



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: July 5, 2022

Re: Special Permit **PB-392, 1960 Massachusetts Avenue**

Overview

Submission Type: Special Permit Application

Applicant: Healing Greene Massachusetts LLC DBA Greene Street

Zoning District(s): Business C (small portion in Residence B); Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District

Proposal Summary: Repurpose the existing building to operate a cannabis retail store.

Special Permits Requested: Cannabis Retail Store Use (Section 11.800)

Other City Permits Needed: Cannabis Business Permit

Planning Board Action: Grant or deny requested special permits.

Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

Other Staff Reports: Parking and Transportation Dept. (TP+T) in separate document.

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Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Cannabis Retail Store (Sections 11.800)	<p>Complies with Zoning Requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located in a BA, BA-2, BA-3, BB, BB-1, BB-2, BC, IA-1, IB, IB-1, or IB-2 district, or a BA-1 district only if it is designated by the Cannabis Control Commission as an Economic Empowerment Applicant or as qualifying for its Social Equity Program. • Located in a permanent building. • Not within 1,800 feet of another Cannabis Retail Store, unless it is designated by the Cannabis Control Commission as an Economic Empowerment Applicant or as qualifying for its Social Equity Program. • Not within 300 feet of an existing public or private K-12 school or within 300 feet of a public children’s playground, public youth athletic field, or public youth recreation facility, otherwise the Planning Board finds that it is sufficiently buffered such that users of such facilities will not be adversely impacted by its operation. • No packaging or re-packaging of cannabis products will occur on-site. <p>Meets Special Permit Criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Site design provides convenient, safe and secure access and egress for clients and employees arriving to and leaving from the site using all modes of transportation, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and public transportation users. • Location and design of cannabis use will not detract from the sense of activity with opaque, unwelcoming façade at ground floor in retail areas. • Loading, refuse and service areas are designed to be secure and shielded from abutting uses. • Building and site are designed to be compatible with other buildings in the area and to mitigate any negative aesthetic impacts that might result from required security measures and restrictions on visibility into the building’s interior. • The facility will provide programs to assist qualifying patients in obtaining services under Massachusetts Medical Use of Marijuana Program.
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43:</p> <p>(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or</p>

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or(c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or(d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or(e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Area Planning and Zoning

