



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: May 6, 2026

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

Overview

Submission Type:	Planning Board Advisory Consultation (PBAC)
Developer:	Old North Development Co.
Zoning District(s):	MAS-12A, partially Residence C-1
Proposal Summary:	Construction of a 6-story building to create 71 residential units, 75 long-term and 13 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and commercial space in the basement and first floor, with a gross floor area of 64,330 square feet
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.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	None

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Zoning & Development Staff Report

Overview

Old North Development Co. (the “Developer”) is proposing to demolish the existing 1-story commercial building and build a new 6-story mixed-use building with about 9,000-10,500 square feet of commercial space within the first floor and the basement, and 71 residential units in the stories above. 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 includes 75 long-term bike parking spaces in the basement. 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.

Planning Board Comments from Initial Consultation Meeting

The Planning Board appreciated several aspects of the project, including the diverse residential unit types and sizes, the provision of private outdoor spaces on balconies and a roof deck, and the selection of sturdy façade materials. Board members also commended the proposal to locate the transformer in an underground vault.

Board members encouraged the Developer to continue coordinating with the City on various site design elements, including the ongoing design work on Mass Ave and sidewalk improvements on Linnaean Street. The Board also asked the Developer to consider increasing the amount of permeable open space.

Board members were generally supportive of the façade design and proposed building massing but provided several suggestions for further study as the design progresses. The Board encouraged the Developer to study alternative strategies to differentiate the Mass Ave and Linnaean Street facades and to consider other color palette options. The Board requested more information to ensure rooftop mechanical equipment would be thoroughly screened from view and encouraged the Developer to consider increasing the size of the roof deck and providing more outdoor play space.

Staff Comments on Revised Submission

The City received a revised application dated April 14, 2026, including updated forms and narrative volume, revised graphics, and a revised appendix volume with additional Green Factor and Green Building documentation.

CDD staff are in communication with the Developer regarding revisions to the Green Factor and Green Building submissions but have not yet issued final certification for this stage of review.

In the initial [Zoning Memo](#) on this proposal, CDD staff noted that additional information would be needed to determine compliance with several zoning standards, which are highlighted below for the Board’s information:

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

- Elevation drawings on page 12 of the Graphic Volume appear to conform to zoning standards for façade transparency and projecting features.
- Roof plans on page 23 and street view renderings provided in the Graphic Volume show sufficient screening of the proposed mechanical equipment.

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

- Updated plans on page 13 of the Graphic Volume confirm bicycle parking spaces meet dimensional standards.
- Elevators will be sized to accommodate extra-long cargo bikes, ensuring access to long-term storage in the basement.

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"> • Multifamily • Non-residential/Active Uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifamily dwellings allowed up to 12 stories • Active Uses required for buildings above 4 stories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Required Active Uses must occupy at least 60% of floor area within 50' of Mass Ave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residential uses occupy floors 1-6 • Roughly 10.5k square feet of commercial floor area provided between the 1st floor and basement (basement area does not count towards GFA) • Active Use requirement appears to be met, depending on final tenancing

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"> • No max for residential • 1.0 FAR non-residential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total GFA: 64,330 sf • Non-residential GFA: 5,479 sf (0.44 FAR)
<u>Building Height & 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 the C-1 district
<u>Yard Setbacks</u>		
Front (Primary Street)	3' (min)	3'
Front (Secondary Street)	2' (min)	3'

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Side/rear within 85' Side/rear beyond 85'	none 5' (min)	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"> • Projections up to 4' allowed up to 50% of façade area facing Primary Street (Mass Ave) • Projections allowed elsewhere subject to Section 5.24.1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass Ave: 3' projections, 28% • Linnaean St: 3' projections, 23%. Appears to comply with Section 5.24.1

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"> • Front yards must be landscaped or hardscaped, and cannot be used for off-street parking • Access drives to parking facilities are allowed up to 30 feet of width for each 100 feet of frontage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front yards on both Mass Ave and Linnaean Street are designed for pedestrian use, including sidewalk expansions and landscaping. • Width of the access drive for the loading bay appears to be less than 30 feet. The proposed curb cut is 20 feet wide.
<u>Façade Transparency</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Façades facing streets must consist of at least 20% clear glass – 30% for non-residential uses • Ground story façades facing Primary Streets must consist of 50% clear glass for non-residential uses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Mass Ave façade</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground story: 69% • Upper stories: 30% • <u>Linnaean St façade</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-residential: 30% • Residential: 29%
<u>Ground Story Design</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground story height must be at least 15' • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed ground story height is 18 feet. • 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.
<u>Street Trees</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New buildings 25k sf or greater must provide street trees, subject to DPW approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

