



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: September 30, 2025

Re: Affordable Housing Overlay Design Consultation **AHO-9, 2072 Massachusetts Avenue**

Overview

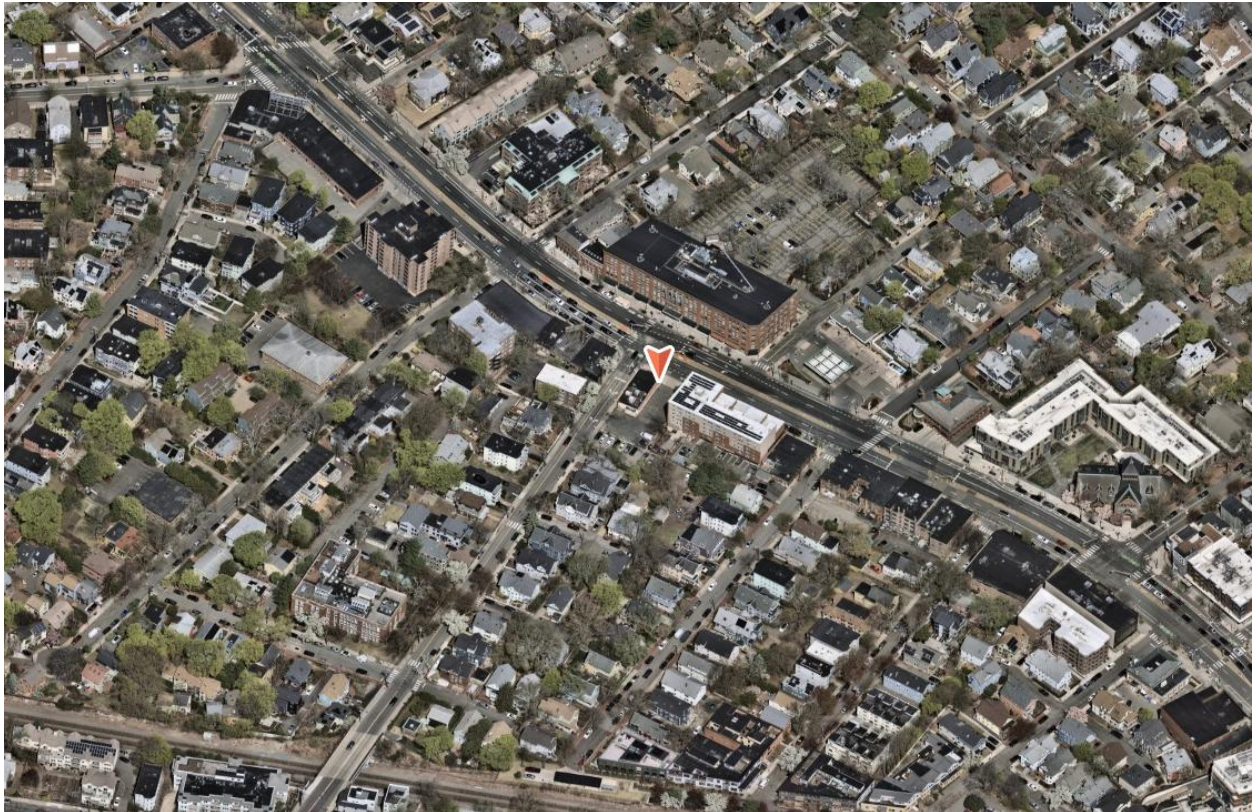
Submission Type:	Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Advisory Design Review
Applicant:	CC HRE 2072 Mass Ave LLC and CC HRE 2072 Mass Ave Tenant LLC
Zoning District(s):	Business A-2/Residence C-1
Proposal Summary:	Construction of a 12-story building to create 73 affordable rental units and amenities under the AHO.
Planning Board Action:	Review and comment on conformance with AHO Development Standards, City Development Guidelines for the proposal area, Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing, and Citywide Urban Design Objectives.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	Department of Public Works (DPW) Report in separate document.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Site & Zoning Context

Site Context

The site consists of a single parcel at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Walden Street in the North Cambridge neighborhood, a few blocks north of Porter Station and just one block south of the Somerville border. Directly across Massachusetts Avenue stands the historic Henderson Carriage Building, and an MBTA bus stop shelter is located along the parcel's northeastern edge. The surrounding neighborhood features a diverse mix of uses, including commercial, mixed-use, office, and residential buildings of varying densities. Building types also range widely. Massachusetts Avenue is lined primarily with single-story commercial structures and mixed-use buildings up to eight stories in height, while Walden Street is predominantly 2½-story residential buildings. The site currently contains a one-story vacant building that most recently housed Darul Kabab, an Indian-Pakistani restaurant, along with a surface parking lot.



