



**CITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

# Central Square Zoning

May 30, 2024

6:00 - 7:30pm



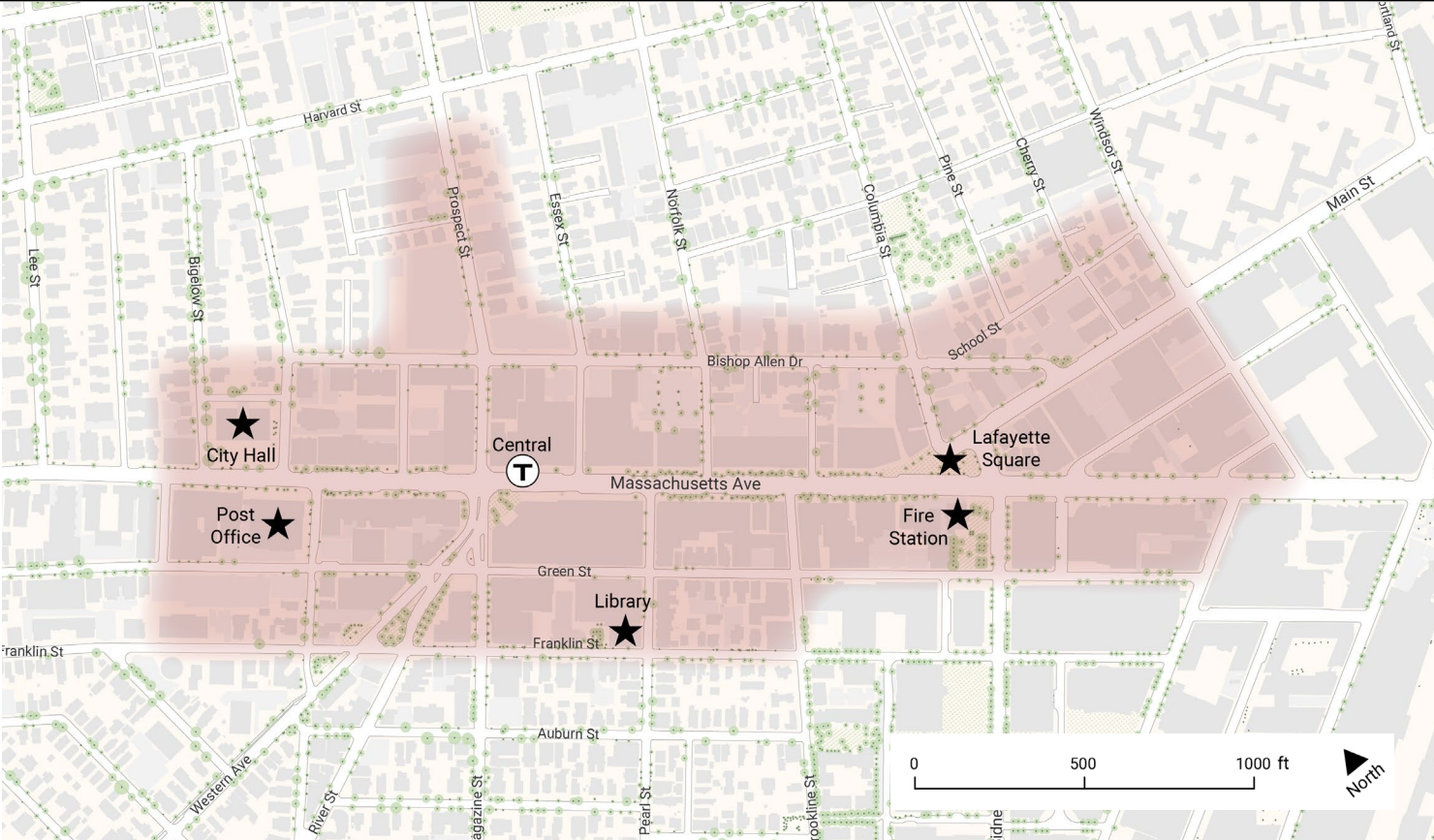
# Project Purpose

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A community process to **update the zoning for Central Square** to allow for and encourage the continued growth, redevelopment, and evolution of the district.

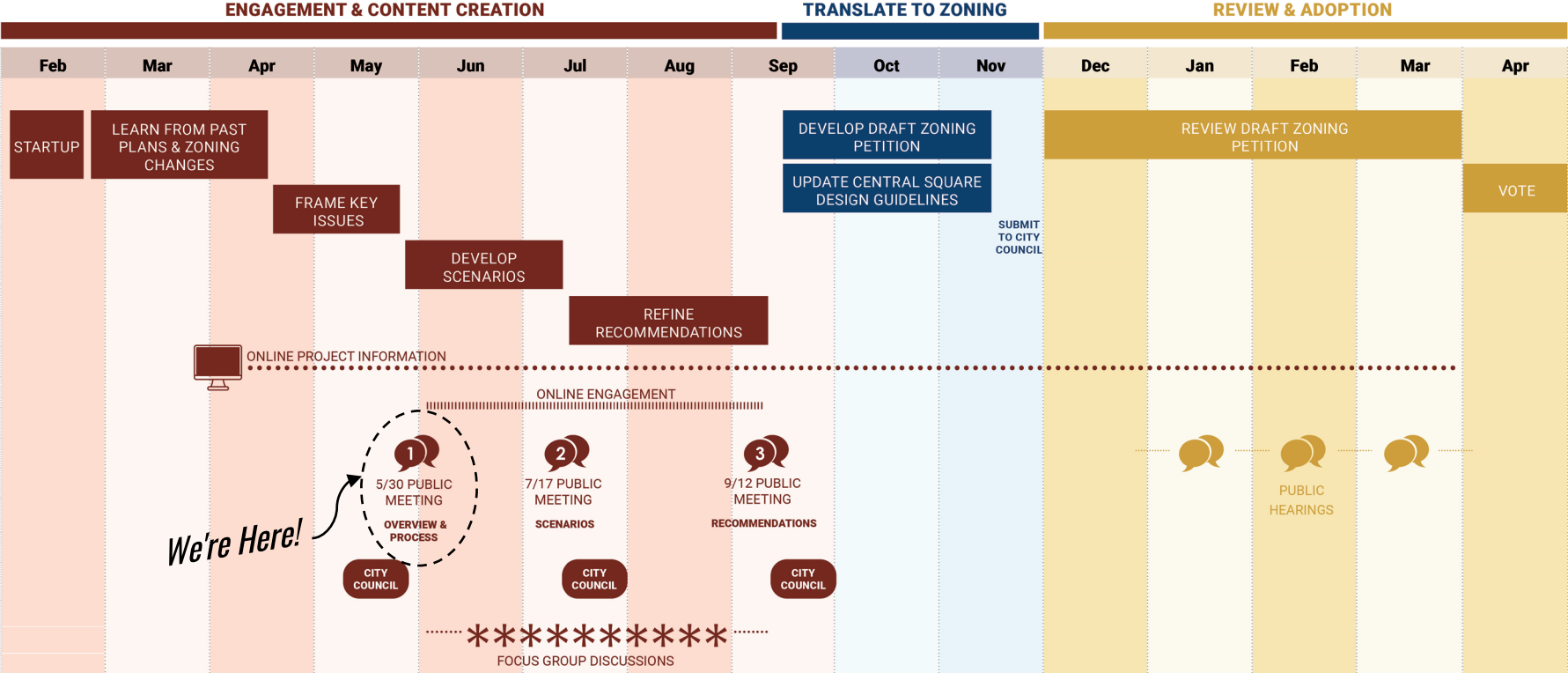


# Current Area of Focus



**CITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

# Anticipated Project Schedule





# Process

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**TODAY!** Recap community goals & ask for your input on key issues



**NEXT TIME** Discuss zoning options, alternatives, and tradeoffs



**THEN** Share & refine draft recommendations



# What We Are Covering Today

- Welcome & Introductions 10 min
- Presentation & Discussion
  - 1 Planning & Community Goals 10 min
  - 2 Zoning & Implementation Overview 20 min
  - 3 Poll & Breakout Group Discussions 30 min
- Report Back 10 min
- Next Steps 5 min



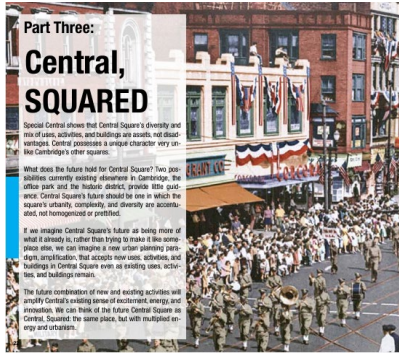
# 1. What has the community shared so far?