<p><u>Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage, and Loading Areas</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanical equipment shall not be located in any required setback, unless the location is mandated by a recognized public utility. • Ground-level equipment shall be permanently screened, with screening of dense trees or fencing at least the height of equipment. • Roof-top equipment shall be permanently screened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Trash facilities are located within the building. • Rooftop mechanical equipment is screened by a parapet.
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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 move in/out and trash pickup
<p><u>Bicycle Parking</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Long term (min.)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Res. ○ Non-res. • <u>Short term (min.)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Res. ○ Non-res. • <u>Dimensions</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 space/dwelling unit (1st 20 DU) • 1.05 spaces/dwelling unit (per DU 21 and thereafter) • 0.1 spaces/1,000 sf • 0.1 spaces/dwelling unit • 1 space/1,000 sf • The project is subject to dimensional requirements for bicycle parking under Section 6.100 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 74 spaces are required and provided for residential uses • 1 space is required and provided for non-residential uses • 8 spaces are required and provided • 5 spaces are required and provided • Short-term and long-term bicycle parking spaces appear to meet the dimensional standards.

Department of Transportation (DOT) staff have reviewed the proposed plans and asked for the following additional information to be provided before a building permit can be issued:

- Ensure proper sightlines at the proposed loading area driveway on Linnaean Street.
- 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.

Development Standard	Requirements in Article 22.000	Summary of Compliance
<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"> • Draft documentation has been provided but compliance has not yet been certified. CDD will need to certify Green Building compliance before a building permit can be issued.
<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"> • Draft documentation showing compliance with Green Roof has been provided. A mix of green roof area and solar photovoltaics are proposed. CDD will need to certify Green Roof compliance before a building permit can be issued.
<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"> • 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.
<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"> • Draft documentation has been provided but compliance has not yet been certified. CDD will need to certify Green Factor compliance before a building permit can be issued.

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

Overview

In its programming, siting, massing, and facade design, the proposed design is similar to that presented in the first Planning Board Advisory hearing on February 10, 2026: It is six floors tall, fills most of the site, and provides retail spaces along Mass Ave. Changes from the previous design are subtle, but positive. Many of them are responses to Planning Board comments and suggestions from staff.

Consistency with Article 19.30's Urban Design Objectives, The goals of the Mass Ave Planning Study, the Citywide Design Guidelines, and the Multifamily Design Guidelines

The proposed design continues to accord with many Cambridge's Urban Design Objectives, the goals of the Mass Ave Planning Study, and to generally follow the principles outlined in the Citywide and Multifamily Design Guidelines:

- The building's overall massing remains generally compatible with the existing buildings on Massachusetts Avenue and the character of its streetscape.
- It occupies the corner of its block and provides streetwall facades on both streets.
- The set back and stepped back massing of the western portion of the building's Linnaean Street facade helps it relate in scale to the adjoining house.
- The building's setback from the front property line on Mass Ave will provide additional clear pedestrian sidewalk width.
- The project will provide street trees on Linnaean Street.
- Its ground floor retail spaces will line Mass Ave and address the intersection of Mass Ave and Linnaean Street.
- Their high ceilings and high facade transparency will contribute to an enjoyable pedestrian experience. Short- and long-term bicycle storage is provided. Mechanical equipment is screened.
- The transformer is hidden in an underground vault.

Responses to Planning Board Comments and Staff Suggestions

The submission incorporates improvements in response to the Planning Board's comments and staff suggestions:

- A solid canopy with a wooden soffit and lighting is now provided above the first floor retail facades, replacing the earlier projecting open sign band.
- At the residential entrance on Linnaean Street, a seating area with low plantings has been provided, and the arrangement of short-term bicycle parking has been adjusted.
- Brick bond details and recessed panels on the ground story facades will enrich the pedestrian experience.
- The ground story has been adjusted at the building's southeast corner in response to the neighbor's concerns about sight lines at their driveway.
- The balconies have been divided into separate sections for each unit that opens onto them.

