



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 25, 2026

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

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## Overview

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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 Transportation (DOT) in separate document.

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## **Zoning & Development Staff Report**

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### **Overview**

The Developer, Capstone Communities LLC (or “Capstone”) and Hope Real Estate Enterprise LLC (or “Hope”), is proposing to demolish the existing single-story restaurant building to construct a new 12-story, 136-foot-tall residential building consisting of 73 affordable rental units and approximately 91,400 square feet of Gross Floor Area. The unit mix will include studios, one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments ranging in size from 667 to 1,042 square feet. The project also includes resident amenities such as a ground-floor community space and a rooftop outdoor terrace. Bicycle parking will be provided with 45 long-term and 1 short-term spaces, supplemented by contributions for a Public Bicycle Sharing Station and Public Bicycle Parking to offset the remaining required spaces.

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

Board members were very supportive of the proposal and commended the Developer for adding a significant number of family-sized units and amenity spaces. The Board thought the proposed height was appropriate for the site, one of the major corridors in the city, well served by public transit and bicycle amenities. The Board generally supported the modern double stacked design and the choice of colors and materials, particularly the use of brick in context with the surrounding buildings and the use of mass timber as both a structural and aesthetic option. The terrace location with orientation toward the street and city skyline was also highlighted.

As the building design advances, Board members encouraged the Developer to consider increasing ground-floor height and transparency. They also suggested refining the elevations, particularly those facing the neighborhood, with greater attention to materials, fenestration, and recesses. The Board requested more detailed floor plans that align interior layouts with façade articulation and structural grids, as well as additional information to better understand feasibility and users experience of the proposed terrace space.

For site design, the Board asked for a contingency plan to protect the large mature tree on the abutting Russel Apartments lot and urged continued coordination with the City on public realm improvements, including Walden Street widening, loading/unloading and pickup/drop-off areas.

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

The City has received a revised application dated February 5, 2026, including updated forms and narrative volume, revised graphics, and a revised appendix volume with additional Green Factor and Green Building documentation.

CDD Staff have confirmed that the project has provided sufficient documentation to demonstrate compliance with Green Building and Green Factor standards at this stage of review. The Project intends to meet Green Building requirements by targeting Passive House certification. The minimum required Green Factor score is achieved through a combination of understory trees, high planting areas, a green roof area, and shaded areas.

In the initial Zoning Memo on this proposal, CDD provided a summary of compliance with AHO standards. The revised submission presents several modifications, including: increasing the eastern side yard setback from zero to five feet along the Russell Apartments property line; increasing the number of long-term bicycle parking spaces by one; incorporating planters along Massachusetts Avenue; and reducing façade glazing from 45 to 35% along Massachusetts Avenue and 40 to 34% along Walden Street.

CDD staff continue to note two items requiring additional clarification to confirm full compliance with AHO zoning standards.

- **Bicycle Parking:** Article 6.000 requires a minimum 3-foot horizontal clearance perpendicular to the length of the bicycle from the center point of each bicycle rack. Page 26 of the graphic volume shows enlarged bicycle parking plans indicating that the two racks arranged in alignment in the second-floor bicycle room and the proposed short-term rack may not meet this requirement. No dimensions are provided for the short-term space.
- **Rooftop Mechanical equipment:** Section 11.207 requires rooftop mechanical equipment to be set back from the principal wall plane by a distance equal to its height. While some of the equipment appears to be screened by a 10-foot-tall structure, it remains unclear whether the equipment is set back as required.

CDD staff has also observed that revisions to the east facade facing the Russell Apartments eliminated the previously proposed recessed and projecting elements. Building and Site Design Standards for AHO projects require building facades not facing the street to incorporate elements that project or recess by at least two feet, occurring at an average interval of 80 linear horizontal feet or less. As currently shown, the east facade does not clearly demonstrate compliance with this standard.

