

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 4, 2026

Re: Advisory Consultation **PBAC-2, 1740 Massachusetts Avenue**

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## Overview

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Submission Type: Planning Board Advisory Consultation (PBAC)

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Developer: Old North Development Co.

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Zoning District(s): MAS-12A, partially Residence C-1

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Proposal Summary: Construction of a 6-story building to create 71 residential units, 75 long-term, and 13 short-term bicycle parking spaces as well as commercial space in the basement and first floor, with a gross floor area of 64,349 square feet under the Planning Board Advisory Consultation process

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Planning Board Action: Review and comment on conformance with the requirements of the zoning district and for consistency with the Citywide Urban Design Objectives as well as any other plans or guidelines established by the City that are applicable to the development.

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Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

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Other Staff Reports: Department of Public Works (DPW), in a separate document.

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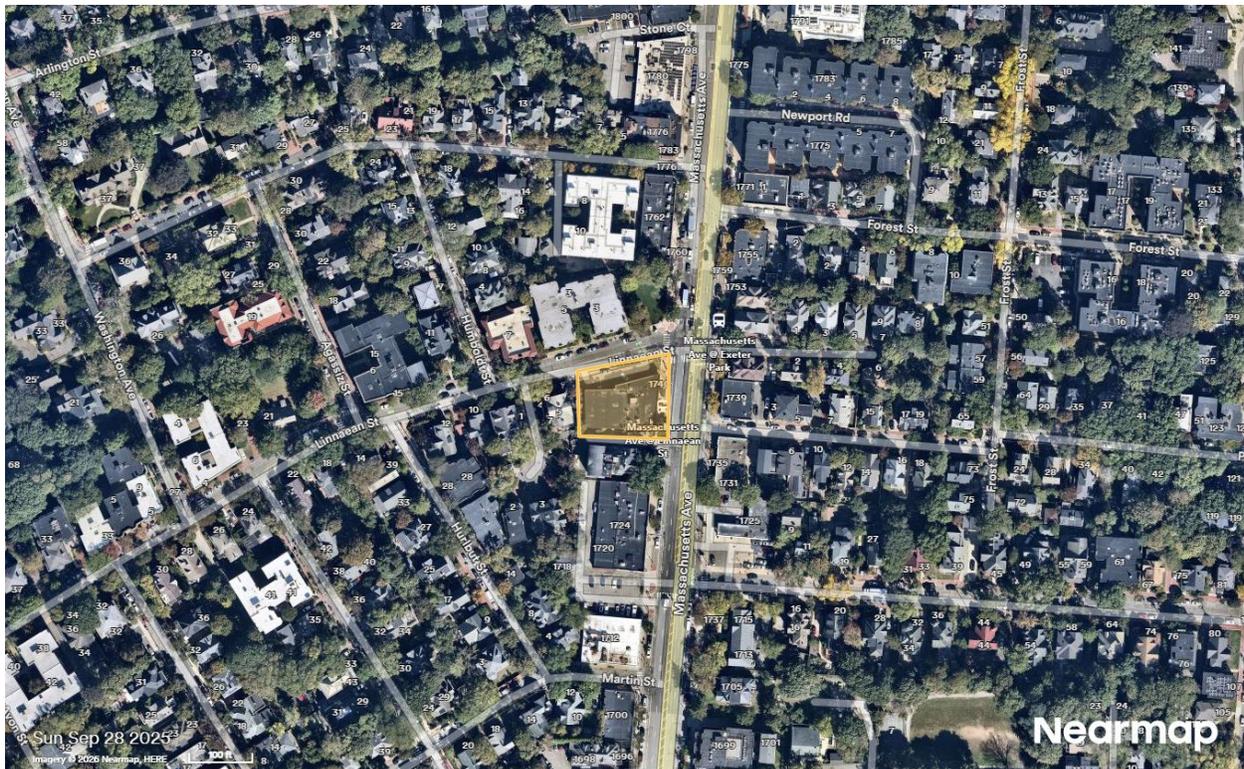
## Zoning & Development Staff Report

### Site Context

Neighborhood/Area: North Mass Ave/Porter Square

Development Patterns: The project is located on the corner of Mass Ave and Linnaean Street, just south of Porter Square. This portion of Mass Ave contains a broad mix of use types and building scales, from one-story commercial buildings to five- and six-story residential buildings. This end of Linnaean Street is residential in nature but contains a varied mix of heights and densities.

Nearby Features: The site is just a few blocks south of the Porter Square MBTA station and Porter Square Shopping Center. Regular bus service is provided along Mass Ave – stops for the 77 and 96 bus routes are directly in front of the site.



