



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: April 9, 2025

Re: Special Permit **PB-407, 729, 735-737, 745, and 755 Concord Avenue**

Overview

Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Boylston Properties
Zoning District(s):	Office-1 (O-1) / Alewife Overlay District - Quadrangle (AOD-Q)
Proposal Summary:	Construct a 12-story residential building of approximately 232,464 square feet gross floor area with 236 residential units, 15 on grade parking spaces, and 272 long-term and short-term bicycle parking spaces.
Special Permits Requested:	Modification of setback requirements for on grade open parking facilities (6.44.1), Project Review Special Permit (19.20), Yard Requirements Waiver (20.1100.5.5.9.3), and Reduction of Green Roofs requirement (22.35.3)
Other City Permits Needed:	Stormwater Control Permit
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	Parking and Transportation Dept. (TP+T), Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate documents.

Melissa Peters | Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Special Permit in the AOD-Q District (20.1100)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal supports the purpose of the AOD-Q District. • The proposal is generally consistent with the vision and goals of the Envision Alewife District Plan (2019) and the Principles of the Alewife Zoning Working Group (2023). • Development plans are in general conformance with the Alewife Design Guidelines (2023) and the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30 of this Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Board may grant special permits for development that deviates from specific design guidelines if the Board finds that the proposal, on the whole, advances the intent of those guidelines.
Project Review Special Permit (19.20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic Impact Findings. Special permits will be granted if the project has no substantial adverse impact on city traffic as analyzed in the Traffic Study. • Urban Design Findings. The Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the city as set forth in Section 19.30.
Reduction of Required Green Roof Area (22.35.3)	The Planning Board may grant a special permit to reduce the required Green Roof Area provided that each square foot so reduced be compensated by a unit price contribution to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust.
Modification of On-Grade Parking Setback (6.44.1(g))	<p>Special permit may be granted to allow for modifications of the requirements in 6.44.1 (a) or (b) if site specific factors favor such modifications.</p> <p><i>6.44.1 (b) Except for one, two, or three family dwellings existing at the time of the effective date of this Ordinance or amendment thereto, no on grade open parking space or driveway shall be located within five (5) feet of any side or rear property line.</i></p>
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43:</p> <p>(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or</p> <p>(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or</p>

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">(c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or(d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or(e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Area Planning and Zoning

Site Context

Neighborhood/Area: Alewife Quadrangle

Development Patterns: Evolving commercial area with various types of legacy industrial uses gradually converting to a mix of higher-scale R&D-focused commercial buildings and multifamily housing.

Nearby Features: Fresh Pond Reservation is just to the south of the Quadrangle. Nearest transit service is by bus along Concord Avenue. Fitchburg Rail Line separates the Quadrangle from the MBTA Alewife Station and development along Cambridgepark Drive. A regional shopping cluster is to the east along Alewife Brook Parkway.