- Planning in Central Square
- C2 Study (2013)
- Central Sq City Lots Study (2023)





# Recent Planning for Central Square



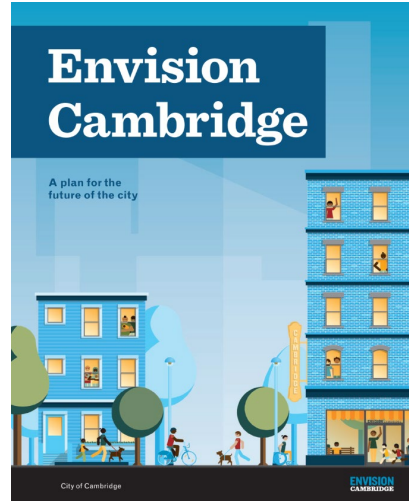
## Red Ribbon Commission Sub-committee Views: Visions for Central Square

In August 2011, the Red Ribbon Commission subcommittee published their report on Central Square. The report includes a vision for the future of Central Square, a plan for the future of Central Square, and a plan for the future of Central Square. The report also includes a plan for the future of Central Square, a plan for the future of Central Square, and a plan for the future of Central Square.

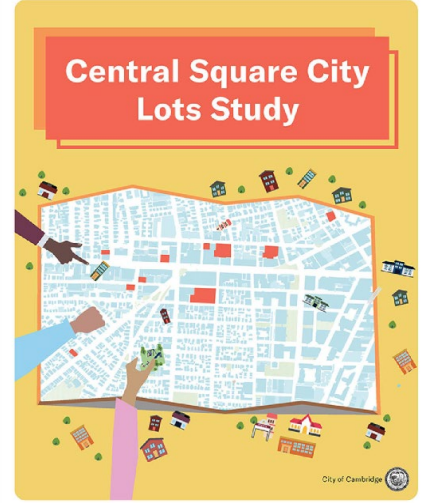
2011 – Central Square Red Ribbon Report



2013 – "C2" Central Square Study



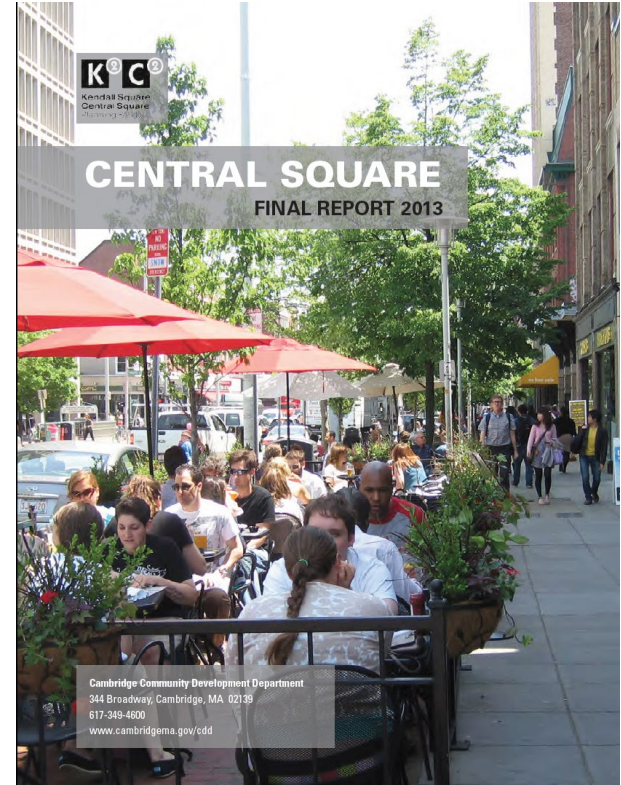
2019 – Envision Cambridge



2023 – Central Square City Lots Study

# “C2” Central Square Study (2011-2013)

The “C2” study sought to develop incentives, recommendations and guidelines to keep future development in Central Square consistent with its civic identity, support sustainability, and provide for appropriate density while being transparent to the community. This framework is meant to shape market forces to support the housing, transportation, retail, non-profit organizations, historic preservation and open space desired by the community.



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# C2 Study Goals (2013)

## C2 STUDY GOAL



**PUBLIC PLACES TO  
BUILD COMMUNITY**



**RETAIL, CULTURAL, AND  
NON-PROFIT DIVERSITY**



**INCREASING HOUSING  
STOCK & DIVERSITY**



**CONNECTING PEOPLE  
TO THE SQUARE**



**A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE  
FOR CENTRAL SQUARE**

## ZONING APPROACHES

Incentives for outdoor and indoor public space, including pocket parks, plazas, courtyards, public rooms, indoor markets, rooftop gardens, library

Require active ground stories; incentivize space for small retailers, arts and culture uses, and social services

Encourage infill; allow greater height and density for housing with affordable and middle-income component; allow “micro-units”

Encourage pedestrian-oriented activity; break up large blocks with public connections; reduce minimum parking; allow shared parking

Standards for sustainable development, energy use, stormwater management, heat island reduction



# Central Square Lots Study

The Central Square City Lots study evaluates ten municipally-owned parking lots and buildings in Central Square for their potential to support the City in using its own assets to realize community goals and support City operations.



# Central Square City Lots Study – Community Goals (2023)

Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create more housing in Central Square, particularly affordable housing</li></ul>
City & Community Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accommodate cultural programs, events, and spaces</li><li>• Create high quality community services in Central Square</li><li>• Provide opportunities for social services to expand and co-locate</li><li>• Address city office and collaboration space needs</li></ul>
Open Space, Parking, Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase parks and open spaces</li><li>• Support ongoing infrastructure improvement projects</li><li>• Meet parking needs &amp; include transportation demand</li></ul>
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan for future opportunities to connect adjacent private lots</li></ul>

