



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: July 30, 2025

Re: Affordable Housing Overlay Design Consultation **AHO-8, 28-30 Wendell Street**

Overview

Submission Type:	Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Advisory Design Review
Applicant:	HRI 30 Wendell LLC
Zoning District(s):	Residence C-2A
Proposal Summary:	Construction of 8-story building in place of the existing 3-story buildings and tennis court to create 95 new rental units and a community space 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 Multifamily Housing, and Citywide Urban Design Objectives.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	Department of Public Works (DPW) in separate document.

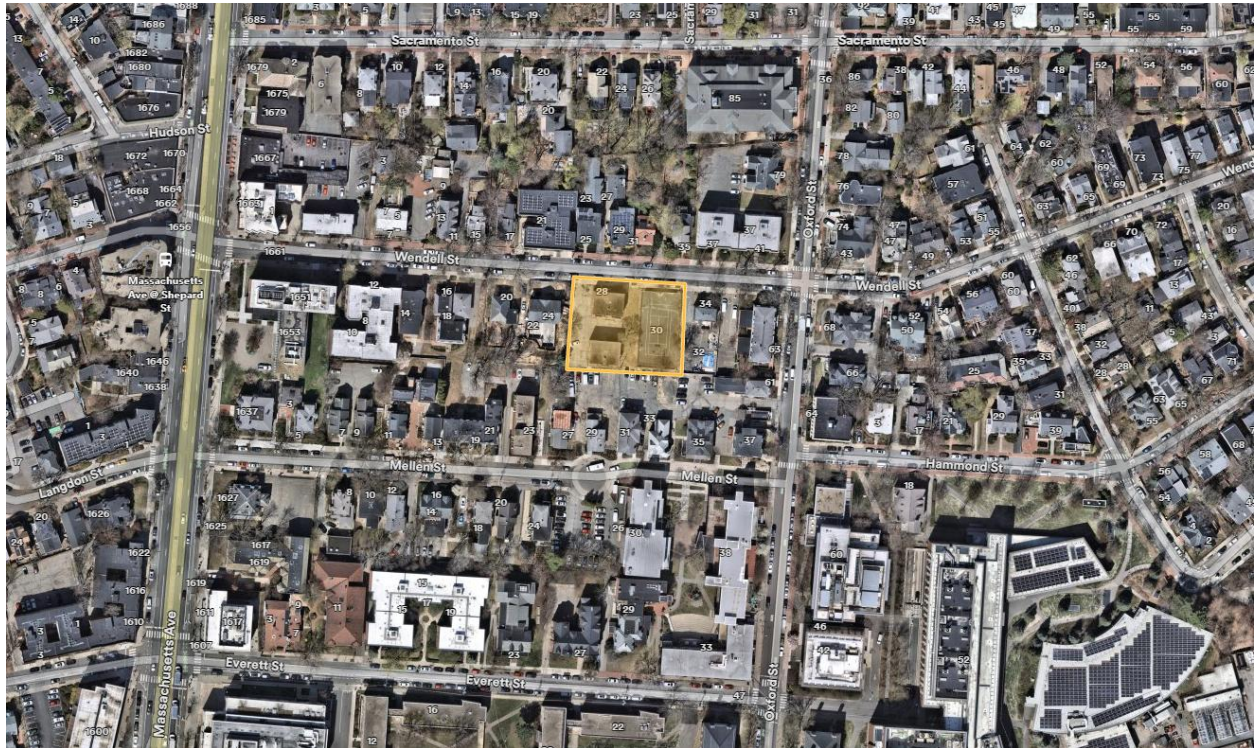
Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Site & Zoning Context

Site Context

The site is defined by two parcels located on the southern side of Wendell Street between Massachusetts Avenue and Oxford Street in the Baldwin neighborhood, a few blocks north of Cambridge Common. The neighborhood is characterized by a diverse collection of building types and uses, including 2-1/2 story houses, triple-deckers, 5-story brick residential buildings, and some larger institutional buildings on Lesley's and Harvard's campuses. The site currently contains two vacant three-story buildings and a tennis court. One building was licensed as a lodging house and operated as a dormitory by Lesley University and the other building was operated by Lesley as market-rate studio apartments.

