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MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 25, 2019

TO: Councilor Susan Albright, Chair
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning & Development
James Freas, Deputy Director of Planning & Development

MEETING DATE: November 7, 2019

SUBJECT: **#165-19 Washington Street Comprehensive Plan Amendment**

CC: Planning & Development Board
City Council

Please find attached a "change log" showing changes to the October 2, 2019 Washington Street Vision Comprehensive Plan Amendment draft as well as a new height diagram and new page discussing how height and related issues can be managed through the future Washington Street zoning. These amendments are based on the comments received at the October 16th Zoning and Planning committee meeting and individually from members of the City Council.

Next Steps

The Washington Street Vision Comprehensive Plan Amendment is next scheduled to be taken up by the Committee on November 7.

Washington Street Vision: Comprehensive Plan Amendment October 28th Draft

Change Log

P. 17 - ...over and over again ~~the planning team heard~~ community members have expressed that walking along most of Washington Street could be so much better.

P. 30 – Header: Reconfigure Washington Street ~~as a boulevard~~ for safety of all users

P. 46 - Given the high costs, the City should maximize strategies to make best use of existing parking supplies first, then use parking utilization data and an assessment of any other public benefits to determine the need for a parking garage.

P. 65 - ...on-site energy production should be ~~considered~~ encouraged.

P. 67 – ~~The vision plan calls for~~ The City should working with adjacent property owners to ...

P. 83 - Building height is an important component of creating this sense of shelter or enclosure ~~with a 1:1 ratio of building height to street width generally being considered the ideal.~~

- Caption - The diagram demonstrates that the height of the buildings at the street edge are similar to the width of the open space. ~~This ratio has~~ Building to street width ratios with a similar relationship have generally been found to make for a comfortable sense of enclosure ~~for humans~~.

P. 84-85 – Height Diagram – Removed ‘Taller Heights’ category from map and key (4 to 10 stories).

- Adjusted the boundary of the middle heights area to end at Crafts Street.
- Added to bulleted notes- Ensure heights vary along any given block so as to maintain the sense of buildings having developed incrementally over time.

