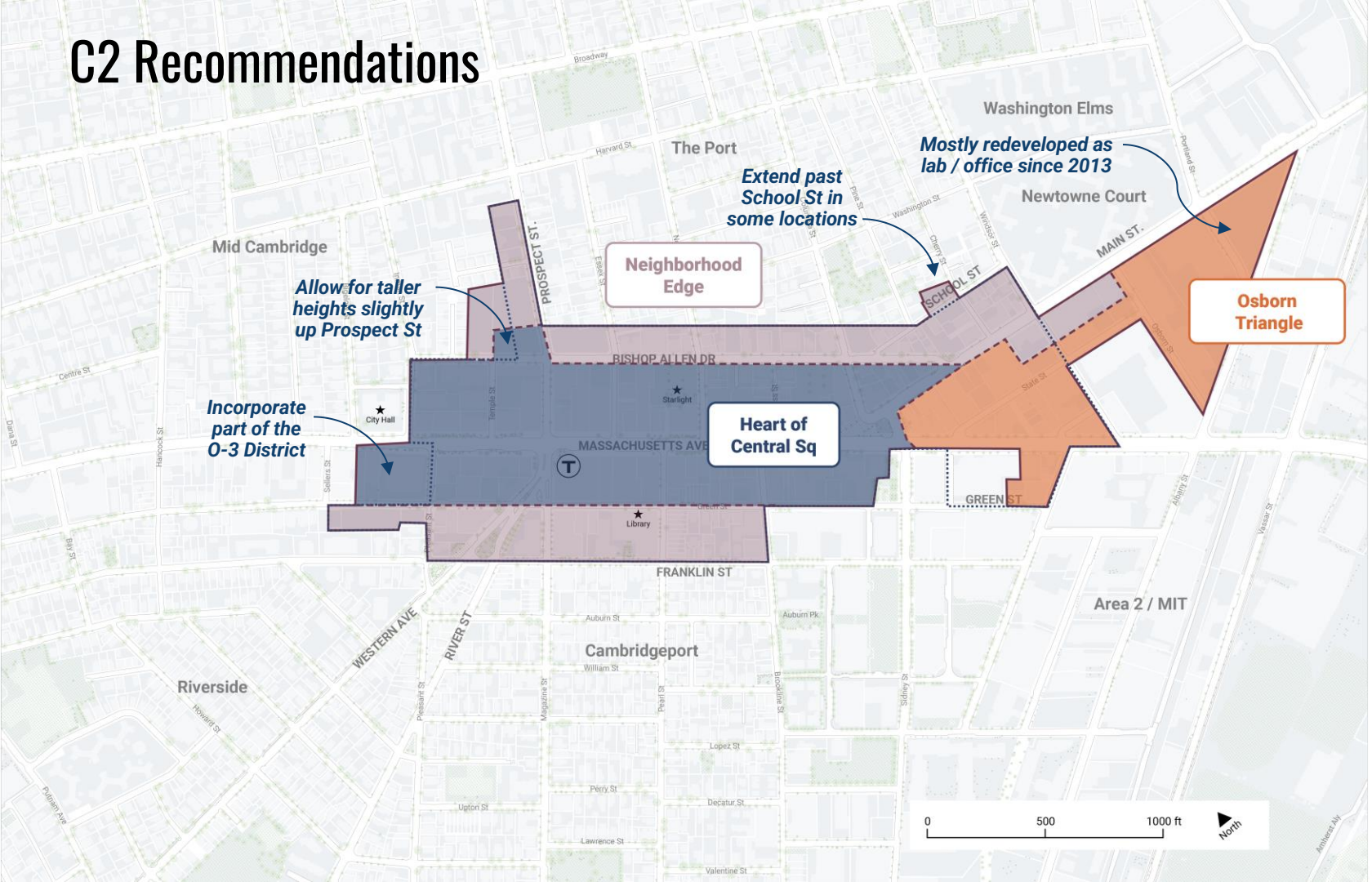
2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

