

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: March 4, 2026

Re: Affordable Housing Overlay Design Consultation **AHO-11, 240 Broadway**

Overview

Submission Type: Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Advisory Design Review

Applicant: Just A Start

Zoning District(s): Residence C-1; Affordable Housing Overlay, AHO Corridor

Proposal Summary: Construction of a 6-story building to create 16 affordable rental units and amenities under the AHO.

Planning Board Action: Review and comment on conformance with AHO Development Standards, City Development Guidelines for the proposal area, Design Guidelines for AHO, and Citywide Urban Design Objectives.

Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

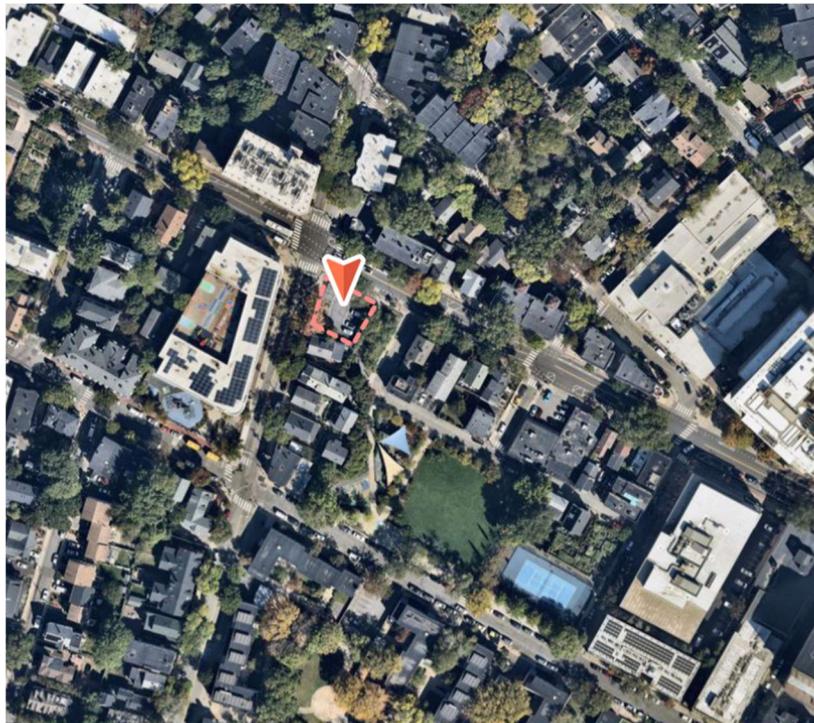
Other Staff Reports: None

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Site & Zoning Context

Site Context

The site consists of a single parcel at the corner of Broadway and Windsor Street in The Port neighborhood. This site is within half a mile of both Kendall and Central Square MBTA Stations, as well as several bus stops. The Port is a high-density residential neighborhood with around seven thousand residents, bounded by Hampshire Street to the north, the Boston & Albany Railroad to the east, Prospect Street to the west, and Massachusetts Avenue to the south. The major commercial center and transit center of The Port lies in Central Square with the main commercial strip along the Massachusetts Avenue edge, while smaller commercial areas exist along Main Street, Prospect Street, and Hampshire Street. Most of The Port is residential in character. There is a nearby scattering of 1-2 story retail and restaurant uses, as well as 2-3 story residential uses. Kitty corner to the site is the former [George Close Company building](#). This 6-story brick building underwent a residential conversion in 1976. It was an example of an early adaptive reuse of a large industrial building and today houses 61 affordable and subsidized apartments operated by Just A Start. It was previously a candy manufacturing factory from 1910 to 1939 and a laboratory and medical equipment manufacturing facility from 1941 to 1971. Directly across Windsor Street from the site is the 4-story brick Fletcher-Maynard Academy building. On its eastern edge, the site directly abuts the [Greene-Rose Heritage Park](#) and connector Public Open Space. The site currently contains an asphalt surface parking lot.



