



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: November 12, 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:	None

---

## **Zoning & Development Staff Report**

---

### **Overview**

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 112,066 square feet and will include a total of 6,764 square feet of open space.

### **Planning Board Comments from Initial Consultation Meeting**

Board members were very supportive of the proposed use, acknowledging the need for both affordable senior housing and family-sized units. Some Board members had concerns about the massing but the Board generally supported the height of the building and the use of brick on the Wendell Street façade. The Board commended HRI on a thorough and responsive community engagement process.

The Board encouraged HRI to consider opportunities to add more plantings in the rear courtyard and explore ways to make the forecourt more publicly accessible as they continue to refine the project’s site design.

As they refine the design of the building, Board members suggested HRI explore opportunities to open the sunroom to the rear courtyard and alternative locations for the Hub. The Board suggested the Developer explore several refinements to the building’s façade including alternative color options for the main massing, reduced glazing on the first floor, and improving the aesthetics of the garage door.

### **Staff Comments on Revised Submission**

A revised application was received by the City dated October 9, 2025, consisting of revised applications forms and narrative, revised graphics volume, and a revised appendix volume. Additional Green Factor materials were submitted on October 14, 2025 and a revised landscape plan was received on October 27, 2025.

CDD staff have confirmed the project has provided sufficient documentation to show compliance with both Green Building and Green Factor standards at this stage of review. The Developer made several changes to the proposed landscaping plan since the first Planning Board consultation, many of which are intended to ensure compliance with the Green Factor zoning requirements. Green Factor standards are designed to incentivize vegetation and other cooling features within 20 feet of the street, making the enhanced landscaping in the front yard a key component of the project’s heat resilience strategy. Adjustments to the rear courtyard increasing the area of passive landscaping also support the project’s overall Green Factor approach. The specific site plan changes are detailed further in the following Urban Design Staff Report.

In the initial [Zoning Memo](#) on this proposal, CDD staff noted two elements that needed additional information to determine that the proposal will be compliant with the AHO zoning standards. These elements, along with the revised submission response, are highlighted below for the Board's information:

- Short-term Bicycle Parking: Article 6.000 standards require a minimum 3-foot clearance on either side of each bike rack.
  - Page 32 of Volume 2 of the revised submission shows the enlarged short-term bicycle parking plan, which appears to demonstrate compliance with Article 6.000 standards. Three of the short-term bike racks were moved in the updated landscape plan. It appears the new design will also comply, but more detail is needed to confirm.
- Minimum Façade Projecting/Recessed Elements: The AHO zoning standards require that an AHO Project incorporate projecting and/or recessed architectural elements of at least two feet for every forty (40) feet of a façade facing a public street.
  - Page 15 of Volume 2 of the revised submission shows the façade details demonstrating compliance with the minimum projection requirements.

**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-2A	Summary of Compliance
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multifamily dwellings allowed</li> <li>• Active non-residential uses allowed in the base zoning district are permitted on the ground floor as-of-right</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal includes multifamily dwellings and a 1,000 square-foot community space on the ground floor</li> </ul>
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underlying District Dimensional Standards allow six stories, 75 feet</li> <li>• AHO Developments are allowed up to 13 stories, 150 feet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed project is eight stories and 90 feet in height.</li> </ul>
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Front and Side Yard</li> <li>• 5' Rear Yard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AHO Project proposes a rear yard setback of 15 feet.</li> </ul>
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AHO Developments must have 30% open space to lot area or meet the underlying District Dimensional Standard, whichever is less.</li> <li>• A lot in a C-2A district adjacent to a C-1 district has a 30% open space requirement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed AHO Project includes 7,124 square feet of open space, meeting the 30% minimum requirement. All open space is proposed to be permeable.</li> </ul>
Parking and Bicycle Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no minimum off-street parking for an AHO Development.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AHO project includes a long-term bicycle parking room inside the building with 77 parking spaces and five bike racks along the Wendell Street side of the building, consisting of 10 short-term bicycle parking</li> </ul>