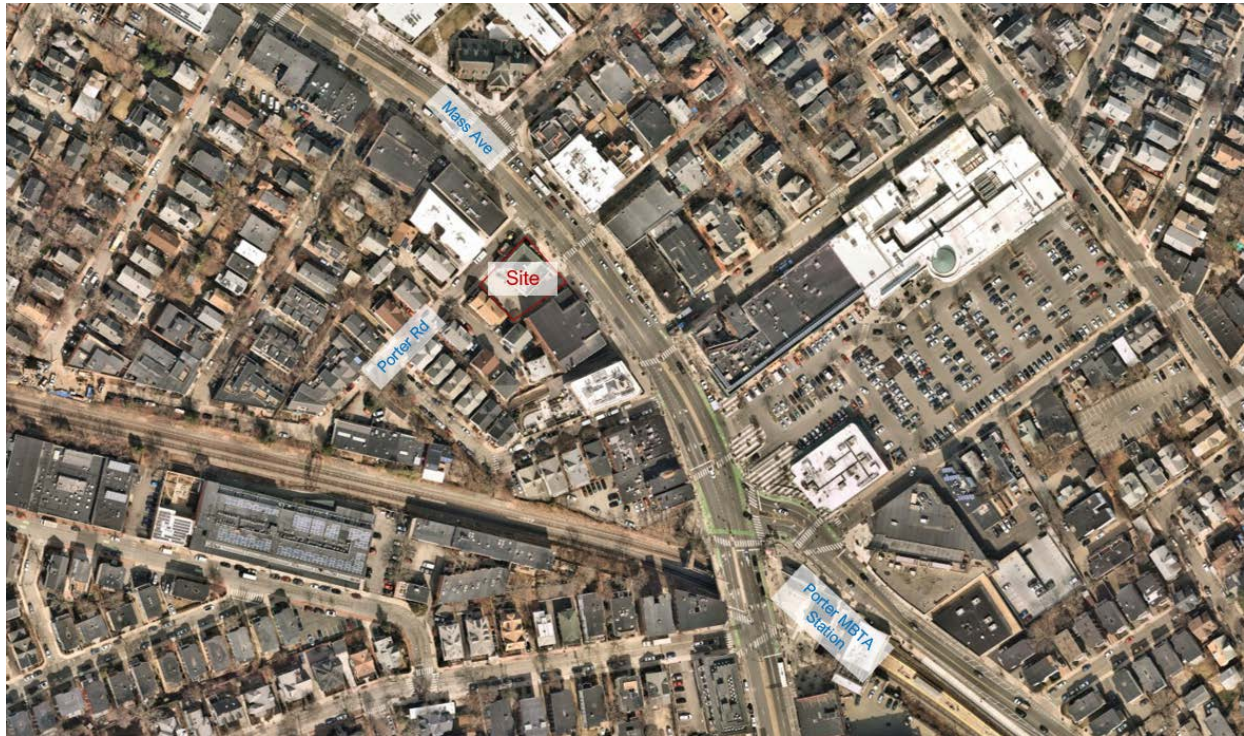
Site Context

Neighborhood/Area: Porter Square

Development Patterns: The project is located on the corner of Porter Rd and Massachusetts Avenue, approximately two blocks northwest of the Porter Square MBTA station. The project is located within the BC base zoning district and the Mass Ave Overlay District. Recent permitted and built projects in this area include a retail cannabis store at 1908 Mass Ave (PB #363), residential conversions at 56 Creighton St (PB #356) and 55 Regent St (PB #318), and a multifamily condominium at St. James Pl (PB #241).

This section of Mass Ave in proximity to Porter Square contains a varied mix of uses and development densities, ranging from smaller 1-scale retail and commercial buildings up to 4-story mixed-use, multi-family and hotel developments. Mass Ave is buttressed by residential neighborhoods on its north and south side, consisting of a mix of single-family homes, duplexes and lower-scale multifamily structures of approximately 2-3 stories in height.

Nearby Features: This site is in close proximity to the Porter Square MBTA station and the Porter Square Shopping Center. Regular MBTA bus service is provided along Mass Ave, for which a stop serving the 77, 83 and 96 bus routes is located immediately in front of the building. Within 1/3 mile southwest of the site are Gerard Bergin Park and Raymond Park.