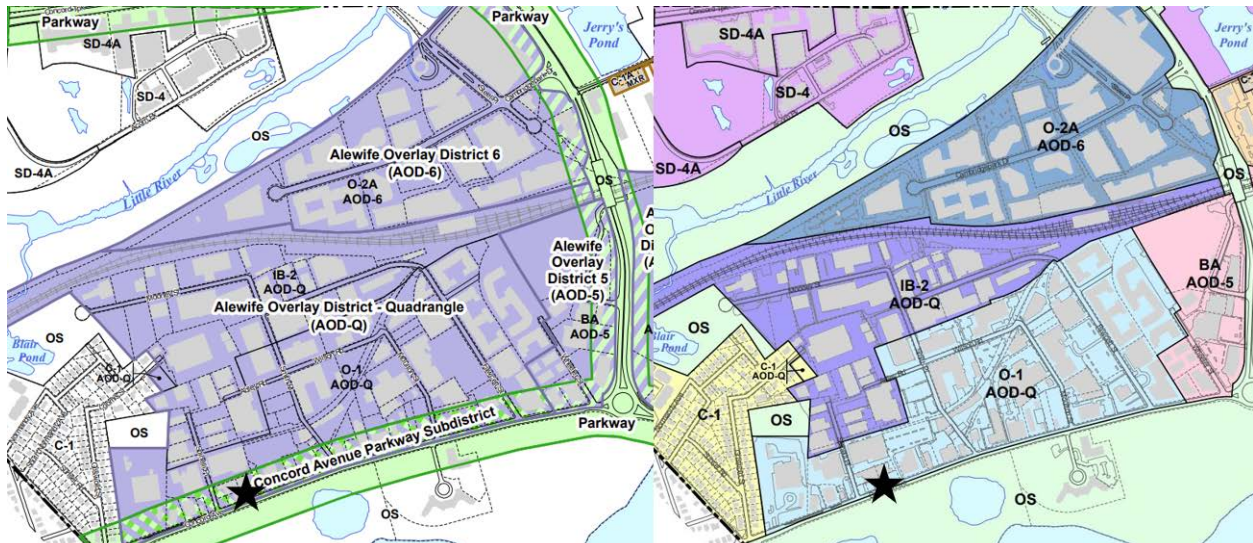


Aerial Context Map showing 745 Concord Avenue. Source: Nearmap, 2024.

Site Zoning

General description: Major redevelopment falls under the Alewife Overlay District – Quadrangle (AOD-Q) zoning adopted in 2023. The AOD-Q allows development at greater height and density, with greater flexibility in setbacks and uses, subject to Planning Board approval and general conformance with the objectives of the Alewife District Plan (2019) and Alewife Zoning Working Group (2023).

	Base District	Overlay District(s)
District(s):	Office-1 (O-1)	AOD-Q
Allowed Uses:	Residential, institutional, office and laboratory	Residential, institutional, office and laboratory, retail and consumer service, some light manufacturing
Max. Building Height	6 stories above grade / 75 feet for residential use 35 feet for non-residential use	12 stories above grade / 145 feet for residential use Varies for non-residential use
Max. FAR/GFA	N/A for residential use 0.75 FAR for non-residential use	4.00 FAR for residential use Varies for non-residential use
Required Setbacks	10-foot front for residential use No side or rear for residential use Formula-based setbacks for non-residential use	Front “build-to” zone based on desired future street sections 15-foot side setback more than 65 feet from frontage
Required Open Space	15% of lot area	20% of lot area overall <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of required open space must be public or publicly beneficial • 25% of lot area must be permeable (even if not counted as open space)
Parking	Maximum parking ratios for non-residential use	Lower maximum parking ratios Pooled parking allowed across district
Other District Standards or Requirements	N/A	Breaks in massing of buildings over 200 feet in length Min. 18-foot ground story height Limits on location of surface and structured parking and curb cuts Standards for location of entrances and fence dimensions Required street tree planting at regular 30-foot intervals Infrastructure contributions for non-residential development



Map of zoning overlay districts (left) and base zoning districts (right).

Development Plans and Guidelines

The Alewife District Plan (2019) establishes goals for the area.

Specific goals for the Alewife Quadrangle created during the 2023 Alewife Zoning Working Group process, which led to the current zoning, include:

- Create a balanced, vibrant, and mixed-use district;
- Increase housing supply, including affordable housing;
- Promote uses which help to establish and support a self-sustaining neighborhood;
- Prioritize the early delivery of critical infrastructure to support the district; and
- Transition and scale development appropriately to existing adjacent neighborhoods.

Current Proposal

Overview

The site is currently a one-to-two-story brick commercial building on a site that is otherwise completely paved and used for parking and loading. At the corner of Concord Avenue and Spinelli Place is a small lawn area owned by the City of Cambridge, which is separated from the development site by a private “paper street” diagonally cutting the corner which is not currently in use. To the west is Eastern States Road, a private street providing vehicle access to sites to the north.

The proposal is to demolish the existing conditions on the site and build a 12-story multifamily residential building with 236 dwelling units. The edges of the site would be surrounded by landscaping and a small parking lot would be provided in the northwest corner. The “paper street” would be re-established as an access and drop-off area for the front entrance, clarifying the boundaries of the city-owned open space at the corner.