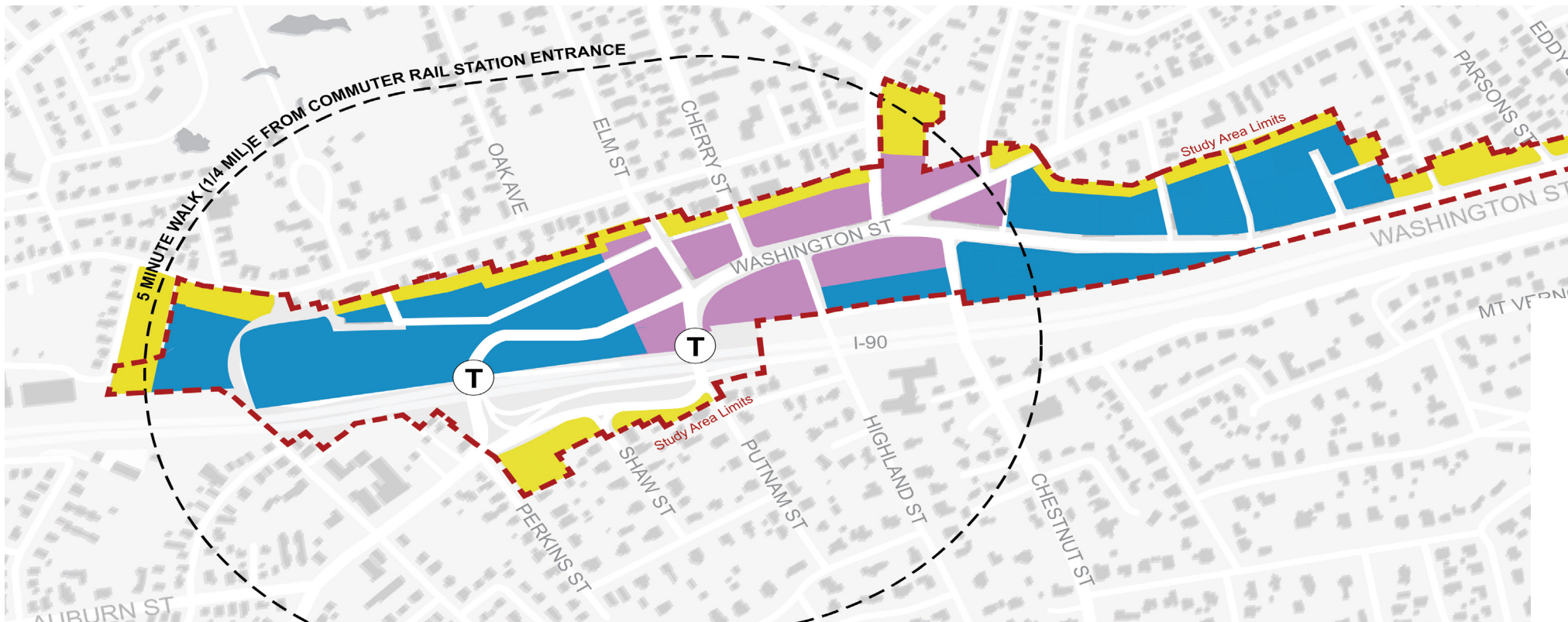
P. 87 – New page added on zoning

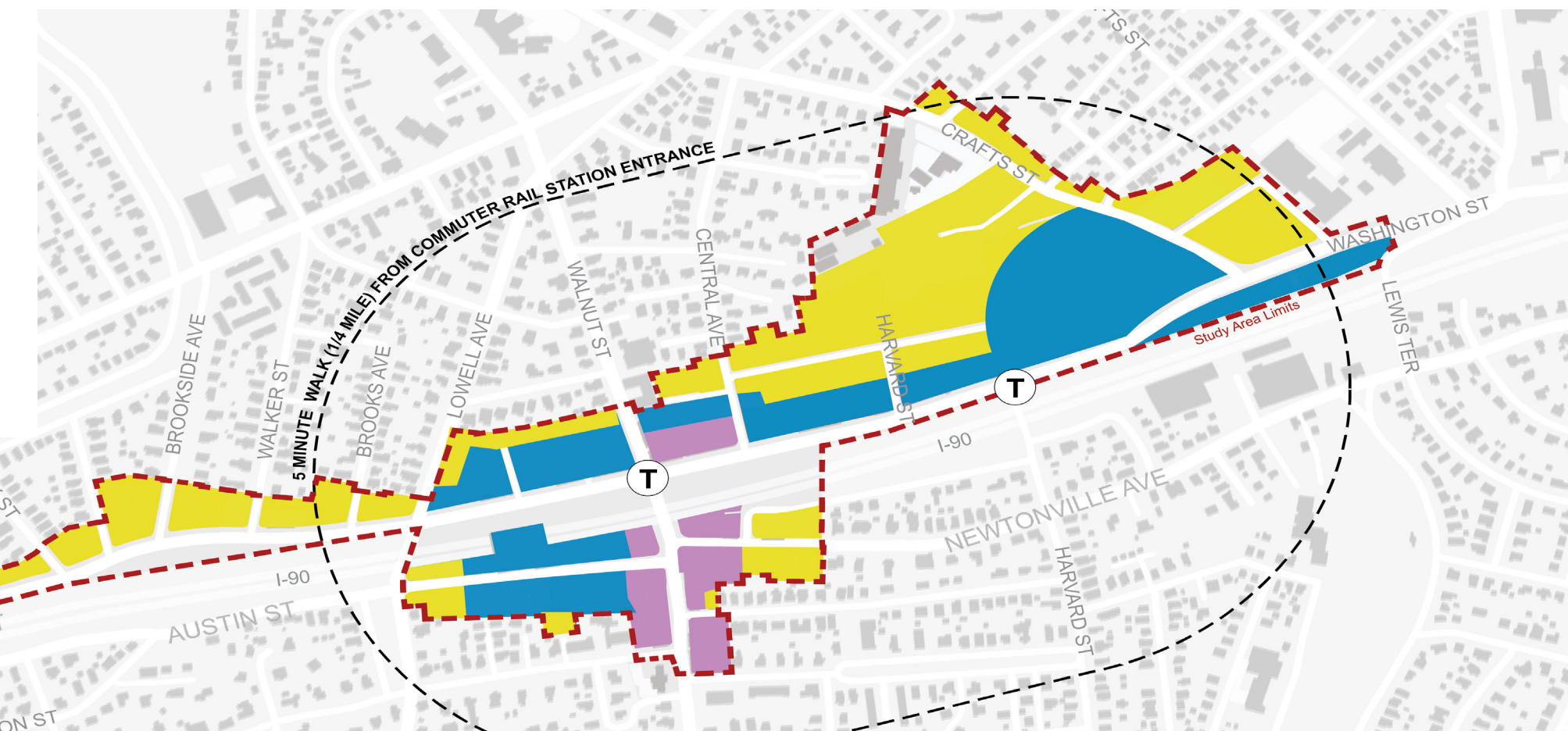
Area-wide Planning Principles

Height Principles Diagram

This diagram illustrates the height principles along Washington Street. The height ranges shown correspond to the area-wide planning principles:

- Maintaining the lower height neighborhood between West Newton and Newtonville.
- Ensuring heights vary along any given block so as to maintain the sense of buildings having developed incrementally over time.
- Creating moments of arrival and transition at the edges of the villages.
- Maintaining the prominence of historic iconic buildings in the village cores.
- Ensuring buildings respond to human-scale throughout the area including upper story stepbacks on taller buildings.





- Low Heights - Neighborhood Character (1 to 3 stories)
- Low Heights - Village Character (1 to 4 stories)
- Medium Heights - Village Character (3 to 6 stories)

Footnotes:

- This is an illustration of principles only; this is not a regulatory or zoning map.
- Further nuance must be developed in Washington Street Zoning including specifying the limits of each zoning district and the rules for each district and building type.
- The scale of some buildings, including taller height buildings, will require additional review and community input as can be achieved through the Special Permit Process.

Implement planning principles through project review

The planning principles identified in this vision plan are essential to how Washington Street can accommodate residential and commercial growth while respecting the architectural character and built heritage of the community. This vision plan is setting a pathway to incremental change over time, not abrupt and immediate change to remake the corridor as a new place. Zoning, and the development project review process that accompanies it, is essential to realizing this intent.