Context Map for 1740 Mass Ave  
Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, 2025

**Site Zoning**

Massachusetts Avenue Districts (Section 17.800)

This is the first project before the Planning Board within the new Massachusetts Avenue Districts, adopted by the City Council on December 22, 2025. The intent of the new zoning is to implement the recommendations of the *Mass Ave Planning Study (2025)*. The new zoning replaces the old base zoning district and overlay system with a new set of base zoning districts that include all use, dimensional, and design standards.

Section 17.802 of the Zoning Ordinance establishes the following goals for the Massachusetts Avenue corridor:

1. Transform the corridor as a livable, walkable neighborhood through the development of mixed-use buildings that help to establish a consistent street wall along Mass Ave and provide active, ground-floor uses.
2. Identify opportunities for development to contribute meaningfully to the Mass Ave public realm through the inclusion of additional trees and plantings, shading devices, art and cultural elements on sites and buildings, and places to passively recreate.
3. Encourage development to include, where needed, additional room for expanded sidewalk area and tree plantings.
4. Accommodate more housing development along Mass Ave through increased density. Address the need for affordable housing and integrate it into the existing neighborhood fabric.

The Massachusetts Avenue Districts include four base zoning districts: MAS-6, MAS-12, MAS-12A, and MAS-18. The number in each name corresponds to the greatest residential height allowed in that district. This project is located in the MAS-12A district. Allowed uses are typical of mixed-use districts – all residential and office uses, and most institutional and retail uses are allowed as of right. The zoning designates specific uses as “Active Uses” including all institutional and retail uses and some office uses. Projects are required to provide Ground Story Active Uses to achieve the greatest residential heights allowed in the zoning district.

There are no FAR limits for residential uses, and most non-residential uses are limited to 1.0 FAR, with some exceptions. Most non-residential uses are limited to 45 feet and 4 stories throughout the corridor. Residential uses follow two height regimes: one for residential-only buildings and one for mixed-use buildings with Active Uses on the ground floor.

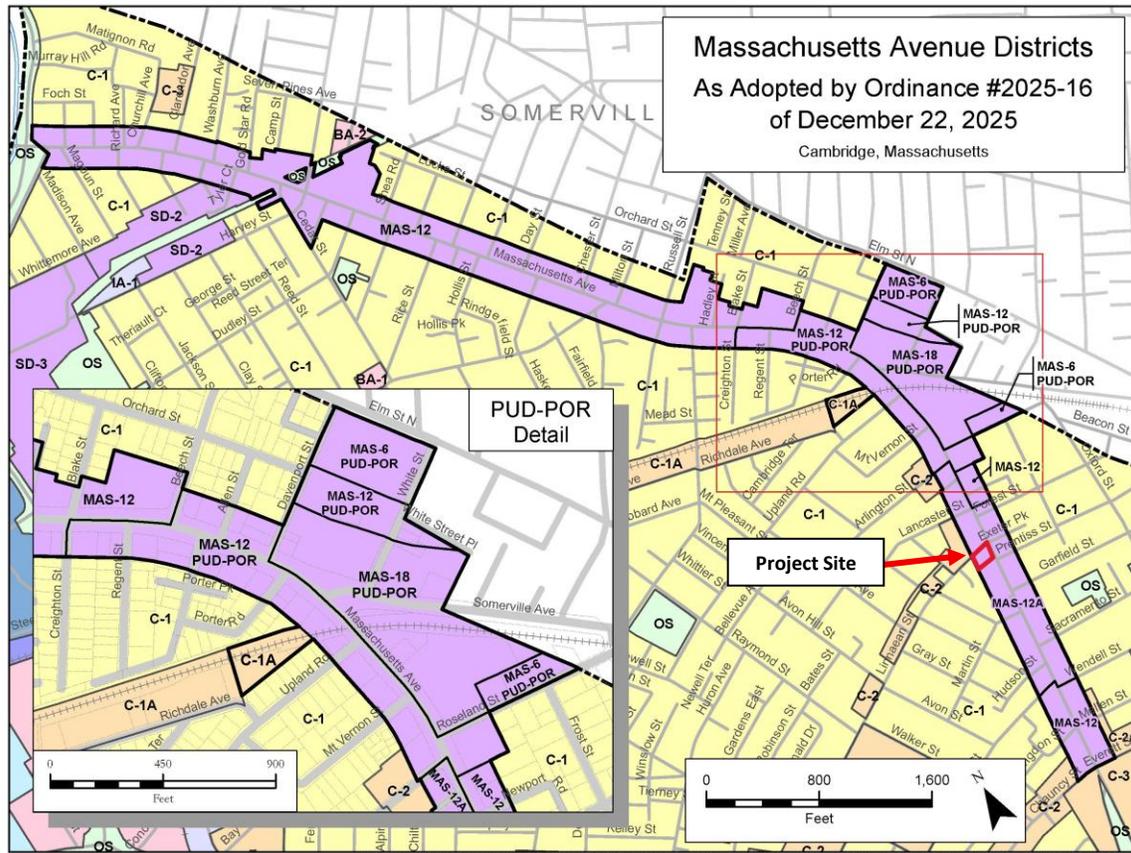
	<b>MAS-6</b>	<b>MAS-12</b>	<b>MAS-12A</b>	<b>MAS-18</b>
<b>Residential Uses (Section 4.31 a-j.)</b>	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	100 feet and 8 stories above grade	45 feet and 4 stories above grade	100 feet and 8 stories above grade
<b>Residential Uses with Ground Story Active Uses (Section 17.803.3)</b>	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade

The Mass Ave Districts have no open space requirements for buildings 8 stories or less. Buildings exceeding 8 stories must provide 15% of the total lot area as open space, including some public or publicly beneficial. Front yard setbacks differ based on whether the front lot line is abutting a Primary Street (Mass Ave or Somerville Ave) or a Secondary Street (any other street). No side or rear yard setbacks are required within 85 feet of a Primary Street, but 5-foot setbacks are required beyond 85 feet. Upper story setbacks are established above 8 stories facing a street, and above 6 stories facing a residence district boundary.

Advisory Consultation PBAC-2, 1740 Massachusetts Avenue – CDD Memo to Planning Board

In addition to typical dimensional standards, the Mass Ave Districts include a set of Building and Site Design Standards that apply to all new construction and supersede those established in Section 19.50, which would normally apply to projects greater than 25,000 square feet.

The Massachusetts Avenue Districts are considered Areas of Special Planning Concern and follow the development review procedures established in Article 19.000. Projects with over 75,000 square feet of residential or 20,000 square feet of non-residential GFA need a Project Review Special Permit from the Planning Board. Virtually everything smaller than that requires some kind of advisory review, including Planning Board advisory review for projects with 50,000-75,000 square feet of residential area.



## ***Development Plans and Guidelines***

### [Mass Ave Planning Study](#) (2025)

- This is the City’s 15-year plan for the future of Mass Ave between Cambridge Common and Alewife Brook Parkway. The plan envisions a Mass Ave that is: more of a neighborhood destination; more inviting; easier to get around; and has more housing options.
- Relevant Goals and Actions:
  - [More of a Neighborhood Destination](#), Strategy A: Foster a mix of local businesses including neighborhood-serving, family-friendly goods and services
    - Action 3: Explore ways to keep commercial rents affordable and vacancies low
  - [More Housing](#), Strategy A: Encourage more housing on the corridor
    - Action 1: Simplify the zoning code and streamline processes
    - Action 2: Adjust zoning along the corridor to achieve zoning objectives to build more housing and prioritize mixed-use development

### [Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing](#) (2025)

- This document provides guidance specifically for multifamily housing, relating to neighborhood context and site design, building design and massing, sustainable design, and other aspects of development.

### [Citywide Urban Design Guidelines](#) (2025)

- This document includes broader design guidance, including context and site, buildings, open space, and the streetscape.

### [Envision Cambridge](#) (2019)

- Massachusetts Avenue is considered a Major Mixed-Use Corridor and as such, “...should grow at a moderate, measured pace that takes advantage of transit proximity and enhances their unique character and sense of place.”
- Relevant Strategies and Actions:
  - [Housing Plan](#), Strategy 1: Increase overall housing production.
    - Action: Change zoning to enable more housing, including affordable housing, to be built along major corridors, squares, and in other areas that have the capacity to accommodate growth and are well served by transit (e.g., increase base zoning, allow multifamily residential development citywide, offer density bonuses for increased percentage of affordable housing units).
  - [Economy Plan](#), Strategy 4: Encourage a business climate that prioritizes local, independent businesses and enables inclusive entrepreneurship.
    - Action: Change zoning to increase density and achieve a mix of uses in targeted areas along Massachusetts Avenue and Cambridge Street, in order to build the customer base for retail.
  - [Urban Form Plan](#), Strategy 1: Increase density near transit nodes while accommodating the unique character of our squares and areas along the corridors.
    - Action: Adjust existing zoning near transit nodes to allow greater density while complementing the character of the surrounding area.

## **Current Proposal**

### ***Overview***

The site currently contains a 1-story building with roughly 8,300 square feet of commercial space, including a retail pharmacy, coffee shop, and clothing store. The lot is 12,425 square feet and includes 8 off street parking spaces in a lot accessible from Linnaean Street. The proposed project would demolish the existing building and build a new 6-story mixed-use building with about 9,000-10,500 square feet of commercial space between the first floor and the basement, and 71 residential units in the stories above.

