

# Business

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## Raising housing options is goal

Cambridge plan would set aside more new units as affordable

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Developers in Cambridge could soon be asked to nearly double the amount of affordable housing they include in new apartment and condominium buildings.

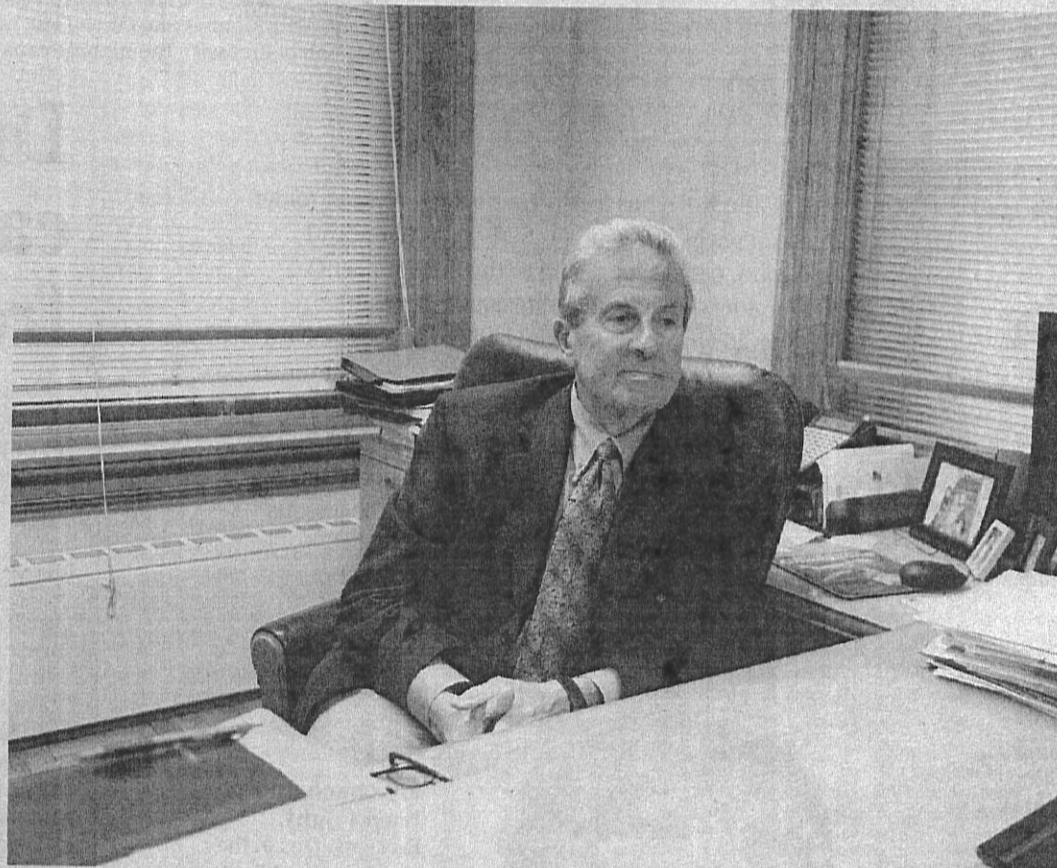
City Manager Richard Rossi filed a proposal Monday with the City Council that would require developers to set aside up to 20 percent of new buildings as affordable units.

The measure aims to capitalize on Cambridge's hot real estate market to generate more affordable housing and help retain working-class residents, who are increasingly being squeezed out, Rossi wrote.

The plan would substantially boost Cambridge's Inclusionary Housing program, which today sets aside about 11.5 percent of units in many new buildings at rents deemed affordable to lower- and middle-income residents; a family of three earning up to \$70,640 a year, for example, would pay \$1,766 a month.

If they take part in the program, developers are currently allowed to increase the number of units in their buildings by 30 percent.

Rossi suggested a range of 17 to 20 percent for new affordable housing requirements, which city officials said would not be so high that it discourag-



BARRY CHIN/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Cambridge City Manager Richard Rossi filed a housing plan with the City Council that would push builders of apartments and condos to set aside more affordable units.

es new construction. "You want to find the right balance," said Iram Farooq, Cambridge's assistant city manager for community development. "We're trying to be as bold as possible while not shutting off development opportunities."

The recommendations come after a monthslong study of Cambridge's housing market by a consultant hired by the city. And they will probably undergo months more study and debate by the City Council.

Several councilors said they are already supportive.

The City Council debate will probably center around whether the rate should be even higher than 20 percent, predicted Councilor Marc McGovern, who is also Cambridge's vice mayor.

Councilors will also probably debate how many of the affordable units should be reserved for low-income residents

and how many for middle-income residents.

In a city where rents have climbed twice as fast as incomes over the last decade, more affordable housing is needed, McGovern said. The trick is how to get it without driving developers out of town.

"I want developers to scream but not run away," he said. "I'm hopeful that's the conversation we can have."

Still, some in the business community are wary of Cambridge asking developers to do too much. Last year, the city nearly tripled the fees new office, lab, and industrial buildings pay toward affordable housing. Rezoning in parts of Central and Kendall squares now include requirements for startup space, transit fees, and other community needs.

Meanwhile, Cambridge just banned plastic bags and is pushing for "net-zero" energy

emissions in new construction. These efforts all address worthy goals, said Sarah Kennedy, director of government affairs at the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce. But they add up.

"There are a lot of different pieces the city's looking at," she said. "Doing all that in a coordinated way is important for developers thinking about building in Cambridge."

Cambridge isn't alone in trying to boost its inclusionary housing program. Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh last year revamped the city's program, to wring more cash out of developers who don't include affordable units in their own projects. And Somerville is considering boosting its requirement to 20 percent affordable units as well.

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