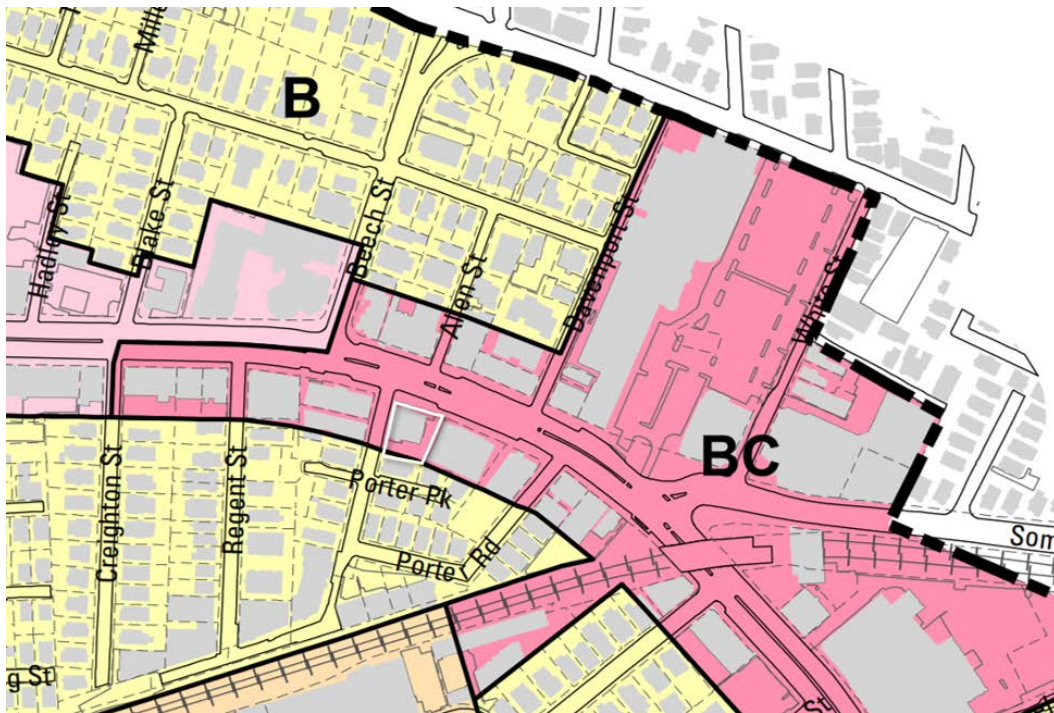


Context Map for 1960 Mass Ave. Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, 2022

Site Zoning

General description: Base zoning permits a wide range of residential, institutional and commercial uses at moderate densities (1.25 FAR for nonresidential development; 2.0 for residential) and buildings of up to 55 feet in height, with lower height requirements proximate to neighboring residential districts. The Mass Ave Overlay District applies additional design and development standards for building facades facing Mass Ave, in order to create a pleasant and inviting pedestrian environment while still encouraging compatibility with the adjacent residential neighborhoods.

	Base District	Overlay District(s)
District(s):	Business C (BC)	Mass Ave Overlay District
Allowed Uses:	Residential, institutional, office/lab, retail and consumer service uses.	Same as base zoning
Max. Building Height	55, with lower heights proximate to residential districts.	Same as base zoning
Max. FAR/GFA	1.25 nonresidential / 2.0 residential	Same as base zoning
Required Setbacks	No front and side; 20' rear yard	Same as base zoning
Required Open Space	None	Same as base zoning
Other District Standards or Requirements	N/A	Building façade design standards apply to buildings abutting Mass Ave.



Site overview. Source: Zoning Map, City of Cambridge.

Development Plans and Guidelines

Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District

The intent of the Mass Ave Overlay District is:

- to create a more harmonious and consistent image for the development of Mass. Avenue, adjacent areas, and abutting neighborhoods;
- to encourage good building design and site development, which enhances the pedestrian amenities;
- to ensure that changes along the Avenue are compatible with the scale and character of abutting neighborhoods;
- to encourage the retention of existing buildings of historic value and uses which serve the abutting neighborhoods; and
- to discourage new development inappropriate in both scale and design.

Design standards associated with building facades apply based on the need to enhance the visual quality of the District, create a pleasant and inviting pedestrian environment, and be compatible with the residential neighborhoods. Specifically, principal building entrances must face Mass. Ave, and front facades must consist of at least 25 percent clear glass.

Cannabis Retail Stores

The following planning and zoning considerations apply to Cannabis Retail Stores:

- Location of Use: Generally, Cannabis Retail Stores are permitted by Planning Board Special Permit in business and some industrial districts.

- Distance Requirements: Cannabis Retail Stores shall not be located within 1,800 feet of another Cannabis Retail Store, or within 300 feet of a pre-existing K-12 public or private school, public children’s playground, or public youth athletic field/recreation facility.
 - The 1,800 feet requirement is waived for licensed Economic Empowerment Applicants (EEA’s) or Social Equity Applicants (SEA’s) by the Cannabis Control Commission.
 - The 300 feet requirement may be modified by Planning Board Special Permit upon finding that the location will not cause substantial adverse impact due to site-specific factors or other mitigating efforts.

- Operations & Logistics: All cannabis-related uses must submit an Operations & Logistics Plan to TP+T and the Police Department, subject to approval prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy. Such a plan describes, among other elements, anticipated hours of operation, expected loading and delivery requirements, circulation routes for customers and employees, and location of vehicle/bicycle parking areas on the site.