The plans currently show 4 commercial spaces on the ground floor, each with its own entrance off Mass Ave, and one large commercial space in the basement, accessible from a commercial lobby fronting Mass Ave. The residential lobby is located around the corner on Linnaean Street. There are no off street parking spaces proposed but there is one residential loading bay that would be used for moving and trash services. The proposed project would include 75 long-term bike parking spaces in the basement – 74 for the residential tenants and 1 for the commercial users. The plans show 9 short-term bike parking spaces on Linnaean Street and 4 additional short-term spaces on Mass Ave.

The project proposes 624 square feet of permeable open space at the rear of the building opposite Mass Ave and 327 square feet of private open space above grade in the form of decks for individual units.

### ***Process Requirements – Advisory Review***

The Planning Board Advisory Consultation (PBAC) procedure is a non-binding development review process for any residential project between 50,000 and 75,000 square feet in gross floor area. The Planning Board has conducted this process for many Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) proposals, but the Multifamily Zoning Amendment adopted in February 2025 makes this process applicable to market-rate development projects as well. This will be the first PBAC review session for a predominantly market-rate housing proposal.

Unlike a special permit review, the Planning Board does not issue any approval or denial of a permit, nor does it establish conditions of approval. Planning Board's role is to provide guidance to the developer on how to comply with zoning and recommend design improvements.

The PBAC procedure includes the following steps ([Zoning Ordinance Section 19.47](#)):

1. Preliminary meeting with CDD and other City staff (complete)
2. Community engagement (complete)
3. Preliminary Consultation with the Planning Board  
The Planning Board reviews initial design plans and discusses how the project will meet zoning requirements, urban design guidelines, and other relevant planning objectives. The Board's action is to make a report to the developer on those issues and suggest revisions or further study that will improve the design.
4. Final Consultation with the Planning Board  
The developer submits a revised proposal for review at a second consultation. The goal of the final consultation is for the Planning Board to review project improvements and provide additional feedback. The final action is to submit a report with any final advisory comments, which is submitted to the developer and the Inspectional Services Department to verify the advisory process has been completed before a building permit can be issued.

**Zoning Compliance Summary**

The site is primarily within the MAS-12A district with a small portion within a Residence C-1 district. Per Section 3.32.1, where more than half of a lot is in a less restricted district, the more permissive dimensional regulations may be extended up to 25 feet into the more restricted district as-of-right for residential uses. This effectively makes the entire site subject to the dimensional regulations of the MAS-12A district.

Uses

<u>Proposed Uses</u>	<u>Requirements for MAS-12A</u>	<u>Summary of Compliance</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multifamily</li> <li>• Non-residential/Active Uses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multifamily dwellings allowed up to 12 stories</li> <li>• Active Uses required for buildings above 4 stories                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Required Active Uses must occupy at least 60% of floor area within 50' of Mass Ave</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residential uses occupy floors 1-6</li> <li>• Roughly 10.5k square feet of commercial floor area provided between the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and basement</li> <li>• Active Use requirement appears to be met, depending on final tenanting</li> </ul>

Development and Site Plan Standards

<u>Development Standard</u>	<u>Requirements for MAS-12A</u>	<u>Summary of Compliance</u>
<u>Gross Floor Area (GFA)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No max for residential</li> <li>• 1.0 FAR non-residential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total GFA: 64,349 sf</li> <li>• Non-residential GFA: 5,551 sf (0.45 FAR)</li> </ul>
<u>Building Height &amp; Stories Above Grade</u>	145' (max) 12 stories (max)	69.95' 6 stories
<u>Open Space</u>	none	951 sf total open space – entirely within C-1 district
<u>Yard Setbacks</u> Front (Primary Street) Front (Secondary Street) Side/rear within 85' Side/rear beyond 85'	3' (min) 2' (min) none 5' (min)	3' 3' 0.5' (Mass Ave) 5' (Mass Ave), 5' (Linnaean St.)
<u>Upper Story Setbacks</u> Primary Street Secondary Street Residence District	13' above 100' 12' above 100' 15' above 75' / 25' above 100'	N/A N/A N/A
<u>Projections into Setbacks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projections allowed up to 50% of façade area facing Primary Street (Mass Ave)</li> <li>• Projections allowed elsewhere subject to Section 5.24.1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projections into Mass Ave front yard setback cover 28% of façade area</li> <li>• More detail needed to confirm projections on Linnaean Street façade comply with Section 5.24.1.</li> </ul>

