**ENVISION REPORT**

[LINK to Envision Final Report](http://envision.cambridgema.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/201906_EnvisionCambridge-Final-Report.pdf)

The Envision Word Summary is [HERE](https://www.cccoalition.org/envision.html)

A group of Cambridge residents met largely weekly over the spring of 2022 to discuss City’s Envision Goals, not only to better understand them, but also to try to address some of the inherent conflicts within these goals and to propose strategies for moving forward, focusing on those issues delimited as action-based and moving through the circa 111 goals one by one. We assigned each Envision goal a separate number (see tab [Envision Overview - Priorities and Numbering](https://www.cccoalition.org/envision.html)) extracted from the final Envision Report to identify each item separately by number for discussion purposes. The following are our recommendations.

**I CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT** (Envision Report pp.58 ff)

Several goals are already completed or are underway, including

* + ***Solar and/or cool roof requiremen*t** (X1a)
  + ***Density bonus incentive for net zero projects*** *(X1g* – in process)
  + ***Sustainable design development*** (XI – in process).

**Recommendations**

1. ***Support adoption of Climate initiatives in progress***
2. ***Electrical vehicle charging infrastructure in new* buildings** (2c)
   1. Support required Mass State action
   2. Encourage adoption of some parts of the Craig Kelly Policy Order.
3. ***Noise pollution review*** (6d).
   1. City should address lab noise well as the massive mechanicals that produce visual and noise pollution to nearby homes. Noise should be one of the priority concerns in new construction. Because the noise level in East Cambridge is now above the maximum noise levels allowed, care should be particularly addressed here and some older buildings (ATT Bent St.) with very high noise levels
   2. Require owner signoffs at CDD specific to noise
   3. CDD should hire a noise specialist and use the already available sound technology to address this.
   4. Add noise to the License Commission as part of the licensing reports and revisions
   5. ISD should also require compliance with the screening required in special permits
4. ***Light pollution*** *(new here, but it also could be added to Urban Form****).*** 
   1. Light pollution is increasingly becoming a problem in higher density areas where at night, light emanating from buildings obscures the night sky, and impacts everything from sleep to well-bring to simply taking pleasure in observing the stars
   2. Adopt a city ordinance on light pollution. Use Cambridge Historical Commission Harvard Square Conservation District report light pollution provisions as a model.

**II COMMUNITY WELLBEING** (Envision Report pp.85ff)

**Recommendations**

1. ***Design and program open spaces for intergenerational use*** (11a):
   1. Actively search for opportunities (for example, if a school gets closed)
   2. Consider converting some streets to green spaces.
2. ***Address open space needs in underserved communities*** (11d).
   1. Make available and publicize the Green Ribbon study.
   2. CDD to work with neighborhood group leaders to establish a series of ongoing neighborhood walks with staff (once a month, thus once a year for each major neighborhood) to understand what is happening on the ground, what is working/what needs improvement, and to think about possible new greenspaces in denser neighborhoods.
3. ***Provide space for athletic and non-athletic activities/events*** (11h).
   1. CDD to work with Neighborhood Group leaders to foster occasional neighborhood and cross-neighborhood, cross-generational events, for example, a day of volleyball on memorial drive park, bocce on the library lawn, medieval fencing at Longfellow park etc.
4. ***Provide underserved neighborhoods with affordable supermarkets*** (12a).
   1. Create financial mechanisms, such as subsidizing rents, to ensure viability of affordable supermarkets
   2. Create more nonprofit supermarkets like the Daily Table
   3. Create year-round “poportunity” sites in underserved communities focusing on food.
5. ***Modify zoning to allow for live-work space for artists*** (14a).
   1. Encourage more artist coops with studio space through zoning incentives
   2. Add studio space in affordable housing, costing the same as a residential unit.
   3. Reach out to a Cambridge-born artist, perhaps in the film or music industry, to help fund an artist-based shared apartment/ condo home with studios.