## Housing



## City & Community Resources

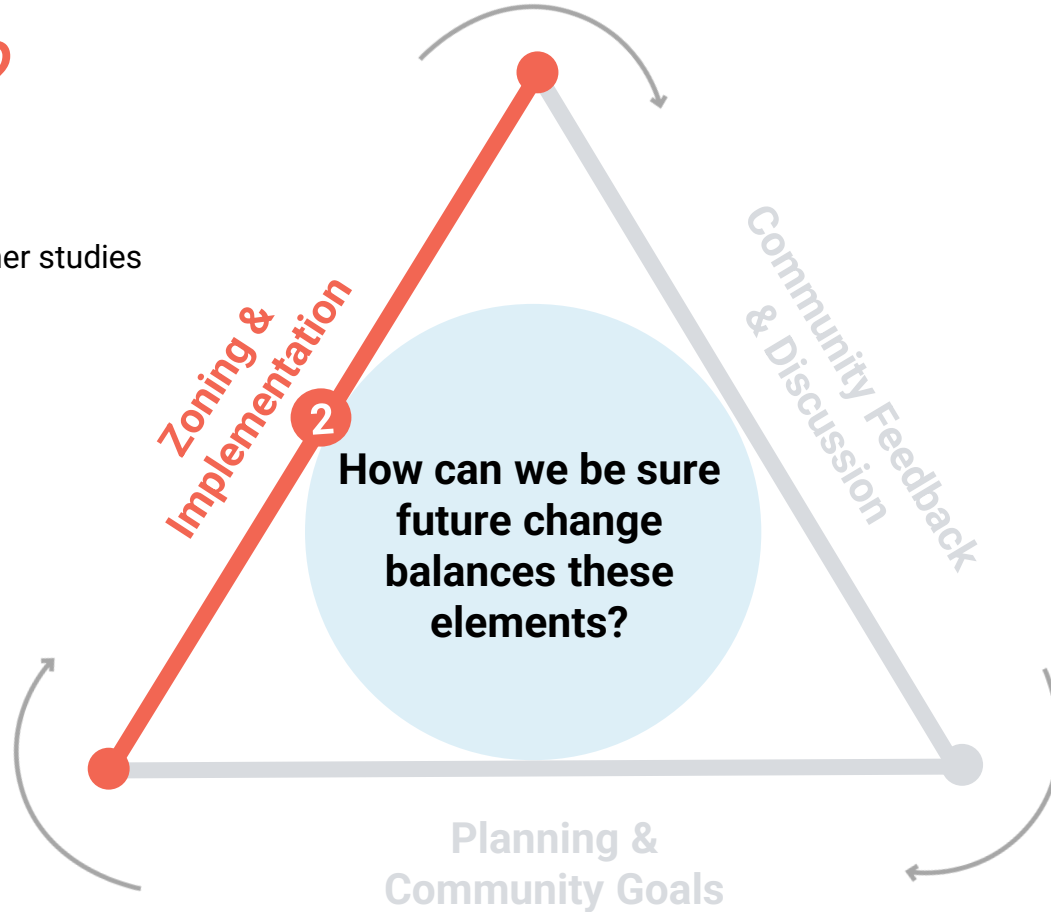


## Open Space, Parking, Infrastructure



## 2. What is zoning?

- Base zoning and overlays
- Design guidelines
- Envision Cambridge & other studies





# What is Zoning?

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- Zoning is the City's rulebook regulating the use of land
- Rules are intended to advance the community's goals while allowing owners to use their private property in a reasonable way
- Zoning sets the rules, but property owners ultimately decide what to do with their land



# What is Zoning?

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## Zoning regulates...

- How land can be used (residential, commercial, etc.)
- Building size and shape
- Where buildings are located on a lot
- Other site or building characteristics (open space, parking, etc.)

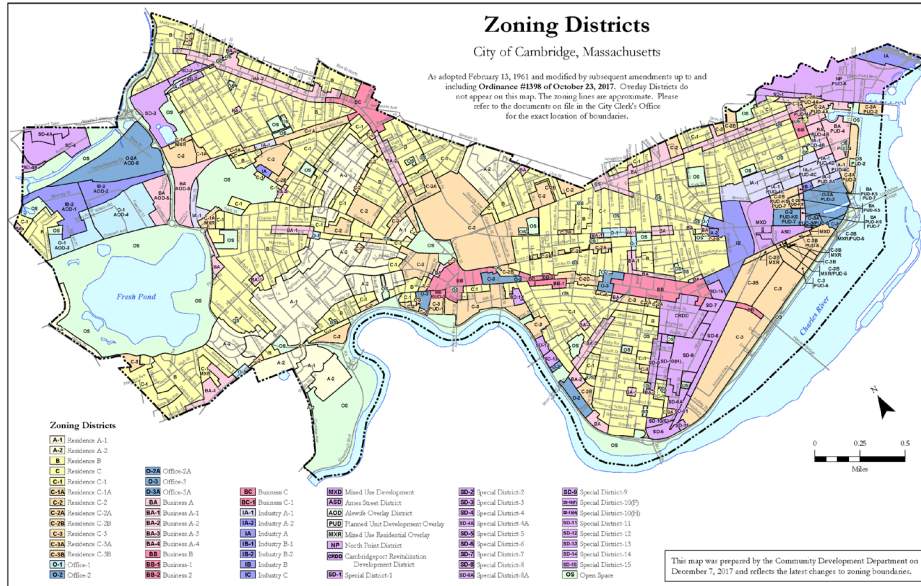
## Zoning does NOT regulate...

- Who can own land
- How businesses operate
- How buildings are constructed and what materials they use
- Matters subject to other state or federal regulation (e.g., building codes, licensing, taxation)

*Zoning can be used to prioritize or incentivize certain uses or site characteristics by relaxing regulations for the uses we want*



# Two Parts to Zoning



Zoning Map

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Search or jump to

NOTIFICATIONS SIGN IN HELP Select Language

Cambridge, Massachusetts - Zoning Ordinance / ZONING ORDINANCE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

SHOW CHANGES MORE

VERSION: OCT 22, 2021 (CURRENT)

ZONING ORDINANCE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

ZONING ORDINANCE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Published in 2019 by Order of the City

**municode**

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ZONING ORDINANCE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

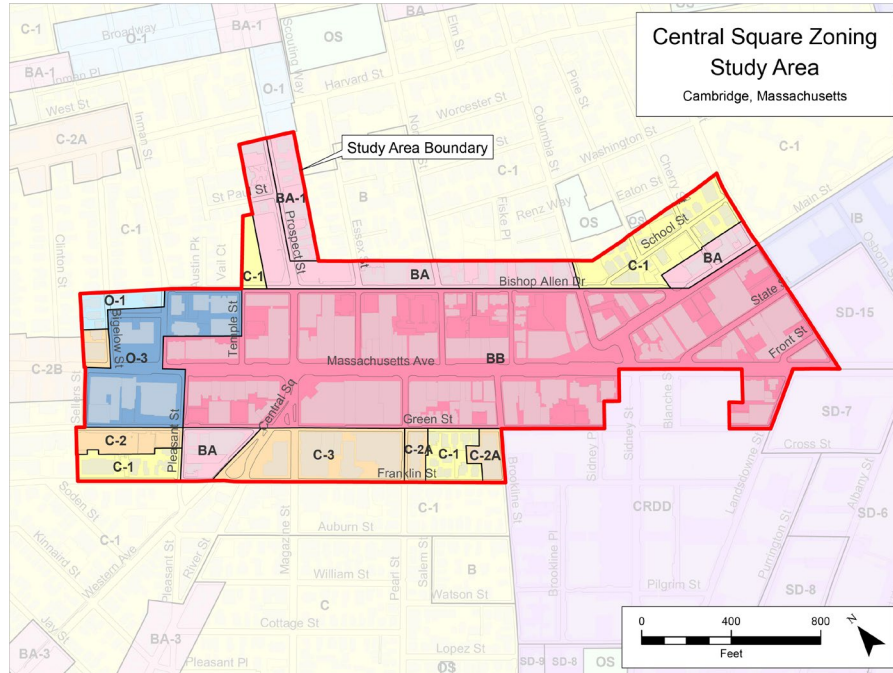
- ARTICLE 1.000 - PREAMBLE
- ARTICLE 2.000 - DEFINITIONS **modified**
- ARTICLE 3.000 - ZONING DISTRICTS
- ARTICLE 4.000 - USE REGULATIONS
- ARTICLE 5.000 - DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS
- ARTICLE 6.000 - OFF STREET PARKING AND LOADING REQUIREMENTS AND NIGHTTIME CURFEW ON LARGE COMMERCIAL THROUGH TRUCKS
- ARTICLE 7.000 - SIGNS AND ILLUMINATION
- ARTICLE 8.000 - NONCONFORMITY
- ARTICLE 9.000 - PROCEDURES AND ADMINISTRATION
- ARTICLE 10.000 - APPEALS, VARIANCES, AND SPECIAL PERMITS
- ARTICLE 11.000 - SPECIAL REGULATIONS
- ARTICLE 12.000 - PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT
- ARTICLE 13.000 - PLANNED UNIT DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

