

Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee Meeting #17

September 12, 2018

Committee Attendees

Robert Winters, Ruth Ryals, Tom Stohlman, Bill Kane

Other Attendees

City Staff, Melissa Peters, Iram Farooq, Cassie Arnaud, Chris Cotter, Wendell Joseph

Consultant team: John McCartin

Eight members of the public were present.

Meeting Overview

The Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee provided feedback on development projections under the City's current zoning ordinance and three zoning ideas that came out of the Envision Cambridge process: *100% Affordable Housing Overlay*, *Super-Inclusionary Housing*, and an *Environmental Performance Incentive*.

The meeting's presentation is online [here](#).

100% Affordable Housing Overlay Discussion

The idea of a citywide 100% affordable housing overlay would give additional density and relief from dimensional requirements for all-affordable projects only. It would also allow an as-of-right permitting approval process.

Committee questions/comments:

- Has there been any talk about increasing the overall number of affordable units that the City builds each year? 50-60 units per year doesn't sound like it's enough.
 - Yes, this has been part of the conversation in the Housing Working Group. The Housing Working Group proposed different ways to increase city funds, including a real estate transfer tax. However, the overlay would not increase affordable housing production on its own.
- I'm still not swayed by the 100% Affordable Housing Overlay. I prefer relatively uniform rules for all parties, both market and affordable housing developers.

Super-Inclusionary Housing Discussion

The City's current zoning requirements mandate that 20% of new residential development (that exceeds 10,000 sf or 10 units) be dedicated to affordable housing and provides a 30% density bonus to those projects. Super-Inclusionary Housing would be a voluntary program that provides additional density bonuses for affordable units that go beyond the City's requirements.

Committee questions/comments:

- Does "buildout under current zoning" assume a full buildout, or a more general trajectory for development that may or may not be 100%?
 - It's based on the potential for buildout by 2030, not full buildout. It follows market trends as it has existed over recent years, and projects it over the years to come, based on the City's current zoning ordinance.
- Has there been any analysis that includes the impact of these projections on city services and infrastructure?
 - We have been coordinating with other City departments to keep them involved in the conversation and incorporate their thinking into our analysis.
- In terms of what we're perceiving as the benefit of super-inclusionary zoning, I would hope that these benefits are not exclusive to just housing, but also is inclusive of other uses, such as ground-floor retail.
 - We've assumed ground-floor retail along the corridors, and in other places in the city that can support it. The way this is calculated is that the bonuses are applied to the whole building, which could include additional uses. We should think of this analysis as a comparative tool, not a predictive tool.

- Since this analysis is essentially based on multiplying factors of what base zoning allows, what this analysis shows me is that places like Central Square would end up with a higher share of additional units because they've have more permissive regulations today, as opposed to other places around the city that have been more conservative. Is there a way for us to think less about increasing by factors, to think instead about what makes sense for density on a contextual basis?
 - This policy is designed so that there is incentive for developers to adopt it so additional density is needed in all areas, including areas that already allow more dense development. One option would be to consider increasing the base zoning in lower density areas if that is something the public is interested in analyzing.
- I know these are just pictures, but are we considering setbacks for these residential buildings, or are we thinking about building right up to the lot lines?
 - As we've been drawing these projections, we're thinking about matching precedent wherever these could take place. In some cases, there would be setbacks. In other cases, there might not be. Again, these would be based on what base zoning or existing conditions mandate.
- As we are considering tripling or quadrupling density, there ought to be some thought as to the size and height of the building and how that relates to setback. A one-story building built up to the lot line will look and feel much different than a four-story building built up to the lot line.
- How are job projections calculated?
 - Job projections are based on commercial development and assumes a use mix typical in different areas. We then apply a general occupancy rate for different job types (i.e. office or lab).
- Did you include in this analysis the dynamic of the profitability of building lab and office space, as opposed to housing? It's so much more profitable to do the former, I don't know how you could push back, even with super-inclusionary.
 - You've hit on one of the big concerns, especially with any housing policy.
 - The Kendall Square assumptions are based on what's currently in zoning, and there are requirements for what percentages must be residential. That has been baked into this analysis when we've made these projections.
- I like the Super-Inclusionary Housing idea, but I'm a little concerned that if you have an area that's already zoned high and then add that multiplier, it ends up putting the lion's share in some neighborhoods, but not others.
- I would like to see the methodology behind these numbers because I think it's important. I'm wary of well-intended policies that have unintended results. I would like to know what those results might do.