C2 Recommendations



 C2 Recommendation

 Existing Central Square Overlay District

2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

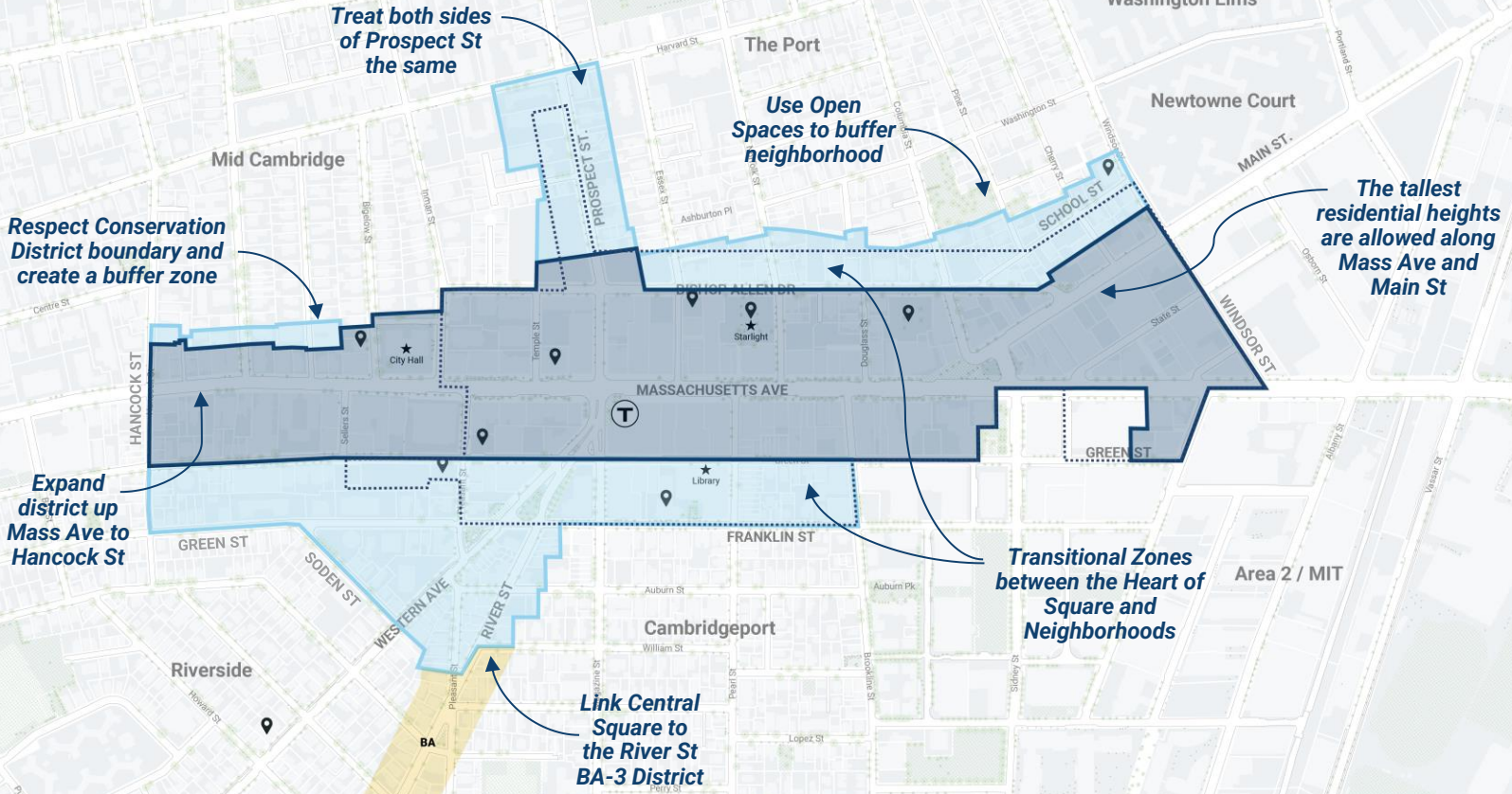
Community Input

Current Zoning



Current Recommendation

-  Central Square Lots Study sites
-  Heart of Central
-  Neighborhood Edge
-  Existing Central Square Overlay District