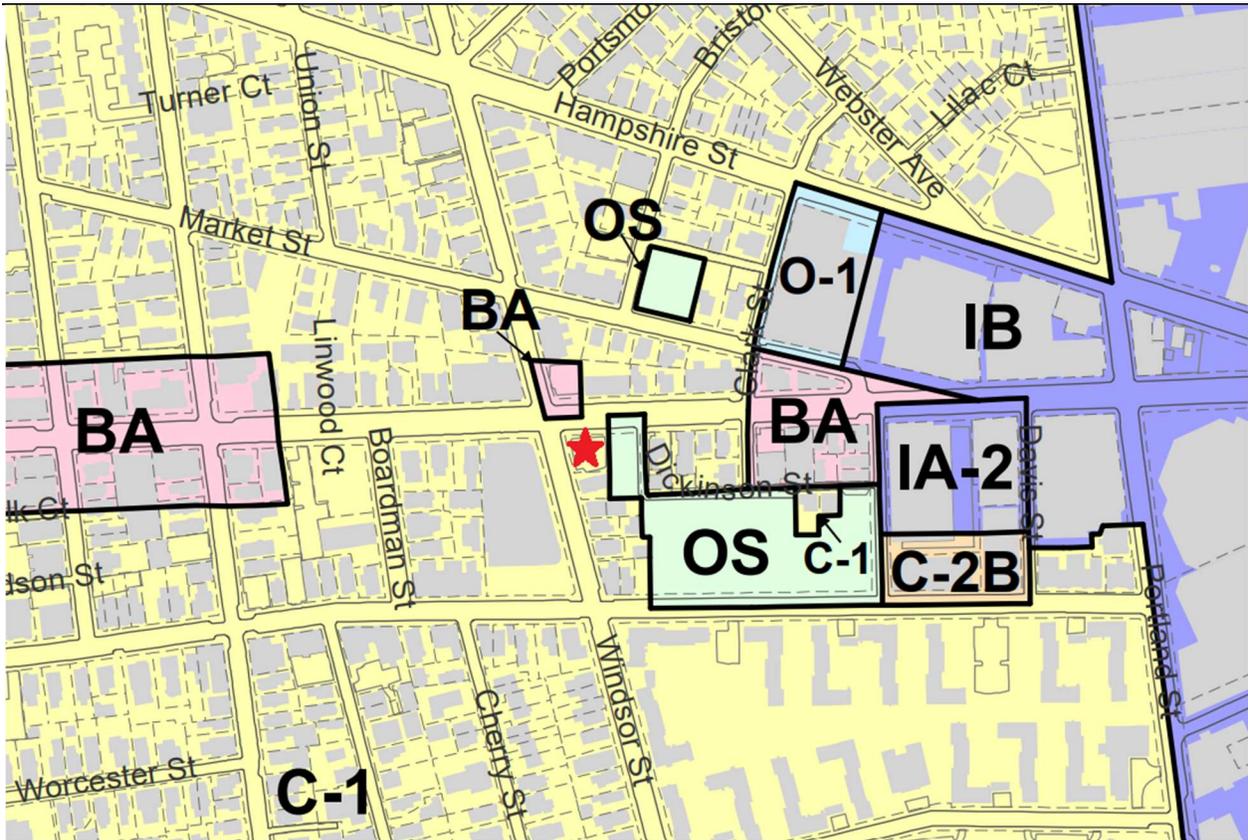
Context Map for 240 Broadway. Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, September 2025

Site Zoning

This site is a 4,675 square foot lot in the Residential C-1 zoning district and is located along an AHO Corridor, which further modifies the dimensional standards that would apply to an affordable development in a C-1 district. The proposed project GFA is 24,278 gross square feet. As the new construction is less than 25,000 square feet of gross floor area, several other standards and regulations do not apply to this proposal. These non-applicable regulations include, the AHO Building and Site Design Standards for New Development found in 11.207.7, the Building and Site Plan Requirements in 19.50, and the Green Building Requirements in 22.20.

Planning Board Advisory Consultation Process

The two-session non-binding Planning Board Advisory Design Consultation Procedure detailed in Section 19.40 of the Zoning Ordinance is not typically required for an AHO project of this size. However, per Zoning 11.207.8(b), “An AHO Project that exceeds the height limitations of the underlying district, inclusive of any additional height permissible under the Inclusionary Housing provisions of Section 11.203.5, but does not otherwise meet the size threshold for a Planning Board Advisory Consultation set forth in Section 19.47, shall nonetheless be subject to a Planning Board Advisory Consultation except that the developer may waive the preliminary design consultation and submit all required materials to be reviewed at a single final consultation session.” Although the underlying Residence C-1 district allows up to 6-stories, as the lot size is less than 5,000 square feet, the height for this lot is limited to no more than 4-stories. Therefore, the applicant is subject to the modified single session Planning Board Consultation Session.



Zoning Map. Source: Portion of 36" by 18" PDF Zoning Map prepared by CDD on February 9, 2026

Comments on Proposal

Project Description

Just A Start, a nonprofit (501(c)3) community development corporation, is proposing to build a new 6-story, approximately 67-foot tall building, with 16 affordable rental apartments at the intersection of Broadway and Windsor Street. The 16 proposed units include four 3-bedroom, eleven 2-bedroom, and one 1-bedroom, and will be restricted to households earning under 30% and 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI). There are no off-street automobile parking spaces. Additionally, 17 long-term bicycle parking spaces are proposed. The total gross floor area of the project is 24,675 square feet and will include 577 square feet of open space.