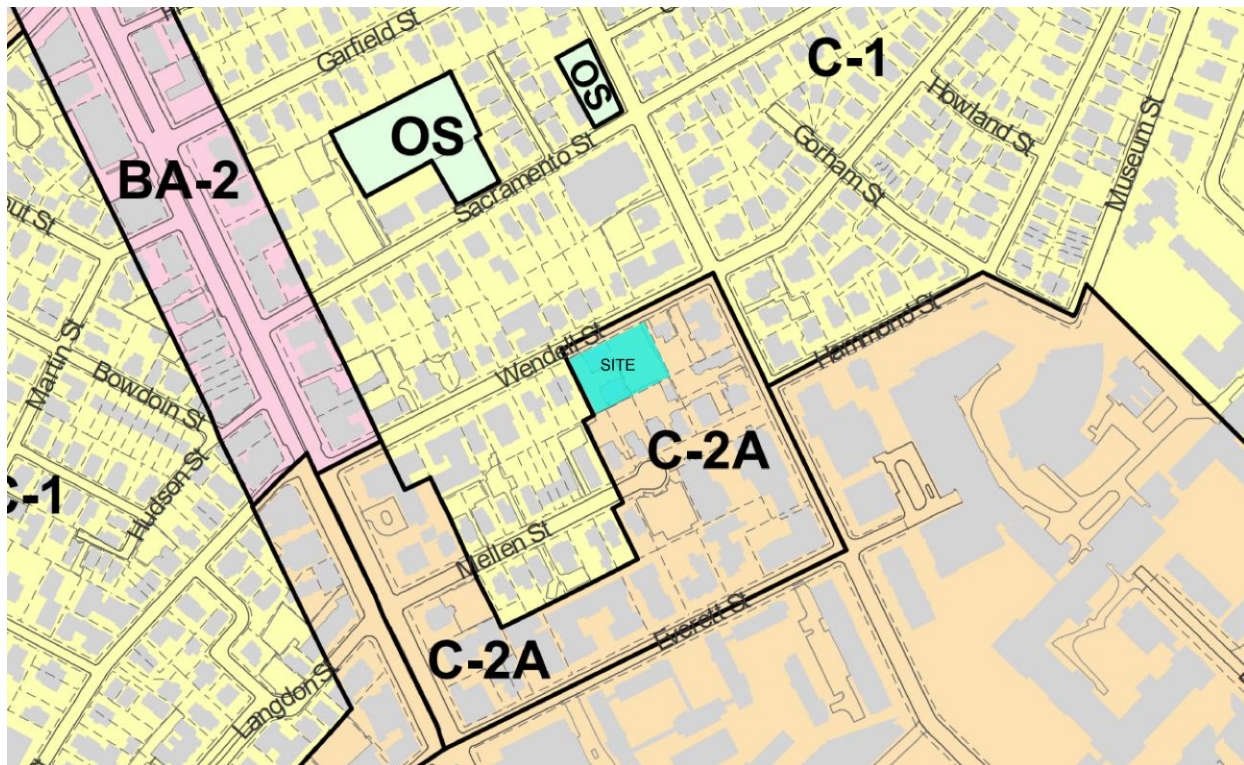


Context Map for 28-30 Wendell St. Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, 2025

Site Zoning

The site is zoned Residence C-2A and is across the street from a Residence C-1 zone. The adjacent properties to the east along Wendell Street are zoned Residence C-1. Residence C-2A is a moderate-intensity residential zoning district which permits all types of residential uses, as well as some institutional uses and neighborhood-scale retail and consumer service uses. Development in the C-2A district is permitted to build up to 75 feet and six stories in height, with a 10% minimum open space requirement. However, where a lot in a Residence C-2A district abuts a Residence C-1, C-2, or C-2B

district, the open space requirement is that of the adjacent district. In this case the open space requirement becomes 30%.



Site overview. Source: Zoning Map, City of Cambridge

Comments on Proposal

General Comments

There have been a few major changes to the AHO in recent years that have impacted this project. The 2023 amendments increased the height limit for AHO projects in the C-2A district from six stories to nine stories. The Multifamily Zoning Petitions adopted in February 2025 increased the base zoning height limit to six stories and 75 feet in C-2A districts, which in turn increased the allowed heights for AHO projects to 13 stories and 150 feet. This is the first AHO project to come before the Planning Board since the City Council adopted the Multifamily Zoning Petitions. Other dimensional standards for some AHO projects, like setbacks and open space, were reduced to reflect the relaxation of those standards under base zoning as well. In the Residence C-2A district, yard setback requirements were changed from a formula-based standard to a static five feet for front, side, and rear yards. No AHO projects are regulated by Floor Area Ratio (FAR) limits, which is consistent with new base zoning standards for residential uses.