**III ECONOMY** (Envision Report p.115ff)

**Recommendations**

1. ***Change zoning to increase commercial density to add jobs*** (3a).
   1. Link job creation to create significant housing for new workers
   2. Housing and transportation need to keep pace with job growth
   3. In modifying height limits remember AHO Housing often is not viable over six stories and 70’
2. ***Change zoning to add density, adding mix of retail uses on Mass. Ave. and Cambridge St.*** (4b).
   1. Look at density and height block by block since parts of these streets have residential or institutional uses at varying scales
   2. Craft new zoning regulations around retail use and active space and ground floors for larger residential buildings and other contexts.
   3. We must update zoning so that labs do not displace desired uses in critical areas, encourage retail and other active uses and avoid blank facades. City Council is debating labs now
3. **Revise zoning to require light industrial in certain areas** (6a).
   1. Implement Envision plans to require light industry in Alewife Quadrangle
   2. Revisit Alewife plan (with the Alewife Study Group) to address recent purchases and plans in Alewife to get the right balance, of Light Industry, Labs, and general office use.

**IV HOUSING** (Envision Report pp. 140ff).

**Recommendations**

1. ***Require the creation of significant new housing in areas that are being rezoned*** (1b).
   1. Implement in Alewife quadrangle,
   2. Identify specific properties that an affordable housing developer or the city could purchase and go to the owner directly?
2. ***Change zoning for more housing along major corridors, squares, and in areas of growth capacity served by transit and allow multifamily residential development citywide*** (1a):
   1. Identify one or two corridors and specific viable streets. Scrutinize corridors for housing opportunities, knowing that not all are the same and that each must be studied block by block in the context of each separate neighborhood.
   2. Guard against tearing down existing sustainable homes to create tall, high-density housing which will be disruptive to existing residents and neighborhoods.
   3. Allowing multi-family structures citywide needs controls to avoid higher cost housing, more environmental destruction, and other unintended consequences
   4. Allow more units within the shells of existing single-family homes possibly through special permit and design review.
   5. Revisit super-inclusionary affordable housing
   6. Address critical infrastructure (including public transit) and green space needs as new housing is planned.
   7. Encourage more affordable housing on corridors (where one can add more units at considerably less cost).
   8. Clear guidelines and criteria must accompany special permitting requirements.
   9. Because housing is not one size fits all, we need housing of various scales and heights especially as one moves away from the corridors and transit hubs. Infrastructure upgrades must be added as well
   10. Retain parking minimums (particularly for commercial) but address criteria
3. **Institute an incentive for owners of multifamily buildings to add more affordable units** (2c).
   1. Utilize a tiered approach to incentivize 30-unit scale projects as well as larger projects.
   2. Revise inclusionary program to add more at a minimal threshold.
   3. Combine FAR and Form-based for the best results. Formula setbacks could be converted to hard numbers, maintaining adequate light and air for different sized buildings
   4. Create ad hoc citywide and neighborhood design review committee system to create criteria and help with critiques.
4. **Change base zoning to require that developers of at least 10-unit multifamily projects to add more family-sized units** (4a).
   1. Create a formal system rather than Informal system now utilized by the Planning Board
   2. Increase requirement beyond the customary 10% based on demand study
   3. Allow flexibility in implementation where it make sense to have all smaller units.
5. **Additional recommendations**
   1. Get more transparency on affordable housing development costs and ongoing studies of AHO outcomes re. racial or economic density factors
   2. We need to rethink city priorities: Is a AAA bond rating supported commercial development more important than housing affordability

