

Development Alert

City Council Zoning Vote Mon. June 27 for **Multi-Family, Commercial & Institutional** Development in One & Two Family Zones

Email your opinion to all nine City Councillors at council@cambridgema.gov or call Mayor David Maher at (617) 349-7219 and call (617) 349-4280 for all the other Councillors (or see <http://www.cambridgema.gov/ccouncil/citycouncilmembers.aspx>).

Mayor & city officials claim that this is NOT “up-zoning” despite opinions to the contrary by:

- Attorney Mark Bobrowski
 - author of the definitive text on Massachusetts zoning law
- Attorney Thomas Bracken
 - successfully challenged the city at the Massachusetts Supreme Court
- Attorney Kevin Crane, former City Councillor
- City Councillor Craig Kelley
- City Councillor Leland Cheung

The Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods is made up of members of neighborhood groups city-wide.

see <http://www2.cambridgema.gov/cdd/cp/neighborhoods.html>

Our City Council is poised to up-zone all residential areas of Cambridge. For example, the Armenian Church on Brattle Street could become up to 30 apartments, including 5 affordable, and possibly some commercial space. Current zoning does not allow multi-family housing in one- and two-family zones, but that would change. Commercial and institutional uses, like offices and preschools, would also be allowed everywhere under the revised Section 5.28 of the zoning law, which rules conversion of non-residential buildings to housing.

Cambridge Day has an extensive article on this zoning change (see <http://tinyurl.com/CambridgeDay528>). Here are some highlights:

Councillor Kelley regarding the city accepting the proposal for apartments at North Cambridge Catholic: "I don't understand how one can be clearer than saying no. When I talk to my kids and I say 'No,' it is a 'No.' When I say 'No, maybe tomorrow,' it's a 'No, maybe tomorrow.' But 'No' in any reasonable discussion means 'No' unless it's qualified, and here that 'No' is not qualified ... and if you look at the development issues and the density issues, this is exactly why. What we're seeing here on Norris Street is exactly why you wouldn't grant this project by special permit, because it is going to swamp this street. It is simply too big for this street."

"That may well be the end result," City Manager Healy responded before walking out of the hearing.

Kelley has also stated, "This is a huge up-zoning of the city."

The Mayor seems to think that if the building is already there, there can be no up-zoning regardless of what happens inside. Mayor Maher: "Do you in any way, shape or form see this as an upzoning?" Stuart Dash of city staff: "No, it's still only addressing the existing buildings."

"If that's not an upzoning, I don't know what is," said East Cambridge's Mark Jaquith during public comment, using the church as an example. "To characterize it otherwise is deluding yourself and the public."

A Norris Street resident referring to the lack of an enforceable limit on the number of bedrooms in units: "This is the ordinance to create 'Animal House,'" he said. "It's very attractive to single people and unattractive to families."

There are other problems as well. One is that this zoning change, sparked by the sale of North Cambridge Catholic High, has only been brought to its immediate neighbors for discussion by the Mayor, and even they are not happy. Another is that the only text available to the public is an old version, which has since been changed drastically several times without public posting. It is also still full of language too open to interpretation by the Planning Board and abuse by developers.

While city officials claim that there are only a few buildings that might be affected by this change, we can all think of many office buildings, churches, schools, hospitals, etc. across the city that could go this route.

We at the Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods would like this issue to be discussed citywide and would like to have an overall cap on the density of these projects which respects the character of the host neighborhood. This vote could be postponed until August or later to allow for a more inclusive and open discussion.

Please contact your City Council **before this Monday's 5:30 City Council meeting** if you also have concerns about how this might affect your neighborhood.

Mark Jaquith, Co-President, Association of Cambridge Neighborhoods