

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE – CAMBRIDGE GROWTH POLICY UPDATE 2007
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

LAND USE

Policy 1 - Existing residential neighborhoods, or any portions of a neighborhood having an identifiable and consistent built character, should be maintained at their prevailing pattern of development and building density and scale.

Policy 2 - Except in evolving industrial areas, the city's existing land use structure and the area of residential and commercial neighborhoods should remain essentially as they have developed historically.

Policy 3 - The wide diversity of development patterns, uses, scales, and densities present within the city's many residential and commercial districts should be retained and strengthened. That diversity should be between and among the various districts, not necessarily within each individual one.

Policy 4 - Adequate transitions and buffers between differing scales of development and differing uses should be provided; general provisions for screening, landscaping and setbacks should be imposed while in especially complex circumstances special transition provisions should be developed.

Policy 5 - The major institutions, principally Lesley College, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the hospitals, should be limited to those areas that historically have been occupied by such uses and to abutting areas that are reasonably suited to institutional expansion, as indicated by any institutional overlay district formally adopted by the City.

Policy 6 - For such institutions reasonable densities should be permitted in their core campuses to forestall unnecessary expansion into both commercial districts and low density residential neighborhoods.

Policy 7 - Notwithstanding the limitations implied in the above policy statements, (1) the establishment of a new center of tax exempt, institutional activity may be appropriate in one or more of the city's evolving industrial areas and/or (2) the development of a modest and discreet institutional presence may be appropriate in any nonresidential district when a combination of two or more of the following benefits accrue to the city:

1. Such action will permanently forestall excessive development at the core campus of an existing institution, in particularly sensitive locations; or
2. Existing institutional activity in a core campus area will be reduced or eliminated, particularly at locations where conflict with existing residential communities has been evident or is possible in the future; and
3. The potential for future commercial, tax paying development is not significantly reduced; or
4. The presence of a stable, well managed institutional activity could encourage, stimulate, and attract increased investment in non institutional commercial tax producing development.

Policy 8 - The availability of transit services should be a major determinant of the scale of development and the mix of uses encouraged and permitted in the predominantly nonresidential districts of the city: the highest density commercial uses are best located where transit service is most extensive (rapid transit and trolley); much reduced commercial densities and an increased proportion of housing use are

appropriate where dependence on the automobile is greatest; mixed uses, including retail activities in industrial and office districts, should be considered to reduce the need to use the automobile during working hours. Similarly, the scale, frequency, mode and character of goods delivery should play an important role in determining the appropriate density of nonresidential uses anywhere in the city.

Policy 9 - The evolution of the city's industrial areas should be encouraged, under the guidance of specific urban design plans, and through other public policy and regulations such that:

1. Those areas can adapt to new commercial and industrial patterns of development;
2. The residential neighborhood edges abutting such areas are strengthened through selective residential reuse within the development areas or through careful transition in density, scale and lot development pattern;
3. New uses and varied scales and densities can be introduced into such areas;
4. Uses incompatible with the city's existing and future desired development pattern are phased out.

Policy 10 - In some evolving industrial areas multiple uses should be encouraged, including an important component of residential use in suitable locations not subject to conflict with desired industrial uses, to advance other development policy objectives of the city:

1. To provide opportunities for those who work in the city to live here;
2. To limit the use of the automobile to get to Cambridge and to travel within Cambridge;
3. To encourage more active use of all parts of the city for longer periods throughout the day; and
4. To limit the secondary impacts of new development on the existing, established neighborhoods. These impacts may be both economic, as in the increased demand placed on the limited stock of existing housing, and environmental, as in the increase in traffic on neighborhood streets.

Policy 11 - A wide range of development patterns should be encouraged in these evolving industrial areas at scales and densities and in forms which would be difficult to accommodate in the city's fully developed districts and neighborhoods.

Policy 12 - Those necessary or desirable uses and activities which require specially tailored environments should be provided for and those uses, activities and development patterns which create distinctive environments that serve as amenities for the whole community should be protected or maintained.

