



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Re: Planning Board Recommendation on the William A. Fox, et al Zoning Petition to rezone the area behind Massachusetts Avenue between Cottage Park Avenue and Edmunds Street and accessed from Cottage Park Avenue from its current designation of Business A2 to Residence B.

Recommendation: The Planning Board does not recommend adoption of the change in zoning designation proposed in the petition at this time.

Discussion: The change in zoning designation here from Business A2 to Residence B would restrict the allowed uses to single and two family residences, and prohibit new commercial uses. The Floor Area Ratio would be reduced from 1.0 for commercial and 1.75 for residential uses to 0.5 or 0.35 depending on lot size; the lot area per unit would be increased from 600 square feet to 2,500 or 4,000 square feet depending on lot size; and the maximum height limit would decrease from 45 feet to 35 feet.

The Business A2 designation in the petition area extends well beyond the 100 feet from the sideline of Massachusetts Avenue, which is typical of the district. The petition area affects 5 lots, most of which are located on the eastern side of Cottage Park Avenue, a limited capacity street. The existing district boundaries date back to at least 1943 when rail service still influenced land uses in the area. Properties on the west side of Cottage Park Avenue are within the Residence B district and consist of mostly single and two family homes.

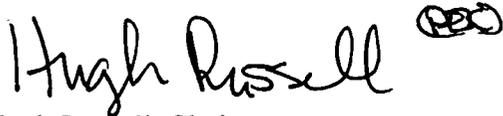
The Board finds that although the petition area is relatively small, it is in a sensitive transitional location between a commercial street, a residential area, and former industrial uses. It is expected that at some point in the near to medium future, existing uses at the end of Cottage Park Avenue and Edmunds Street, zoned Special District 2, will likely be redeveloped to residential uses. Recent zoning initiatives in the area have focused on providing adequate transitions as well as protecting and promoting a residential fabric. The Business A2 designation extending into the residential neighborhood here does not seem to be consistent with these goals. However, the non residential uses that have existed within the petition area, particularly at 22 Cottage Park Avenue, have not necessarily had an overall negative impact on the area. The basic concern seems to be in regards to potential new uses, and the impact on the residential character of the area.

There is a logical planning rationale for extending the Residence B district here. However, when considering the impact on properties within petition area, as well as the potential future uses within the area, it is not immediately evident that the petition represents the most appropriate solution to the concerns that have been raised.

Special District 2 is located adjacent to the petition area and was created in 1999 in order to encourage residential uses in a form and density compatible with the adjacent neighborhood. A similar rationale could be used for extending this district into the petition area, which would allow similar residential density as well as some office uses, specifically in the larger building at 22 Cottage Park Avenue. Another consideration is the impact of Article 5.28.2 of the Zoning Ordinance which allows the conversion of non residential structures to residential use. At the time of this petition, discussions about the applicability of Article 5.28.2 are before the City. The outcome of the discussions regarding Article 5.28.2 could also significantly impact what type of development is possible at 22 Cottage Park Avenue within the petition area.

The Board is reluctant to recommend rezoning a small area such as this, which could potentially have significant impacts on one or two properties, without a more comprehensive study of the larger area, specifically, to clarify what the overall public purpose of rezoning the area would be, and to better understand the zoning options available and their potential impacts. The Board does remain sympathetic to the goals of protecting the residential fabric of the neighborhood here and does anticipate that a rezoning of the area in some form will be appropriate.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board

 (RS)

Hugh Russell, Chair