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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: 12/28/2022

Re: **AHO-1, 52 New Street – Advisory Design Consultation Meeting #2**

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## Overview

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

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Developer: Just A Start

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Zoning District(s): Industry A-1 (IA-1)

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Proposal Summary: Demolition of an existing building and construction of a 129,230-square-foot residential building with 107 permanently affordable rental apartments and approximately 3,000 square feet of retail space at the ground story. The new building will be six stories above grade with a height of 70 feet. The development will provide 43 on-site parking spaces along with 112 long-term bicycle parking spaces and 12 short-term bicycle parking spaces.

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Planning Board Action: Review and comment on the responses from the developer to the Board's initial comments regarding conformance with AHO Development Standards, City Development Guidelines for the proposal area, Design Guidelines for AHO, and Citywide Urban Design Objectives. The Board may discuss revising the initial report to generate a Final Report that will be provided to the Superintendent of Buildings to certify compliance with the advisory design consultation procedures under AHO zoning.

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Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

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Other Staff Reports: None

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**11.207.5 – 11.207.7 AHO Development Standards**

Development Standard	Requirements for an AHO Project in IA-1
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum six stories / 70 feet.</li> </ul>
Density	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No maximum FAR or minimum lot area per dwelling unit.</li> </ul>
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No required front yard in IA-1.</li> <li>• 10’ minimum side yards for residences in IA-1, may be reduced to 7.5’ by AHO.</li> <li>• 10’ minimum rear yard for residences in IA-1.</li> </ul>
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No required open space in IA-1.</li> </ul>
Existing Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not applicable to the proposed development.</li> </ul>
Parking and Bicycle Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No minimum off-street parking.</li> <li>• Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures are required if there are 20 or more units and less than 0.4 spaces per dwelling unit are provided.</li> <li>• Bicycle parking is required per Article 6.100, with flexibility in the location and type (long-term and short-term), and the number of spaces may be reduced if a Public Bicycle Sharing Station is provided.</li> </ul>
Site Design and Arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Front yards may be landscaped or hardscaped but cannot be used for off-street parking.</li> <li>• Pedestrian entrances shall be visible from the street.</li> <li>• Buildings with front facades in excess of 250’ in length parallel to a street shall provide forecourts to break up massing.</li> </ul>
Building Facades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building facades facing a public street or public open space shall have a minimum 20% clear glass.</li> <li>• Building facades shall incorporate projections/recesses at regular intervals to promote visual interest.</li> </ul>
Ground Stories and Below Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground stories shall be at mean grade or no more than 4 feet above, with entrances to non-residential uses accessible at grade, unless the City Engineer determines that a higher ground story elevation is necessary for flood protection.</li> <li>• Structured parking within a ground story shall be set behind residential units, common areas, or other populated areas of the building.</li> <li>• Facades of ground stories cannot have expanses of more than 25’ with no windows or pedestrian entryways.</li> <li>• Ground stories with non-residential uses must have a height of at least 15’, average depth of 35’ from the front façade, and at least 30% clear glass frontage.</li> </ul>

Development Standard	Requirements for an AHO Project in IA-1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bedrooms, kitchens, and bathrooms in dwelling units cannot be located below grade.</li> </ul>
Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage and Loading Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mechanical equipment shall be generally screened from view. Rooftop mechanical equipment must be set back from the roof line equal to its height.</li> </ul>
Environmental Design Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green Building Requirements as set forth in Section 22.20 apply to AHO Developments of 25,000 square feet or more.</li> <li>New outdoor light fixtures shall be fully shielded and directed to prevent light trespass onto adjacent residential lots.</li> <li>AHO Developments are exempt from the Green Roofs Ordinance.</li> </ul>