Apart from zoning, the City Council adopted a [Cannabis Business Permitting Ordinance](#) in 2019. This ordinance sets standards for the composition and activities of a cannabis business in Cambridge, including a preference period for certain types of applicants. According to the current ordinance, until September 23, 2022, a Cannabis Business Permit can only be issued to an entity that is certified as: An Economic Empowerment Applicant certified as such by the Commonwealth's Cannabis Control Commission; or a Social Equity Program Applicant certified as such by the Commonwealth's Cannabis Control Commission who is also a Cambridge resident and has been for at least the previous three years; or Women or Minority Owned business as certified by the Commonwealth and /or by the City; or a Cambridge resident for at least the three previous years prior to application earning less than fifty percent (50%) of Area Median Income (AMI) in the three previous tax years prior to application.

Current Proposal

Overview

The proposal includes the reuse of an existing, one-story commercial building, previously used as a bank, into a cannabis retail store, with no physical changes to the site or current development program proposed. The proponent is Healing Greene Massachusetts LLC (“Greene Street”), a minority-owned Economic Empowerment Applicant certified by the Cannabis Control Commission (CCC).

The approximately 9,000 square-foot site contains a 6,616 square-foot building sited near the corner of Porter Rd and Mass Ave, and an accessory parking lot in the rear containing approximately 7 spaces. A small portion of the parking area appears to extend into the Residence B district – this could present a zoning concern, given that the parking is accessory to a new use that is not permitted in a Residence B district; the Inspectional Services Department will need to determine if it can remain as a pre-existing nonconforming condition.

The site is accessed by a driveway on Porter Rd, and a secondary driveway along the Mass Ave frontage. There are continuous sidewalks along both street frontages, with a wider (approx. 18-20 feet) sidewalk along the Mass Ave frontage. An MBTA bus stop is located near the main entrance of the building. The project involves few changes to the overall site layout and design. The building will have two main entrances along Mass Ave – the primary front entrance near the corner of Porter Rd and Mass Ave, and an ADA-accessible entrance nearer to the northeast corner of the site. The Applicant has included striping to better direct vehicle traffic to enter along Porter Rd and exit along Mass Ave. The parking space closest to the Porter Rd entrance is proposed to be used as a “Ride-Share & Loading Vehicle” only space. Short-term bicycle parking is proposed near the Porter Rd entrance and the ADA-accessible entrance. The ground-level windows are proposed to include rotating window displays with light boxes featuring local art. Modest signage in non-illuminated channel letters saying “Greene Street” is proposed above the main entrance to the retail space.

The Cannabis Retail Store is proposed to be open 9:00 am to 9:00 pm seven days a week. Home delivery of cannabis products is not being proposed as part of this application, and no cultivation, manufacturing, or social consumption uses will occur on site.

Distance Requirements

The Application notes that the site is not located within 300 feet of a pre-existing K-12 public or private school, public children’s playground, public youth athletic field, or public youth athletic recreation field. Further, the Application states that, per Section 11.803.1(b) of the Zoning Ordinance, the site is not located within 1,800 feet of another Cannabis Retail Store, but the 1,800 foot requirement does not apply to licensed Economic Empowerment Applicants (EEA). Over the past two years, the Planning Board has granted Cannabis Retail Store special permits to two other retailers in the vicinity: Budega, Inc. (an EEA) at 1686 Mass Ave ([PB-355](#)), and Porter Square Remedies (a non-EEA) at 1908 Mass Ave ([PB-363](#)).

Operations & Logistics Planning

As discussed earlier in this memo, the site changes proposed are minimal and mostly designed to help improve the circulation of vehicles and pedestrians throughout the property. Two short-term bicycle

parking areas are proposed (comprising 3 total spaces according to the Application), as well as four long-term bicycle parking spaces within the building. Additional comments are provided in the memo from TP+T.

Community Engagement

The Applicant held a pre-application community engagement meeting on February 7, 2022, led by a neutral moderator. The meeting was held in person and allowed for remote participation via Zoom. Three people attended the meeting, and asked questions related to anticipated hours of operation, number of anticipated customers, proposed traffic mitigation measures, proposed lighting and exterior signage, site security, and education measures, among others. The application does not explicitly describe how the proposed project was informed by the community engagement meeting.

