

Hi everybody,

Folks have asked for a “plain English” overview so here goes. There will be some “shortcuts” in this so please excuse me. I also did not live in this neighborhood during the history that I attempt to summarize so I’m sure that I have missed things.

The “Bishop Petition” (Special District 2 “down” zoning) is a result of the early and particularly unfortunate plans for the Cambridge Lumber redevelopment followed by the Fawcett Oil redevelopment folks declining to release copies of the plans they projected on a screen at the July NCSC meeting. Note that these two developments are very the first use of the Special District 2 zoning created 11 ½ years ago.

The Special District 2 (SD-2) area along The Linear Park/The Minuteman Bikeway all changed when the Red Line was extended to Alewife. By this time, the heavy industrial area along the old rail line had long since disappeared. Then rail line was removed, the Red Line tunnel placed underneath, and in 1985 we got the Linear Park. There were no infrastructure improvements (for instance, the dead end streets were not connected).

Despite this “sea change”, the area around the Linear Park remained “Industrial A-1” (IA-1) completely surrounded by the two family, “Residence B” (Res-B) zoning district. In other words, most of the folks reading this email live in “Residence B” and cannot, by law, add an “in law” apartment to their two family home for their aging parent.

In 1988-1989, The North Cambridge Neighborhood Study was conducted. It recommended to “down zone” the Industrial A-1 area. Eventually, neighbors filed a petition “down zone” this area to Residence B. It did not survive the process.

In 1998, the Planning Board recommended the density that is in the Bishop Petition as their analysis was that this density was sufficient to encourage residential development. After all the hearings and public process on “The Planning Board Petition”, the density was increased by 30% at the vote in the city council that changed most of Industrial A-1 to Special District 2. At that moment, after twelve (12) years of efforts, meetings, and hearings, there was only a small number of residents present in front of the council.

THE BISHOP PETITION: Three Parts

Part 2

Rolls back the 30% density increase from the vote 11 ½ years ago.

I believe (and this is only my personal belief) that there was an “unintended consequence” of the last minute 30% up zoning. The Planning Board Petition

allowed apartment buildings and there were larger parcels of land in SD-2. These two facts meant that an additional 30% up zoning is applied to compensate the developer for building Affordable housing. This would not normally apply in Residence B which is designed for two family homes and it is rare that the lots of land are large enough to hit the requirement of 10 units or more for Affordable housing. In other words, for large lots of land, the density almost doubles from Residence B (even allowing for the 30% Affordable up zoning in Residence B).

So, does the current density fulfill the purpose of Special District 2:

“17.22 Purpose. It is the intent of this Special District 2 to encourage the establishment of residential uses in the district in a form and density compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhood. ...”

Part 1 removes the commercial uses from SD-2. In the distant past, this area was serviced by the railroad. The railroad is gone and we are left with exceptionally narrow streets that are so dangerous that they should be one-way ... but several are dead ends. Currently SD-2 is designed to encourage residential, and all the SD-2 developments proposed are residential. So the Bishop Petition removes the commercial uses from SD-2. This should be an obvious “non-issue” and should be implemented as any current non-residential uses are either already not allowed or “grandfathered”.

Part 3 of the Bishop Petition attempts to protect the Linear Park. This is in a direct response to two things. The first is the white plastic fence that Frank Fodera used to replace the Linear Park fence from Cedar Street to the Tyler Court pedestrian gate while building the condos at 2440 Mass Ave. This is not only unattractive but has become a repository for graffiti which is removed at taxpayer expense through an overly involved public process.

The second was the second version of the Cambridge Lumber redevelopment plans posted on the CDD website dated June 22 2011. These plans specify that a “6’ Board Fence & Lattice Fence Topper” be placed on top of the concrete “retaining wall” which, as we can see, is about 3’ above grade. The thought of the Linear Park being encased in a 10’+ set of walls is too unfortunate to contemplate and the Bishop Petition prohibits it.

OK, this is the best I can do right now. I sure somebody else can do better!
Charlie