**AHO Design Guidelines**

<b>Site Design Objectives</b>	
1. <u>Response to Context</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design site layouts to harmonize with the neighborhood context.</li> </ul>
2. <u>Open Space &amp; Landscape Design</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design open space to enhance the lives of residents and the broader community by offering aesthetic and environmental benefits.</li> <li>Offer useful amenities to residents, provide opportunities to minimize the impact of new development on neighbors' privacy and quality of life, and contribute to the beauty of the city.</li> </ul>
3. <u>Circulation</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote non-motorized mobility by prioritizing pedestrian-friendly and bike-accessible site design.</li> </ul>
4. <u>Parking</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimize the impact of parking and driveway.</li> </ul>
5. <u>Utilities</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimize the visual, acoustical, and environmental impacts of essential utilities and services.</li> </ul>
6. <u>Outdoor Lighting</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide lighting for safety and functionality while minimizing energy use, light pollution, and other negative impacts.</li> </ul>
7. <u>Public Art</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrich the visual environment and strengthen the sense of place by incorporating art.</li> </ul>
<b>Building Design Objectives</b>	
1. <u>Massing</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Configure massing for compatibility with the prevailing or desired pattern of neighboring buildings and open spaces. In established neighborhoods, relate to the existing pattern of streets and other open spaces, and prioritize compatibility with existing buildings. In evolving areas, configure new developments to help realize the City's vision for urban form.</li> </ul>
2. <u>Facades</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Design facades to enhance and enliven the public realm. In established areas, emphasize compatibility and reinforce sense of place. In evolving residential and commercial districts, contribute to the transformation of urban form by setting precedents for design excellence.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where appropriate, incorporate ground level retail spaces and common areas to foster a lively enliven the urban environment.</li> <li>• Provide daylight to interior spaces, avoid excessive energy use, and protect the privacy of residents of neighboring buildings.</li> <li>• Design facades to relate to the residential scales and patterns of Cambridge's diverse and historic neighborhoods.</li> <li>• Design street facades to offer a sense of civic presence and human scale, and visual interest as appropriate to their role in defining public space.</li> </ul>
3. <u>Architectural Details, Materials, Color, and Finishes</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use materials that are warm, inviting, and compatible with surrounding existing buildings and the neighborhood context. Develop building facades of high-quality, durable materials and with colors, finishes, and textures appropriate to building contexts.</li> </ul>
4. <u>Building Interiors</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing, like all housing, should serve the needs of its residents while contributing to the residential character and sense of neighborhood within the area at large.</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainable Design Objective</b>	
1. Site and Building Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve resilience measures to the maximum extent possible, including energy efficiency and measures to promote the health and wellness of residents.</li> </ul>

The complete set of Design Guidelines for Affordable Housing, 28 July 2020 can be found at:  
[https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/CDD/Housing/Overlay/zngamend\\_aho\\_designguidelines\\_20200728v2.pdf](https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/CDD/Housing/Overlay/zngamend_aho_designguidelines_20200728v2.pdf)

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



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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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Date: 12/28/2021

Zoning Report: **AHO-1, 52 New Street – Advisory Design Consultation Meeting #2**

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## Overview

The developer, Just A Start, proposes to construct a 129,230-square-foot residential building with 107 permanently affordable rental apartments. The building will also include approximately 3,000 square feet of retail space at the ground story. The development will provide 43 on-site parking spaces along with 112 long-term bicycle parking spaces and 12 short-term bicycle parking spaces.

This is the first project to come before the Planning Board (the “Board”) under the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO), Section 11.207 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. The AHO standards apply “as-of-right,” meaning that no special permit or discretionary zoning approval is needed. Upon completing the advisory design review procedure, the developer can seek a building permit.

The Board held the first of two required advisory design consultations on October 26, 2021. Following their review, the Board issued a report, dated November 12, 2021, that highlighted the key comments that Board members made during the meeting. The developer submitted responses to those comments and is now before the Board for their second and final required advisory design consultation. Following this meeting, the Board may submit a revised report to the Superintendent of Buildings or submit the initial report as the Final Report.

## Planning Board Comments from Initial Consultation Meeting

Board members were supportive of the proposed building, so their feedback focused on opportunities for improvement. Overall, Board members encouraged Just A Start to pursue a bolder, more colorful design for the building that would make it less drab and provide an attractive edge to frame Danehy Park.

Additionally, Board members endorsed the comments made in the memos provided by CDD and DPW and asked that they be considered when refining the design. Board members also asked the developer to consider the suggestions made in written public comments, calling specific attention to those submitted by Jan Devereux.