Zoning Ordinance





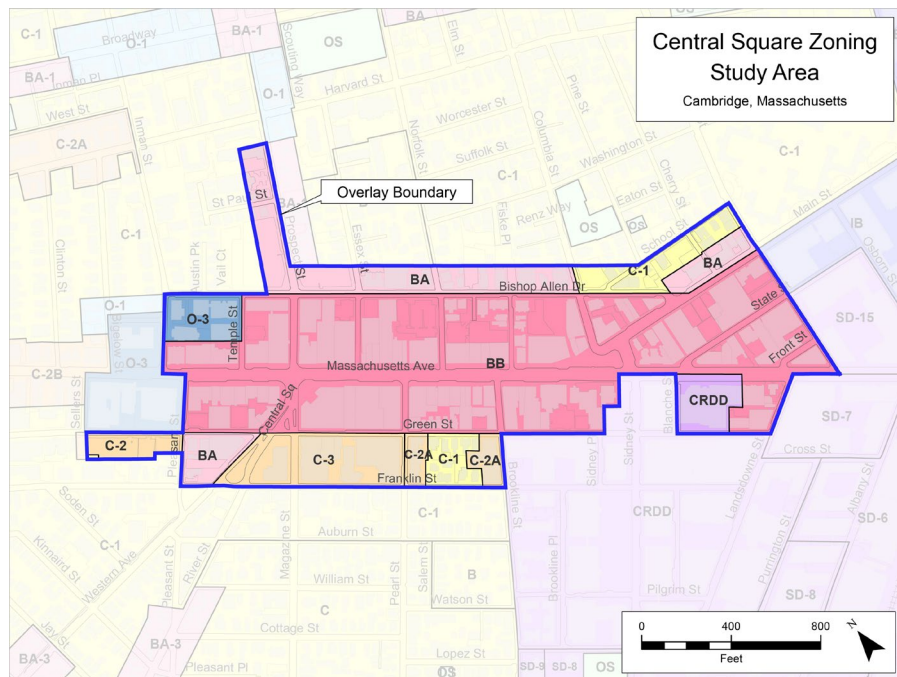
# Central Square Base Zoning Districts



- Core of Central Square on Mass Ave and Main Street is zoned Business B (BB) and Office 3 (O-3)
- Both districts allow most residential and office uses – Business districts also allow retail
- Residential districts are located towards the edges, decreasing in density as you get further from the core of the square



# Central Square Overlay District

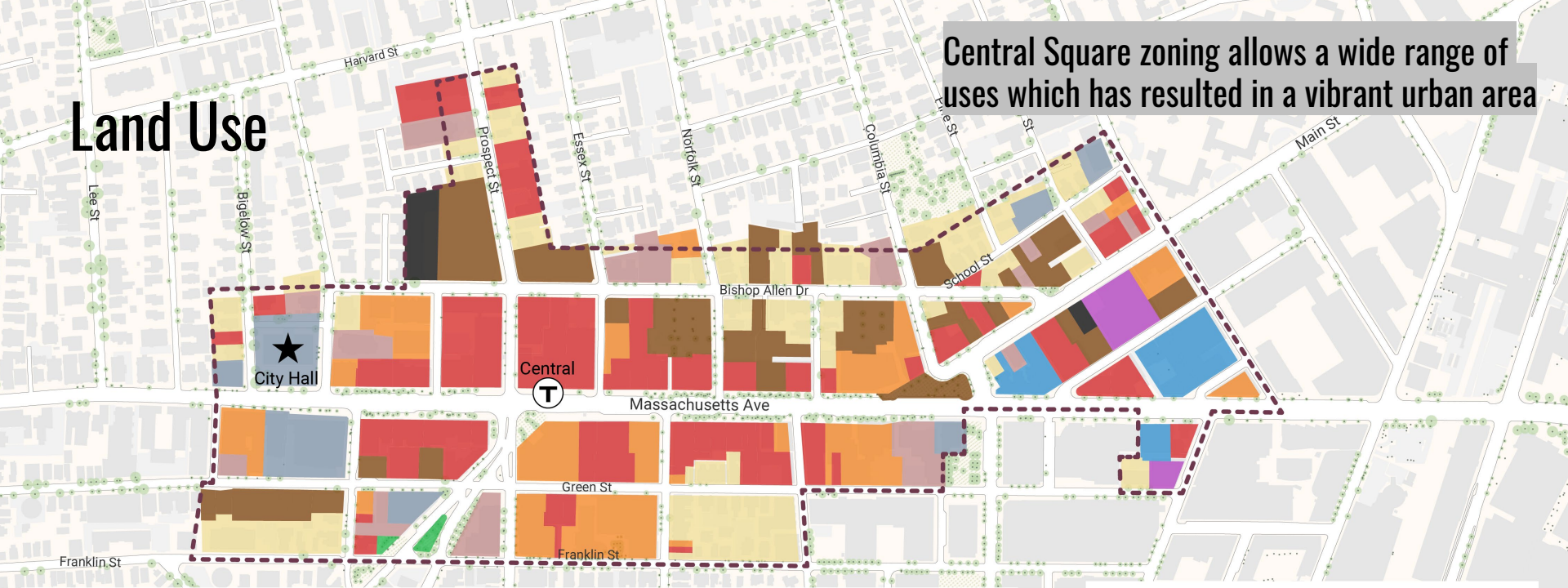


- Overlay districts change the rules of the base zoning districts to promote a particular use or purpose
- The Central Square Overlay aims to...
  - Encourage housing in BB and O-3 districts
  - Limit chain businesses, bank frontage, and other ground floor uses
  - Add an additional layer of review for larger buildings

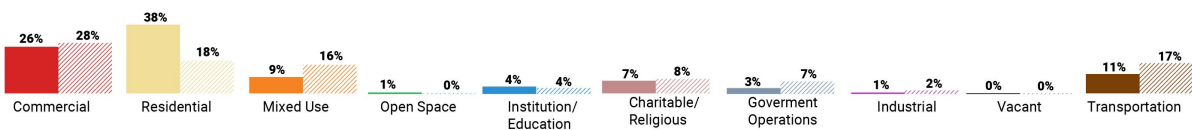


# Land Use

Central Square zoning allows a wide range of uses which has resulted in a vibrant urban area

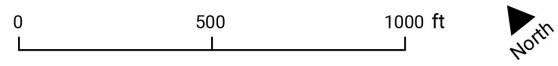


## Land Use Summary



## Generalized Land Use

- Commercial
- Residential
- Mixed Use
- Institution/Education
- Open Space
- Transportation
- Vacant
- Government Operations
- Charitable/Religious
- Industrial

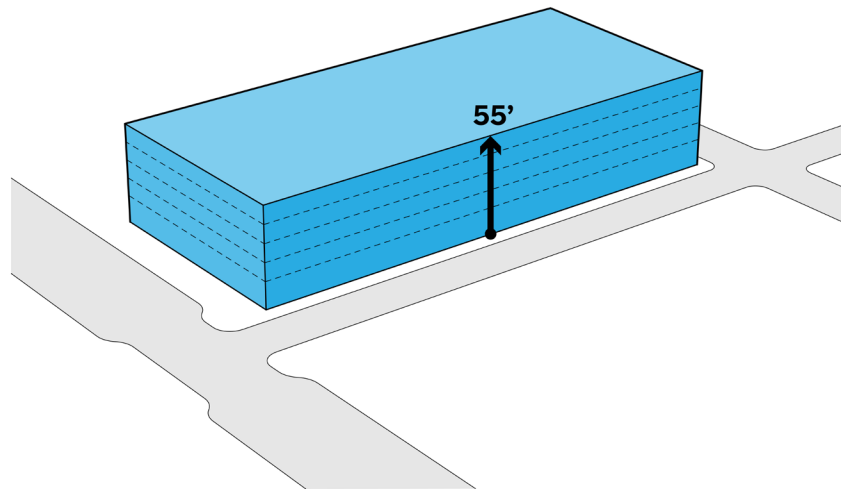


# Height and Bulk

- Zoning controls the size and shape of buildings through height and density limits
- *Bulk Control Planes* are used to shape the upper stories of buildings by requiring setbacks above a certain height
- Density is measured by the Floor to Area Ratio (FAR)