Consistency with AHO Development Standards

The AHO development standards applicable to this project are summarized in the table below.

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Residence C-1 Zoning District	Summary of Compliance
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multifamily dwellings allowed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AHO Project includes multifamily dwellings.
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AHO Developments on an AHO Corridor are allowed up to 12-stories, 140 feet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AHO Project is six-stories and 66' – 5 1/8" in height.
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AHO Dimensional Standards have no front yard and no side yard requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AHO Project proposes two front yard setbacks of 2' – 10 3/4" on Broadway and 2' – 6 5/8" on Windsor Street. It has a side yard of 2' adjacent to Broadway and a side yard of 5' – 6" adjacent to Windsor Street.
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Per Zoning 11.207.5.2.4(d), AHO Developments on "...lots consisting of five thousand (5,000) square feet or less in total lot area that directly abut a Public Open Space consisting of at least one thousand five hundred (1,500) square feet of area shall not have a minimum open space requirement under this Article." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AHO Project includes 577 square feet of open space, or 12%. The AHO Project directly abuts the Greene-Rose Heritage Park and connector, a Public Open Space at least 1,500 square feet in area, and complies with the requirement for zero open space.
Parking and Bicycle Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No minimum off-street parking for AHO Developments. Bicycle parking is required per Article 6.100, but additional flexibility is provided for the location, quantity and type (long-term and short-term) of bicycle parking required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AHO Project includes a long-term bicycle parking room on the first floor with 17 spaces.
Environmental Design Standards	<p>This AHO project is subject to the following Sustainable Development Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 22.80: Flood Resilience Section 22.90: Green Factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation demonstrating compliance with all relevant Sustainable Development Standards has been submitted to and certified by CDD and DPW staff.

Prior to submission of an application to the Planning Board for a Final Design Consultation, the project team met with City staff to review draft materials. Revisions were made to ensure substantial completeness of the final application materials. Staff note that the building height in feet is shown as 68'

- 11” on the building information table found on page 7 of Volume 1. Elsewhere in the Volume 1 narrative and in Volume 2 building section plan sheets, the height is shown as 66’ – 5 1/8”. Similar minor discrepancies exist for the proposed yard setbacks. All shown heights and yard setbacks comply with the applicable Zoning. The building information chart should be corrected prior to Building Permit. No other outstanding comments on zoning conformance remain.

CDD staff have confirmed the project has provided sufficient documentation to show compliance with Flood Resilience and Green Factor standards at this stage of review. See Urban Design staff memo for additional comments on alignment with the Citywide Urban Design Objectives.

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

<p>Development should be resilient to the effects of climate change as anticipated in the <i>Resilient Cambridge</i> plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Up-to-date projections of climate change impacts over the project's anticipated lifespan are incorporated• Flood Resilience Standard in Section 22.80 and the Green Factor Standard in Section 22.90 are met or exceeded• Use of strategies that have environmental co-benefits• Integrative approach to climate change resilience that accounts for the existing context and promotes the other design objectives of the area and the City
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Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

The project's overall siting and massing strategy is a good response to the site and context. By transforming a surface parking lot into a corner anchoring building, the proposal makes a substantial positive contribution to the neighborhood fabric and public realm.

Consistency with Multifamily Design Guidelines

The design as proposed generally adheres to the applicable principles outlined in the Multifamily Design Guidelines:

- The building is appropriately sited to maintain the street wall on both streets and anchor the corner.
- Its vertical massing with repetitive facades articulates the public realm with an appropriately scaled urban presence.
- The building has a distinct base, middle, and top.
- Several streetscape improvements are incorporated into the design, which enhance walkability and the pedestrian environment.

Site Design

The project proposes several meaningful streetscape improvements, including removing the existing curb cut on Broadway, installing a new sidewalk with a brick edge treatment in its place, and setting the building back from both sidewalks. These interventions collectively enhance pedestrian circulation, strengthen the public realm, and contribute to a more coherent streetscape character. Within the setback area, new paving and planters are proposed to enhance the pedestrian realm, while additional space also provides a buffer for the existing street trees.

Recommendations

- The design team is encouraged to explore the potential to plant an additional street tree near the corner on Broadway, where an existing tree pit appears available, to further strengthen the streetscape and canopy continuity.
- The new paving at the street corner within the property lines could be chamfered to reflect the massing strategy of the building, reinforcing a cohesive design language between the architecture and the ground plane. Additionally, the placement of planters along the building edge should avoid locations directly opposite existing street trees to ensure that the sidewalk remains as open and unobstructed as possible.