## Staff Comments on Responses to Planning Board’s Comments

As mentioned in CDD staff’s first memo, the project as proposed is generally consistent with the standards set by the AHO. Most of the standards relate to basic development characteristics such as height, setbacks, and parking. As a result, the Board primarily issued comments in response to the building and site design, which are addressed in the accompanying urban design report.

The developer provided a thorough response to the various questions and comments that were issued by City staff, the Board, and members of the public. The following are some aspects of the project that the Board had requested more information on in relation to the AHO development standards:

- Ground Level Retail. The Board agreed with CDD staff that it would be helpful to learn more about what range of use types might be envisioned for the proposed Level 1 space that is designated in the plans as “retail.” The zoning allows an AHO project to have active non-residential uses on the ground floor, which it defines as Institutional Uses listed in Section 4.33, Office Uses listed in Section 4.34 Paragraphs a. through e., and Retail and Consumer Service uses listed in Section 4.35 that provide services to the general public. The developer notes that they have not started the leasing process for the ground floor retail but aims to secure a tenant that will benefit residents of the building and neighboring community. CDD Economic Development staff notes that some types of retail use that have been successful along New Street include fitness, craft retail manufacturing, personal services, and commercial recreation. As the street has changed over time, there may be other successful uses such as food uses (e.g., restaurant/café), which was mentioned during the [2015 Fresh Pond-Alewife Customer District Survey](#).
- Unit Size. The Board also commented on the appropriateness of the size of the units and the unit rent price point. In response, the developer shared information about the unit sizes and rent price points of other Just A Start residential properties. The zoning sets standards for AHO Eligible Households based on household income relative to the Area Median Income (AMI); the zoning also sets standards for rent and sale prices. AHO projects are not required to meet certain requirements for the size of units as measured by the amount of net square feet or the number of bedrooms. In addition to the zoning standards, Just A Start is also required to follow standards set by funders, such as the state Department of Housing and Community Development. This includes standards regarding rental price points, unit sizes, and cost per unit. CDD staff has reviewed the proposed interior layouts and will continue to work with Just A Start to ensure that units are maximally livable for households they’re designed to serve.
- Transportation Demand Management. Since the proposed project has a parking ratio of 0.4, per the Zoning Ordinance, the developer is not required to implement Transportation Demand Management (TDM). However, Just A Start has committed to voluntary TDM measures, including the following:
  - Conduct residential education sessions on location of bike parking and nearby Bluebikes stations, how to get a Bluebikes membership, where people can go in bike lanes, and transit options, including location of nearby bus stops and routes, and how to get and reload a Charlie Card;
  - Invite the Community Development Department to conduct an annual bicycle safety training for residents;
  - Install a bulletin board for car/vanpool matching;
  - Provide a Transportation Coordinator using the same property manager at Rindge Commons;
  - Provide a Transit Screen in lobby with MBTA bus and subway information and Bluebikes information;
  - Provide one 3-month bus/subway link pass Charlie Card to each of the 107 units upon move-in and commit that JAS resident services will provide on-going annual T-passes, subject to securing grant funding.

- Flood Resilience. CDD consulted with the Department of Public Works (DPW) on the information provided relative to flood resilience. DPW acknowledges the challenges associated with meeting the City's standards for flood resilience at this site and supports Just A Start's efforts to find passive protection methods for vulnerable building entrances as well as their commitment to a management plan for other spaces. DPW has also expressed to Just A Start that they should pursue design options that would protect critical infrastructure. DPW will continue to work with Just A Start on these designs and plans as the project progresses.

Prior to issuance of a building permit, some additional clarification will be needed on the following zoning-related items:

- Open Space. It appears that the amount and type of open space has changed from the numbers that were recorded on the dimensional form in the original project materials. There are also some discrepancies between page 9 and page 55 of the PDF of the Planning Board Response document. When applying for a building permit, an accurate recording of open space will be needed.
- Bicycle Parking. Bicycle parking dimensions, including layout and access routes, will need to be reviewed for conformance with zoning standards before issuance of a building permit. As part of this review, the developer should provide a 1" = 10' plan of the long-term bicycle storage room that notes clearances within the room and on the route to it, as well as the location and number of the required tandem and trailer bicycle parking spaces.