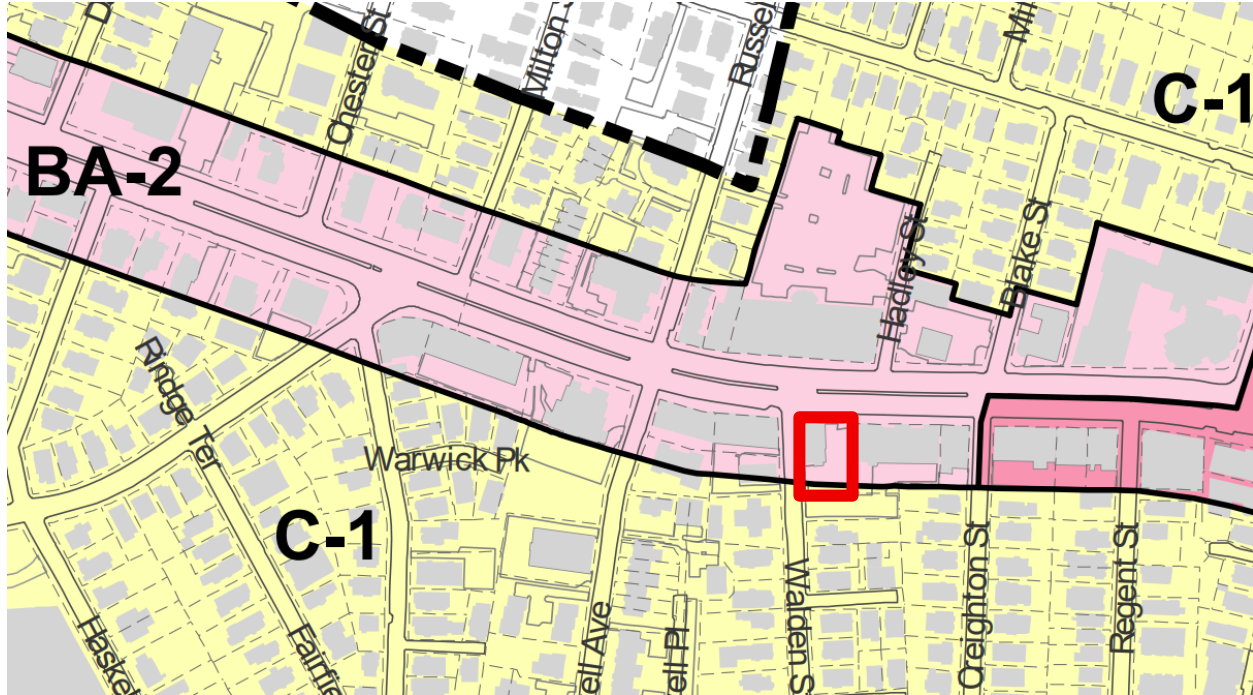
Context Map for 2072 Massachusetts Avenue. Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, April 2025

Site Zoning

This site spans two zoning districts, with the majority located in a Business A-2 (BA-2) district and a small rear portion situated in a Residence C-1 district. As a development carried under the AHO, per Section 11.207.5.1, the project may apply the zoning requirements of the district covering most of the lot to the entire parcel. Accordingly, the BA-2 district, which is the more permissive base zoning, is extended to

AHO Design Consultation AHO-9, 2072 Massachusetts Avenue – CDD Memo to Planning Board

the approximately 13-foot portion zoned C-1. The BA-2 district has no minimum Open Space or Side/Rear Setback requirements for residential uses, and under the AHO, no minimum front yard setback is required. Additionally, while base BA-2 zoning limits residential building height to 6 stories and 75 feet, the AHO allows up to 13 stories above grade and a maximum height of 150 feet. Because this AHO development exceeds 50,000 square feet, it is subject to the two-session Planning Board Advisory Consultation process.