Proposed Uses

The Application proposes the following uses on the site:

Proposed Uses	Location/Size	Allowed/Special Permit?
Multifamily dwelling (4.31-g.)	236 dwelling units	Allowed

Proposed Dimensions

The Application proposes the following dimensions for development on the site:

Dimension	Proposal	Relief Sought?
Gross Floor Area (GFA)	232,464 SF (approx.)	AOD-Q special permit required
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	4.8 (max. 4.00 + 30% inclusionary bonus)	AOD-Q special permit required
Height and Stories	12 stories / 145 feet above grade	AOD-Q special permit required
Setbacks	25-foot front on Concord Ave 15.5-16.5-foot fronts on Spinelli and Eastern States 10-foot side yard (north boundary)	AOD-Q special permit required to reduce 15-foot side yard setback more than 65 feet into lot (north boundary)
Open Space	27% total; 25% permeable Street frontage programmed as publicly beneficial open space with seating areas and plantings	Complies with AOD-Q standards
Other Design Standards	Building frontage broken by courtyard into lengths <200 feet Ground story height ~22 feet (w/ mezzanine) Main entrance on Concord Ave Surface parking and curb cut located on side street	Complies with AOD-Q standards (details including fence height and street tree locations to be reviewed)

Proposed Parking, Bicycle Parking, and Loading

The Application proposes to provide:

- 15 surface parking spaces, with 11 spaces in a lot at the northwest corner and 4 short-term spaces parallel to a private access street cutting the corner from Concord Ave to Spinelli Place.
- 248 long-term bicycle parking spaces, located inside the building on the ground story and mezzanine.
- 24 short-term bicycle parking spaces, located in outdoor racks along the edges of the site.

Special Permits

The Application seeks these special permits:

- Alewife Overlay District – Quadrangle (20.1100): The AOD-Q district requires a special permit for increased height and FAR as proposed for this development. The intent of the special permit is not to prohibit development at the allowed scale but to provide a process to ensure that the site design is consistent with the planning and design objectives for the area.

Many of the specific design standards in the AOD-Q zoning can also be modified by the Planning Board if the project is in general conformance with the objectives. The Application proposes to meet all design standards except that it seeks a reduction in the required side yard setback, which only applies to areas at least 65 feet into the lot, from 15 feet to 10 feet. The reduction is minor and applies to an area that functions more as a rear yard than a side yard, but is technically considered a side yard because the site has three street frontages.

- Project Review Special Permit (19.20): Residential development with at least 75,000 square feet of GFA is subject to a project review special permit, which is granted if the project is found consistent with the city's urban design objectives and will not cause adverse traffic impacts considering the findings of a Transportation Impact Study (TIS) and proposed mitigation. Refer to the Urban Design Report and Transportation Department memo for commentary on those topics.
- Reduction of Required Green Roof Area (22.35): New residential buildings with at least 25,000 SF GFA are required to have 80% of the roof area devoted to Green Roof Area of Solar Energy Systems. However, areas required for mechanical equipment or maintenance and usable outdoor space are exempted from the calculation. The Application shows the majority of the roof area (about 19,590 SF) as exempted, with only 760 SF remaining that is subject to the requirement. There is 600 SF of Green Roof Area proposed at level 10 of the building next to an area to be used by building occupants.

Although the Application is intending to meet the requirement, it can be difficult to make an exact determination of whether the proposal complies until the building permit stage.

Therefore, it is typical for applicants to seek preemptive approval of a reduction by special permit. That way, if the project is determined not to meet the 80% requirement at the building permit stage, the remainder can be met with a contribution to the Affordable Housing Trust used to install green or solar roofs on affordable housing developments.

- Reduction of Required Parking Setback (6.44.1(g)): General parking standards require surface parking to be set back 5 feet from a rear or side lot line, but there is broad discretion to approve modifications by special permit based on site-specific factors. Normally these special permits are granted by the BZA, but the Planning Board can grant the permit along with other special permits for a project before the Planning Board. In this case, the proposed parking lot would be built to the lot line, where it abuts another existing surface parking lot.