Achieving the outcomes described in this plan will require new zoning with stronger requirements for controls on building height, size, and placement than is currently found in Newton's zoning ordinance. These requirements will need to clearly require that building heights reduce as they get closer to adjacent neighborhoods, that building widths be controlled, that taller buildings step-back in height above 4 stories, and that there be clear diversity in building heights within a project. At the same time, the maximum allowable height of 6 stories in some areas, as shown on the height diagram on pages 84-85, will be an important component of achieving the many public objectives of this plan, from plazas and open spaces to underground parking. Therefore, the development project review process provided by the requirement of a special permit for any building that exceeds 3 stories in height is also important for realizing these same planning principles on individual sites.

The special permit process formally brings the City into the design process through its role in reviewing and approving a project. This role should be used to further ensure that the planning principles enumerated in this vision plan are incorporated into each proposed development. To that end, the criteria in the Washington Street zoning used to shape the decision-making of the City Council on a special permit must clearly identify consistency with this vision plan and its planning principles. Among these should be the idea that the tallest buildings should be used sparingly along the corridor, marking significant locations and otherwise used to advance public purposes.

Setting the special permit criteria and development standards of the Washington Street zoning so that the public, property-owners and potential developers can have clear expectations of what can happen along this corridor will be one of the most important implementation steps of this plan. The vision presented here offers an opportunity to improve the quality of life for the neighborhoods and villages in the area. New zoning and thoughtful review of development proposals will be necessary to realizing that opportunity.