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Residence C-2A	Summary of Compliance
		spaces. These spaces appear to conform to the quantity and dimensional requirements in Article 6.000.
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 shall provide forecourts to break up massing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed project meets all the Site Design and Arrangement requirements.</li> </ul>
Building Facades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building facades facing public streets shall have a minimum percentage of 20% glazing.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Facades of ground stories shall have expanses of no more than 25' with no windows or pedestrian entryways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed project meets all the Building Facade requirements.</li> </ul>
Ground Stories and Below Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground stories with non-residential uses must have a height of at least 15' and a depth of 35'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AHO Project illustrates a 15-foot Ground Story height.</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>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground story mechanicals and refuse areas appear to be either within the building itself or on the rear side of the building. All rooftop equipment appears to be set back at least 10 feet.</li> </ul>
Environmental Design Standards	<p>This AHO project is subject to the following Sustainable Development Standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 22.20: Green Building</li> <li>• Section 22.80: Flood Resilience</li> <li>• Section 22.90: Green Factor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Project intends to meet Green Building requirements by targeting Enterprise Green Communities certification.</li> <li>• Documentation demonstrating compliance with all relevant Sustainable Development Standards has been submitted to and certified by CDD and DPW staff.</li> </ul>

### 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>
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"> <li>• Up-to-date projections of climate change impacts over the project's anticipated lifespan are incorporated</li> <li>• Flood Resilience Standard in Section 22.80 and the Green Factor Standard in Section 22.90 are met or exceeded</li> <li>• Use of strategies that have environmental co-benefits</li> <li>• Integrative approach to climate change resilience that accounts for the existing context and promotes the other design objectives of the area and the City.</li> </ul>

## Urban Design Staff Report

---

### Overview

The proposed design for the Affordable Housing project at 28-30 Wendell Street has continued to advance positively since the first Planning Board hearing was held on August 5, 2025. During the intervening time the applicant, Homeowners Rehab Inc. (HRI), met with City design staff to review and discuss the Planning Board's feedback as well as any outstanding zoning issues. Additionally, Planning Board members were offered the opportunity to view samples of the proposed materials at the City Hall Annex. Comments received afterwards suggest that members who viewed the materials were generally supportive of the choices.

The overall approach to the project's site plan, massing, cladding materials, and program distribution have generally remained consistent since the previous hearing. However, a number of changes and refinements have been made to address comments and concerns raised by members at the previous hearing. These include:

#### Front (north) Courtyard and Front Yard

- The design of the paved portions has been further consolidated and rationalized.
- The applicant has committed to working with the City Arborist and DPW to install additional street trees between the curb cut and entrance to the lobby.

#### Rear (south) Resident Courtyard

- Doorways have been added from both the Resident Common Room and Sunroom directly into the courtyard to increase indoor/outdoor connectivity.
- Additional vegetation has been added to the courtyard, with a canopy tree located at the center, additional planters, and a landscaped area along the western edge. The tree will act to reduce solar heat gain during the warmer portions of the year.
- The shade structure has been relocated to the southern side of the courtyard where it helps to further define the space and provides additional shading for the Resident Services room.
- The rear fence will be designed to incorporate hardwood panels with laser cut patterns to provide visual interest.

#### Building Massing and Facade

- The ground floor street-facing windows have been redesigned with a more residential scale and character that will help decrease light trespass at night.
- The primary lobby entrance has been moved further east so it is located more centrally and no longer immediately adjacent the western brick volume.
- The garage door will be painted or include imagery to reduce its impact on the public realm.
- The cornice profiles have been refined to better proportionally align with the scale of the building and similar examples from the existing adjacent context.
- The stone window lintels in the brick portions of the façade have been made taller to further visually increase the size of the windows.