Building and Site Design Standards

<u>Design Standard</u>	<u>Requirements for MAS-12A</u>	<u>Summary of Compliance</u>
<u>Front Yard Design</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Front yards must be landscaped or hardscaped, and cannot be used for off-street parking</li> <li>• Access drives to parking facilities are allowed up to 30 feet of width for each 100 feet of frontage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Front yards on both Mass Ave and Linnaean Street are designed for pedestrian use, including sidewalk expansions and landscaping.</li> <li>• Width of the access drive for the loading bay appears to be less than 30 feet but more detail is needed.</li> </ul>
<u>Façade Transparency</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Façades facing streets must consist of at least 20% clear glass – 30% for non-residential uses</li> <li>• Ground story façades must consist of 50% clear glass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The developer noted in the narrative that the ground story will consist of 60% clear glass and the upper stories will be 25% transparent.</li> <li>• More detailed calculations shown on elevation drawings should be provided ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation.</li> </ul>
<u>Ground Story Design</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground story height must be at least 15’</li> <li>• Each use at the ground story must have an entrance directly from the Primary Street, or a Secondary Street where the use does not front the Primary Street</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed ground story heights are 16-18 feet.</li> <li>• Commercial spaces all appear to have entrances onto the Primary Street (Mass Ave). The residential use does not front the Primary Street on the ground story so the entrance on Linnaean St appears to meet the standard.</li> </ul>
<u>Street Trees</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New buildings 25k sf or greater must provide street trees, subject to DPW approval</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project proposes 3 new street trees on Linnaean Street. DPW will need to review the plans in more detail before a building permit is issued.</li> </ul>
<u>Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage, and Loading Areas</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mechanical equipment shall not be located in any required setback, unless the location is mandated by a recognized public utility.</li> <li>• Ground-level equipment shall be permanently screened, with screening of dense trees or fencing at least the height of equipment.</li> <li>• Roof-top equipment shall be permanently screened</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electrical equipment is proposed within the front yard setback on Linnaean Street in an underground vault. The developer notes this proposal will be coordinated with Eversource.</li> <li>• Trash facilities are located within the building.</li> <li>• Rooftop mechanical equipment is screened by a parapet. More detail is needed to determine if this is sufficient.</li> </ul>

Off-Street Parking, Bicycle Parking, and Loading Standards

The off-street parking, bicycle parking, and loading requirements of the Business A district generally apply as normal to the Massachusetts Avenue Districts.

<u>Development Standard</u>	<u>Requirements in Article 6.000</u>	<u>Summary of Compliance</u>
<u>Vehicular Parking</u>	No minimum/maximum	None proposed
<u>Loading Bays</u>	No minimum/maximum	1 loading bay proposed off Linnaean Street for residential uses
<u>Bicycle Parking</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Long term (min.)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Res.</li> <li>○ Non-res.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Short term (min.)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Res.</li> <li>○ Non-res.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Dimensions</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 space/dwelling unit (1<sup>st</sup> 20 DU)</li> <li>• 1.05 spaces/dwelling unit (per DU 21 and thereafter)</li> <li>• 0.1 spaces/1,000 sf</li> <li>• 0.1 spaces/dwelling unit</li> <li>• 1 space/1,000 sf</li> <li>• The project is subject to dimensional requirements for bicycle parking under Section 6.100</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 74 spaces are required and provided for residential uses</li> <li>• 1 space is required and provided for non-residential uses</li> <li>• 8 spaces are required and provided</li> <li>• 5 spaces are required and provided</li> <li>• Long-term bicycle parking spaces appear to meet the dimensional standards.</li> <li>• More details are needed to verify if the short-term parking spaces on Mass Ave meet the dimensional requirements. Bike racks must be 3' away from the building façade.</li> </ul>

Department of Transportation (DOT) staff have reviewed the proposed bicycle parking relative to zoning standards and asked for the following additional information to be provided before the final advisory review:

- Clearly indicate all existing and proposed curb cuts and confirm whether the 20-foot curb cut for the loading dock is necessary for its operation.
- Provide dimensions of the loading area and clarify the management plan. The loading area must meet the relevant dimensional and layout standards in Article 6.000.
- Consider making a contribution to the City Bike Fund instead of installing short-term bike parking on Mass Ave as allowed under Section 6.104.2.
- Coordinate with DOT staff to ensure the project is consistent with the City’s Mass Ave bike lane short-term and long-term improvements.

Inclusionary Housing (Section 11.203)

Inclusionary housing standards require at least 20% of the project’s net dwelling unit floor area to be used for affordable housing units if a project creates at least 10 units or at least 10,000 square feet of residential Gross Floor Area. For projects greater than 30,000 square feet, at least one family-sized affordable unit per every 6,000 square feet of affordable net dwelling unit floor area is required. Family-sized units have at least three bedrooms and at least 1,100 square feet of interior floor area.

Affordable units must be similar in quality and finish to market-rate units, have similar access to the building amenities, be dispersed through the building, and have units size distribution comparable to the

building overall. Housing Department staff reviews and certifies that the Inclusionary Housing Requirements are met at the Building Permit stage, and requires the recording of a covenant to guarantee permanent affordability of the inclusionary units.