For example: low rent industrial space for start up enterprises; locations for industrial use and development which could be compromised by proximity to other, incompatible, uses, including residential uses; small commercial enclaves which directly serve their immediate surrounding residential neighborhood; locations appropriate for gas stations, car repair facilities, tow yards, etc.; structures or clusters of structures eligible for local historic district designation; or for designation as a local conservation district; environments as frequently found in the Residence "A" districts, where a unique combination of distinctive architecture and landscaped open space prevails; areas designated or eligible as national register historic districts.

Policy 13 - A pace of development or redevelopment should be encouraged that permits the maintenance of a healthy tax base, allows for adjustment and adaptation to changing economic conditions, and is consistent with the City's urban design and other physical development objectives yet does not unreasonably disrupt the daily activities of the city's neighborhoods and residents or overburden the city's water and sewer infrastructure.

TRANSPORTATION

Policy 14 - Increase the City's investment in Transportation Demand Management to promote non single occupancy vehicle forms of transportation and assist Cambridge employers, both individually and collectively, in developing such programs for their employees and operations.

Policy 15 - Enact land use regulations that encourage transit and other forms of non-automobile mobility by mixing land uses, creating a pleasant and safe pedestrian and bicycle environment, and restricting high density development to areas near transit stations.

Policy 16 - Encourage regional employment patterns that take advantage of areas well served by transit to and from Cambridge.

Policy 17 - Seek implementation of MBTA transit improvements that will provide more direct and, where demand is justified, express service to Cambridge from those portions of the region now inadequately served by transit to Cambridge.

Policy 18 - Improve MBTA public transportation service within the city including updating routes, schedules, signs, and bus stop placement.

Policy 19 - Investigate the feasibility of developing and implementing, within the financial resources of the City, a paratransit system, utilizing taxi cabs where appropriate, in order to supplement the current MBTA system in Cambridge.

Policy 20 - Encourage the state transportation and environmental agencies to develop a regional goods movement plan; in the meantime, use the City's limited authority as much as possible to route truck traffic around rather than through residential neighborhoods.

Policy 21 - Discourage vehicle travel through residential areas both by providing roadway improvements around the neighborhoods' perimeters and by operational changes to roadways which will impede travel on local streets.

Policy 22 - Undertake reasonable measures to improve the functioning of the city's street network, without increasing through capacity, to reduce congestion and noise and facilitate bus and other non automobile circulation. However, minor arterials with a residential character should be protected whenever possible.

Policy 23 - Encourage all reasonable forms of non-automobile travel including, for example, making improvements to the city's infrastructure which would promote bicycling and walking.

Policy 24 - Support regional transportation and land use policies that will improve air quality by reducing dependence on single occupancy vehicles, both through reduction in employment based travel and in other trips taken for nonwork purposes.

Policy 25 - Promote the use of truly clean alternative vehicle technologies for necessary vehicle travel particularly in regards to fleets.

HOUSING

Policy 26 - Maintain and preserve existing residential neighborhoods at their current density, scale, and character. Consider exceptions to this policy when residents have strong reservation about existing character, are supportive of change, and have evaluated potential changes in neighborhood character through a planning process.

Policy 27 - Where possible, construct new affordable housing that fits neighborhood character. In existing residential neighborhoods housing should be built at a scale, density, and character consistent with existing development patterns. Permit reconstruction of affordable housing (defined as more than 50% of units rented or owned by households at 80% or less than median income) that serves a wide range of incomes and groups at previous nonconforming density where reconstruction is less expensive than rehabilitation. Emphasize construction of affordable housing designed for families with children.

Policy 28 - Affordable housing in rehabilitated or newly constructed buildings should serve a wide range of households, particularly low and moderate income families, racial minorities, and single persons with special needs.

Policy 29 - Encourage rehabilitation of the existing housing stock. Concentrate City funds and staff efforts on rehabilitation that will provide units for low and moderate income residents.

Policy 30 - Concentrate rehabilitation efforts in the city's predominantly low and moderate income neighborhoods.

Policy 31 - Promote affordable homeownership opportunities where financially feasible.

Policy 32 - Encourage non profit and tenant ownership of the existing housing stock.