Other Zoning Requirements

Based on its size and location, the proposal is subject to the following general standards in zoning:

- Green Building Requirements (22.20): Triggered by at least 25,000 square feet of GFA. The initial stage Green Building Report has been reviewed by CDD staff. Based on the documents submitted, the project is expected to achieve the minimum criteria for certification using the Passive House Rating System. The applicant is pursuing Passive House certification. Because this is a residential project, an embodied greenhouse gas emissions analysis is not required.
- Flood Resilience Standards (22.80): Applies to all new construction. A report has been provided to DPW on the City's projected Long-Term Flood Elevations (year 2070) on the site. The project plan shows that the building's lowest elevations will be above the projected 10% and 1% probability flood levels.
- Floodplain Requirements (20.70): Although a Floodplain Narrative is provided with the application, the project is outside of the Flood Plain Overlay District so those standards do not apply.
- Green Factor Standard (22.90): Applies to all new construction. The project is proposing to meet the standard by providing a high-SRI roof and meeting a "Cool Score" of 1.57 through its site design. Most of the Cool Score is attained by planting 11 new canopy trees on the site, with the rest achieved through planting understory trees, high and low shrub planting areas, lawns, use of high-SRI pavement, and shade canopies.
- Inclusionary Housing Requirements (11.203): Triggered by at least 10 units or 10,000 square feet of residential GFA. A minimum of 20% of the project, based on the final net (interior) floor area of dwelling units, must be affordable to low and moderate income households. Some of the affordable units will be required to be family-sized (3+ bedroom) units. The requirements will be certified by the Housing Department at the building permit stage and enforced through a restrictive covenant.

Non-Zoning Requirements

- Tree Protection Ordinance: This is the only relevant non-zoning requirement applicable to this review. As required for a Project Review Special Permit, the Application includes a tree removal plan which shows that there are no significant trees on the site. The only proposed planting removal is a staghorn sumac shrub. The proposed conditions on the site will include 11 new shade trees and 20 new understory trees, plus additional street tree plantings are proposed along the adjacent sidewalk.

Advisory Review

The Applicant has had many advisory review sessions with staff, starting in 2022 when the zoning for the Alewife Quadrangle area was first being considered. Several more sessions were held throughout 2024, after the new zoning was adopted, to review the design and provide feedback as it evolved.

Community Engagement

The Application summarizes the project team's community engagement program as required by the Planning Board Rules. The team hosted an on-site open house and a virtual meeting in September, 2024, both of which were attended by community members. The Applicant conducted additional engagement with Cambridge Highlands neighbors, owners and representatives of abutting sites including Fayerweather Street School, Mount Auburn Hospital, and West Cambridge Science Park, and with several City Councillors.

Overall Comments

This is the first major development proposed in the Alewife area since the adoption of the AOD-Q zoning in 2023 and the first market-driven multifamily residential proposal in the area since 55 Wheeler Street, which was permitted in 2018 and only completed in 2024. Given the challenges faced by multifamily housing development in recent years, it is exciting to see a new proposal at this scale. It is especially exciting for this area, where additional housing is a key planning objective.

From a zoning standpoint, the proposal is fairly straightforward. The AOD-Q zoning encourages residential and mixed-use development, with fewer requirements or limitations on residential development compared to commercial. For a residential project, the main consideration for the AOD-Q district is whether the site design supports the future conditions of the area, which focuses on improved conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists as the area transitions from mostly auto-oriented commercial uses to a mix of residential and office/lab. Other requirements in the AOD-Q district, such as neighborhood uses and contributions to broader infrastructure improvements, are not applicable to residential development. This is intended to avoid barriers to additional housing.

Adapting to desired future conditions is a challenge for the designers, but the project team in this case has been extraordinarily diligent in working with staff to make sure that the project fits within the future conditions plan. As a site with three frontages, the proposal complies with all AOD-Q standards that are intended to improve the surrounding public realm as directed by the Alewife District Plan, especially the planned future street cross-sections. The only place where flexibility is being sought is at the rear of the site, which is preferable if it helps to support the desired outcomes along the site frontages.

This project will also support the city's affordable housing and sustainability goals as it will be subject to the inclusionary housing requirements and the city's robust standards for sustainable design, climate resilience, energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reduction.

