**ENVISION REPORT**

**Novembr 6, 2022**

**OVERVIEW**

A group of Cambridge residents met largely weekly over the spring of 2022 to discuss the 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, moving through the circa 111 goals one by and focusing on those issues delimited as action-based. 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.

Broader Goals and Background

1. We need a City Plan –our group focused on Envision, but the City Council and the City are not following it. We need integrated city planning (personnel etc). A 1992 solution ~~to make~~ that made a list of planning principles served the city well. What is a plan for a city that is 80-90% already developed? The 1965 plan ~~was~~ recognized that old industrial uses would end. There would be ~~several~~ new economic changes, new industrial areas. What is the balance we need to have to keep our city livable, functional? We need a framework.
2. Reorganize CDD. Now it is a development agency not a planning agency. The implications of development are huge (labs vs housing vs environment vs livability).
3. Opportunity exists with new Presidents of Harvard and MIT to bring our institutions into play (housing for students/staff and expertise (on housing, environment, tech and other issues).
4. City Council and City are now driven by ideology, not facts or practical solutions. Missing pieces: finance, capital development,need to redress labs, which compete with other commercial endeavors (also need a definition of labs, figure out how to address uses).
5. City is being financed by rising property values & tax increases –has impacts (25-38% rise in 5 years). Many residents in lower/middle income brackets or on fixed incomes. Not a benefit to ~~us~~ residents, but only as investment properties. We need city to use real data for decisions – and more transparency (housing affordability etc).
6. We need a registered traffic engineer and traffic committee and a transportation plan –follow state law. Need professionals & interested residents on boards who are not swayed by politicians (whose main goal is necessarily reelection). Must follow city policy, but not clear what city policy is without a plan.
7. Housing crisis in city, and lower and middle income people are being forced out. 20% of our renters are students or post-docs or affiliated with universities. And we do not have the tools to deal with this. Sustainability of older housing, role that NCDs play. Perfection becomes enemy of progress.
8. Engage with neighborhood group and other leaders as resources; intellectual and real life advisors; engage and deploy the Cambridge Community Foundation report as core framing.

***Conclusions:*** We need leadership to nudge ship in right direction, to thread the needle if needed. Opportunity for City Manager to play a strong leadership role. We are a city of 6.43 square miles not 53 square miles. Things that may work elsewhere may not work here. Invite Manager to discuss his views.

**TOP PRIORITIES**

I. CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT

1. Electrical vehicle charging infrastructure in new buildings.
2. Address noise and light pollution through specialist hires, on the ground analysis, and regulations.
3. Add public green spaces in new projects and to available sites in denser neighborhoods.
4. Develop a realistic plan for getting existing buildings closer to net zero quicker than 2050 state goal. Proposed BEUDO plans costing $177K per condo unit are not practical. No credit is given for being in an apartment bldg. We need to address heat loss per dwelling unit not per square foot. There needs to be a meeting with management companies, condo board leaders. Window air conditioner units are far more efficient – more heat and cooling per unit of efficiency. Windows that open are important for ventilation. Many structures here were built 100 yrs ago, so huge expense But a lot of low hanging fruit - insulation, storm windows.

II. COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

1. Provide underserved communities with low price food markets or food truck or outdoor markets.
2. Plan universal Pre-K locations citywide in new and older buildings. Consider public and private vendors and wage equity for workers.
3. Find ways to encourage (curate) opening of needed stores/businesses in key squares/ areas to meet needs of residents and encourage non-use of vehicles. This is important in form-built planning. Anticipate using ground floors as amenities and as leverage for upper story use.

III. ECONOMY

1. Link new housing and transportation to job creation and new commercial development approvals.
2. Rezone parts of Mass. Ave and Cambridge Street for ground floor retail and greater density upper level housing.
3. Bring our large (150 plus employees?) commercial employers to Planning Board once a year –with reports (on area employee housing, transportation, environmental issues, other – like annual Town/Gown report and Planning Board meeting.
4. Address store/commercial vacancies in a strong and possibly “tiered” way. An increasing fine based on time, that would eventually make it better to rent properties for less than keeping them vacant. While we have “taking” concerns, Washington D.C. does this. Owners have two years to occupy a space, then the city can look at a vacancy tax, and ratchet it up every two years.

IV. HOUSING

1. Require that affordable housing developers focus on corridor sites with greater height and density potential. Ask the city or CRA to acquire lands for this purpose.
2. Require more transparency on affordable housing development costs. (Jefferson Park cost over $1 million a unit; market rate housing costs far less).
3. Institute annual reporting to Council Housing Committee on various issues (resident demographics; rental costs; ownership numbers, building costs etc.). We need an integrated analysis for development – full implications on diversity. We now only deal with one issue at time, and do not address the ramifications of our decisions – schools, infrastructure, so we have no way to evaluate the full range of potential results. It is not one size fits all issue and solutions. We are approaching things as silos.
4. Require that the Affordable Housing application process be initiated anew by candidates every year (Cambridge’s list is many times higher than Boston’s perhaps for this reason).