Environmental Performance Incentive Discussion

The Environmental Performance Incentive would be a voluntary program that provides a density bonus to developments in exchange for improved environmental building performance, such as: net-zero construction ahead of the deadlines (based on building use) set forth by the Net Zero Action Plan, net-positive construction after the same deadlines; district energy, and resiliency measures.

Committee questions/comments:

- We should consider a "net little" or LEED Platinum policy? There's a reason why labs, for example, are averse to doing this. What if the standard was more achievable?
- If you give a developer density bonuses for net-zero construction, the additional height will have negative impacts, such as shadows.
- A significant concern with district energy is that the increasing dependence on electric energy is a burden for the city itself. So, there are questions about the availability of district energy as well as the capacity of the grid.
- We still have a lot to talk about regarding motivating lab developers to help achieve these ideas. There's a huge economic opportunity there. Right now, there is a drastic imbalance in Kendall Square in terms of lab space versus housing. Affordable housing is not attractive compared to another floor of lab space.
- So much of what we're doing depends on energy infrastructure being sufficient or being sufficiently worked on. Is that happening?
 - Yes, we have talked to Eversource about some of what we're considering. They know that these things are under discussion and that the City is thinking about more residential uses, for example.

We are trying to keep them involved and updated on these conversations. Usually, when new development goes in, Eversource takes that as an opportunity to install larger transformers that can service not just the building, but other facilities in the area.

- I would be happier if it wasn't purely net zero construction but was more flexible and inclusive of other alternatives.

Public Comment

The following are questions/comments from members of the public in attendance:

- I feel like we're putting the cart before the horse: the cart being developers and the horse being the community, the city, and their needs.
- I was surprised that the different working groups are not talking to each other. I feel like many environmental issues could be tied to or addressed by Super-Inclusionary. In addition to density bonuses, developers should also be able to give linkage mitigation fees for issues that will impact their surroundings and their buildings. This should be connected to any bonuses we give to developers.
- As a member of the public, I'm concerned there are only four Advisory Committee Members here. I would really encourage more outreach so that more than half of them are present at the next meeting.
- Is there a way to calculate the loss of affordability in the surrounding neighborhood when new development, which includes a small percentage of affordability compared to market-rate housing, goes up in neighborhoods where people have been able to afford to live there but can no longer do so?
 - We haven't researched the effects on broader market affordability on neighborhoods. We don't have a precise answer to that. Our subconsultants and market research team have informed us that the demand for luxury housing in Cambridge is almost infinite. As a result, the measures that are necessary to push back must be quite robust and aggressive.
 - This is a hard question to answer. In the past, most of the units the City added came through purchasing existing multifamily housing. That used to be a very easy approach because there wasn't a lot of competition. What we have seen over the last 5-8 years is a dramatic turn in how competitive the market is for those buildings. This is a signal of what the demand is right now in the market.
- Why are we not putting more affordable housing in more traditional residential areas?
 - Inclusionary gets triggered when you have over 10 units/10,000 sq. ft. The density that is needed for this kind of development in some of these neighborhoods simply does not allow that kind of development.
- Since the Environmental Performance Incentive is geared towards new construction, I'm worried about tearing down older housing to make way for net-zero construction.
- There's a lot of money that comes from the expansion of labs. You run into a real quality of life issue if these are cited in or near residential areas. When I hear all this stuff, it sounds like number crunching, and you lose the fabric of the community and the human integration into your plans. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach, and I hope there's some way of monitoring these proposals to get more housing or taller buildings without adversely impacting the community.
- There's a very high level of generalizations here that tends to miss the effect on abutting neighborhood. The City's Zoning Ordinance equates lab and office uses, and if demand holds, there will be many more conversions to lab from office uses, which is a huge environmental concern (re: light and sound pollution).
- I don't know that anybody has looked at how the zoning for Mass Ave around Riverside and Mid-Cambridge has been written to protect abutting neighborhoods. The human dimensions are missing from this analysis.
- If we're going to do affordable housing, then we must be serious about it, and we're each going to have to give up a little more for this to happen. What excites me about these proposals, is that we are looking at the whole city, looking at the opportunities, and offering to developers a set of options to help us achieve what we say we want. If not, we'll still be talking about affordable housing over the next 20-30 years.