**V MOBILITY** (Envision Report pp.157ff).

**Recommendations**

1. ***Advocate for high-quality greenway links that complete gaps in the regional network to alleviate cut through traffic in Cambridge*** (1r):
   1. This doesn’t make sense. Currently greenway links are mostly used for bike lanes, not parks which is what green spaces should be addressing*.*
2. ***Change zoning to reduce maximum parking requirements near transit nodes while balancing impacts of parking spillover on residential streets*** (5a**).**
   1. Use special permits with TP&T department review. The best bet is to keep parking minimums but allow opt outs and redress public transportation problems in the city.
   2. Parking now is based on discretionary permitting, analyzing each case specifically for each locale. Harvard Square is the only place currently with no parking minimums because of its unique context.
   3. Many bicyclists also have cars so bike spaces can’t replace all automobile spaces
3. ***Require development projects to minimize adverse traffic impacts via Article 19 requiring transportation demand management measures and mitigation measures***. (5c)**.** 
   1. This is ongoing but needs additional design review standards.
   2. Our system of special permit review should be extended downwards to smaller projects.
   3. We need far more transparency and rather than the public having to specifically ask for employee parking numbers for each project, the city must provide this and making it available and accessible for each case.
4. ***Create incentives and new loading zones that encourage large trucks to deliver off-peak***. (6e).
   1. We can have pre-9 AM deliveries but that is also peak vehicle and bicycling hours.
   2. In Central, Harvard and Porter Square commercial areas currently there are regulations deliveries. Owners must get up earlier.
   3. We could expand this experimentally–perhaps with compensation. Ask the Central Square BID to consider this on a trial basis and evaluate the results.
   4. There’s the problem of delivery trucks in bike lanes. Cities with active bicyclists have dealt with this by putting bikes as sidewalk level and separate from street. That would have to be a capital improvement and it would have to address the large number of pedestrians who also use the sidewalks, including the 25% of Cambridge residents who walk to their employment.
5. ***Additional Planning needed***
   1. We must Improve city public transport to serve each neighborhood on a twenty-minute schedule
   2. Need to plan for new employees and residents
   3. We need far better planning. For example, the new 74–78-line buses can’t go under the rail station. This reduces the number of stops on Concord Ave
   4. Special permits should be used for parking reductions near transit hubs.
   5. Need to close loophole so developer cannot build a half million SF of labs and 1000 employees with no additional parking, displacing existing commercial rental spaces, without analysis of impacts on existing parkers.