Policy 33 - Encourage where appropriate, recognizing housing's possible impact on desirable industrial uses, the construction of new affordable housing through requirements, incentives, and zoning regulations, including inclusionary zoning provisions, in portions of the city traditionally developed for nonresidential, principally industrial, uses. Create effective, well designed transitional zones between residential and industrial uses.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

Policy 34 - Cambridge's evolving industrial areas are a valuable resource whose mix of uses must be carefully planned over the next twenty years.

Policy 35 - Appropriate development in the city's evolving industrial areas should be encouraged to maintain the city's overall economic health, to expand the tax base, and expand job opportunities for Cambridge residents.

Policy 36 - The observable trend towards the development of clusters of related uses in the city's evolving industrial areas should be strengthened through the city's land use policies.

Policy 37 - In evolving industrial areas for which economic development, urban design, or other plans have been developed, private phased development consistent with those plans should be permitted to develop to completion, even if completion may take more than a decade.

Policy 38 - Within clearly established limits, land use regulations in the evolving industrial areas should recognize the need for flexibility of use as for instance between office, research, and light manufacturing activities and provide for a wide range of density options throughout the city including those which foster research and development and start up operations.

Policy 39 - Development patterns in all nonresidential areas must be planned to minimize negative impact on abutting residential neighborhoods.

Policy 40 - The City should actively assist its residents in developing the skills necessary for them to take full advantage of the city's changing economic makeup and to provide the personnel resources which would make Cambridge a desirable place to locate and expand.

Policy 41 - The benefits of a strong employment base should be extended to portions of the resident population that have not benefitted in the past; the City should support appropriate training programs that advance this objective.

Policy 42 - While recognizing some of the disadvantages of any urban location for many kinds of manufacturing activities, the City should make every effort to retain and recruit a wide range of enterprises suitable for a Cambridge location, presently, or in the future as manufacturing processes evolve and change. Where possible the disadvantages should be minimized and the real advantages strengthened for manufacturing activities that can widen the city's job base and solidify its economic vitality.

Policy 43 - The City should establish the regulatory environment and provide the support necessary to encourage the establishment of manufacturing activities for which the city may be a suitable location in the future.

Policy 44 - The City should actively cultivate a regulatory and policy environment that assists in the retention of existing industries, supports the creation of new businesses and the innovative thinking that precedes it, retains an inventory of low cost space necessary for fledgling enterprises, and fosters an innovative environment where entrepreneurship thrives.

Policy 45 - Specialized economic activities for which Cambridge is a congenial host, such as the tourism and hospitality industries, should be supported.

Policy 46 - The diversity, quality, and vigor of the city's physical, ethnic, cultural, and educational environment should be nurtured and strengthened as a fundamental source of the city's economic viability. More specifically, minority businesses and economic entrepreneurship should be encouraged.

Policy 47 - Existing retail districts should be strengthened; new retail activity should be directed toward the city's existing retail squares and corridors.

Policy 48 - Retail districts should be recognized for their unique assets, opportunities, and functions, and those aspects should be encouraged, in part to assure that they can compete with regional shopping centers and maintain their economic viability

INSTITUTIONS

Policy 49 - The City and its major institutions should engage in a formally established ongoing dialogue to share concerns; identify problems, conflicts, and opportunities; and to fashion solutions and areas of cooperation to their mutual satisfaction. As part of this dialogue, each institution should create a plan describing its existing status as well as outlining its future needs and goals, and the means for achieving those goals.

Policy 50 - The City should recognize the need for the major institutions to adapt and respond to changing circumstances to maintain their leadership positions in education, health care, and research while recognizing, responding to and coordinating with City policy goals.

Policy 51 - Where tax exempt academic uses are expanded into retail corridors and squares, mixed use development including taxable retail or other commercial development should be incorporated wherever possible, especially at street level, recognizing each retail area for its unique assets, opportunities and functions, and strengthening these aspects when expanding into such areas.

Policy 52 -The city's major educational institutions should be encouraged to provide housing for their respective faculties, students, and staff through additions to the city's inventory of housing units. Effective use of existing land holdings should be a tool in meeting this objective, where it does not result in excessive density in the core campus. In addition, where new housing is to be located within or abutting an existing neighborhood, it should match the scale, density, and character of the neighborhood. The institutions should be encouraged to retain this housing for client populations over an extended period of time. They should consider housing other city residents within these housing developments as a means of integrating the institutional community with city residents.