Special Permit Conditions

If the Board decides to grant the special permit, the following list summarizes the general categories of conditions recommended for this development based on the requested special permits:

1. **Approved Development:** Authorized development would need to conform with the submitted application materials. An Approved Dimensional Form would be attached as an Appendix.
2. **Permitted Uses:** The special permit would authorize only this Applicant to operate only a Cannabis Retail Store – it would not be transferrable to another operator without amending the special permit. Other types of Cannabis Uses have not been proposed and therefore would not be allowed. In part, this means that home deliveries would not be allowed from this site unless the Planning Board approves a Cannabis Courier to be co-located with the Cannabis Retail Store.
3. **Design Review:** CDD staff would review and approve design details at the construction documents phase, prior to issuance of a building permit, to certify that the plans conform to the Planning Board’s approval. Board members may cite specific areas of focus for detailed staff review, based on the Urban Design Report and Board discussion. It may also be helpful for the Board to describe in the special permit conditions what range of design changes could be authorized without the Planning Board needing to review and approve those changes.
 - a. For this proposal, continuing review would include review of the proposed long-term bicycle parking design, review of signage and landscaping details, and other items highlighted in the memo from Urban Design.
4. **Transportation and Infrastructure:** Work being done on City property would be subject to review and approval by appropriate City departments, including DPW, TP+T and CDD. Transportation mitigation measures, as recommended in the TP+T memo, would be included as conditions.
5. **Other Permits and Regulations:** The special permit would be conditioned on ongoing compliance with the Cannabis Business Permitting Ordinance as well as other state and local regulations.

Appendix - Zoning Text Excerpts

Special Permit for Retail Cannabis Establishment Use in Business B District.

Special Permit for Retail Cannabis Establishment Use in Business B District

11.801 Statement of Purpose. The purpose of this section is to provide for the limited establishment of Registered Marijuana Dispensaries for the medical use of cannabis products and Cannabis Establishments for the non-medical use of cannabis products, as they are authorized pursuant to applicable state laws and regulations.

11.802 General Requirements

11.802 .1 Allowed Cannabis Uses.

(a) Cannabis Retail Stores and Cannabis Production Facilities shall be allowed only after the granting of a special permit by the Planning Board, subject to the requirements set forth in this Section 11.800, et seq.

(b) Either Cannabis Retail Stores or Cannabis Production Facilities, as defined in Article 2.000 of this Zoning Ordinance, may be established to provide cannabis products for medical or non-medical use, or both, in accordance with applicable state laws and regulations.

(c) A Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility that has previously received a special permit from the Planning Board only to authorize a Registered Marijuana Dispensary shall be required to amend its previously issued special permit to authorize the conversion to or co-location of a Cannabis Establishment for the non-medical use of cannabis or marijuana.

11.802.2 Licenses and Registration. A special permit issued pursuant to this Section shall be conditioned on the Permittee maintaining all required state and local licenses and/or registrations and complying with all applicable state and local public health regulations and all other applicable laws, rules and regulations at all times. No Building Permit or Certificate of Occupancy shall be issued for a Cannabis Use that is not properly licensed and/or registered with the applicable state and local agencies.

11.802.3 Limitation of Approval. A special permit authorizing the establishment of a Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility shall be valid only for the licensed or registered entity to which the special permit was issued, and only for the site on which the Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility has been authorized by special permit. If the license or registration for a Cannabis Use has not been renewed or has been revoked, transferred to another controlling entity, or relocated to a different site, a new special permit shall be required prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.

11.802.4 Building. A Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility shall be located only in a permanent building and not within any mobile facility. All sales, cultivation, manufacturing, and other related activities shall be conducted within the building, except in cases where home deliveries are authorized to serve qualified medical marijuana patients pursuant to applicable state and local regulations.

11.802.5 Cannabis Research and Testing Facilities. A Cannabis Establishment that is licensed as a Cannabis Independent Testing Laboratory or Cannabis Research Facility pursuant to applicable state

laws and regulations, but is not authorized to sell or otherwise transfer Cannabis Products to consumers or to cultivate, manufacture, or otherwise produce Cannabis Products that are intended to be sold or otherwise transferred to consumers, shall be regulated within the Table of Use Regulations in Section 4.30 of this Zoning Ordinance as a Technical Office (Section 4.34, Item “f.”) or, if such establishment is noncommercial, a Noncommercial Research Facility (Section 4.33, Item “c.”). Such establishment shall comply with all state and local laws and regulations, including regulations promulgated by the Cambridge Public Health Department, where applicable.