**VI URBAN FORM PLAN** (Envision Report pp.181ff).

**Recommendations**

1. ***Eliminate parking minimums for corridor development*** (1a). *See above (V.2.)*
2. ***Adjust existing zoning near transit nodes to allow greater density***. (1b).see (1V.1.a)**. *Adjust zoning in residential districts to be more compatible patterns of development, including building setbacks, heights, open space, parking, and uses*** (2d).
3. We need better planning and a means to address urban form on a block-by-block basis with neighborhood input. Overall, we should not be asking for wholesale citywide development (redevelopment). We oppose the wholesale development or redevelopment of existing residential areas. Virtually every neighborhood in Cambridge has a mix of housing forms. Most are non-conforming due to setbacks. New development has to fit in.
4. Up-zoning the little land we have and under the huge constraints of a large population already living here, along with various financial constraints, needs careful study.
5. Rather than making citywide zoning dimensional changes, we propose a zoning change to allow the BZA or Planning Board to grant set back, height and or FAR changes with special permits in lieu of variances, considering cases on a site-by-site basis, granting relief when there is a good reason.
6. We also need more transparent and straight-forward ways to evaluate projects and scale including creating criteria for minimum and maximum heights specific to each neighborhood and context. Once Special permits are granted, we also need a formal means to determine when and if the conditions are met. City Council must sign off on what goes into criteria**,** andsuch decisions should first go to the neighborhood groups and the long-term planning committee.
7. **Strengthen the permitting criteria and the application process for special permits.**
   1. The Planning Board and Cambridge Historical Commission now work with the developer to get a better plan. Realign the city staffing structure so that employees of both Inspectional Services and CDD can work together to bring about a better functioning city, a better use of resources, and better outcomes. Allow the BZA to use CDD design staff to help with the BZA cases and include design as part of the process. TP&T should evaluate transportation needs
   2. Neighborhood groups and/or a citywide ad hoc design committee should meet with the staff and developers of new projects early, looking at a project wholistically and how it impacts the neighborhood and larger area.
   3. Because city staff work for City Manager, who is currently focused on adding as much commercial development as possible, staff reviews are often mechanical analyses, setting up various criteria and addressing those criteria rather than looking at the larger issues. We must make sure we have a far more holistic approach to development.
   4. NCDs or the equivalent of NCDs should be established in all residential areas, so that the significant projects can be reviewed in public.
   5. Include smaller projects, not just 50,000 SF and 25,000 SF in design review and bring in neighborhood groups and ad hoc design committees as part of the process. Medium size buildings (5 or 10 units) need to be reviewed.
   6. Graphic form technology exists for visualizing increased density and should be available to different commissions (Planning Board, BZA, Historical Commission
   7. Address Increasing wealth disparities. Many thousands of Cambridge employees now make six figures or more; they are pushing out many poor and lower-income residents. The City needs to try to address some sense of balance by (a) modifying the annual town gown report to add more information on student, staff, and post-doc housing, transportation, and incomes in Cambridge and the area, and (b) requiring a new complementary annual report from our largest employers addressing not only local and area housing accommodations, transportation, and salaries but also how they will address related housing and displacement challenges in the city. Consider providing tax rebatement or other benefits for companies or institutions that build new area housing.
8. ***Establish development standards to promote street activating uses on ground floors***(3d)
   1. Allow 5’ of additional building height so that ground floor retail can have appropriate ceiling heights.
   2. We oppose monotonous street walls in favor of more height, scale, and design variability maintaining building distinctiveness in keeping with the neighborhood. Consider pushing back the front to compensate for the extra height. Consider how well continuous façade (street wall) buildings fit into the individual lower scale neighborhoods. Protect some historic homes on many of these avenues.
   3. Utilize development guidelines, rather than standards, incorporating preservation and maintaining the historic as a key piece of this being responsible to neighborhoods and neighborhood residents.
   4. Protect the residences on and right behind the commercial uses.
   5. Replace “missing teeth” adding the right new structures to an existing functional and sustainable building and neighborhood fabric
9. ***On prohibiting parking and vehicular loading and service in Mixed-Use corridors, and curb cuts*** (3e).
   1. This is a viable principle, could work as a guideline if there is design review. But if created as proscriptive proposal it would pose many problems regarding drop-offs handicap accessibility, leading to cars parking in the bike lane.
10. ***On requiring primary building entrances to be located on the mixed-use corridors***. (3f).
    1. As a guideline (rather than a requirement) this is good. One problem though is places for drop offs and cars or deliveries blocking bike lanes.
11. ***Initiate district plans for specific areas re. zoning and design guidelines*** (4a).
    1. A few transitional areas could be looked at for housing, such as Bent and Charles Streets in East Cambridge. We should not be addressing the districts but at the edges – that is more important. The only remaining “district” in the city is at Alewife, which was master planned as part of the Envision process.