*In Central Square:*

- **Height allowed as of right: lesser of 55 feet or base zoning limit**



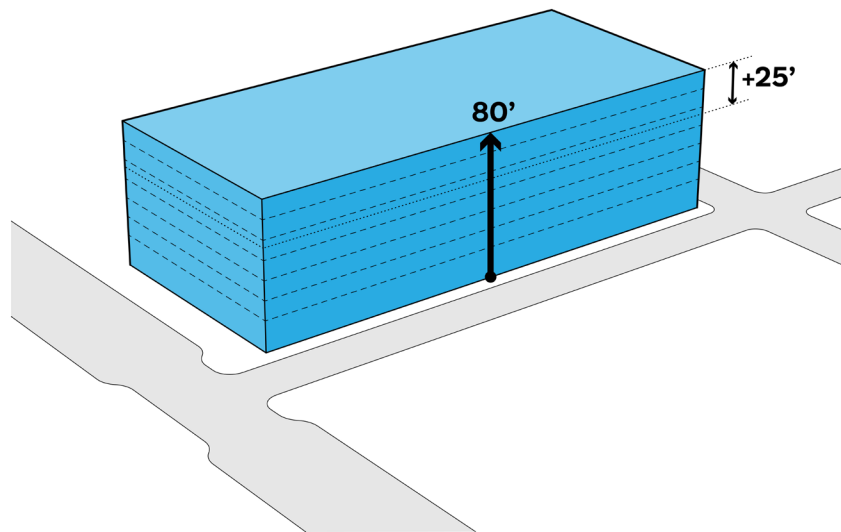


# Height and Bulk

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*In Central Square:*

- **Height allowed by special permit: up to 80 feet if allowed by base zoning**

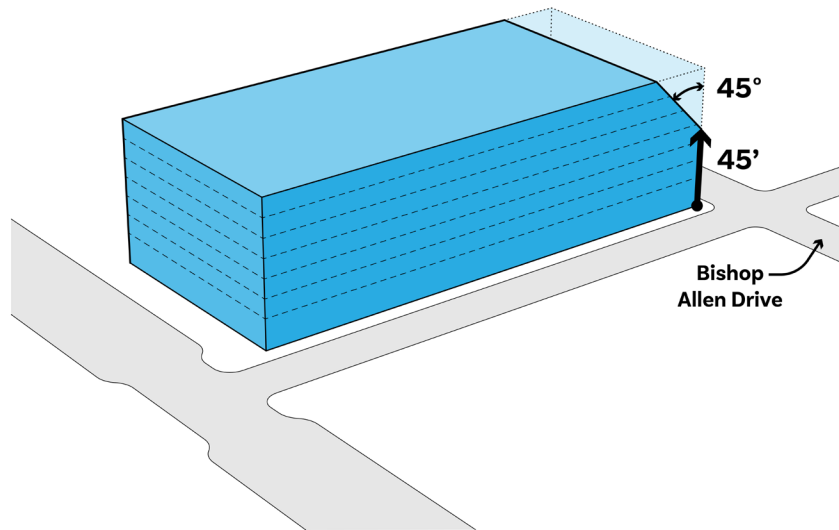


# Height and Bulk

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*In Central Square:*

- **45-degree bulk control planes above 45'** where lot abuts Prospect or Bishop Allen

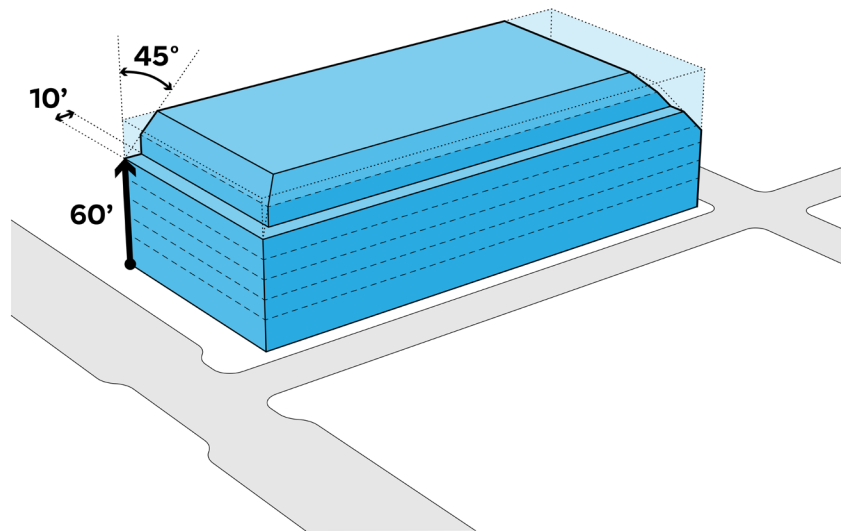


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*In Central Square:*

- **Step-back above 60' of at least 10' from front line and 45-degree plane at 60'**

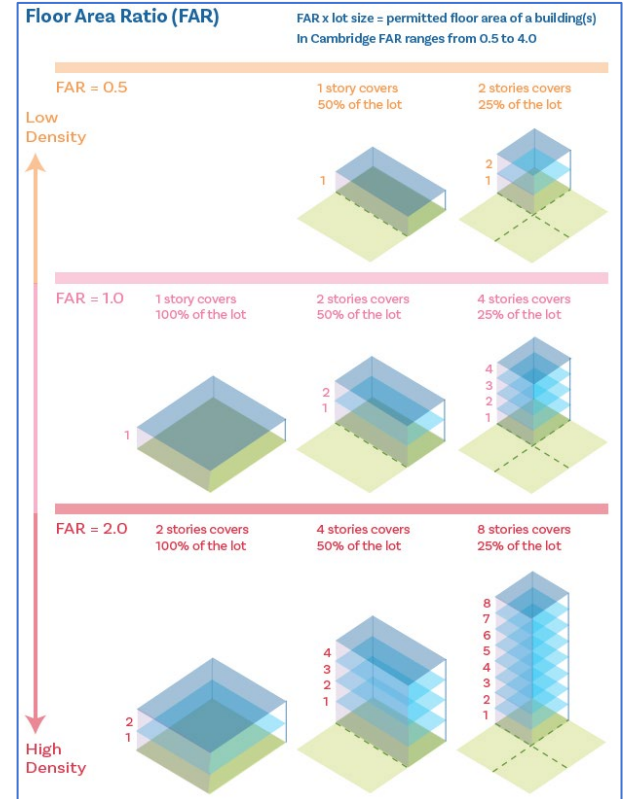


# Height and Bulk

- Zoning controls the size and shape of buildings through height and density limits
- *Bulk Control Planes* are used to shape the upper stories of buildings by requiring setbacks above a certain height
- Density is measured by the Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

*In Central Square:*

- **4.0 FAR allowed for residential uses and 2.75 FAR for non-residential uses in BB districts**

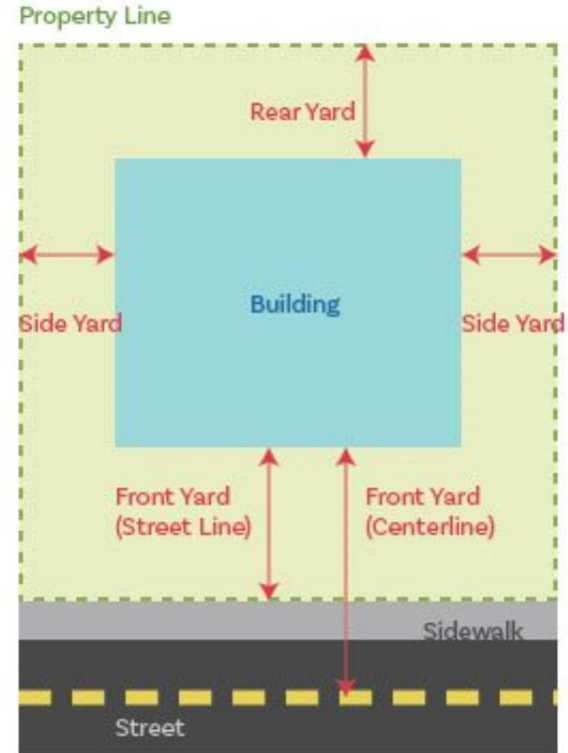


# Open Space and Setbacks

- Zoning sets minimum open space and setback standards that vary by district

## *In Central Square:*

- In the Business B district, commercial uses do not have front yard setback or open space requirements, while residential uses do
- Developers need a special permit from the Planning Board to waive setback and open space requirements for residential uses





# Priorities and Incentives

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## How can zoning prioritize different uses?