Special Permit Conditions

If the Board decides to grant the special permit, the following list summarizes the general categories of conditions recommended for this development based on the requested special permits:

- **Approved Development:** Authorized development would need to conform with the submitted application materials. An Approved Dimensional Form would be attached as an Appendix.
- **Permitted Uses:** The special permit would authorize multifamily residential uses. In the future, uses that are allowed by zoning but not authorized by the special permit would require Planning Board approval, and uses that are limited by the Zoning Ordinance (e.g., requiring a separate special permit from the Planning Board or BZA) would need to seek the necessary relief.
- **Design Review:** CDD staff would review and approve design details at the construction documents phase, prior to issuance of a building permit, to certify that the plans conform to the Planning Board's approval. Board members may cite specific areas of focus for detailed review, based on the Urban Design Report and Board discussion.
- **Transportation and Infrastructure:** Work being done on City property would be subject to review and approval by appropriate City departments, including DPW, Transportation and CDD. Land dedicated to public use (including new sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure) will be subject to recording of easements with the City. Additional conditions may be included as recommended in the DPW memo. Transportation mitigation measures, as recommended in the Transportation Dept. memo, would be included as conditions.
- **Sustainability:** Development will be subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20 and the Green Factor Standard in Section 22.90, which will be reviewed again by CDD staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages. Compliance with Green Roof Requirements in Section 22.35 would be reviewed at the building permit stage, and if the final design is determined not to meet the full Green Roof Requirement then a payment would be made to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust to account for the difference in required and provided square footage.
- **Housing:** Development will be subject to Inclusionary Housing requirements, which will be certified by the Housing Department at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages.
- **Construction Management Program:** Per Section 18.20, staff would recommend a Construction Management Program be provided and approved by the Transportation Dept., DPW, and other applicable City departments before issuance of a building permit. This program would also include a community outreach program designating a point of contact to provide information to the public during the construction process and notification panels posted on the site with project information.

Appendix - Zoning Text Excerpts

6.44.1 Setbacks for on grade open parking facilities shall be provided as follows:

- (a) No on grade open parking space shall be located within ten (10) feet of that portion of a building wall containing windows of habitable or occupiable rooms at basement or first story. However, on grade open parking spaces serving one, two, or three family dwellings may be located within five (5) feet of that portion of such building wall.
- (b) Except for one, two, or three family dwellings existing at the time of the effective date of this Ordinance or amendment thereto, no on grade open parking space or driveway shall be located within five (5) feet of any side or rear property line.
- (c) No on grade open parking space shall be located within a required front yard setback
- (d) The area between the required parking setback line and the building or lot line shall be landscaped and maintained in accordance with the requirements of Subsection 6.48.
- (e) No on grade open parking shall be allowed in a Residence C-2A district within one hundred and twenty five (125) feet of a Residence C-1, C-2, or C-2B District.
- (f) In an Industry C district, no parking lot shall be located within fifty (50) feet of a residential district or within twenty five (25) feet of an open space district, a park or public recreation area or the right of way of a designated parkway.
- (g) The Board of Zoning Appeal may grant a special permit to allow for modification of the requirements in 6.44.1 (a) or (b) if site specific factors favor such modification.

General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

10.43 *Criteria.* Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:

- (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or
- (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or
- (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or
- (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or
- (g) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and
- (h) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Project Review Special Permit

19.25 Review Criteria. In granting a special permit under this Section 19.20 the Planning Board shall make the following findings.

19.25.1 Traffic Impact Findings. Where a Traffic Study is required as set forth in Section 19.24 (3) above the Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area as analyzed in the Traffic Study. Substantial adverse impact on city traffic shall be measured by reference to the traffic impact indicators set forth in Section 19.25.11 below. [Further discussion in TP+T memo]

19.25.2 Urban Design Findings. The Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the city as set forth in Section 19.30. In making that determination the Board may be guided by or make reference to urban design guidelines or planning reports that may have been developed for specific areas of the city and shall apply the standards herein contained in a reasonable manner to nonprofit religious and educational organizations in light of the special circumstances applicable to nonprofit religious and educational activities.

Criteria for Issuance of Special Permit in Alewife Overlay District – Quadrangle

21.1100.8.4.3 Criteria. In addition to the criteria in Section 10.43 of the Zoning Ordinance and other criteria specific to the special permit being sought, the Planning Board shall grant a special permit only if it finds that the following general criteria are met:

- (a) The proposal supports the purpose of the AOD-Q District.
- (b) The proposal is generally consistent with the vision and goals of the Envision Alewife District Plan (2019) and the Principles of the Alewife Zoning Working Group (2023).
- (c) Development plans are in general conformance with the Alewife Design Guidelines (2023) and the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section [19.30](#) of this zoning ordinance. The Planning Board may grant special permits for development that deviates from specific design guidelines if the Board finds that the proposal, on the whole, advances the intent of those guidelines.