2024 Zoning Proposal

C2 Zoning Recommendations

Community Input

Current Zoning

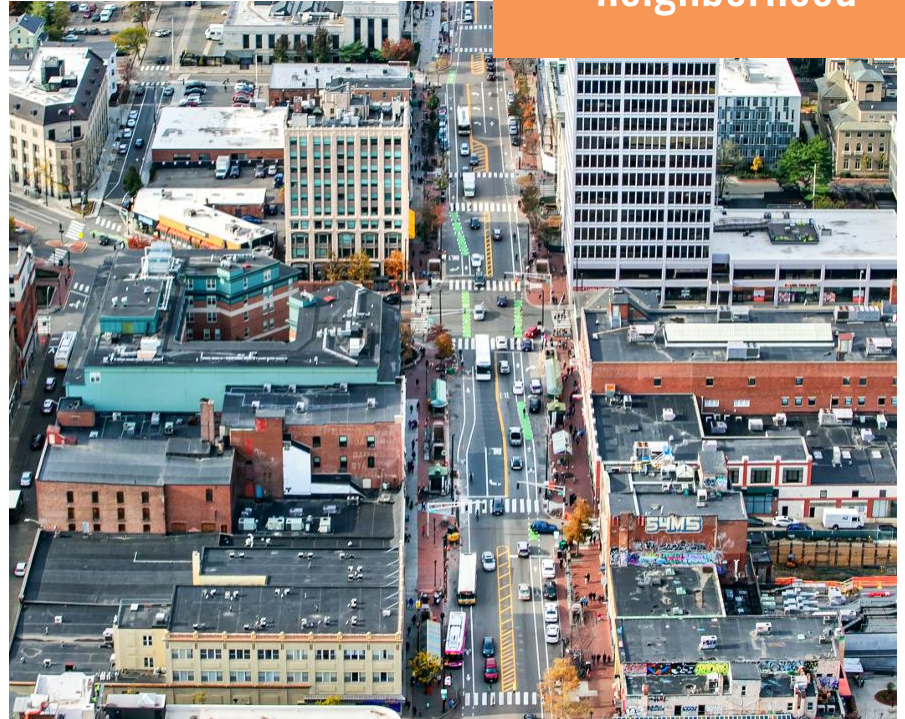


How can zoning strengthen the Cultural District?



GOAL 2: We want to reinforce Central Square as Cambridge's historic downtown and cultural district

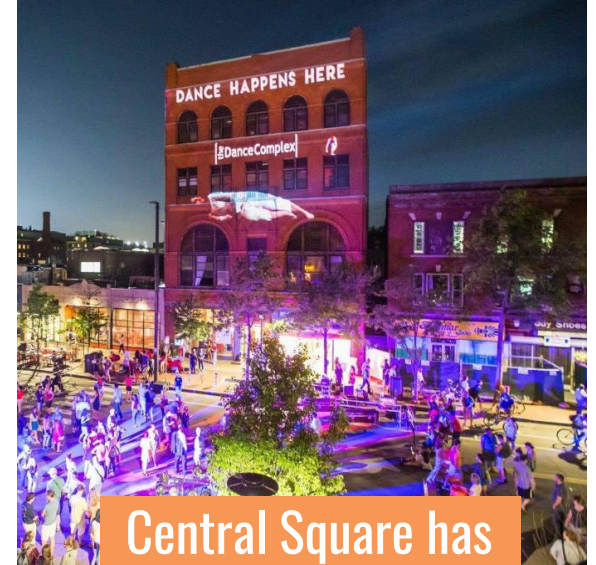
Active ground floors along major streets help create a vibrant neighborhood



GOAL 2: We want to reinforce Central Square as Cambridge's historic downtown and cultural district

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL SPACE

- Gallery
- Art Studio
- Production Studio
- Theater
- Museum
- Entertainment or Music Venue
- Social Club
- Night Club
- Maker Space
- Community Gathering Spaces
- Community Center



Central Square has a rich history of cultural spaces

GOAL 2: We want to reinforce Central Square as Cambridge's historic downtown and cultural district

To create more of these uses, we can allow them through zoning and incentivize the uses we really want to see