11.803 Location Standards.

11.803.1 Cannabis Retail Stores.

(a) Cannabis Retail Stores shall be allowed only by Planning Board Special Permit within the following districts: Business A (BA), Business A-1 (BA-1), Business A-2 (BA-2), Business A-3 (BA-3), Business B (BB), Business B-1 (BB-1), Business B-2 (BB-2), Business C (BC), Industry A-1 (IA-1), Industry B (IB), Industry B-1 (IB-1), and Industry B-2 (IB-2) districts, and special districts and overlay districts whose use regulations are based on those of any of the aforementioned districts, subject to any limitations set forth in the regulations of those districts. In the Business A-1 district, only applicants that have been designed as Economic Empowerment Applicants or certified as eligible to participate in the Social Equity Program by the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission may be permitted and it shall be made a condition of the special permit that such designation or eligibility shall be maintained.

(b) A Cannabis Retail Store shall not be permitted within one thousand and eight hundred (1,800) feet of another Cannabis Retail Store, except if the applicant has been designated as an Economic Empowerment Applicant or certified as eligible to participate in the Social Equity Program by the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission and it is made a condition of the special permit that such designation or eligibility shall be maintained.

(c) All products offered to consumers shall be pre-packaged off-site, and no packaging or repackaging of cannabis or marijuana products shall take place on the premises of a Cannabis Retail Store unless it also meets the requirements for a Cannabis Production Facility.

11.803.2 Cannabis Production Facilities shall be allowed only by Planning Board Special Permit in the Industry B-2 (IB-2) district, provided that the establishment is not greater than 10,000 square feet in Gross Floor Area.

11.803.3 Buffer Zones.

(a) A Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility shall not be permitted within 300 feet of a pre-existing public or private school providing education in kindergarten or any of grades one through 12, except where the Planning Board, in issuing a special permit, approves a reduced distance upon finding that the location will cause no substantial adverse impact due to site-specific factors or other mitigating efforts agreed to in writing by the permittee and made conditions of the special permit.

(b) A Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility shall not be permitted within 300 feet of a pre-existing public children’s playground, public youth athletic field, or public youth recreation facility, except where the Planning Board, in issuing a special permit, approves a reduced distance upon finding

that the location will cause no substantial adverse impact due to site-specific factors or other mitigating efforts agreed to in writing by the permittee and made conditions of the special permit.

11.804 Application Requirements. An application to the Planning Board shall contain, at a minimum, the following information:

- (a) Description of Activities: a narrative providing information about the type and scale of all activities that will take place on the proposed site, including but not limited to cultivating and processing of Cannabis Products, on-site sales, off-site deliveries, distribution of educational materials, and other programs or activities.
- (b) Context Map: A map identifying, at a minimum, the location of the proposed establishment, the locations of all other Cannabis Uses in the vicinity, the locations of all public or private schools providing education in kindergarten or any of grades one through 12, and the locations of all children’s playgrounds, youth athletic fields, or other youth recreation facilities, with measured distances provided to demonstrate whether the location complies with the standards of Section 11.803 above.
- (c) Site Plan: A plan or plans depicting all existing and proposed development on the property, including the dimensions of the building, the detailed layout of automobile and bicycle parking, the location of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular points of access and egress, the location and design of all loading, refuse and service facilities, the location, type and direction of all outdoor lighting on the site, and any landscape design.
- (d) Building Elevations and Signage: Architectural drawings of all exterior building facades and all proposed signage, specifying materials and colors to be used. Perspective drawings and illustrations of the site from public ways and abutting properties are recommended but not required.
- (e) Logistics Plan: A plan identifying the on-site or off-site locations where deliveries and loading functions will take place and a narrative describing how deliveries to the site, loading, and other service functions will be conducted, as well as a plan and narrative identifying the transportation options for customers and employees, including public transportation services, on-site and off-site parking facilities, and bicycle facilities.
- (f) License or Registration Materials: Copies of all materials submitted to applicable state and local agencies for the purpose of licensing and/or registration, and any certification or license issued by any such agency, excluding any information required by law to be kept confidential.
- (g) Host Community Agreement: A narrative describing progress that has been made at the time of application toward establishing a host community agreement with the City of Cambridge.