Zoning Map. Source: Zoning Districts, City of Cambridge, February 2025

Comments on Proposal

Project Description

The applicants, Capstone Communities LLC (or “Capstone”) and Hope Real Estate Enterprise LLC or (“Hope”) are proposing to demolish the existing single-story restaurant building to construct a new 12-story, 126-foot-tall residential building consisting of 73 affordable rental units and approximately 91,700 square feet of Gross Floor Area. The unit mix will include studios, one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments ranging in size from 500 to 1,159 square feet at 30% and 60% AMI. The project also includes resident amenities such as a ground-floor community space and a rooftop outdoor terrace. Bicycle parking will be provided with 44 long-term and 1 short-term spaces, supplemented by a financial contribution to offset the remaining required spaces.

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 Business A-2 Zoning District	Summary of Compliance
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifamily dwellings allowed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal includes multifamily dwellings and residence amenities on the ground floor and rooftop.
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying District Dimensional Standards allow 6 stories, 75 feet • AHO Developments are allowed up to 13 stories, 150 feet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed project is 12 stories and 126 feet in height.
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying District Dimensional Standards have no Side and Rear Yard requirements. • AHO Dimensional Standards have no Front Yard requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parcel is a corner lot, so it contains two front yards and two side yards. A 5-foot setback is provided at its southern side yard and no setback to the east. • The project proposes a 6-inch front yard setback on both street fronts.
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AHO Developments require 30% open space or meet the underlying District Dimensional Standard, whichever is less. • A lot in a B-A2 has no open space requirement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While no Open Space is required, the project includes an outdoor terrace at the 12th floor, planters along Walden Street, and ornamental trees along the southern lot line.
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 project provides two long-term bicycle parking rooms with 44 parking spaces and one short-term space on Massachusetts Avenue. Under Article 6.100, 76 long-term bicycle parking spaces and 8 short-term spaces would be required for a project of this size. The remaining long and short-term spaces required will be satisfied through a Public Bicycle Sharing Station contribution. • Some long-term bicycle parking spaces do not appear to meet the dimensional standards in Article 6.100.
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.

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Business A-2 Zoning District	Summary of Compliance
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 45% transparency along Massachusetts Avenue and 40% along Walden Street.
Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage and Loading Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanical equipment shall be generally screened from view. Rooftop mechanical equipment must be set back from the roof line equal to its height. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground story mechanicals and refuse areas appear to be within the building itself. All rooftop equipment appears to be screened by a 10 feet high screen, but it is unclear if the equipment is setback by a dimension equal to at least its height.
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 22.90: Green Factor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Project intends to meet Green Building requirements by targeting Passive House certification. A Green Building Report will be required ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation. • A Cool Score sheet has been submitted but complete documentation showing compliance with Green Factor Standards will be required ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation.

Recommendations

The following is a summary of recommendations that may be considered for revised submission:

- Detail of long-term bicycle parking layout to confirm compliance with design standards in Article 6.100.
- Information about number of Public Bicycle Sharing Stations and docks to ensure compliance with AHO Bicycle Parking Standards.

- Further review of all rooftop mechanical equipment to ensure the screening requirements of the AHO design standards are met.

Transportation Comments

The Department of Transportation (DOT) staff has been working with the applicant and provided the following comments on the proposal:

- DOT is very supportive of the developer’s plan to pull back the building’s first floor in order to widen Walden Street as it approaches the intersection with Massachusetts Avenue. The revised curb line will accommodate two ten-foot lanes traveling north and one ten-foot lane traveling south. This is a significant improvement over current conditions and will improve the operation and safety for all road users.
- Further review the configuration of the northernmost racks in the ground-floor bicycle parking room to ensure that the access aisle is sufficient and racks are not blocked once bicycles are parked.
- Further review both bicycle parking rooms to ensure compliance with Bicycle Parking Guidelines for accessibility and improve circulation challenges, including providing more direct exterior access to the ground floor room, improving turns, and avoiding reliance on circulation through the trash room.