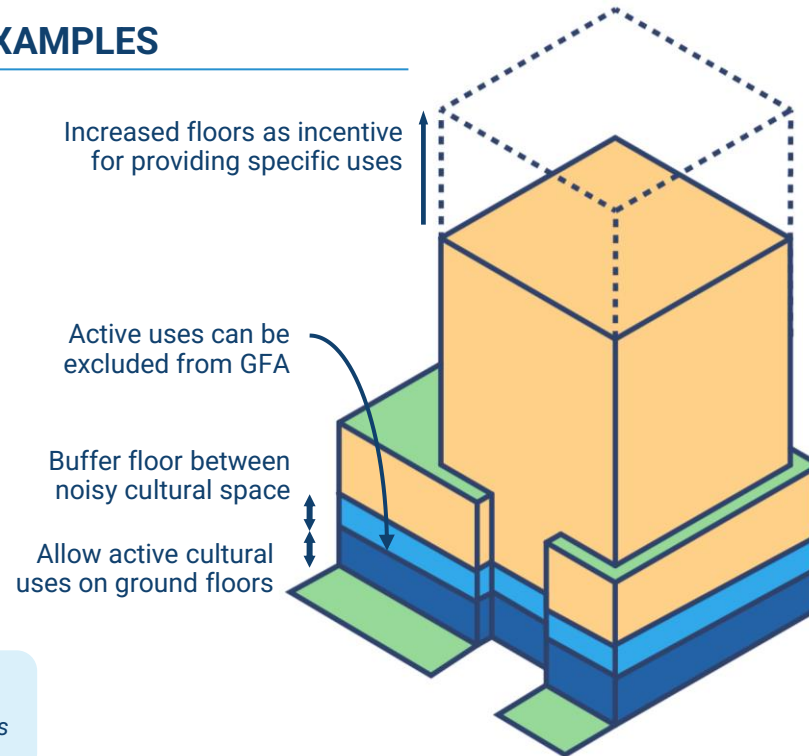
“

It can be challenging having housing directly above louder cultural spaces. You need some sort of buffer between them

“

Okay with slightly taller heights if it gets us more arts and cultural spaces

EXAMPLES



How do strategies differ between Central Square's core and edges?

Heart of Central

Allow all cultural uses as-of-right

Require active uses on the ground floor of larger projects

Incentivize cultural uses through development bonuses:

- additional non-residential space, and/or
- additional floors of housing

Neighborhood Edge

Allow all cultural uses as-of-right except for more impactful uses

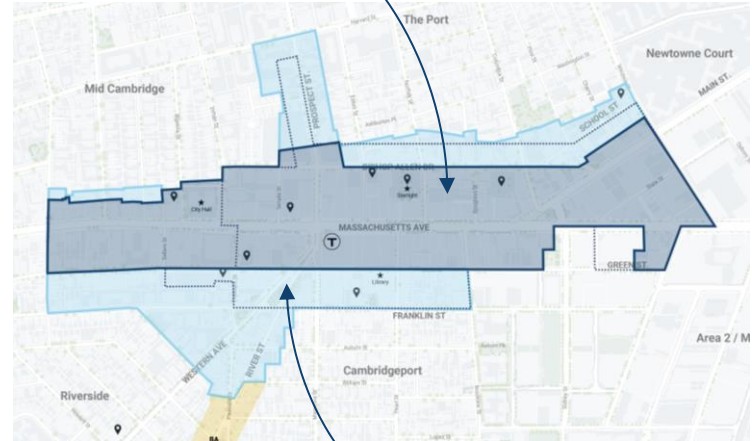
Incentivize cultural uses through development bonuses:

- additional non-residential space, and/or
- additional floors of housing

This creates a busier ground floor within the Heart of Central Square

“

It would suck to have someone put a loud night club in a transition zone, right next to residential housing



Impactful uses (such as music venues, nightclubs, and theaters) will need to go through special permit and review



What cultural uses are you excited to see in Central Square?

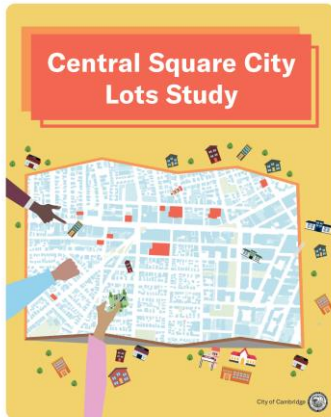
i Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

How can we use public land for community building?



GOAL 3: We want places to gather and build community

The Central Square City Lots Study identified 10 publicly owned sites that can help achieve city goals



GOAL 3: We want places to gather and build community



Zoning needs to be flexible to allow opportunities for development solutions across multiple sites.

EXAMPLES

- Creating public space by allowing development to shift across sites
- Allowing phased development with a mix of uses

Today's focus

● Community Goals

● Preliminary Recommendations

● **Discussion**

● Next steps



**CITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

We want to hear from you!

? Does this height / shape / boundary resonate with your vision for Central?

? What kinds of uses or spaces are most important to you in maintaining Central Square as a cultural district?



**CITY OF
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In breakout rooms:

Share your thoughts on our **two questions in Miro** (60 mins).

Choose **one person to share back** themes from your discussion (15 mins)

Guidelines for a **productive and inclusive** discussion



Make space for everyone to contribute and avoid interruptions.



Listen to understand, not to respond. Respect others while they're talking.



Challenge ideas, not people. Embrace different points of view, we might not all agree.



Speak from your own experience (e.g., I...), instead of generalizing (e.g., "we, us, them").



Share, even if you don't have the right words!
Ask for clarification and ask questions freely.



Share out

? Does this height / shape / boundary resonate with your vision for Central?

? What kinds of uses or spaces are most important to you in maintaining Central Square as a cultural district?



**CITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

**What were the main
themes from your
group's discussion?**

Today's focus

• Community Goals

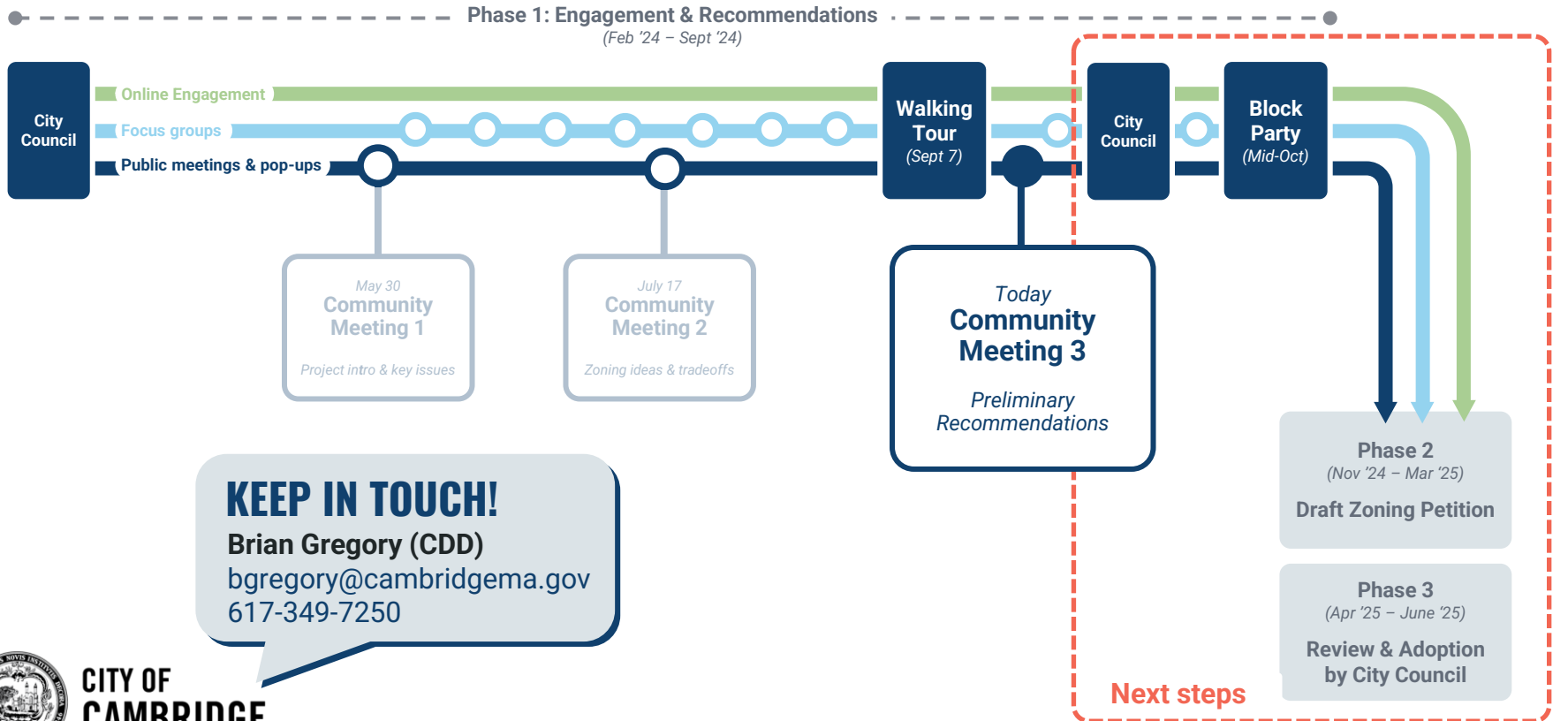
• Preliminary Recommendations

• Discussion

• **Next steps**



Next Steps



KEEP IN TOUCH!

Brian Gregory (CDD)
bgregory@cambridgema.gov
617-349-7250



**CITY OF
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Block Party!

When:

Saturday, October 19th, 1pm-5pm
(please consult project website)

Where:

Norfolk St between Bishop
Allen Drive and Mass Ave

Why:

To share final recommendations
and celebrate Central Square!



CITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Party In-Person!

We want to **thank the community** for sharing your time, feedback, and ideas with us.

On October 19th, our team will be hosting a **block party** with partners in Central Square!

There will be art, games, and activities for all ages/abilities that will transform Norfolk St.

Our team will share the **final zoning recommendations**, and information on many of the **other great projects** in and around Central Square will be there too!