The project narrative states that the project will comply with inclusionary housing standards by providing 13 affordable units, including 2 3-bedroom units. Housing Department staff will need to review the unit mix, location, and interior finishes in more detail before a building permit is issued.

Sustainability Requirements (Article 22)

Because the project involves the construction of a new building that is more than 25,000 square feet, it must comply with Green Building, Green Roof, and Green Factor requirements.

<b><u>Development Standard</u></b>	<b><u>Requirements in Article 22.000</u></b>	<b><u>Summary of Compliance</u></b>
<u>Green Building Requirements (Section 22.20)</u>	Projects at least 25,000 square feet in GFA required to be designed to LEED Silver, Passive House, or Enterprise Green Communities standards. Subject to review by a qualified professional. Certification by the rating agency is not required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project intends to meet Green Building requirements through Passive House (PHIUS) certification.</li> <li>• Summary of compliance is provided; additional compliance materials will be required ahead of the final Planning Board consultation.</li> </ul>
<u>Green Roof Requirements (Section 22.35)</u>	At least 80% of roof area, excluding mechanical equipment and usable space, must be green roof area or used for solar energy systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft documentation showing compliance with Green Roof has been provided. A mix of green roof area and solar photovoltaics are proposed.</li> </ul>
<u>Flood Resilience Standards (Section 22.80)</u>	Requirements for protection from 10% and 1% annual probability Long Term Flood Elevations (LTFEs) where they affect development on a site.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site is not subject to LTFEs, so Flood Resilience Standards will be met. Final documentation needed for DPW to certify compliance must be provided before the second Planning Board consultation.</li> </ul>
<u>Green Factor Standard (Section 22.90)</u>	New construction must employ roofs with a high solar reflectivity index and other site design features such as trees, plantings, green roofs, shade structures, and high-reflectivity pavement to achieve a minimum Cool Score.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft documentation showing compliance with Green Factor has been provided, with a draft Cool Score. Final documentation for Green Factor certification at the advisory review phase must be provided ahead of the second Planning Board consultation.</li> <li>• More detail needed on proposed canopy tree, which may not be viable due to its proximity to the property line on one side and the transformer vault on the other, and necessary sight lines out of the proposed loading area</li> <li>• Recommendations on building and site design will likely impact the Cool Score.</li> </ul>

### ***Community Engagement***

The developer held three community meetings between November 11 and December 10, 2025, including two hybrid meetings and one in-person meeting. One meeting was held in conjunction with Porter Square Neighborhood Association and one was with the Neighborhood Nine Community Group. Meeting notices were provided on site and emailed to the Porter Square Neighborhood Association, Taylor Square Neighborhood Association, and the Neighborhood Nine Listservs. Roughly 30-60 members of the public attended each meeting. The developer provides a comprehensive summary of the discussion topics in the submission materials.

### ***Ongoing Zoning Review Items***

The following is a summary of zoning considerations that will need further review:

- General note: the submission materials contain slight discrepancies between narrative and graphic materials regarding total non-residential space, number of bike parking spaces, number of inclusionary housing units, etc. These should be reconciled for the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation.

#### Massachusetts Avenue Districts Building and Site Design Standards (Section 17.805.4):

- Provide dimensions of the loading area, including the access drive.
- Elevation drawings should confirm façade transparency levels and provide details on how projecting features on Linnaean Street meet zoning requirements.
- More detail is needed to confirm the rooftop parapet is sufficient screening for the proposed mechanical equipment.

#### Off-Street Parking, Bicycle Parking, and Loading Standards (Article 6.000):

- More detail is needed to verify short-term bike parking spaces meet dimensional standards

#### Green Factor (Section 20.90):

- Provide more detail on proposed canopy tree to ensure its viability.

**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

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### Urban Design Comments

The proposed six-story mixed-use project at 1740 Massachusetts Avenue is generally compatible with the existing buildings on Massachusetts Avenue and the character of its streetscape. The building's slight setback from the parcel's property lines on Mass Ave and Linnaean Street (in accord with the new Mass Avenue Zoning) widens the sidewalks to create a more accommodating streetscape, yet its architectural design maintains the sense of an urban streetwall. The building will provide ground-floor retail/active uses on Mass Ave. On the building's north side, its residential entrance and lobby face Linnaean Street, a quiet and smaller scaled residential street. The western portion of the Linnaean Street facade is set back further from the public sidewalk, and is stepped back on its upper stories in response to the massing of the adjacent 2 ½ story pitched roof house.