- Many zoning districts have different dimensional standards for residential and non-residential uses
- Prioritize by allowing taller and denser buildings for one type of use over the other

### *In Central Square:*

- The BB and O-3 districts under the Central Square Overlay allow a higher FAR for residential uses than non-residential uses



# Priorities and Incentives

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## How Zoning Incentives Work

- Allow more space to be built for things that benefit the owner (such as market-rate commercial space or housing) in exchange for dedicating space to uses that have a public benefit (e.g., small business, arts, social services, affordable housing)

*Ways to do it:*

- “Exempt” space from Gross Floor Area (GFA) limits if it is dedicated to a desired use
- Allow a development “bonus”

*In Central Square:*

- Residential balconies in BB are exempt from GFA
- Rooftop spaces in BB are exempt by special permit
- Retail spaces  $\leq 1,500$  SF are exempt from GFA

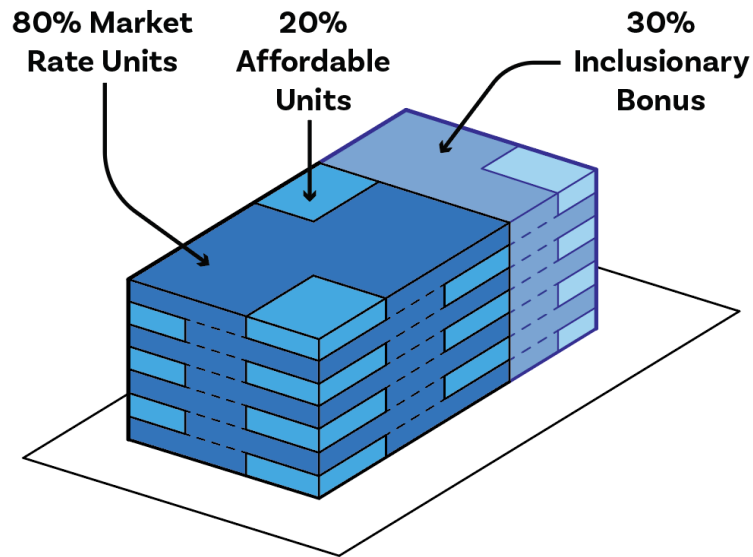


# Inclusionary Housing

Inclusionary Housing leverages the private market to provide Affordable Housing in market-rate developments.

*How it works:*

- Projects that create 10 or more units are required to provide 20% affordable
- In return, Inclusionary Projects are afforded a 30% density bonus, but no height bonus
- For projects less than 10 units, a developer may voluntarily choose to comply with Inclusionary requirements to get the 30% density bonus

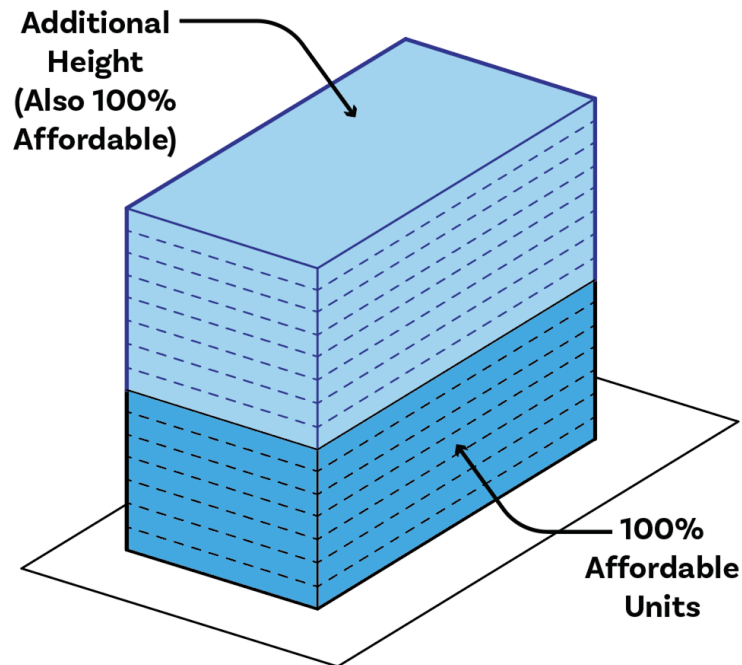


# Affordable Housing Overlay

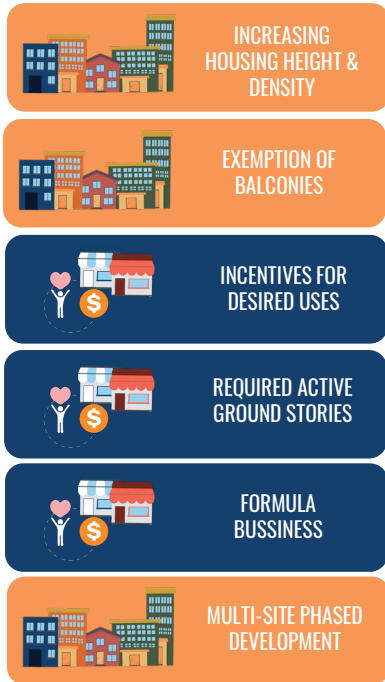
The Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) is a city-wide overlay zoning district that establishes modified dimensional standards and a by-right approval process for projects that provide 100% Affordable Housing.

*In Central Square:*

- The Central Square Overlay District is considered an AHO Square, which means AHO Projects have a height limit of 15 stories/170 feet and have no FAR limits



# C2 Zoning Recommendations (2013)



## ZONING APPROACHES

Allow up to 12 stories (14 stories in Osborn Triangle); middle-income and family-sized units required for increased height/density

Exempt balconies up to depth of 5 feet

Exempt by SP: retailers with average size  $\leq 5,000$  SF; institutional arts, culture or social service uses; "Public room" or approved public facilities (library, &c.)

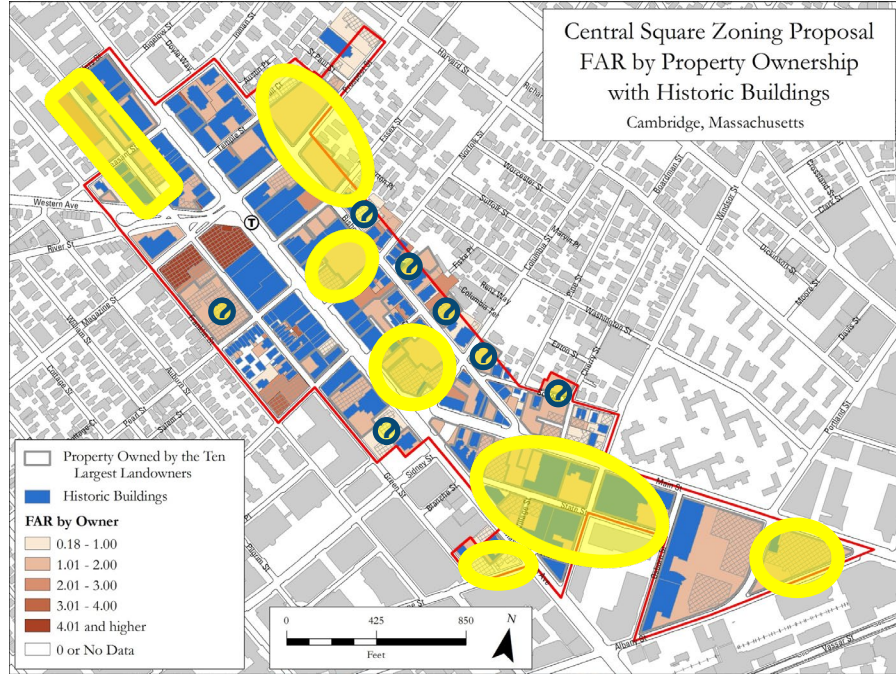
Design standards for height and depth, entrance locations, &c.; limited range of retail and non-residential uses allowed on Mass Ave and Main Street

