



To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: June 10, 2026
Re: Special Permit **PB-411, 8 Winter Street**

Overview

Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Syed Jafry / Carlos Ferreira
Zoning District(s):	CAM-6, partially Residence C-1
Proposal Summary:	Construct a 6-story residential building of approximately 24,819 square feet gross floor area with 23 residential units, 24 long-term and 4 short-term bicycle parking spaces.
Special Permits Requested:	Modifications to Building and Site Plan Standards (17.705.1.3)
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

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Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Cambridge Street Building and Site Plan Modification Special Permit Criteria (Section 17.705.1.3)	<p>The Planning Board may approve modifications to the building and site plan standards upon finding that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the criteria in Section 17.707.2 are met and (ii) modifications respond to site specific conditions that result in a design that is equally supportive of the purpose of the Cambridge Street Districts.
Cambridge Street General Special Permit Criteria (Section 17.707.2)	<p>In granting a special permit within the Cambridge Street Districts, the Planning Board shall find that the following criteria are met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The proposal supports the purpose of the Cambridge Street Districts as described in Section 17.702. (b) Development plans are in general conformance with the vision and goals of the Our Cambridge Street Planning Study (2023) and the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30 of this Zoning Ordinance and are consistent with the Citywide Urban Design Guidelines (2025) and Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing (2025) as applicable.
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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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 (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

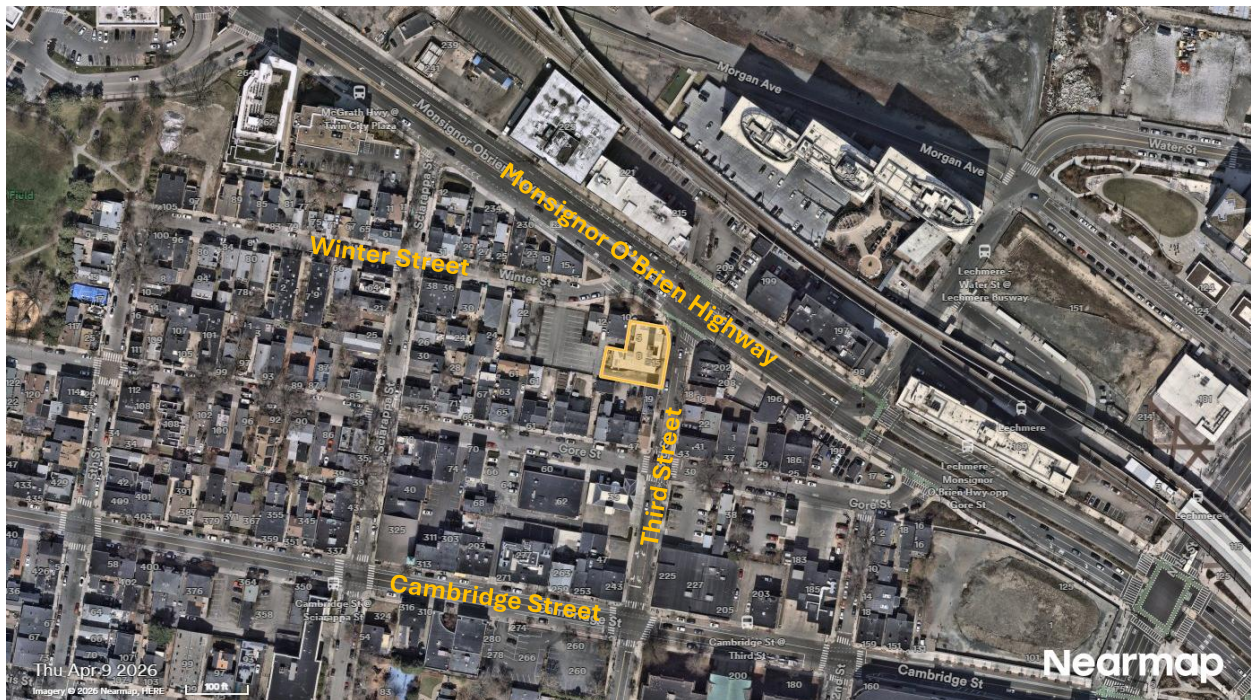
Area Planning and Zoning

Site Context

Neighborhood/Area: East Cambridge/Monsignor O’Brien Highway

Development Patterns: Monsignor O’Brien Highway serves as the border between the established East Cambridge neighborhood and the evolving Northpoint/Cambridge Crossing area. The southern side of the highway is characterized by dense, urban residential development of 2-3 stories with business uses on O’Brien Highway and Cambridge Street. Heights on the northern side of the highway increase to 6-8 stories and include a mix of uses including residential, hotel, commercial, and industrial uses.