AHO projects are no longer subject to certain transportation requirements. Before the recent zoning changes, AHO projects of 20 or more units, providing a parking ratio of less than 0.4 spaces per dwelling unit, were required to provide specific Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures. This is no

longer a requirement under the AHO. Design standards related to site design, building facades, and mechanical equipment now only apply to AHO projects at least 25,000 square feet. This proposal exceeds that 25,000 square-foot trigger so all of those design standards still apply.

Previously, all AHO projects were required to go through the same design review process – two consultation sessions with the Planning Board – before seeking a building permit. The Multifamily Zoning Petitions amended those requirements so that only larger projects need to go through the Planning Board Advisory Consultation process. AHO developments 50,000 square feet or greater will still go through the same two-session Planning Board process as before. Projects less than 50,000 square feet that exceed the height limit of the base zoning district are also subject to the Planning Board Advisory Consultation requirement but only need to go through one session. This proposal is larger than 50,000 square feet so it will go through the two-session Planning Board advisory review process.

The intent of all the above changes was to make sure the standards for AHO projects are no more onerous than those for comparable market-rate residential developments under the new zoning. The Multifamily Zoning Petitions relaxed many of the base dimensional and review standards for residential developments, necessitating the above changes to the AHO.

Project Description

Homeowners Rehab, Inc. (“HRI” or the “Developer”) is proposing to demolish the existing structures and construct a new 8-story, 90-foot tall building consisting of a total of 95 affordable units. The project will consist of 40 units designed for seniors and 55 units designed for families and will also include a 1,000 square-foot multipurpose community space on the ground floor that will be available to residents as well as neighborhood organizations. Five off-street parking spaces are proposed along with 77 long-term bicycle parking spaces and eight short-term bicycle parking spaces. The total Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the project is 110,803 square feet and will include a total of 6,764 square feet of open space.

Consistency with AHO Use 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-2A	Summary of Compliance
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifamily dwellings allowed • Active non-residential uses allowed in the base zoning district are permitted on the ground floor as-of-right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal includes multifamily dwellings and a 1,000 square-foot community space on the ground floor
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying District Dimensional Standards allow six stories, 75 feet • AHO Developments are allowed up to 13 stories, 150 feet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed project is eight stories and 90 feet in height.
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No Front and Side Yard • 5’ Rear Yard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AHO Project proposes a rear yard setback of 15 feet.
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AHO Developments must have 30% open space to lot area or meet the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed AHO Project includes 6,764 square feet of open space, meeting the 30% minimum

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Residence C-2A	Summary of Compliance
	<p>underlying District Dimensional Standard, whichever is less.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot in a C-2A district adjacent to a C-1 district has a 30% open space requirement 	<p>requirement. All open space is proposed to be permeable.</p>
Parking and Bicycle Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no minimum off-street parking for an AHO Development. • 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 inside the building with 77 parking spaces. These spaces appear to conform to the quantity and dimensional requirements in Article 6.000. The Project shows five bike racks along the Wendell Street side of the building, consisting of 10 short-term bicycle parking spaces. It is unclear if these spaces meet the minimum three-foot horizontal clearance standards.
Site Design and Arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front yards may be landscaped or hardscaped but cannot be used for off-street parking. • Pedestrian entrances shall be visible from the street. • Buildings with front facades in excess of 250' in length shall provide forecourts to break up massing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed project meets all the Site Design and Arrangement requirements.
Building Facades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building facades facing public streets shall have a minimum percentage of 20% glazing. • Building facades must include projecting and/or recessed elements of at least two feet on an average interval of 40 linear feet along a Public Street, and 80 feet elsewhere. Such projecting or recessed elements do not apply to the lowest or highest Story Above Grade. • Facades of ground stories shall have expanses of no more than 25' with no windows or pedestrian entryways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed building consists of 25% transparency along Wendell Street. • The Wendell Street façade will need more review as the design progresses to ensure the recesses and projections are provided at the required intervals.
Ground Stories and Below Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground stories with non-residential uses must have a height of at least 15' and a depth of 35'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The AHO Project illustrates a 15-foot Ground Story height.
Mechanical Equipment,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanical equipment shall be generally screened from view. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground story mechanicals and refuse areas appear to be either