V. MOBILITY

a. Improve city public transport to serve each neighborhood on a twenty-minute or less schedule.

b. Minimize adverse traffic impacts through design guidelines, expert help, regular review.

c. Review impacts of separated bike lanes in terms of bicycle use, bicycle safety/accidents, and

traffic. Hire replacement for Joe Barr with engineering background. Invite Netherlands’ bicycle experts to advise city and CDD on best bicycle lane practices (bike boxes and other simple techniques). Note: Netherlands provides services to other countries.

VI. URBAN FORM

1. Prioritize “livable” streets – trees, more pedestrian-only areas with outdoor markets and update the city open space plan to include other open space areas.
2. Create city neighorhood design review framework like the East Cambridge Planning Team and the Alewife Study group for new smaller, medium, and larger size projects.
3. Safeguard the existing Neighborhood Conservation District and landmarking processes.
4. Have the CDD present their planning work each year before City Council Neighborhood and Long-Term Committee.
5. Initiate new zoning and design plans for specific neighborhood and commercial areas following the model of the Harvard Square Conservation District Report and Harvard Square Zoning Petition.
6. Task city architects and designers to work with both the Planning Board and BZA on projects and require our planners and designers to use the newest technology (now readily available) for better modeling and impact analysis.

OVERVIEW OF ENVISION GOALS

**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
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.
   2. Require owner signoffs at CDD specific to noise and other compliance measures.
   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 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.
5. ***Building Energy use regulations*** 
   1. This is complicated because each existing building poses different challenges and a simple unrealistic deadline won’t achieve net zero, or close to it. We need to identify compliance strategies for a number of typical buildings and uses.
   2. Some of the desired uses, or preservation goals, will conflict with net zero goal.

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

**Recommendations**

1. ***Universal Pre-K eduction***
   1. Private sector cannot achieve these goals – needs city action.
   2. Pre-K is good ground floor use in mixed use buildings – need to provide incentives.
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 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.
4. ***Modify zoning to allow for live-work space for artists, musicians, and performers*** (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
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.
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, housing, 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
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 with 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 proposals studied in Envision.
   6. Address critical infrastructure (including public transit) and green space needs as new housing is planned.
   7. Clear guidelines and criteria must accompany special permitting requirements.
   8. 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.
   9. Require more transparency on affordable housing development costs and lists including yearly renewal of applications on affordable housing wait list.
   10. Require an annual report from affordable housing companies before City Council’s Housing Committee to address finances, priorities, successes, other issues.

1. **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 zoning 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 project critiques.
2. **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.
3. **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 by commercial development more important than housing affordability?

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

**Recommendations**

1. ***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. The city must require employee parking numbers for each project under review, making it available and accessible for each case.
2. ***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. Integrate the work of traffic, public works, CD departments, and outside consultants.
   4. Require yearly open public meetings before the now defunct Traffic Board for oversight Transit advisory committee to involve the public in their work and reports.

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

**Recommendations**

1. ***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).
2. We need better planning and a means to address urban form on a block-by-block basis with neighborhood input. New development has to fit in.
3. 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.
4. 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 conformance with urban design guidelines.
5. **Strengthen the permitting criteria and the application process for special permits.**
   1. Realign the city staffing structure so that employees of Historical Commission, 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 design review of BZA cases. 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. NCDs or the equivalent of NCDs should be established in all residential areas, so that the significant projects can be reviewed in public.
   4. 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.
   5. Graphic form technology exists for visualizing increased density and should be available to different commissions (Planning Board, BZA, Historical Commission
   6. 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.
6. ***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
7. ***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 of those parcels. Instead, the land is managed today as commercial properties, biotech and parking, with only two grad student housing projects having been built. We need a master planning process involving MIT, CDD and the neighborhood to create a new physical plan for all the parcels and timeline to get it accomplished with additional housing density 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.
8. ***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 where 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 of impacts beyond the project boundaries.
9. ***Develop design guidelines for as-of-right affordable housing development (5a).*** 
   1. This has been completed, but should be periodically reviewed and improved.
   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.
10. ***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.
11. **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.
12. ***Clarify the development review process by publishing a process diagram to clearly articulate requirements and expectations at every step.*** (5g)
13. **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
14. **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).
15. **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. Bridging the railroad track to connect Quadrangle with T station should be a priority.
16. **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.