Nearby Features: The Lechmere Green Line MBTA station is located only a few blocks to the southeast along Monsignor O’Brien Highway. The Twin City Plaza shopping center and Gold Star Mothers park are located a few blocks up O’Brien Highway to the northwest. Cambridge Street is two blocks south of the site.



Context Map for 8 Winter St.
Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, 2026

Site Zoning

Cambridge Street Districts (Section 17.700)

This is the first project before the Planning Board within the new Cambridge Street Districts, adopted by the City Council on January 26, 2026. The intent of the new zoning is to implement the recommendations of the *Our Cambridge Street Study (2023)*. The new zoning replaces the old Business A zoning district with a new set of base zoning districts that include all use, dimensional, and design standards.

Section 17.702 of the Zoning Ordinance establishes the following goals for the Cambridge Street corridor:

1. Maintain established patterns of land use while allowing new infill development that complements existing buildings;
2. Encourage residential and mixed-use development while incentivizing additional density for development that includes active ground floor retail uses;
3. Promote a dynamic urban streetscape and an accessible public realm through building and site design, and;
4. Allow the production of a diverse mix of economically viable ground floor retail uses.

The Cambridge Street Districts include three base zoning districts: CAM-6, CAM-10, and CAM-12. The number in each name corresponds to the greatest residential height allowed in that district. This project is located in the CAM-6 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 CAM-10 and CAM-12 districts. There are no Ground Story Active Use requirements in the CAM-6 district.

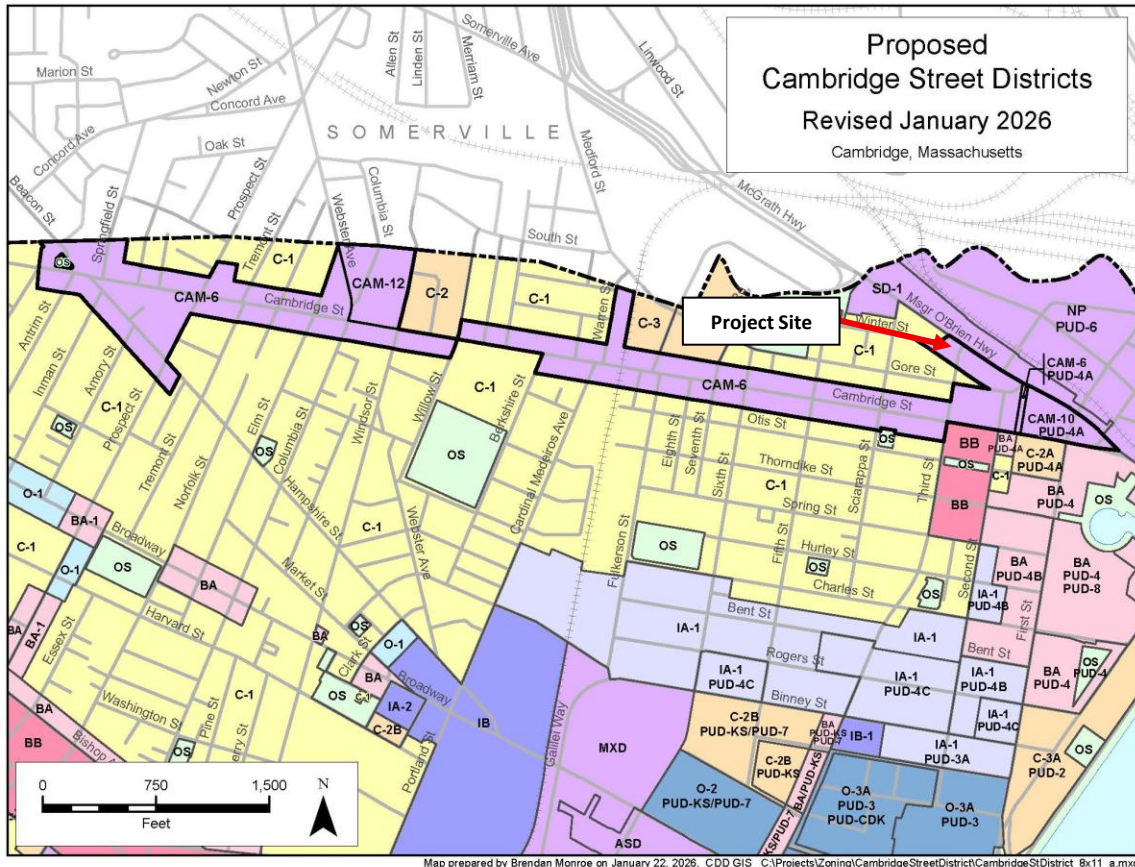
There are no FAR limits for residential uses, and most non-residential uses are limited to 1.0 FAR, with some exceptions. Most non-residential uses are limited to 35 feet and 3 stories throughout the corridor. Residential uses follow two height regimes: one for residential-only buildings and one for mixed-use buildings with Active Uses on the ground floor.