Policy 53 - Except in circumstances where further institutional growth is appropriate or beneficial to the city as a whole (see Policy 7) the city's institutions should be discouraged from creating new fiscal burdens on the City treasury through the conversion of property from tax producing uses to nontaxable uses, and should mitigate any harmful effects of such conversions through financial compensation.

Policy 54 - The institutions' capacity for commercial investment should be directed in part to assist in the transformation of evolving industrial areas and commercial districts, as defined by City policy and elaborated upon through formally established, on going planning discussions.

Policy 55 - Where major institutions invest in commercial properties, their willingness to manage those properties partly in response to broader community objectives of diversity and community need, as articulated through the continuing formal dialogue with the City and its residents, should be encouraged, consistent with the institutions' fiduciary responsibilities.

Policy 56 - Recognizing the localized nature of their physical presence, the city's smaller institutions should be regulated on an individual basis as provided in the zoning ordinance's institutional regulations and as they are impacted by zoning, urban design, and other City policies.

URBAN DESIGN

Policy 57 - Design review for new development should be established throughout the city for all areas where future development will be of a scale or quantity that will potentially change or establish the character of the district.

Policy 58 - Even in areas where the character of a district is firmly established and new development is likely to be very modest, design review should be required where small scale changes are likely to disrupt the desired district character.

Policy 59 - The regulations for all zoning districts in Cambridge should reflect the city's fundamental urban design and environmental objectives: height, setback, use, site development, and density standards imposed should be consistent with or advance those urban design objectives.

Policy 60 - Urban design and environmental standards should be developed for all areas of the city which are or may be in the future subject to redevelopment or significant new development.

Policy 61 - Urban design standards should reflect the historic context within which change will occur while permitting design that is responsive to contemporary circumstances.

Policy 62 - As transitions between differing uses are extremely important in a densely developed city, urban design standards should be developed to ensure that these transitions are made properly, respecting to the maximum extent possible the needs of each contrasting use.

OPEN SPACE

Policy 63 - Open space and recreational facilities serving a wide range of functions and clientele, including the elderly and special needs populations, should be encouraged, either through expansion of the existing inventory, through multiple use of existing facilities, or through creative programming of those facilities.

Policy 64 - Conservation lands and other environmentally sensitive areas are a vital part of the city's open space system and should be maintained and protected appropriately. Public access to and use of these areas must be carefully planned and balanced with preservation of these resources.

Policy 65 - Expansion of Cambridge residents' opportunities to use regional recreational facilities (those owned by the Metropolitan District Commission and the Commonwealth) located in the city should be encouraged, particularly where the adjacent residential community is underserved by local recreational facilities, and when the legitimate regional use of that facility would not be unduly restricted. In addition, there should be increased coordination of recreation programming and planning between the local and regional levels.

Policy 66 - New open space facilities, including larger ones for organized activities, should be considered for those private developments where the size of the development, the amount of land area and/or the ownership patterns provide the flexibility to accommodate such a facility without loss of economic value for other uses.

Policy 67 - Acquisition of publicly owned or administered open space should be made in those dense residential areas clearly deficient in all forms of open space, but only where significant fiscal resources are provided through federal or state acquisition programs or a substantial portion of the cost is borne privately; facilities of modest size and flexible in use characteristics, located close to the homes of the persons for whom they are intended should be encouraged.

Policy 68 - Only under extraordinary circumstances should existing open space facilities be eliminated from the city's inventory for other uses; small, passively or merely visually used facilities, should not be undervalued in this regard merely for lack of intensive or active recreational use.

Policy 69 - The city should encourage the permanent retention and protection of useful, effective, attractive private open space whether publicly accessible or not. Community use of private recreational and open space facilities in the city should be encouraged at reasonable levels where the private function of those facilities would not be impaired and where the recreational activity provided by the private facility is not well served in available public facilities.

Policy 70 - Repair, maintenance and timely upgrading of existing facilities should be the City's highest fiscal priority with regard to open space and recreational facilities. The City should explore, and adopt as appropriate, mechanisms whereby the private sector can reasonably provide, assist in and/or contribute to the maintenance of publicly useable open space and recreational facilities.