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
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.

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

Consistency with Multifamily Design Guidelines

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

- The building is appropriately sited to maintain the streetwall on Massachusetts Avenue.
- Its vertical massing articulates the public realm by providing a visual target at the bend in Mass Avenue.
- Together with the Henderson Carriage Building on the opposite side of Mass Ave, it creates a gateway to the Porter Square area as one approaches it from the west.
- The building's distinct ground story base is constructed of appealingly textured materials and includes a large glazed area at the corner.

Site Design

The building fills most of the site, leaving little space for landscape improvements.

On its west side, the ground floor is set back from Walden Street. As part of improvements to Walden Street suggested by city staff, the curb and sidewalk will be relocated farther east from its current location, widening the currently constricted street. The sidewalk will be partially under the building's cantilevered upper floors. Underground utilities in the affected area may introduce complications, however; further investigations of subsurface conditions will be made.

New trees are provided along the parcel's south edge, between the building and the city-owned parking lot on Walden Street.

The project refrains from proposing improvements to the Mass Ave sidewalk and existing bus stop, as the sidewalk's revised design (expected as part of City-led improvements to Mass Ave) is still in process.

Recommendations

- Planters are shown against the building on the Walden Street sidewalk. Whether the resulting restrictions in sidewalk width (to approximately 5'-2" clear) is advisable should be evaluated.
- The applicant should continue to coordinate with city staff on changes to Walden Street and Mass Ave.

Building Design

The building's general concept a good response to the site: The division of its broad faces into two (or three) elements, separated by vertical grooves, emphasizes the building's verticality and breaks up its mass. The slight bend in the Mass Ave facade will create an appealing foreshortened view as one

approaches the building from either direction on Mass Ave. The brick ground floor facade will provide texture at the pedestrian level.

Recommendations

- Massing
 - Consider relocating the 12th story terrace (currently at the building's northwest corner) to the southwest corner, so as to accentuate the building's verticality at the intersection of Mass Ave and Walden Street, and to step down toward the neighborhood to the south.
- Facades
 - The earlier version of this project, dated October 27, 2020, with vertically striated light colored cladding, punched windows on the west and north facades, and more solid wall surface, was very successful. Consideration could be given to reinstating that aesthetic on at least some of the facades.
 - Consideration could be given to further breaking up the facades by using *both* the earlier wall and punched window expression and the current frame and infill expression, using one system in the northern portion of the mass and the other in the southern portion.
 - In the frame and infill system, consider differentiating the widths of the piers and the horizontal members.
 - Consider providing larger windows on the east facade.
 - Consider locating the east facade's vertical division farther north, so as to separate the northern Mass Ave facing component from the southern element that faces the interior of the block.
 - The lengths of blank ground story wall without openings may be excessive.
 - Careful treatment of doorways and other openings in the brick of the ground floor facades, and the contrast between the brick walls and the highly glazed Community Room at the northwest corner design of the ground floor facades will contribute to a rich pedestrian experience. (Sert's treatment of similar conditions in his office building at the intersection of Prospect Street and Bishop Allen Drive could be a useful reference.)
 - The locations of fenestration on the ground story Walden Street facade should be coordinated with the interior layout.
 - Whether sufficient access is provided to the transformer room should be evaluated. If a large door is required, it should be designed to complement the rest of the facade.
 - Consider alternative color palettes for the exterior.
 - The use of an exposed mass timber structural system will enrich the building's appearance. The ground floor structure is proposed to be steel frame, however. Can the steel be expressed in a way that complements the exposed mass timber?

- Plans
 - Note that better coordination between the vertical notches in the west facade and the interior layouts would improve the unit configurations.

Sustainable Design

Recommendations

- The possibility of dedicating portions of the roof to green roof systems should be investigated.
- Clarify whether the seemingly high window to wall ratio on the west facade will meet passive house standards.

Consistency with City wide Urban Design Objectives

The project appears to meet the Citywide Urban Design Objectives.