Zoning and Planning for Multi-Family Housing In Greater Boston

Photo: Winthrop
Projected demand for housing: *Hundreds of thousands of units*
1. Any use specified above in section 4 as permitted in dwelling districts.
2. Detached apartment or tenement houses.
3. Hotels and lodging houses, dormitories, providing there is no display or advertising visible from the street except for a small name sign.
4. The following uses shall only be permitted in the Apartment District upon the grant of a Special Permit by the Zoning Board of Appeals:
   a. Uses, whether or not on the same parcel as activities permitted as a matter of right, accessory to activities permitted as a matter of right, which activities are necessary in connection with scientific research or scientific development or related production. The Zoning Board of Appeals may grant such permit provided that it finds that the proposed accessory use does not substantially derogate from the public good. (Ord. Of 42991)
5. Open air markets of any type shall be prohibited. The sale of used household goods by residential occupants on their premises, normally referred to as garage sales, shall be allowed providing that such sale shall not continue for a period or more than seven (7) days in any year, except by Special Permit of the Zoning Board of Appeals. (Ord. of 42991)

B. Dimensional Requirements.
1. Residential dwelling units, except one or two family units, which will be subject to Section 4, Dimensional requirements.
   a. Frontage:
      Forty (40) feet plus five (5) feet per unit up to seventy (70) feet maximum required.
   b. Four thousand (4,000) square feet per unit up to a total of ten (10) units, then five hundred (500) square feet per unit for all units in excess of ten (10) units. (Ord. of 62987)
2. All other residential: Floor area ratio, 1 to 1 maximum (Ord. of 62987)
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4. Height:
   Four (4) stories, not to exceed sixty (60) feet maximum. Penthouses shall not be subject to fourstory limitations provided the total height of the building including penthouses does not exceed sixty (60) feet. Total floor area of church spires, belfries, cupolas, chimneys, radio and flag poles, water tanks, hose towers and penthouses shall not exceed in aggregate twentyfive (25) percent of the floor area of the first floor, and provided that such church spires, belfries, cupolas, chimneys, radio and flag poles, water tanks and hose towers, penthouses and shall not be more than fifty (50) percent higher than the average height of the roof of the main structure. (Ord. of 62987; Ord. of 41188)
5. Front Yard:
   a. Twenty (20) feet minimum of which ten (10) feet shall be used for landscaping.
   b. Corner lots, seven (7) feet minimum on one (1) side of corner. (Ord. of 62987)
6. Side Yard:
   a. Ten (10) feet minimum up to and including three (3) stories and forty-five (45) feet in height.
   b. Twelve (12) feet minimum for four (4) stories and over fortyfive (45) feet in height. (Ord. of 62987)
7. Rear Yard:
   Twentyfive,(25) feet minimum. (Ord. of 62987)
8. Accessory Building:
   Shall be located only within the rear yard and shall occupy not more than thirtythree (33) percent of the rear yard area and shall not exceed two (2) stories and/or twenty (20) feet in height nor be located any closer than seven (7) feet from any lot line. (Ord. of 62987)
9. Inground Swimming Pools:
   Six (6) feet minimum form any lot line. (Ord. of 62987)
We do not have the zoning in place to meet demand for housing.
What is our current plan for adding multi-family housing?

What should our plan be for more multi-family housing?
Very little land is zoned for multi-family housing.
And municipalities highly restrict density.
2

We are moving to a system of project-by-project decision-making.
Away from mapped districts for multi-family housing
Survivor of Two Town Meetings
discretionary
ad hoc
reactive
political
unpredictable
slow
flexible
The current system is problematic for:

- Planning infrastructure and services
- Reducing the high cost of building
- Addressing an urgent housing crisis
The most widespread trend in zoning for multi-family housing has been to adopt *mixed use zoning*. 
3 Mixed Use

Somerville

Medford
3 Mixed Use

Wakefield

Concord

Watertown

Braintree

Quincy
3
Mixed Use
Housing is also going up in new lifestyle shopping centers.
3 Mixed Use

Watertown
4

Municipalities are allowing incremental development in historic centers; and more on the municipal peripheries.
Where to put multi-family housing?

- Residential areas?
- City/town/village centers?
- Commercial corridors?
- Office parks?
- Industrial districts?
Interpretation of local plans, in aggregate: Where to put multi-family housing?

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- **Industrial districts?**
  Yes, we’re on it!
NEEDHAM

Centers/Edges
Ten dwelling units: Needham Center
NEEDHAM

Age-restricted, special permit

Centers/Edges

Friendly 40B
10 390 136

4 Centers/Edges
WELLESLEY SQUARE

4 Centers/Edges
Wellesley 2018 Draft Unified Plan:

“Rezone office, business and industrial districts in the eastern part of Wellesley near I-95 (for example, Walnut Street and the office parks) to provide more development capacity and mixed use potential. [...] Because of their location, they have little impact on the residential community.”
At Edge Cities, do we:

Isolate each new project

OR

Make places where you can

• Walk from site to site
• Take a...
  bike
  train
  boat
  bus
  shuttle
  Uber
  your own car
Edge City I
Edge City I
Edges City II

Somerville
Edge City III:

Places where you can

• Walk from site to site
• Take a...
  • bike
  • train
  • boat
  • bus
  • Uber
  • your own car
Four Fab Findings:

1. Zone more land for multi-family housing, **up and out**

2. Reform **approval process**, for flexibility and predictability

3. Allow multi-family housing next to **mixed use** hubs

4. Allow more housing in **centers** (and near transit), and plan connected growth nodes on the **edges**
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Chelsea