Additional changes to the project's design beyond those in response to the Planning Board's comments include:

- The inclusion of a new canopy tree in the front (north) courtyard and additional understory trees in the front courtyard and west side yard setback.
- A reconfiguration of the floorplan on the seventh and eight floors that reduces the depth of the upper-level setback on the western side of the building but introduces a new upper-level setback on the southern façade to the west of the rear courtyard.
- The inclusion of a 30" wide by 24" deep inset in the central volume of the street-facing façade spanning from the second floor through the sixth floor to comply with the required number of façade offsets along the street-facing elevation.
- The redesign of the Little Free Library area to eliminate the previously proposed textured brick treatment and instead combine the library and the adjacent doors into a unified set of panels.

### **Urban Design Comments on Design Revisions**

The majority of the design revisions proposed since the first Planning Board hearing have positively advanced the project. The building remains consistent with both the Multifamily and Citywide Urban Design Guidelines, and changes in response to Board feedback have addressed a number of earlier concerns. Remaining suggestions for consideration include:

#### Site Plan

The design of the front courtyard could be even further simplified to create a more unified space. Potential modifications could include:

- Consolidating the entry, bike parking, and seating area into a single cohesive composition.
- Widening the entrance to the space to create a more welcoming connection to the sidewalk.
- Including additional seating along the west edge of the paved entry area.
- Including an additional canopy tree on the west side of the courtyard to mirror the newly introduced one on the east side.
- Aligning the placement of trees with solid portions of the ground floor façade.
- Testing alternative orientations for the bike parking to increase ease of access.

#### Massing

The additional upper-level setback along the southwest portion of the seventh and eighth floors creates a more gradual transition in height between the project and the neighboring properties to the south. It also further reinforces the reading of the western portion of the building as a six-story volume. While the western upper-level setback above the sixth floor has been reduced, it remains substantial enough to provide a clear visual distinction between the 6-story and 8-story portions and reduce the perceived height of the building when viewed from street level.



## Façade

### *Inset in the Central Building Volume*

The inclusion of a vertical inset in the middle of the north elevation from the second through sixth floor creates an awkward solution to the requirement for a greater number of façade offsets. It introduces an incongruous design element and complicates the reading of the central volume by partially but not fully bifurcating it. Potential alternative strategies for satisfying the requirement could include:

- Optimally, introduce a projecting bay from floors two through six centered above the Lobby entrance. This would serve to further emphasize the building entry, provide a more substantial modulation of the middle façade, and moderately increase the size of the associated units.
- Less ideally, carry the inset all the way through the top of the building. This would create an alternative reading of the central portion as two cojoined volumes as opposed to a single one.

### *Ground Floor Fenestration*

- Uniting the Hub entrance and the window immediately to the east into a single compositional element would eliminate the thin vertical band of brick currently shown between them.
- Evenly spacing the three windows on the ground floor of the north façade to the east of the Lobby entrance would better align them with the cadence of the windows above.
- The previous submission grouped the fenestration along the south-facing ground floor elevation of the courtyard. A similar organizational approach applied to the current design could produce a more logical arrangement and help further connect the inside to the outside.

### *Access*

- Ensure the location and configuration of the garage access conforms to City sight line standards: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/Traffic/CPCC/dotsightlinereviewguidelines.pdf>
- Consider installing a vehicle exiting light (without sound) as an extra caution for pedestrians.
- Consider an automatic door for the bike room to make it easier to maneuver a bike through.

### *Rear Bays*

- The darker color of the bays that form the east and west elevations of the rear courtyard could make the space appear smaller and less bright versus a lighter color cladding.
- Changing the bay spandrels to a more similar color to the rest of the bay's cladding would unify them as a single compositional object and avoid the "O" reading on the rear elevation.

### *Little Free Library*

While the current proposal represents a more holistic approach to the Little Free Library and adjacent access doors, the loss of the textured brick shown in the previous proposal is unfortunate. Employing a similarly artful approach to the proposed paneled area would help enliven the public realm and could provide an opportunity to celebrate the site's history and connection to Lesley, as suggested by Planning Board members during the first hearing. The garage door could potentially benefit from being incorporated into this composition.