The applicant met with staff several times as the design developed over the last few months; the current design incorporates many of staff's suggestions. While the project generally conforms to many of the city's goals for urban form, additional improvements could be considered to further enhance its fit with its urban context.

### **Consistency with Multifamily Design Guidelines**

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

- It provides a streetwall facade facing Massachusetts Avenue.
- The building mass it provides at the corner of the site—facing the intersection of Mass Ave and Linnaean Street—will help frame the grassy lawn on the opposite side of Linnaean Street.
- Its massing transitions between the larger scale and taller buildings common on Mass Ave and the smaller scale and lower buildings common on Linnaean Street.
- Its massing and facades are articulated into base (“pedestrian frontage zone”), middle, and top zones.
- Projecting elements break down the scale of facades.
- Ground floor retail/active use spaces are located along Massachusetts Avenue and at the corner facing the intersection with Linnaean Street. Their numerous entrances and large storefront windows will help activate the street. The tall floor-to-floor dimension of the ground story will offer flexibility of interior fit-out to retail tenants.
- The project provides a transitional outdoor space between the Linnaean Street sidewalk and the building's residential entrance.
- It proposes new street trees (subject to coordination with DPW).
- The transformer is concealed in an underground vault.
- The green roof and rooftop photovoltaic panels will reduce the urban heat island effect and generate energy.

## **Site Design**

The proposed building fills most of the site. The minimal setbacks on the east (Mass Ave), south, and west sides of the site leave little outdoor space for plantings or resident use. On its north (Linnaean Street) side, the building's ground floor is set back at the residential entrance by 10 feet, creating a sheltered outdoor area under the cantilevered upper stories. A slightly deeper setback at the western end of the Linnaean Street frontage creates a space for the proposed underground transformer vault and relates to the front yard setback of the existing neighboring house. Short-term bicycle parking is provided in the Mass Ave and Linnaean Street setbacks.

Further coordination with staff regarding ongoing city initiatives and additional detailed information about the site design would assist staff's review of the project.

## **Recommendations**

- Coordinate with the Department of Public Works and the Department of Transportation on the design of the Mass Ave and Linnaean Street streetscapes.
  - Continue to coordinate with the DPW and the DOT regarding the city's ongoing Mass Ave Partial Construction street design project. Plans call for a sidewalk-level bike lane and a bus stop on the site's Mass Avenue frontage. Ensure that the project is consistent with both short-term and long-term improvements to the bicycle lane. Ensure that retail/active use entrances will not be blocked by the bus shelter.
  - Coordinate with DPW and DOT on locating a Bluebikes station in the public sidewalk on Linnaean Street. The City will be responsible for the cost and installation of the station equipment. Space required for the installation and clearances needed to maintain an accessible sidewalk may affect the location of proposed street trees and other streetscape elements.
  - Inventory any existing bike racks on public sidewalk. Any removals must be coordinated with the Department of Transportation.
  - Discuss detailed locations of short-term bike racks on Mass Ave frontage and/or on making a contribution to the City Bike Fund on lieu of installing new racks on Mass Ave.
  - Resolve with DPW whether public easements should be created for public use of widened sidewalks that will extend into the parcel's front setback zones on Mass Avenue and Linnaean Street.
- To create a more welcoming place to linger and meet other residents, consider providing outdoor seating at the residential entrance, and consider relocating the short-term bike parking located in the Linnaean Street setback farther west, partially in front of the Management Office.
- The proposed canopy tree (Black Tupelo) at the northwest corner of the property is in a very constrained location, bounded by property line limitations on one side and the driveway and transformer vault on the other. Consider using a modular suspended pavement system to create favorable growing conditions. Verify whether the tree will cause visibility issues for vehicles leaving the loading area. Consider other landscaping options.
- To reduce the building's impact on its immediate neighbors, consider creating a broader green area located toward the interior of the block.

- Additional information regarding existing and proposed curb cuts would advance detailed discussions with DPW and DOT staff:
  - Indicate all existing and proposed curb cuts on the plans.
  - Investigate whether the proposed 20-foot curb cut for the loading dock could be reduced. (Provide documentation of turning movements).
  - Note that changes to curb cuts will likely require curb cut modification permits from the city. Approval should be acquired before a Building Permit is issued.

### **Building Design**

With the exception of the setback and stepbacks at the western portion of its Linnaean Street facade and a slight stepback on its south side, the building is a six-story-tall box, trapezoidal in plan to fit the shape of the parcel, and articulated into a base, middle, and top. Shallow projecting elements added to the middle zone of the Mass Ave and Linnaean Street facades—varied in size and proportion—introduce an intermediate level of scale.