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Residence C-2A	Summary of Compliance
Refuse Storage and Loading Areas	Rooftop mechanical equipment must be set back from the roof line equal to its height.	within the building itself or on the rear side of the building. All rooftop equipment appears to be set back at least 10 feet.
Environmental Design Standards	<p>This AHO project is subject to the following Sustainable Development Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 22.20: Green Building • Section 22.80: Flood Resilience • Section 22.90: Green Factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Project intends to meet Green Building requirements by targeting Enterprise Green Communities certification. A Green Building Report will be required ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation. • Documentation showing compliance with Flood Resilience Standards and Green Factor Standards as set forth in Article 22.000 will be required ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation.

Recommendations

The following is a summary of zoning issues that will need to continue to be looked at as the design progresses:

- Detail of short-term bicycle parking layout to confirm compliance with design standards in Article 6.000.
- Further review of Wendell Street façade recesses and projections to ensure AHO design standards are met.

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

Introduction and Context

The project proposes the redevelopment of two adjacent parcels fronting Wendell St - currently consisting of tennis courts and two small brick dormitory buildings - into a single 8-story building containing 95 units of 100 percent affordable mixed-age housing. The building forms an “H” shaped footprint in plan that occupies the majority of the site and defines two courtyards: a shallower, wider public open space and entry forecourt along Wendell St, and a deeper, narrower private courtyard on the building’s south side for its residents. Each courtyard is lined with active ground-floor uses. Additionally, the project includes a community “Hub” space along Wendell Street, intended as a resource for use by residents of Homeowners Rehab Inc. (HRI) projects in the surrounding area. The project also provides five internal parking spaces for staff and resident service providers.

Wendell Street is a smaller one-way residential street in the Baldwin Neighborhood extending from Massachusetts Avenue in the west to near the border with Somerville in the east. It is located one to two blocks north of Lesley University’s Doble campus. The project’s block contains a diverse range of building types, including 2-1/2 story wood-clapboard residential homes, triple-deckers, 5-story brick apartment buildings, and two 5-6-story institutional buildings located at the intersection with Massachusetts Avenue. The development pattern is characterized by front yard setbacks ranging from 5’ to 20’ deep, with the majority within the 10-20’ range. Side setbacks vary, but buildings are generally close enough to one another to produce a coherent and legible street wall. One unprotected bike lane spans between Oxford St and Massachusetts Avenue, and parking is allowed on both sides of the street. The site is a roughly 15-minute walk to both Harvard and Porter Red Line Stations and is served along Massachusetts Avenue by the 77 & 96 bus routes. Nearby public open spaces include the Sacramento Field and Community Garden and Alden Play Area, both located one block north on Sacramento Street.

The applicant team has met with City design staff multiple times since the project was first introduced, and the design has positively and collaboratively evolved throughout the process. The applicant has demonstrated an ongoing openness to incorporating feedback to align the project with the City’s goals.

Consistency with Multifamily Design Guidelines

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

- Reflecting common design elements and materials present in the surrounding context,
- Enhancing the public realm with active ground-floor uses, higher levels of transparency, high-quality materials, and landscaped open spaces,
- Modulating the massing to respond to the form and scale of nearby buildings,
- Providing internal and exterior common spaces to build a sense of community, and
- Achieving high levels of energy efficiency and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

Both the Updated Affordable Housing Overlay and the Multifamily Zoning purposefully allow for potentially larger and taller residential buildings than the existing context in an effort to address Cambridge's critical housing shortage. Within this framework, contextualism needs to be achieved through employing creative design strategies that can effectively harmonize between different building scales. While new developments need not directly mirror their surroundings, they can be evaluated on how well they foster dialogues with their context and add to the beauty and livability of the City.