Require special permit

Allow coordinated development across multiple sites through phased development permitting and/or transfer of development rights



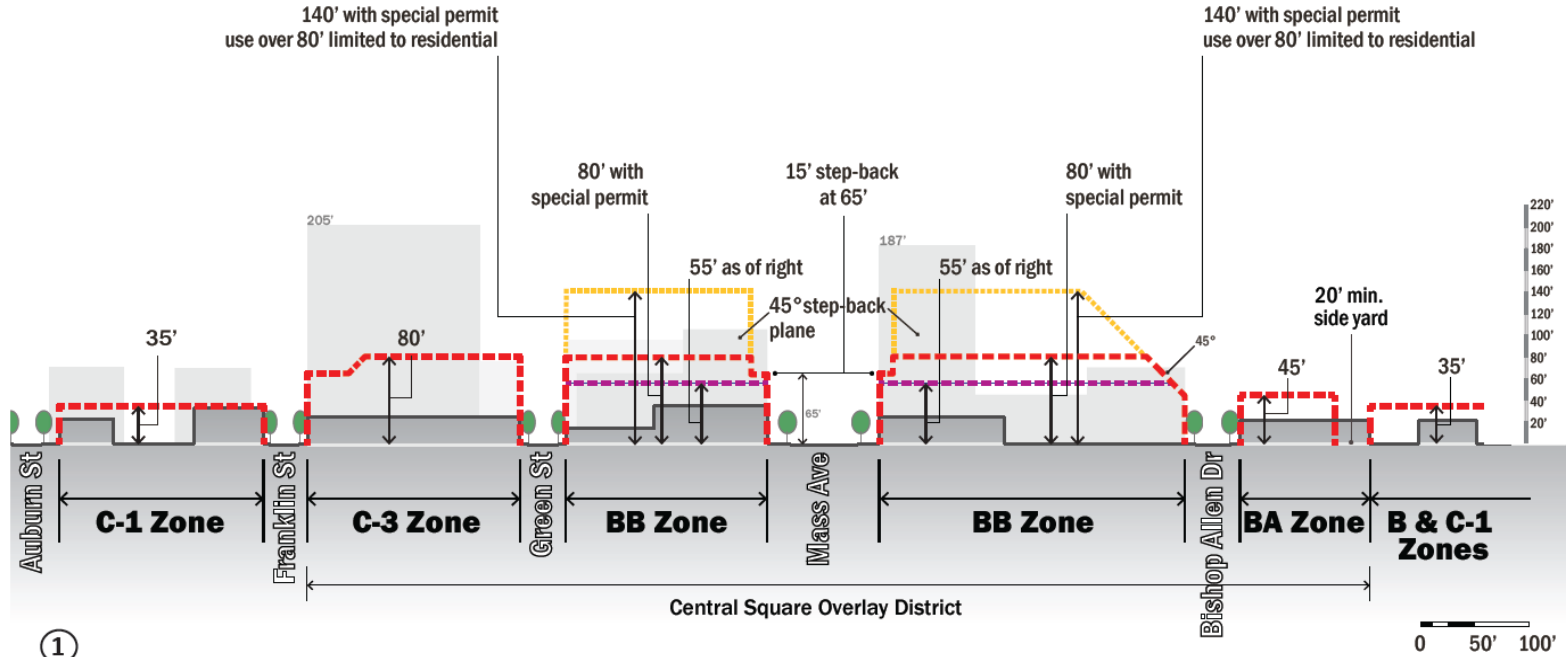
# C2 Study Zoning Analysis (2013)



- Identified areas for future growth based on land ownership, existing use, and historic status
- Modeled development potential on example sites



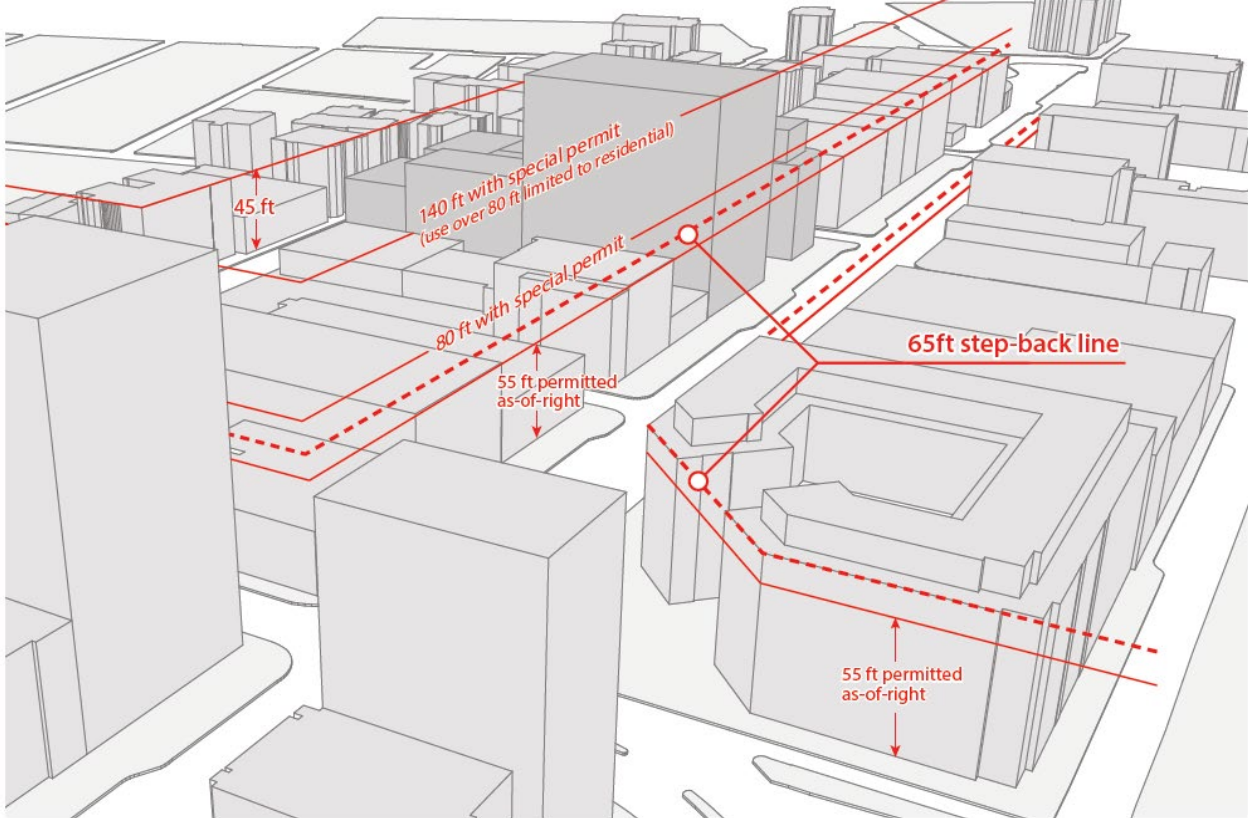
# Building Heights



①



# Building Heights



# What's happened in zoning since C2?

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## Central Square Zoning

- 2013 Forest City Amendment
- 2015 “Mass and Main” Amendment
- 2017 “Central Square Restoration” Amendment
- 2020 Starlight Square