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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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Date: 12/28/2021

Urban Design Report: **AHO-1, 52 New Street – Advisory Design Consultation Meeting #2**

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## Urban Design Comments on Design Revisions

The updated design of the proposed affordable housing project at 52 New Street is similar to the design that was presented in the Planning Board hearing on October 26, 2021. While numerous improvements have been made in response to Planning Board and staff comments, the project's basic urban design concept remains the same, and the project's architectural and site design remains generally consistent with the AHO Guidelines. As before, the project's civic benefits to Cambridge include the provision of urgently needed affordable housing and its contributions to the creation of a pedestrian-friendly mixed-use neighborhood at the western border of Danehy Park.

Changes to the design include:

1. Color accents have been added at window jambs, sunshades at windows, in opaque areas of fenestration, and in areas of cladding panels.
2. Numerous changes have been made to the northwest façade, facing New Street, adding color and details, extending the zones of the first-floor windows down to floor level, and strengthening the façade's role as a streetwall for New Street.
3. At the northeast façade, facing Danehy Park, colored recesses have been added at the fifth and sixth floors increasing the articulation of the building's skyline. The proportions of the facades' outermost planes in elevation have been adjusted.
4. The fifth and sixth floors facing Danehy Park have been articulated into smaller individual segments (approximately relating to the sizes of individual residential units) by slight recesses and contrasting colors.
5. Landscape elements have been added, including additional trees in the entry terrace/courtyard and vegetated screening of the entry drive from the neighboring property, and the deck on the second-floor terrace has been enlarged.
6. A new entrance to the long-term bicycle room is provided, allowing more direct entry from the building's entry terrace/courtyard.
7. In anticipation of a possible future path along the methane vent at the south side of Danehy Park (the realization of which is dependent on the results of an ongoing study and subsequent process), the documents depict potential locations of future connections from the building's entry terrace/courtyard and the project's own path along the building's north façade. The retail entrance is more prominent on the plaza at New Street.
8. A more connective pedestrian route has been created from New Street to the entry terrace/courtyard via the covered passage on the building's north side.
9. The deck on the south facing second floor terrace has been enlarged.
10. Screening has been added to control light trespass from the garage.

In addition, new information is provided regarding residential unit configurations and sizes and resident amenities, indicating that the unit sizes and amenities are similar to those of other affordable residential projects.

Because the Planning Board's review of this project is advisory, there are no conditions for continuing design review. However, as the developer further refines the design through the building permit and construction process, staff would encourage the developer to review the following considerations. Staff are happy to continue to consult with the developer as appropriate.

**Site Plan:**

1. As was mentioned in the previous hearing, northbound pedestrians on New Street may choose to enter the site via the driveway on the building's south side and walk through the drop-off to the entry courtyard/terrace, instead of using the loggia/passage on the building's north side. People arriving on bicycles will also be likely to use the driveway to get to the long-term bicycle parking room. The design of the driveway should recognize its importance as a pedestrian and bicycle route in terms of its pavement, plantings, and the first-floor façade adjoining it.
2. There were suggestions that the pedestrian route from New Street to the building's lobby consist of a more connective ensemble of spaces. The revised drawings have addressed this to some degree, adding trees in the courtyard and adding wood-look wall panels to the facades, but the linkages between these spaces could be further strengthened. Possible means include the eastward extension of the ramped loggia/passage's soffit to the courtyard, or perhaps into it; greater continuity of first floor facade materials from the passage through the courtyard to the lobby; the addition of a continuous (or semi-continuous) horizontal element at the top of the first-floor façade that would thread from the retail façade on New Street through the passage to the courtyard to the lobby entry, and perhaps into the lobby itself; slightly angling the easternmost portion of the retail space's north wall to relate to the angle of the trees in the entry terrace/courtyard; more continuity of plantings; etc.
3. Consider providing backs on at least some of the benches in the entry terrace/courtyard.
4. The retail entry has been moved to directly face the plaza on New Street, making it much more visible to the public. To create a more gracious relationship to the plaza, adjustments could be considered to the exact location of the retail space's entry door, the design of its small stoop, the width of the steps and the arrangement of their railings, and the glazed areas next to the door could be increased.
5. Consideration could be given to replacing the pole lights in entry courtyard terrace with low level lights.
6. Greater clarity should be provided regarding screening of the driveway from the adjoining property to the southwest, and whether the fence could extend closer to the street without interfering with view triangles.
7. The location of the emergency generator and gas meters (if any) should be clarified.
8. The City acknowledges the perception that the gravel trench that runs along sections of the perimeter of Danehy Park could be a logical location for an active shared use path, and that this project should make considerations for connections to a future path. It should be noted that this gravel path is an active methane vent trench that supports the abandoned landfill that has been develop into the Danehy Facility. With its required function, along with the current design, this trench cannot support use as a pathway. That said, the City is currently in the process of completing an evaluation of the Danehy site as part of a review 30 years after the landfill closure. Part of this review includes an evaluation of the condition and design of this trench vent system. Pending the results of this evaluation, the City may identify options, as have been used