Building Design

While the project successfully establishes a strong, anchoring presence at the corner and strives to respond to context, additional refinement of the building's façade articulation would help

strengthen its relationship with the public realm. Further study should consider how the building's façade expression and architectural detailing respond to the surrounding neighborhood.

Recommendations

- The overall façade composition benefits from a clear and orderly rhythm, and the introduction of varied window treatments, including window surrounds and accent panels, adds some definition and depth. However, the window-to-wall ratio is quite low at around 12% for each facade, which contributes to a heavy and uninviting appearance across all elevations.
 - Increasing window dimensions, both height and width, would improve the building's proportions and improve the visual rhythm. Incorporating additional secondary façade elements, such as articulated bays, and detailing such as mullions, expressed sills, headers, and enhanced trim, would enrich the façade's texture, helping to elevate the project's overall presence on the street and respond to the character of nearby buildings.
- The middle sections of both street facades are divided by thin, vertical trim elements intended to reference the character of nearby residential buildings. These elements, however, appear out of scale for a building of this size and do not fully align with the project's emerging architecture.
 - As an alternative, the introduction of projecting bays could provide additional interior benefits while meaningfully modulating the façades and contributing to a more robust approach to vertical articulation.
- The top floor has been set back slightly, enabling a clearer and more legible transition in materials between the fifth and sixth floors. Despite this, it continues to read as disproportionately tall, and the window openings appear undersized relative to the wall height, resulting in an unbalanced façade composition.
 - Consider strengthening the cornice at both the rooftop and the fifth floor and potentially raising the fifth floor cornice line to give it greater presence, similar to the proportions evident on the George Close Building. Alternatively, the upper level could benefit from more deliberate articulation or differentiation from the floors below, such as through a true mansard roof, or by introducing more varied massing or step-backs that visually reduce the perceived height.

Ground Floor / Pedestrian Zone

The ground floor has continued to improve since the project was first presented to staff. Window dimensions have increased, and the pergola and brick façade introduce additional texture while responding to the surrounding context. However, several refinements are recommended to strengthen the building's relationship with the public realm, create greater overall consistency with relevant urban design guidelines, and support a more pedestrian-friendly ground floor experience.

Recommendations

- Much of the ground floor frontage along both streets is occupied by utility and service functions, with only the small corner lobby qualifying as active. Staff recommends exploring strategies to expand the amount of frontage devoted to actively inhabited spaces, with particular attention to the Broadway elevation. Expanding active uses along the street edge would create a more welcoming public realm. Additionally, rearranging some of the ground floor uses, such as the trash room and bike room, may also present an opportunity to create a more spacious and functionally efficient entry experience for residents.
- Ground floor windows follow the façade rhythm established on upper floors, which reinforces a clear vertical alignment. However, the windows are very small, which negatively affects the building’s relationship with the street. Increasing the amount of transparent ground floor glazing would significantly enhance visibility, natural light, and the overall sense of openness along the sidewalk. Areas to focus on include the entry/lobby, bike room, and other publicly visible ground floor spaces.
- The height of the ground floor appears quite squat in relation to the proportions of the overall massing. The application of materials on the façade further accentuates this effect, causing the ground floor to read even lower than it actually is. Increasing this perceived height would produce a more generous and civic-scaled ground floor presence, better aligned with the scale of the building and its surrounding context.
- The pergola concept has potential, but could be further developed to function more effectively as weather protection or as a more substantial architectural element. Along Broadway, the pergola could be raised to align with the height of the cornice above the transformer to create a clearer and more cohesive datum line. The proposed thin vertical supports appear visually delicate; replacing them with more substantial pilasters would provide better structural clarity and reinforce the architectural vocabulary of the ground floor.
- The ground floor façade would benefit from richer brick detailing, including recessed panels, pilasters, patterned coursing, and refined elements such as articulated sills and headers. These details can significantly enhance perceived façade depth and texture at the ground floor, where pedestrians experience the building most directly.
- The transformer door offers an opportunity to integrate a creative or artistic design feature, allowing what is typically a technical element to contribute positively to the streetscape. The application notes this as a possibility, and staff would continue to encourage exploration of this opportunity with the City's Arts and Cultural Planning Department.

Sustainable Design

The project is being designed to meet Passive House Standards, although it is not pursuing formal certification. The project will comply with the City’s stretch energy code and will seek green building certification through Enterprise Green Communities (EGC).

Consistency with Citywide Urban Design Objectives

There are several areas noted above where improvements to the building design and ground floor experience would enhance the project’s relationship with the surrounding neighborhood and create greater consistency with Citywide Urban Design objectives.