

STATEMENT from the Stroudwater Village Association regarding the proposed rezoning of 1945 Congress Street (Elks Club Property). stroudwatervillageassociation@gmail.com

This statement specifically references updates to the rezoning proposal in July, 2015 and should be considered in addition to our prior letters to the Planning Board from January 2015 and May 2015.

The Stroudwater Village Association remains opposed to any one-off rezoning of the parcel at 1945 Congress Street, or for that matter any other individual parcel in the neighborhood area, until a comprehensive visioning process for the neighborhood is undertaken. Such a visioning process should involve all stakeholders, including but not limited to residents, the City of Portland, the Portland Jetport, MDOT, UNUM and other businesses and organizations in the neighborhood such as the Elks Club, the Tate House, area places of assembly and the several businesses on Congress Street near the Fore River. **The Planning Board has been reticent to undertake such a process, but the latest zoning map submitted by the applicant (Fig 1) illustrates perfectly why such a visioning process is critical before any decisions are made.**

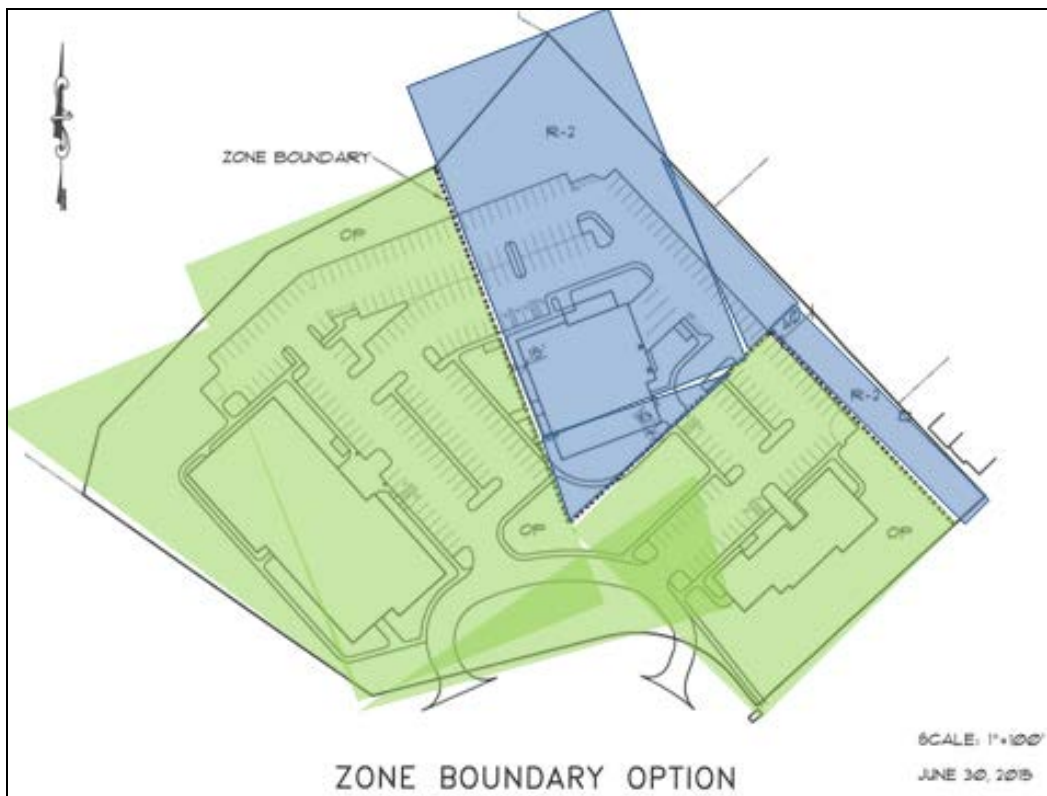


Figure 1. Zone Boundary Option submitted by Applicant, showing the small amount of R-2 zoning remaining (blue) that would allow a tax-exempt, conditional-use seller to stay on the land in comparison with the large amount of land (green) allowed to the seller to “cash out” to a commercial developer.

Put simply, the zoning proposal allows an existing tax-exempt, conditional-use organization to simply draw a box around itself and then carve up and “cash out” the rest of its land at maximum market value for commercial development, regardless of the will of other area stakeholders. Clearly a great deal for

the seller/organization and commercial developers, but a bad deal for the City and for the neighborhood – not to mention probably not the intent of conditional use zoning and tax exemption in the first place.