	CAM-6	CAM-10	CAM-12
Residential Uses (Section 4.31 a-j.)	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	75 feet and 6 stories above grade
Residential Uses with Ground Story Active Uses (Section 17.703.3)	75 feet and 6 stories above grade	120 feet and 10 stories above grade	145 feet and 12 stories above grade

The Cambridge Street Districts have no open space requirements for buildings 6 stories or less. Buildings exceeding 6 stories must provide 15% of the total lot area as open space, including some public or publicly beneficial for buildings taller than 8 stories. Front yard setbacks differ based on whether the front lot line is abutting a Primary Street or a Secondary Street. Primary Streets include Cambridge Street, North First Street, Hampshire Street, Monsignor O’Brien Highway, and Prospect Street. Secondary Streets include all other streets. 4-foot front yard setbacks are required on Primary Streets and 2-foot setbacks are required on Secondary Streets. 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 6 stories in the CAM-10 and CAM-12 districts.

In addition to typical dimensional standards, the Cambridge Street 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 Cambridge Street 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.



Cambridge Street Active Use Zoning Petition (2026)

The City Council is currently considering a zoning petition intended to strengthen active use requirements in the Cambridge Street Districts. As initially proposed, the petition would rezone the project site from CAM-6 back to Business A. Monsignor O'Brien Highway is a couple of blocks away from Cambridge Street and has a distinct development pattern from the rest of the district. Some of the development standards and active use requirements designed to support an active streetscape on Cambridge Street do not necessarily transfer to O'Brien Highway.

Development Plans and Guidelines

[Our Cambridge Street Study](#) (2023)

- This is the City’s plan for the future of Cambridge Street between Lechmere and Inman Square. The plan envisions a Cambridge Street that is inviting, local, affordable, accessible, and resilient.
- Relevant Goals and Actions:
 - [Affordable](#), Strategy 7: Encourage higher density mixed use residential
 - Action B: Increase allowable heights for mixed use/residential buildings to 6 stories

[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)

- Cambridge Street 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 is located at the intersection of Winter Street, Monsignor O’Brien Highway, and Third Street, with frontage primarily on Third Street. It is two blocks north of Cambridge Street. Due to the adjacent sidewalk bump-out, the site is relatively removed from Winter Street itself. The proposal is to build a 6-story multifamily residential building with 23 dwelling units. A private way runs around the side and rear of the site, connecting Third Street to Winter Street.

In 2023, the previous owner of the site was granted a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) for dimensional relief under prior zoning to demolish the existing 1-story commercial building and construct a 5-story residential building. The project received a building permit shortly after relief was granted by the BZA. When the multifamily zoning amendments were adopted in February 2025, the Applicant, who had taken over the project from the initial owner, began the process to amend their building permit to add a 6th floor to the project, which was allowed in the district after the 2025 zoning amendments.

The current Cambridge Street zoning was adopted in January 2026, before an amended building permit was issued but after construction had begun on the building’s foundation and elevator core. The CAM-6 district also allows up to 6 stories of residential development but introduced new setback requirements and design standards that the project as initially designed does not meet. Construction of the elevator core, foundation, and framing up to the floor of the second story is complete.