11.805 Special Permit Criteria. In granting a special permit for a Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility, in addition to the general criteria for issuance of a special permit as set forth in Section 10.43 of this Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board shall find that the following criteria are met:

- (a) The site is designed such that it provides convenient, safe and secure access and egress for customers and employees arriving to and leaving from the site using all modes of

transportation, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and public transportation users.

(b) On-site loading, refuse and service areas are designed to be secure and shielded from abutting uses.

(c) The building and site have been designed to be compatible with other buildings in the area and to mitigate any negative aesthetic impacts that might result from required security measures and restrictions on visibility into the building's interior.

(d) In retail areas, the location and design of the Cannabis Use will not detract from the sense of activity with opaque, unwelcoming façades at the ground floor. Where interior activities must be screened from public view, such areas should be screened by transparent, publicly accessible active business uses where possible. Opaque façades should be minimized, and where they are necessary they should include changing public art displays or other measures to provide visual interest to the public.

(e) If the proposed Cannabis Retail Store or Cannabis Production Facility is not proposed to include a Medical Marijuana Treatment Center, it will nevertheless provide programs to assist qualifying patients within the city or neighborhood who are registered through the Massachusetts Medical Use of Marijuana Program in obtaining services under that program.

General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

10.43 *Criteria.* Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:

- (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or
- (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or
- (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or
- (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or
- (g) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and
- (h) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

This proposed cannabis retail store is to be located in the former USA Alliance Bank building on the corner of Porter Road and Massachusetts Avenue. The building was originally constructed as the North Avenue Savings Bank in 1906 in the Classical Revival Style. It was designed by the architectural firm of Gay & Proctor who also designed 1955 Massachusetts Avenue, where the Post Office is now. The front vestibule and one-story side wing were added in 1948.

The former bank use provided little in terms of streetscape animation owing to its classical revival style, and its siting being setback from and above the sidewalk. All the windows were previously quite opaque due to the use of drapes, so little activity was visible to passersby. As mentioned, in the Zoning and Development report, the proposal generally maintains the status quo, apart from the addition of rotating window displays featuring local art, and the use of frosted film on some windows. The art displays will add color and some liveliness to the pedestrian environment. Additionally, the lightbox approach provides a sense of depth, which results in a more successful pedestrian interface. The proposed frosted film on the two main windows facing Massachusetts Avenue is not supported by staff. While these windows are somewhat buffered by trees, Staff would prefer to see a less opaque treatment; something with depth, transparency, or a film with a pattern or gradient. Furthermore, given the location of the sales floor above the sidewalk, the potential for all windows to be completely transparent should be investigated. If a case could be made that visibility of product from the public realm is not a concern, the ideal urban design outcome of façade transparency could be achieved. Staff also note that there are some inconsistencies between the narrative and the graphics regarding use of frosted film on the upper transom windows and the treatment of the vestibule's side windows. As these windows offer no views of product, staff recommends that transparent glazing be utilized.

The proposed signage appears understated, which is appropriate for the building. The existing light fixtures and entry doors will remain, which given the historic context is supported by staff. No changes to existing mechanical equipment are proposed.

In terms of the site design, minimal changes are proposed. It appears that some additional plantings are to be installed around the building's edges, although specific details are unclear. Similarly, the site plan shows screening of the gas meters and trash receptacle facing Porter Road. Further details of the proposed plantings and screening should be provided as part of the continuing review process.

Continuing Review

The following are additional recommendations for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Feasibility study of leaving all windows transparent.
- Treatment of all windows and entry doors, including proposed lightbox details, options for the administration and curation of art displays, and alternative approaches to the use of frosted film on Massachusetts Avenue.
- Review of all landscaping details, including proposed screening treatments for the gas meters and trash receptible.
- Review of exterior signage, lighting, and other security features that may be required by state regulations.