Far more ominous and concerning to the SVA than just this one parcel is the precedent this would establish for similar would-be sellers in the area. Figure 2 shows the potential “domino effect” of the potential rezoning gift from the city to other would-be sellers. Once the Elks (blue circle) are allowed to do this, why wouldn’t any responsible board member of other similar organizations (churches, Masons, the Tate House), consider “cashing out” their land? We know that Congress Street and Westbrook Street frontage would be very attractive to gas stations, donut and coffee shops, etc. On what leg would the city or neighborhood stand to prevent that kind of future activity when we are allowing it now?

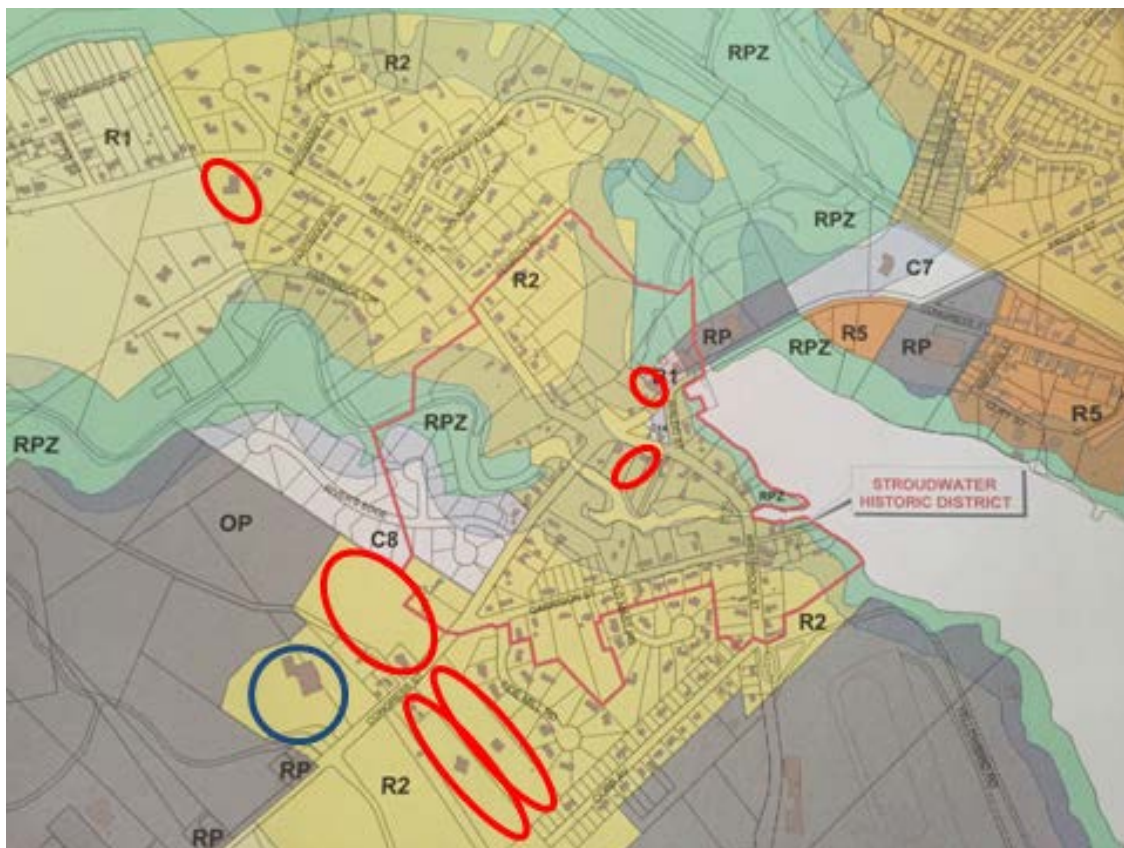


Figure 2. Stroudwater Village neighborhood zoning map highlighting potential sellers in red who are similar to the Elks (in blue). “Similar” in this case means tax-exempt, conditional use organizations sitting on large amounts of land that may be attractive to “cashing out” via piecemeal development.

Stroudwater residents, and the SVA, are not opposed to all change in principle. If the City would like to have a conversation about how to incorporate more mixed-use activity into Stroudwater, by all means, let’s have it. But let’s have it with all stakeholders, and think about the big-picture effects, not just parcel-by-parcel. To restate, **the Stroudwater Village Association remains opposed to any one-off rezoning of the parcel at 1945 Congress Street, or for that matter any other individual parcel in the neighborhood area, until a comprehensive visioning process for the neighborhood is undertaken.**