**Overview of the Advancing Housing Affordability (AHA) Petition**

**What this Zoning Petition Seeks to Do**

With this petition, we are seeking to do several things to advance housing affordability in Cambridge. First, we propose modifying single family zoning restrictions here to allow additional residential units within the shells of existing single family and two-family homes, with necessary relatively modest changes (doors, windows) positioned on the backs of houses or at the rear side walls. This will not only preserve existing sustainable residences but will also provide an avenue to legalize the many illegal apartments that now exist. Second, ask that any housing plans that seek to add three or more units for one of these dwelling units meet affordability guidelines, pro-rated as the number of units increase.

We also provide a bonus for owners to add more affordable units, by allowing a 30% increase in FAR (floor area ration to a maximum of .50 FAR and a 30% increase in Gross Floor Area for Auxiliary Dwelling Units (ADU) on this site, with allowable existing and new residential unit sizes sized at 500 SF or higher. Third, to help address climate change, we request that all new residential off-street outdoor parking spaces be of water-permeable surfaces that absorb rain. Finally, to address Cambridge housing and other concerns, we propose a citywide overlay requiring all employers of more than 100 persons to provide area plans and annual reports on reaching the goals outlined in these plans for housing, transportation, parking, and infrastructure for 85% of its full-time employees, students, and affiliates by the year 2040.

**Why these Zoning Changes are Needed**

Cambridge, founded in 1630, is a unique historic city and decades of growth and more recent explosive commercial development have made it one of the densest cities per square mile in the United States. Cambridge’s diverse neighborhoods include a broad array of architecturally beautiful and historic housing which most residents feel is essential to preserve. Cambridge's diverse neighborhoods strike a unique and delicate balance between architectural density and green space that is the envy of many other cities. Climate Change makes it imperative to preserve mature trees, green spaces, and open spaces between buildings, but we also need to provide still more housing than we are currently providing in the Cityand the area. The significant addition of new employees arriving here for the infotech and biotech industry, many of whom make far higher salaries than long term residents is forcing out the latter as gentrification accelerates.

The Cambridge Envision Report Housing Goals explicitly seek to promote: Affordable Housing; Housing Diversity; Livable Communities; Housing Stability; Market Affordability; Opportunity Neighborhoods (near transportation, services, and employment); and green spaces. For purposes of equity, it is time to modify zoning for exclusively single-family housing throughout the city, and to do so in a way that will not exacerbate housing costs by substantially increasing property values, destroying the rich array of sustainable historic housing, or adding to environmental problems by tearing down existing stock for larger more expensive housing. It is also time to require our large employers and institutions to work with the City residents and officials, individually and together, to create areawide housing, transportation, parking, and infrastructure plans that will help address the critical concerns the City is now facing.

We know from the recent [U.S. Census](https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/CDD/FactsandMaps/PopulationData/Citywide/census_2020_top_line_results.pdf) data that the total number of units of housing in Cambridge is up 14.0% or 6,616 units between 2010 and 2020. The total number of occupied units increased 12.6% in the same decade, while the number of vacant units rose a staggering 33.3% during this period. Much of this may be due to properties being bought as investments, but we need to address root causes. Cambridge is a wealthy city with a progressive citizenry committed to both maintaining its historic diversity and adding more affordable housing. Cambridge is one of the only cities in Massachusetts currently meeting state affordable housing standards, but the local and area waiting list for our affordable housing is extremely long. Sadly, the cost of creating each new unit of tax-funded affordable housing is very high ($908,914.93 per unit recently in Jefferson Park). Yet Cambridge has a large existing housing supply of smaller units within our existing housing infrastructure, both in compliance with and not in compliance with applicable zoning and building codes.

Many single-family and multi-family homes can be adapted to create a new supply of residential units such as studios, one-bedrooms, and smaller two-bedroom units, as well as single-room-occupancy communities and cooperatives with shared living spaces. These all will enable individuals and households seeking lower rents to move in, increasing the supply of existing various unit sizes and thereby helping reduce average rents citywide. As noted by the [Cambridge Community Foundation](https://cambridgecf.org/housing-crisis-grips-cambridge/) “14.84% of our current housing is income-restricted affordable housing units accessible to families earning below $78,480 for a family of four (80% of Cambridge‘s area median income of $98,100)….This means we are losing school teachers, firefighters, artists, police, nurses, nonprofit staff, small business owners, senior citizens, and increasingly, the long-standing African American families, who have been anchors in our community for generations.” One key concern is the paucity of homes for families more generally. Our hope is that by providing a bonus for affordable housing in existing single-family homes we will be able to ameliorate this situation. In addition, by asking our large employers (and the City) to step up, we hope that they will provide plans to pay the down payments for homes in the broader area for their low-and middle-income employees thus helping Cambridge employees build equity where they are living.

The stated purpose of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance (Section 1.30) is as follows: to lessen congestion in the streets, conserve health, secure safety from fire, flood, panic, and other danger, provide adequate light and air, prevent overcrowding of land, avoid undue concentration of population, and encourage housing for persons of all income levels. It is also intended to facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water supply, drainage, sewerage, schools, parks, open space, and other public requirements, while also helping to conserve the value of land and buildings, including the conservation of natural resources and the prevention of blight and pollution of the environment. In addition, our zoning is intended to encourage the most rational use of land throughout the city, including the encouragement of appropriate economic development, the protection of residential neighborhoods from incompatible activities, and consideration of plans and policies adopted by the Cambridge Planning Board, as well as to provide the means to preserve and increase the amenities of the city. The AHA petition addresses and complements many of these purposes.

The Advancing Housing Affordability Petition offers an important avenue to change both the short term and long-term impacts of our growth., It also helps maintain the many features of this city that we love and must preserve in an era in which climate change and other factors weigh heavily. We believe that these zoning changes will not only provide an avenue for more affordable housing in Cambridge but also area wide solutions to the problems we are facing.