- The elevators have been enlarged to accommodate cargo bikes.
- The rooftop area occupied by HVAC condensers has been reduced, and the efficacy of their screening has been checked.
- The rooftop area dedicated to solar photovoltaic panels has been increased.

Additional Planning Board Comments

A few topics raised by the Planning Board have not yet been fully addressed:

- The possibility of providing sunshades on all of the south facing windows, instead of just some of them.
- More information could be provided regarding options for public art.
- The potential aesthetic contribution of the garage door facing Linnaean Street.
- The potential of alternative color schemes to enhance the building's compatibility with its context.
- The possibility of a stronger response to the civic importance of Mass Avenue in contrast to the smaller-scaled and residential nature of Linnaean Street.

Urban Design Comments on the Revised Design

While the building's siting and massing provide effective streetwall facades along Mass Ave and Linnaean Street, a more nuanced treatment of these facades would integrate the building more actively with its contexts and contribute more decisively to Cambridge's civic structure.

- The building could do more to respond to and reinforce the large scale and civic significance of Mass Ave in contrast to the smaller scale and residential character of Linnaean Street by adopting different facade strategies for the two streets.
 - Despite the differences in the size, character, and importance of the streets, the building uses essentially the same facade strategy for Mass Ave and all but the westernmost portion of Linnaean Street: a flat wall to which boxy projecting elements have been added on the second to fourth floors. While not identical, the approximate symmetry of the two facades about the diagonal to the intersection emphasizes the building's corner and equivocates the streets.
 - Consideration could be given to an alternative strategy, in which the building engages and emphasizes the differences in scale and character of the streets. One possibility would be to compose the building of two elements: The first—addressing Mass Ave—a regular slab-like mass, enhanced with four-story-tall bay windows at a consistent spacing; the slab's northern end distinct from the rest of the Linnaean Street facade and addressing the open lawn on the opposite side of Linnaean Street. The second—addressing the rest of the Linnaean Street frontage—a more freely arranged facade incorporating smaller scaled projecting elements.
- At the building's southeast corner, a two-story-tall boxy element at the building's second and third stories projects both toward the street and toward the neighboring property. It has fenestration on its Mass Ave side. Its side facade is windowless (probably in response to fire

separation requirements). Its height and dimensions recall those of the existing historical building.

- In attempting to relate the large size of the proposed building to the smaller scale of the neighboring historical building, however, the boxy element appears to compete with its neighbor, rather than complement it.
 - Consideration could be given to instead providing a full height element at the corner, allowing the new building frame the historical building and its front yard, rather than attempt to emulate its scale.
- Additionally, the blank squarish form of the corner element’s south side will be prominent for pedestrians as they look northward on Mass Ave. The blank panel has a slightly overlapping relationship to the height of the building’s blank first story wall facing the neighboring building.
 - Consideration could be given to providing more visual interest on the element’s south facing surface.
 - Consideration could be given to adjusting the relationship between the bottom of the squarish element and the top of the first story blank wall, and/or to distinguishing them by changes in material or color.
- The building’s top floor is proposed as a continuous cap on the building’s south and east sides, and on the majority of its north side, tending to emphasize the building as a unitary blocky mass. More articulation of the top floor would both add visual interest and could strengthen the building’s response to the site by distinguishing the portion of the building facing Mass Ave from the portions along Linnaean Street and that face the building’s neighbors.
- On the building’s west and south sides, the use of vertically vs. horizontally grained cladding materials is intended to distinguish its ground story from its upper stories. Consideration could be given to more differentiation between these zones, however, in terms of material, color, texture, or joint pattern.
- Consideration should be given to eliminating through-wall vents from the Mass Ave and Linnaean Street facades.

Ongoing Coordination with City Staff

The applicant will coordinate with city staff on the final designs of the Linnaean Street and Mass Ave sidewalks. Topics include:

- The final locations of street trees.
- Coordination with the city to locate a city-provided Bluebikes station on Linnaean Street.
- Forthcoming changes to the city’s Mass Ave bicycle lane construction project and the potential provision of a bus shelter on Mass Ave.
- Potential changes to the first floor facade on Linnaean Street if the proposed underground vault for the transformer cannot be achieved.