elsewhere in the park, for a broader redesign of the trench system which will allow for reconsideration of the gravel trench space. No specific project or schedule has been identified for this reconsideration of the space and there is no guarantee that if the space can be reconfigured, its best use will be determined to be a shared use path. Regardless, as a direct abutter, there is value in the project reviewing potential connections should a future change at this location occur.

**Massing:**

9. Suggestions for giving the building's southeastern end a more articulate massing could be considered. Compatibility with the low scale buildings on Bay State Road would be increased if the end of the building were expressed more as a group of masses, some of them shorter than the building's typical six floor height, and additional green roofs and/or roof terraces could be provided.
10. The suggestion to extend the massing of the building's upper floors over the driveway to the drop-off could be considered further (but as noted in the application, this would likely reduce the size of the first-floor retail space).

**Elevations:**

11. Consideration could be given to lighter or less brown colors in the panelized cladding system, to increasing the amount of variation in the phenolic wood panels, and to providing additional accents and areas of color.
12. As noted in the first memo, the joint systems, fasteners, joint patterns, surface textures, etc. of the panelized cladding system should be carefully studied.
13. Consideration could be given to using tilt/turn operable windows instead of inswing hoppers.
14. At the first-floor retail façade, the relation between the retail space and sidewalk could be further strengthened by recessing the areas below the windows all the way down to grade.
15. More glazing could be considered at the retail entry.
16. As seen looking north from New Street, the building's south and west facades are treated as similar, roughly symmetrical with each other around the building's corner. To help frame New Street as civic space, consideration could be given to a greater distinction between the building's front façade facing New Street facing and its side façade facing the adjoining property. If the westernmost zone of the south façade - the zone approximately the width of the first-floor retail window - were distinguished by a reveal or a change in color or materials from the rest of the south façade, it would do much to create a more articulate corner and give emphasis to the building's New Street façade's frontality as it addresses the street.
17. The south facing portion of the first-floor façade will be prominent for pedestrians walking north on New Street. The size and proportions of the retail window, the treatment of the wall below it, its relationship to the windows above, and to the potential vertical zone described in the item above could be further studied.
18. Through-wall vents for kitchens, bathrooms, etc., are shown on the elevations. It would be preferable if these spaces were vented to the roof. If through-wall venting can't be avoided, their sizes and locations should be carefully arranged to achieve a pleasing outcome.
19. The heights of rooftop mechanical equipment should be checked relative to vantage points in the surrounding area, including Danehy Park, and the dimensions of screening should be checked relative to equipment heights and required clearances to comply with zoning standards.

**Plans:**

20. As noted in the accompanying Zoning Report, The Department of Public Works (DPW) acknowledges the challenges associated with meeting the City's standards for flood resilience at this site. DPW will continue to work with Just A Start on these designs and plans as the project is progressed.
21. A 1" = 10' plan of the long-term bicycle storage room should be submitted. Clearances within the room and on the route to it should be checked, and the location and number of the required tandem and trailer bike parking spaces should be clarified.
22. As noted above, bicyclists will likely enter the garage via the driveway at the south edge of the site. Consideration could be given to eliminating the parking space in front of the door at the western corner of the long-term bicycle storage room. Bicycle parking dimensions, including layout and access routes, will need to be reviewed for conformance before issuance of a building permit.
23. Light trespass from the drop-off and garage should be controlled by means such as fixture shielding, motion sensors, louvers, etc.