



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Community Development Department

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To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Brian P. Murphy, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: May 18, 2011 *BPM*

Re: Calendar Item #6 dated April 25, 2011 regarding visual materials to accompany the Zoning Ordinance

In response to this order, inspired by the “Miami 21” Initiative, to evaluate the possibility of developing visual materials to aid in the understanding of requirements and regulations within the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, we report the following. Community Development Department staff met with the former Miami Planning Director a few months ago to learn about the work that led to improvements in the Miami zoning regulations. While the Miami and Cambridge regulatory systems and documentation are very different, it is possible to create similar graphic enhancements to support the clarity of Cambridge regulations.

The best place to incorporate these visual materials would be in *The Zoning Guide: A User Guide to the City of Cambridge Zoning Ordinance*. This document was published to help people understand the contents of the Zoning Ordinance in a relatively brief format with clear explanations. The current version includes explanatory diagrams, but the utility of the document could be greatly enhanced with the kind of graphics that Miami used—photographs, diagrams, drawings and other visuals that clarify the text. Some of the City’s design guidelines already contain such elements to provide a vision of desirable outcomes that goes beyond the strict requirements in the Zoning Ordinance. It would be inadvisable to include illustrations within the Ordinance itself because images may be interpreted differently than the legally adopted text. However, *The Zoning Guide*, which is issued administratively and is periodically updated, can be modified by staff as required to ensure effective communication.

This approach, using a separate reference to incorporate visual material, is similar to that used in New York City and would be our recommendation for improving the documentation in Cambridge.