Reduction of Required Green Roof Area

22.35.3 Exemption. The Planning Board may grant a special permit to reduce the required Green Roof Area, Biosolar Green Roof Area, or Solar Energy System below the area required by Section 22.35.2, provided that each square foot so reduced be compensated by a unit price contribution to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust. This unit price shall be determined based on the average costs to design, install, and maintain green roofs and rooftop solar energy systems in Cambridge using actual cost figures to the extent possible, shall be subject to annual adjustment based on standard construction cost indices, and shall be calculated, and recalculated approximately every three years, by the Cambridge Community Development Department. All such funds contributed to the Trust shall be dedicated to the design and incorporation of Green Roof Area, Biosolar Green Roof Area, or Solar Energy Systems into new or existing affordable housing developments.

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

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

745 Concord Avenue will be the first building along the avenue designed under the Alewife Overlay District-Quadrangle (AOD-Q) Zoning adopted in 2023. The site is within the AOD-Q South Height Subdistrict, which allows 12 stories above grade for residential uses. The project's 236 residential units, which will be subject to inclusionary housing requirements will contribute to the transformation of the Alewife Quadrangle into a vibrant mixed-use district. With one minor exception (see the Z&D memo), the design conforms to the build-to zones and setback lines established by zoning.

The project will set a precedent for future buildings along Concord Avenue, giving it a new and more urban scale. Its height and massing are commensurate with the Avenue's role as an important entrance to the City of Cambridge and as the interface between the Alewife Quadrangle District and Fresh Pond Reservation. The project will help realize the city's planned streetscape layouts for Concord Avenue, Spinelli Place, and Eastern States Road.

The application includes an extensive account of how the design responds to the Alewife Design Guidelines (2023). Highlights include:

- The design of building massing to frame adjoining streets and the adjoining city owned parcel.
- The shaping of the building's mass and the design of its facades to reduce sense of bulk.
- The design of facades to provide visual interest and to create a sense of a ground floor "people scaled" pedestrian zone.
- The provision of common spaces on a high-ceilinged ground floor.
- The location of the service entrance and parking in relatively unobtrusive locations.
- The provision of numerous trees and lower plantings, both on site and in the adjoining city-owned parcel at the intersection of Concord Avenue and Spinelli Place.
- An interest in entering into an agreement with the city to improve the city-owned parcel with new landscaping.
- The location of the building's transformer within the building volume.
- The control of light trespass.

During the design process the applicant met with city staff on numerous occasions, working closely on the project's site plan (including its improvements to the adjoining streets), and on the building's massing and façades.

Proposed Site Design

- The site layout conforms to the street sections for Concord Avenue, Spinelli Place, and Eastern States Road as established in the AOD-Q zoning.
 - It provides improved or new bike lanes, sidewalks, street trees, and vehicular lane widths.
 - It provides a floating bus stop for the west-bound route on Concord Avenue.

- The front setback on Concord Ave is treated as public amenity. It is enhanced by low plantings, benches, and short-term bicycle parking. Numerous new canopy trees will provide shade and shelter.
- A diagonal easement at the southwest corner of the site, held by the property owners along Spinelli Place, and a triangular city-owned parcel at the intersection of Concord Avenue and Spinelli Place pose unique constraints on the site plan and building massing.
 - The site plan re-establishes a vehicular drive on the easement as a covered drop-off for the building's lobby.
 - The building's western facade is angled in plan in accord with the site's southwest property line.
 - The applicant is open to negotiating with the city for the use and maintenance of the triangular city-owned parcel. The drawings suggest improvements that will be made to it, assuming that such an agreement is reached, including the provision of a 19-dock Bluebikes station (the same size as the station that currently exists on the city-owned parcel) and plantings.
- A south-facing courtyard, an "Amenity Garden" for building residents, is visually open to Concord Avenue, but separated from the Concord Avenue front yard it by plantings and a low wall.
- A total of 15 Parking spaces are provided on-site, including drop-off parking spaces along the covered drive under the building's western wing. The applicant is working with the owners of 35-59 Smith Place and the Atmark Building on Fawcett Street for the use of additional spaces.
- The existing site is essentially impervious. The proposed project surpasses the minimum zoning requirements for permeable and vegetated area.