**Consistency with AHO Development Standards**

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

<b>Development Standard</b>	<b>Requirements for AHO Project in Business A-2 Zoning District</b>	<b>Summary of Compliance</b>
Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multifamily dwellings allowed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposal includes multifamily dwellings and residence amenities on the ground floor and rooftop.</li> </ul>
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underlying District Dimensional Standards allow 6 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 12 stories and 136 feet in height.</li> </ul>
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underlying District Dimensional Standards have no Side and Rear Yard requirements.</li> <li>• AHO Dimensional Standards have no Front Yard requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The parcel is a corner lot, so it contains two front yards and two side yards. A 5-foot setback is provided for both side yards.</li> <li>• The project proposes a 6-inch front yard setback on both street fronts.</li> </ul>
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AHO Developments require 30% open space or meet the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While no Open Space is required, the project includes an outdoor</li> </ul>

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Business A-2 Zoning District	Summary of Compliance
	<p>underlying District Dimensional Standard, whichever is less.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lot in a B-A2 has no open space requirement.</li> </ul>	<p>terrace at the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, planters along the Streets, and ornamental trees along the southern lot line.</p>
<p>Parking and Bicycle Parking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No minimum off-street parking for AHO Developments.</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 project provides two long-term bicycle parking rooms with a total of 45 parking spaces where 76 spaces would be required for a project of this size. The remaining required spaces will be satisfied through a Public Bicycle Sharing Station contribution of 25 docks.</li> <li>• One short-term bicycle space is provided on Massachusetts Avenue where 8 are required. A Public Bicycle Parking Contribution will offset the remaining required short-term spaces.</li> <li>• Some long- and the short-term bicycle parking spaces do not appear to meet the dimensional standards in Article 6.100.</li> </ul>
<p>Site Design and Arrangement</p>	<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> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed project meets all the Site Design and Arrangement requirements.</li> </ul>
<p>Building Facades</p>	<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 building consists of 35% transparency along Massachusetts Avenue and 34% along Walden Street.</li> <li>• Facade facing the Russell Apartments appear to not include any projecting and or/recessed elements of at least two feet on an average interval of 80 linear feet.</li> </ul>
<p>Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanical equipment shall be generally screened from view. Rooftop mechanical equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground story mechanicals and refuse areas appear to be within the building itself. Some rooftop</li> </ul>

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in Business A-2 Zoning District	Summary of Compliance
and Loading Areas	must be set back from the roof line equal to its height.	equipment appears to be screened by a 10-foot-tall screen, but it is unclear if the equipment is setback by a dimension equal to at least its height.
Environmental Design Standards	This AHO project is subject to the following Sustainable Development Standards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 22.20: Green Building</li> <li>• Section 22.90: Green Factor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation demonstrating compliance with all relevant Sustainable Development Standards has been submitted to and certified by CDD 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>

<p>Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.</p>	<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>
<p>Development should be resilient to the effects of climate change as anticipated in the <i>Resilient Cambridge</i> plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><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

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### Overview

The project at 2072 Massachusetts Avenue proposes to replace the existing single-story commercial building with a 12-story building that will provide 73 affordable residential units. As noted in the memo to the Planning Board for the project's initial hearing on October 7, 2025, the design accords with the intent of Cambridge's Multifamily Design Guidelines, and will contribute to the developing character of Mass Ave. Subsequent to the initial Planning Board hearing, the project team met with staff to review the project's revised design, which incorporates numerous improvements, many of them in response to Planning Board and staff suggestions:

- To reduce the risk of damage to the existing tree at the neighboring Russell Apartment's rear patio, the side setback along the east side of the site has been increased to 5 feet.
- The design of the rooftop outdoor terrace has been developed, including the provision of a small play structure.
- The linear planter along the building's west side—along the Walden Street sidewalk, has been lengthened (still retaining five feet of clear sidewalk width), and an additional planter is provided on the building's north side, in front of the building's Community Room on Mass Ave.
- Improvements to the ground floor facades include greater height, more fenestration, and a lighter brick color. On the Walden Street facade, the transformer door and the adjoining person door are better integrated into the facade's overall composition.
- A placeholder for art is indicated on the ground floor north elevation, behind the existing bus stop shelter.
- The upper story facades have been coordinated with interior layouts, resolving discrepancies present in the earlier design.
- Additional glazing has been provided on the east facade, giving it a more residential appearance.
- A slightly warmer color palette has been adopted.
- The ground floor plan has been reorganized, creating clearer circulation patterns, providing windows to additional rooms and a more accessible route to the bicycle storage room.
- The ground floor bicycle storage room now has a door leading to the east setback, providing an alternate exit (and perhaps entrance) for bicyclists.
- The layout of the second-floor bicycle parking room has been improved.
- The design team will continue to work with DOT and DPW on changes to Walden Street and Mass Avenue.