Further efforts could be made to relate the building’s architectural design to specific aspects of the context. Mass Ave is a primary component of Cambridge’s civic structure, it is large-scaled and has a mixed-use character. Linnaean Street has a more residential/neighborhood character, it is narrower, and has mostly smaller-scaled buildings. The 1740 Mass Ave project presents the opportunity to engage the distinct characters of both streets, and at the same time – create a more articulate relationship between them.

In addition, further development of the building’s interior and more information regarding design assumptions would advance the advisory review process.

### **Recommendations**

- To strengthen the urban pattern, consider more assertively differentiating the building’s Mass Ave and Linnaean Street facades from each other, utilizing means such as massing, facade layout, proportions, design of fenestration, types and arrangements of projecting elements, materials, etc. Possible strategies include:
  - Treating the building as the union of two elements: a tall bar (or “slab”) along Mass Ave, with a regular facade expression of rhythmic bays; and a more informal stepped-back facade on the western portion of Linnaean Street.
  - On the Mass Ave Facade, providing a consistent series of projecting bay windows, each running continuously from the level of the second floor to the level of the sixth floor.
  - On the Linnaean Street facade:
    - Responding to the grassy open space on the north side of Linnaean Street by treating the easternmost 30 to 40 feet of the facade as a vertical facade, related to the Mass Ave facade, and distinct from the rest of the building’s north facade.
    - Responding to the smaller-scaled character of the rest of Linnaean Street by extending the stepped-back profile of the western portion of the facade farther east to meet that 30- to 40-foot-wide vertical zone.

- To further respond to the differences between the two streets and to add visual interest to the building's upper profile, consider breaking up the continuous horizontal massing of the building's sixth story.
- To reduce the building's impact on its immediate neighbors, consider setting back or stepping back portions of the building's south or west elevations.
- To more strongly relate to the rich detail of the buildings in the existing context:
  - Further develop the building's exterior details, joint patterns, finishes, and color palette to relate to the existing buildings on the Mass Ave and Linnaean Street.
  - Consider providing additional detail in areas of solid wall, in fenestration and sun shading elements, and balcony railings.
- Consider providing more variety in the design of the storefronts of the individual retail/commercial spaces along Mass Ave: fenestration, solid areas, materials, colors, etc.
- The sign band above the retail entrances and fenestration appears to be open—not a solid canopy. Consider making it solid, with an attractive soffit, so as to shelter pedestrians from rain.
- Develop the exterior lighting design to create a welcoming pedestrian experience along the streets and at the entrances to the retail spaces.
- Further develop the ground story façade on Linnaean Street, with particular attention to the area west of the residential lobby. Consider the use of decorative brick patterns and relief and the design of the garage door.
- Consider providing a richer and more visually appealing ground floor façade on the building's south side, where it faces the existing historical residential building at 1734 Mass Ave.
- Consider using public-facing walls for public art and placemaking activation.
- Evaluate the height of the parapet relative to the height of rooftop HVAC equipment and photovoltaic panels and vantage points on Mass Ave and Linnaean Street.
- Building Interiors
  - Provide accessible bathrooms for active use spaces.
  - Consider venting all retail spaces to facilitate possible food service use.
- Coordinate with DOT on transportation and on bicycle parking
  - Consider providing Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures to residents to help them not need to own cars. The city can provide cost effective recommendations.
  - Review the basement long-term bicycle parking room for clearances. Staff will be happy to advise.
  - Make sure there is elevator access to the long-term bicycle parking area and the access route meets all the requirements of Section 6.106. (Check the size of the elevator relative to extended bikes.)
  - Consider providing automatic door opening devices to make it easier for residents to transport their bikes from the bike room to outside.
  - Consider providing bike repair tools in the bike room.
- Loading area
  - Provide the dimensions of the loading area.

- o Clarify the management plan for loading operations: Will retail tenants be permitted to use the loading area in addition to its use for residential move-ins/outs and other uses serving the residential population?
- o Explain the trash removal process for the site.

## **Sustainable Design**

### Recommendations

- In coordination with DOT staff, consider providing additional street trees if possible.
- Consider providing additional sun-shading elements at retail and residential fenestration.
- As the proposed tree at the northwest corner of the site accounts for a significant percentage of the proposed Cool Score, carefully consider measures to ensure its viability.

### Consistency with City wide Urban Design Objectives

The project is generally consistent with the Citywide Urban Design Objectives:

- It increases Cambridge's housing inventory.
- It will be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly.
- It is generally responsive to the existing/anticipated pattern of development.
- It makes efforts to mitigate adverse environmental impacts on its neighbors.
- It reinforces aspects of Cambridge's urban form.

### Recommendations

See the above comments regarding:

- Recommendations to strengthen the project's fit with its contexts by adjusting the building's massing and facades.
- Coordination with the city's ongoing initiatives that will affect the streetscapes of Massachusetts Avenue and Linnaean Street.