Comments on Site Design:

- The applicant should continue to coordinate with staff on the details of curb cuts; crosswalks; cycle tracks; the intersections of cycle tracks and driveways, Eastern States Road, and Spinelli Place; the bus stop; and tree planting standards.
- Consider smoothing out the dogleg jog of the sidewalk along Eastern States Road.
- Evaluate whether the area along the north side of the building can be planted.
- Consider additional street trees on Concord Ave for shade and greater spatial continuity: on the east side of the entrance drive and south of the city owned parcel.
- Consider additional street trees on Eastern States Road (while maintaining appropriate vehicular sightlines).
- Evaluate tree locations relative to sight lines at intersections.
- Consider creating an agreement for public access to the front yard along Concord Avenue as a POPS (Privately Owned Public Space) and providing appropriate signage.

Proposed Building design

- The proposed building's generally U-shaped configuration reduces the perceived bulk of the building by dividing the building's streetwall façade into two smaller elements.

- The building's developed massing is conditioned by the unique circumstances of the site. Its western façade is angled to in response to the property line of the triangular city-owned parcel. Its eastern wing extends along Concord Ave to hide the service yard and parking lot in the northeast corner of the site.
- The building façade's division into base, middle, and top zones helps mitigate its considerable height:
 - The majority of the building's facades – on the typical upper floors – are clad with off-white three-dimensionally shaped metal panels. Their shaping and trim provide visual detail and texture. Vertically striated green spandrel panels link pairs of windows vertically.
 - The ground floor facades are clad in green terracotta. Their large windows reflect the common spaces on the building's interior. Projecting canopies and a trellis/loggia in the Amenity Garden emphasize pedestrian scale.
 - The building's top is subtly articulated from the floors below by the form design of the building's top two stories at the most prominent corners, slightly cantilevering over the recessed stacked balconies below. Folded panels at the very top of the facades and a thin continuous edge that caps them implies a cornice while refraining from overt historical reference.
 - The western wing is two floors shorter than the rearmost bar and the east wing, further reducing the building's apparent bulk. It is clad in vertically striated green metal, similar in color to the first-floor terracotta, further breaking down the building's bulk by its contrast with the typical facades and also enabling it to serve as a tower-like landmark at the entrance to Spinelli Place. The recessed balconies at its western folded corner create a distinctive crenelated pattern, further emphasizing its uniqueness. A roof terrace for residents at its 11th floor overlooks the Fresh Pond Reservation
- The extensive ground floor spaces facing Concord Avenue open onto the Amenity Courtyard and continue along the Concord Avenue frontage. They include the entrance lobby (accessed from Concord Avenue via an outdoor seating area), a living room, a mail lounge, and a co-working space.
- There are large bicycle parking rooms on ground floor and the mezzanine.
- The rooftop mechanical appears to be set back sufficiently to minimize visibility from grade.
- The building will comply with Passive House requirements for energy efficiency.

Comments on the Building Design:

The massing is a good response to the site; the facades incorporate well developed shallow three-dimensional shaping and textures and details. Some relatively minor comments on the design could be made:

- Further development of the ground floor facades facing the Amenity Garden.
- Clarify whether the “painted metal trellis” along the north side of the Amenity Garden is open and consider plantings on it.

- On the green clad west wing, consideration could be given to creating an additional interruption on the angled western portion of its wrapper-like facade, for instance a second vertical rectangular figure of grouped windows.
- Consider increasing the amount of green roof if possible, either on the high roof, or on the roofs of the ground floor projections into the Amenity Garden.

Continuing Review:

The following are additional recommendations for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Façade details.
- The location and design of public art.
- Review of plant species and locations, including on the City-owned parcel.
- Details of sidewalks, crosswalks, curb cuts, bicycle lanes, and bus shelter.
- A mockup of materials for Planning Board review and approval before materials are purchased, showing colors and details of cladding panels, trim, windows, balconies, etc.
- Rooftop mechanical equipment and possible need for screening.
- Public art.
- Design of exterior lighting to minimize glare and light trespass.
- Potential for the front yard setback along Concord Avenue to be a POPS (Privately Owned Public Space), and if this course is pursued, the development of an agreement to that effect.