    2. MIT Cambridgeport land close to the river has development potential. During the University Park planning process in the 1980’s, MIT committed that all land below Pacific Street to the river should be reserved for long term housing of faculty, students, and staff – up to 2000 units - and plans were developed for each those parcels. Instead, the land was granted to the MIT Investment Groupwho manage it today as commercial properties, biotech and parking, with only two grad student housing projects having been built. It is important to remind MIT of these commitments made a long time ago We need a master planning process involving MIT, CDD and the neighborhood to create a physical plan for all the parcels, and a temporal plan and timeline to get it accomplished. Look at land use, additional housing density (such as 10 story MIT dorms on either side of tracks), additional open public spaces, services, and neighborhood serving commercial for the entire area.
    3. Like MIT, Harvard also must be encouraged to do more on housing faculty staff and students in its Cambridge, Allston, and other properties.
12. ***Prepare a streetscape/landscape character plan identifying different types, and set guidelines for types of landscaping, building frontages, etc.* (4b).** 
    1. The goal should not be to have a few standard types of streetscapes, but an effective design review process for infill proposals.
    2. Create guidelines for areas of city there are none. CDD design review staff should also assist the Zoning Board in design review of all significant projects. See VI 3.a Having the Planning Board, BZA, and Historical Commissionshare some design staff for projects would help particularly in evaluation impacts beyond the project boundaries.
13. ***Develop design guidelines for as-of-right affordable housing development (5a).*** 
    1. This has been completed, and, since 5b-5h are part of a single discussion, and we agree that we need to create better design review guidelines.
    2. In addition, we need an ad hoc citywide design committee and in some areas neighborhood group design committees to address this.
    3. Once we have guidelines, we also need an enforcement means. The best way to achieve this is to have the ad hoc citywide design committee and neighborhood group design committees have the option of recommending a project come before the Planning Board.
    4. Project information should be better organized on CDD site. In each case one should be able to find the individual cases and guidelines.
    5. In 5c Envision asks that one continue to update area- and neighborhood-specific design guidelines so outcomes complement neighborhoods, and the review process is more predictable to stakeholders and developers.
    6. CDD has to address comprehensive design issues with neighborhoods before submitting documents to Planning Board. In the past there were lots of neighbors and neighborhoods involved who made significant contributions to project design. All neighborhood groups should set up design review groups, reaching out to professionals and asking them to serve in a volunteer way to review projects initiated in the area.
14. ***Encourage developers to meet with the City’s urban design team early before conceptual design commences***(*5e*).
    1. There are requirements in place that need to be strengthened, particularly that developers meet with neighborhood groups, that CDD to send a representative to these meetings, that neighborhood groups invite CDD to these meetings and that neighborhood groups be formed in all city areas.
15. **For** ***larger-scale projects, encourage applicants to present initial design concepts to the Planning Board for preapplication advisory review*** (5f).
    1. Include project imagery technology and viewshed studies, creating still images or a video to show what a proposed building will look like as one walks at a distance around it including photos from locations that are not on public streets.
16. ***Clarify the development review process by publishing a process diagram to clearly articulate requirements and expectations at every step.*** (5g)
    1. *This is important, especially for neighborhoods, and CDD should do it.*
17. **Update the citywide urban design objectives in the City’s Zoning Ordinance to reflect Envision Cambridge recommendations**. (5h).
    1. This is important and perhaps it could be done by a new adhoc Design Review Board in affiliation with neighborhood groups and their committees
18. **Review and simplify the various elements of project review established by Article 19 of the Zoning Ordinance to provide a clearer set of procedures.** (5j)
    1. We do not support this because design review requires judgement, and if too rigid, doesn’t work well
19. **Encourage family-friendly design elements (such as playgrounds) in residential and commercial development projects and public realm improvements through development review and design guidelines.** (6f). 
    1. Of course. Especially important for AHO reviews.
20. **Build open space, bicycle, and pedestrian connections to integrate the “Alewife Square” into the fabric of the City (as recommended in the Alewife Planning Study).** (7b).
    1. Sure, but vehicular traffic is a larger transportation problem because of single access from Concord Avenue. Concord Ave will get worse and worse with no apparent options for improvements.
    2. Bridging the railroad track to connect quadrangle with T station should be a priority.
21. **Allocate funds to convert paved traffic islands into green spaces or reconfigure roadways to eliminate them**(7d)*.*
    1. Yes, but this may not be a top priority.
22. **Prioritize the planning and implementation of routes connecting citywide open spaces and regional paths and trails, including the Charles River, Fresh Pond, Danehy Park, Alewife with the regional greenway system**. (7e).
    1. We should prioritize adding parks where we need them.
    2. Consider widening sidewalks and adding more trees to create pedestrian greenways to connect existing parks.