For reference, the complete set of Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing can be found at:
<https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/CDD/ZoningDevel/OtherProjects/multifamilyhousing/multifamilydesignguidelines20250625final1.pdf>

Site Design

The proposed project creates a coherent street wall foregrounding a landscaped zone which serves to visually expand the public realm. Roughly half of the building's front facade is set back 8-9' from back-of-sidewalk, with the other half set back roughly 20' to create a landscaped public forecourt. Along the middle and eastern portions of the ground floor, two building entrances and high levels of transparency into the lobby, offices, and "Hub" help to activate Wendell Street. Along the western portion of the north elevation, a free little library and "reading nook" animate the blank façade of the parking and transformer room. Both the transformer and parking are internal and completely shielded from view. The south-facing resident courtyard space provides outdoor common space for residents and includes a trellis to mitigate heat in the warmer seasons.

Recommendations

- Further coordination between the existing street tree wells and the proposed hardscape areas along the back-of-sidewalk could provide additional clearances at these potential pinch points.
- The inclusion of an additional street tree roughly aligned with the Short-Term Bike Parking near the Lobby entrance would further enhance the public realm and combat heat island effect.
- Ensure that both the shade and ornamental tree proposed at the southeast corner of the site adjacent to the rear parking easement are feasible and will have adequate space to thrive.
- Consider reorienting the Short-Term Bicycle parking at the Lobby to be perpendicular to the sidewalk to aid ease of access and avoid narrowing the sidewalk when bikes are locked to them.
- Reassess the orientation of the short-term bike parking located at the entrance to the Hub, as the current configuration could block pedestrian access to the entry area and benches.
- Ensure the condensers shown in the southeast corner of the site are adequately shielded and will not negatively impact the adjacent properties.

Building Design

The proposed design employs a number of strategies intended to integrate with the surrounding context despite the inherent differences in scale. A substantial step-back of the western portion of the building above the 6th floor reduces the visibility of the upper floors when approached from the west. Step-backs at the same height along the northern Wendell Street façade, as well as their brick cladding, mirror

similar proportions and materials of the existing brick apartment buildings along the street. Design elements such as soldier courses and stone lintels further reinforce this relationship and aid in balancing the low window-to-wall ratio required by Passive House standards. The asymmetrical composition of these brick-clad volumes creates a more dynamic and varied experience along the street.

The taller central portion of the building is set back a further 10' from Wendell St along the north side. Its ground floor is clad in a manufactured stone material, and the top is capped by a prominent projecting cornice. Its windows are logically arranged into vertical bands separated by clapboard-clad sections framed by shallow vertical fins. The uppermost two floors on the south side of the building are clad in a lighter tan-colored material. Two darker gray bays wrap the southeast and southwest corners from the second to sixth floors, and two additional dark gray bays frame the upper floors of the resident courtyard.

Recommendations

- Employing a prominent cornice at the topmost portion of the building may unintentionally reinforce the difference in scale between the project and its context. A more subtle design strategy for terminating the building façade may call less attention to the height of the building.
- For the cornices at the top of the brick portions, a smaller projecting dimension may produce a stronger relation to the detailing found on the nearby brick apartment buildings.
- The full-height projecting bays along the southern façade of the building appear to reinforce the vertical height of the building, and their darker gray cladding will reflect less light into the southern courtyard space. Additional iterations that reduce or eliminate them could potentially help to further diminish the building's presence when viewed from Mellen Street.
- Further exploration of the approach to the windowsills on the brick portions is encouraged, as these may provide additional opportunities to visually expand the windows.

Sustainable Design

The design as proposed generally follows the principles outlined in the Multifamily Design Guidelines:

- The building is designed to meet Passive House standards.
- The building is all-electric.
- Many units have two exposures, allowing for increased passive ventilation.
- The depth of the return at the brick windows and the vertical fins present at the windows in the main body of the building will help reduce solar gain on the east and west elevations.

Recommendations

- Determine if including sun shading devices at windows on south-facing elevations would reduce undesirable solar gain, especially at the glazed ground-level courtyard and rear elevations.
- The inclusion of photovoltaic systems can help sustainably lower energy costs.
- The inclusion of a green roof on the western step-back would help with storm water management, provide additional green space, and be a visual amenity for the adjacent units.
- Ensure the five in-building parking spaces are able to charge electric vehicles.
- Include frequent outlets in the bike room to allow residents to charge their electric bicycles.

Appendix - 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 • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing
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
Development should be resilient to the effects of climate change as anticipated in the <i>Resilient Cambridge</i> plan.	<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