### Urban Design Comments on Design Revisions

#### Site Design

The changes to the site plan - principally the slightly wider setback on the building's east side, and the additional planters on the west and north sides – are improvements.

- Consideration could be given to planting columnar trees in the portion of the building's widened east setback adjoining the Russell Apartment Building's rear patio (with care to not negatively affect the existing tree on the Russell Building's property).
- Greater clarity on the use of the east side doorway to the bicycle storage room, and the route from it to the public street, would be helpful.
- Consider planting trees with a taller growth habit on the south side of the site, adjoining the city owned parking lot.

### Building Design

The changes to the building's architecture noted above are mostly subtle improvements. The building's overall appearance is similar to that of the previous design: the residential stories consist of a group of vertical massing elements running from second floor level to the building's top, separated from each other by vertical reveals, yet unified with each other by a light-colored frame-like grid of double floor proportions that is infilled by panels and fenestration; the residential stories are supported by a ground story that combines brick wall and full height fenestration.

As in the previous design, one of the appealing features of the facades is the low window sills, located just above floor level, which contribute to a sense of light and openness in the residential units—creating almost the sense of an interior porch, and also place the window openings in dialog with the larger-scaled double-story areas framed by the light-colored facade grid.

It's hard to tell precisely from the renderings, but in some of them the grey infill panels in the residential stories appear to be very close to the plane of the light colored facade grid.

- To enrich the facades with more relief and shadow, consideration could be given to increasing the depth to which the grey infill panels are recessed back from the plane of the light-colored gridded frame elements.

The color scheme is warmer than that of the previous version, but remains quite subdued.

- Consideration could be given to incorporating more color, perhaps in the window mullions, which are very close to the color of the adjoining infill panels.

### *North Facade (facing Mass Ave):*

In the previous design, the north (Mass Ave) facade consisted of a two-bay-wide eastern (left hand) portion, and a four-bay-wide western (right hand) portion, separated by a vertical reveal that was aligned over the solid wall to the east of the entrance door. In the current design the vertical reveal has been shifted west, almost to the middle of the facade. The eastern portion consists of two bays, each wider than in the previous version. To achieve this, the blank panels within the light-colored facade grid have been considerably widened. The western portion of the facade has been reduced to three bays wide. The vertical reveal between the eastern and western portions is now partially over the entrance door fenestration and partly over the solid wall to the east of it, creating a slightly awkward relation between the building's ground floor base and the residential tower above it.

- Consideration could be given to reverting to the two bay and four bay arrangement for the east and west portions of the facade, and relocating the vertical reveal so that it is east of the entrance fenestration.

In the previous design, the Mass Avenue entrance was recessed into the building, creating a deep sheltered outdoor area at the door. In the current design, the entrance doors and associated fenestration are close to the plane of the masonry facade.

- Consider recessing the building entrance enough to create a shallow sheltered area outside the doors.

*West facade (facing Walden Street):*

The locations of the reveals between the vertical massing elements of the residential stories have been coordinated with the interior layout. Note that the living room window of the northernmost one-bedroom unit on the west side of the building seems excessively narrow.

- Consideration could be given to widening it.

In the previous design, the northern of the two vertical reveals on the west facade had fenestration in it for the associated unit's living room.

- Consideration could be given to reinstating the fenestration, both to give more natural light to the living room and to enrich the facade.

*East Facade (facing Russell Apartments):*

Improvements include wider windows and reductions to the widths of the blank infill panels, the relocation of the vertical strip that divides the facade into an eastern and western portion closer to Mass Ave, and the elimination of the small punched windows that had been in that strip.

In contrast to the previous version, which stepped in plan, the east facade is now flat (or very close to flat).

- While this does not appear to be problematic, a change in plane at the two vertical strips – recessing them relative to the gridded portions of the facade - could be considered.

*South Facade (facing the city parking lot)*

The facade benefits from the simplification of the vertical strip that divides the facade into two portions.

- Consideration could be given to widening the windows, and to increasing the depth to which the infill panels are recessed.