## Citywide Zoning

- 2017 Inclusionary Housing increase to 20%
- 2019-2021 Green Building Updates (per Net Zero Action Plan)
- 2020 Affordable Housing Overlay + 2023 Amendment
- 2021 Green Roofs Requirement
- 2022 Elimination of minimum parking citywide
- 2023 Climate Resilience Zoning



# Forest City Amendment (2013)

- Addition to University Park across from Osborn Triangle
- 6-stories (95 feet), 227,000 square-foot lab/office building
- Active ground story on Mass Ave





# Mass and Main Amendment (2015)

- Former Quest Diagnostics site
- 18-stories over 6-stories (195 over 70 feet)
- 285 units of housing
- 17% affordable to low-moderate income
- 3% affordable to middle income
- Ground story restaurants and open space



# 2017 “Central Square Restoration” Amendment

<b>C2 Zoning Recommendation</b>	<b>2017 Amendment</b>	<b>C2 Recommendations Not Addressed</b>
<b>Increased Housing Height and Density</b>	Increased residential density at existing height limits	No additional height for housing
<b>Incentives for Desired Uses</b>	Exempted retailers ≤ 1,500 square feet	No incentives for arts and culture, social services, public spaces
<b>Exemption of Balconies</b>	Exempted recessed balconies and roof decks	N/A (but could revisit)
<b>Required Active Ground Stories</b>	Limited bank frontage to 25 feet, increase by SP	No other standards for design and use of ground stories for activation
<b>Formula Business</b>	Special permit required	None (but could revisit)
<b>Multi-site / Phased Development</b>	Not included	No process for coordinated, phased development across multiple sites



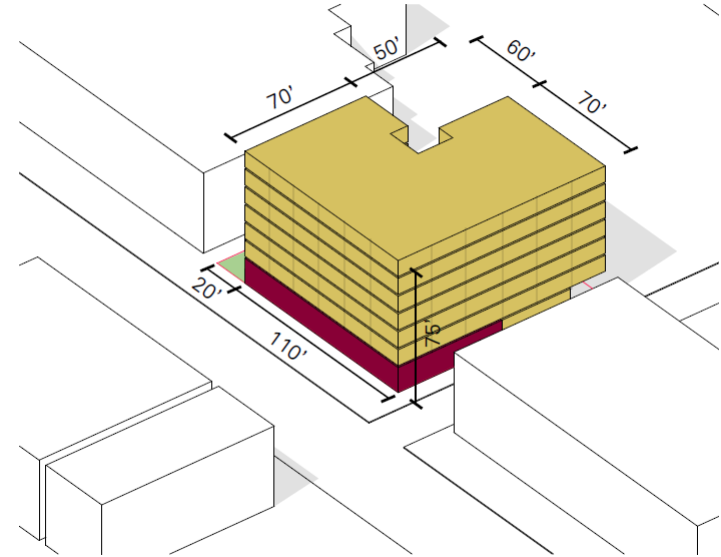
# 2017 “Central Square Restoration” Amendment

## Discussion of Height and Density

- Increased housing density possible but “tight” within 80-foot height limit
- More difficult due to high-rise building code requirements for buildings above 70 feet

February 2017

8



# Proposed Development Post-2017



907 Main Street Hotel renovation/addition – built



727 Mass Ave Hotel addition – permitted, not yet built



600 Mass Ave Housing addition – permitted, not yet built



544 Mass Ave Housing addition – permitted, not yet built



# Starlight Square

- Outdoor entertainment and pop-up retail on city-owned parking lot
- Permitted in 2020 under zoning waiver due to state of emergency
- Later enabled by 2023 zoning amendment

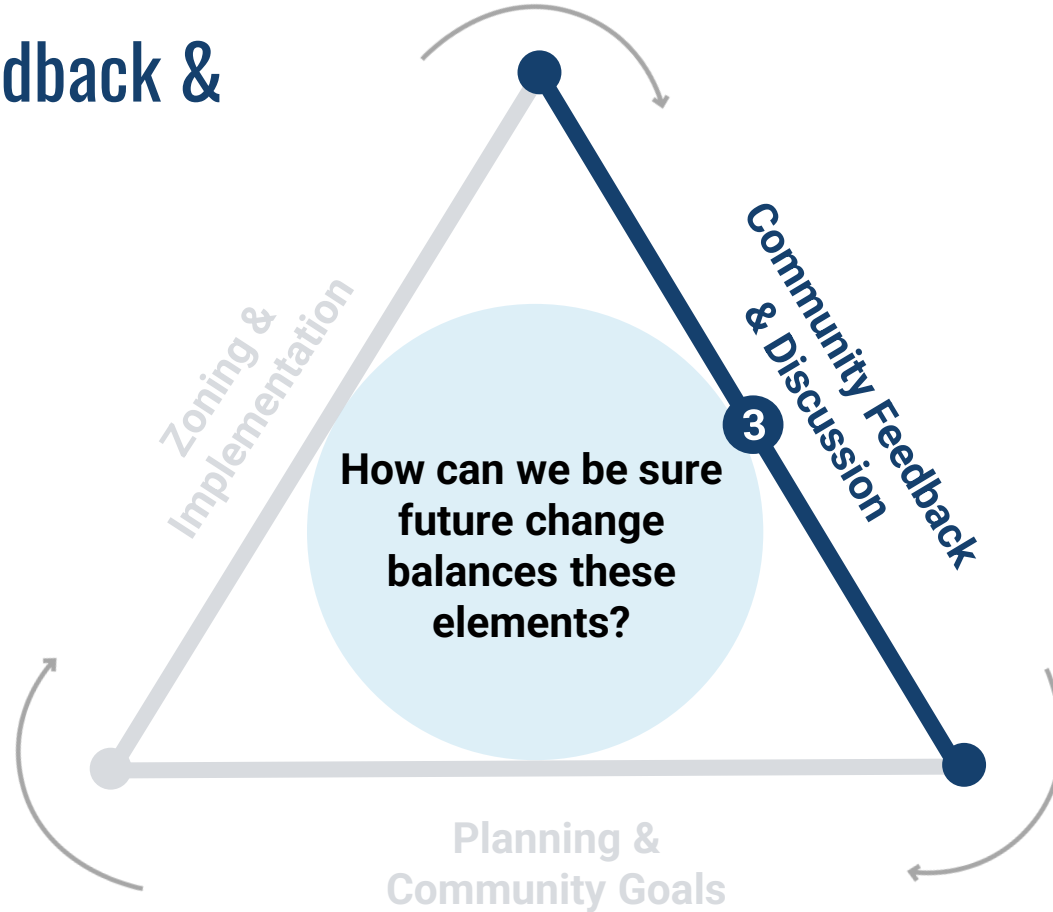


# Summary: What's left to do?





### 3. Community Feedback & Discussion





# Quick Poll: Interests & Concerns

5 minutes

slido



**What are you most interested in as part of this rezoning process?**

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

slido



**What are you most concerned about?**

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

# Breakout Group Discussions

20-30 minutes

# Group Discussion Guidelines

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- Be Respectful, be kind
- Embrace different points of view
- Avoid interruptions, one person speaks at a time
- Listen to understand, not to respond
- All stereotyping and hateful comments are not tolerated



## Discussion Part 1: Vision

Let's Talk About...

**WHAT USES DO YOU WANT TO  
SEE IN CENTRAL SQUARE?**

*How can zoning support  
these uses?*

# Discussion Part 2: Assets & Opportunities

Let's Talk About...

## **ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES**

*What are the assets that are important in Central Square?*

*Where are the opportunities for the future?*



# Report Back

Share 2-3 highlights from your group's discussion

# Next Steps

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1. The recording and chat from this meeting will be posted to the project website for reference and for anyone who wasn't able to attend.  
<https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/communitydevelopment/centralsquarerezoning>
2. A collaborative online mapping tool will be available soon through the website where anyone can enter their feedback and ideas.
3. We'll begin arranging focus groups with organizations and businesses.
4. The next Community Meeting will be July 17<sup>th</sup>, where we will discuss zoning options, alternatives, and trade-offs. We hope to see you there!