Proposed Uses

Proposed Uses	Location/Size	Allowed/Special Permit?
Multifamily dwelling (4.31.g)	23 dwelling units	Allowed as-of-right

Proposed Dimensions

Development Standard	Proposal	Relief Sought?
<u>Gross Floor Area (GFA)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total GFA: 24,819 sf Non-residential GFA: N/A Exceeds threshold for Inclusionary Housing Requirements (Section 11.200) 	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Building Height & Stories Above Grade</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 63.3’ 6 stories 	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Open Space</u>	None	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Yard Setbacks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1’ (O’Brien Hwy) 7.5’ (Third St.) 16’ (Third St.) / 8’ (Winter St.) 16’ (Third St.) / 8’ (Winter St.) 	Building and Site Plan Standards Modification special permit required for front yard setbacks (17.705.2.3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-foot front yard setbacks are required on Primary Streets

<u>Projections into Setbacks</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >50% of Primary Street facade 	Building and Site Plan Standards Modification special permit required for façade projections (17.705.2.6)
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Cambridge Street Building and Site Design Standards

Design Standard	Proposal	Relief Sought?
<u>Front Yard Design</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front yards appear to be a mix of landscape and hardscape • Roughly 18’ drive aisle for trash pickup and bike parking access off Third St. 	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Façade Transparency</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans calculate 20% windows facing Third St., 25% facing O'Brien Hwy • No more than 25' expanse without window or entryway 	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Ground Story Design</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground floor height varies from 13.3’ to 14.8’ above sidewalk grade • No direct entrance from O’Brien Hwy sidewalk 	Building and Site Plan Standards Modification special permit required for ground story height and ground story entrances (17.705.4.7 and 17.705.4.8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15-foot ground story heights are required on Primary Streets • Ground story uses must have a direct entrance from the Primary Street
<u>Street Trees</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project is less than 25k sf 	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage, and Loading Areas</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformer located behind building – not in required setback 	Complies with CAM-6 standards (screening details for rooftop mechanicals, trash area, and transformer need further review)

Proposed Parking, Bicycle Parking, and Loading

Development Standard	Proposal	Relief Sought?
<u>Vehicular Parking</u>	None proposed	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Loading Bays</u>	None proposed	Complies with CAM-6 standards
<u>Bicycle Parking</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Long term (min.)</u> • <u>Short term (min.)</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 spaces required and provided • 3 spaces required, 4 provided 	Complies with CAM-6 standards (access and security of long-term spaces may need further review)

Special Permits

The Applicant seeks a special permit to modify the Building and Site Plan Standards of the Cambridge Street Districts. Specifically, the special permit would allow the following modifications:

- Allow reduced front yard setbacks
- Allow more than 50% of façade to project into required front yard setbacks
- Allow ground story height below the minimum 15 feet
- Allow ground story use with no entrance from the Primary Street

To grant this special permit, the Planning Board must find that the project on the whole meets the objectives of the district, modifications respond to unique site-specific conditions, and the project generally conforms to the goals of the Our Cambridge Street Study and any other relevant city plans and design guidelines.

This site is within the Cambridge Street Districts but not directly located on the corridor, so some of the district's objectives may be less applicable to this project. The relevant standards in this case were designed to expand the public realm and support active Primary Streets. O'Brien Highway is the designated Primary Street in this case, but the site is primarily oriented towards Third Street, which supports a mix of uses but is more residential in nature. Though the site technically abuts O'Brien Highway, it is disconnected from the Primary Street by a landscaped sidewalk bump-out in the public right-of-way. There is a significant grade change from O'Brien Highway along Third Street, which the project addresses through retaining walls on the O'Brien Highway front. The project supports the housing goals in the *Our Cambridge Street Study* and *Envision Cambridge* plans by adding 23 new units of housing including 20% affordable residential floor area.

Other Zoning Requirements

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.

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. Housing Department staff are working with the Applicant to confirm 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, it must comply with Flood Resilience and Green Factor requirements.

Development Standard	Requirements in Article 22.000	Summary of Compliance
<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. DPW has certified compliance.
<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"> • Green Factor standards will be met by planting 3 new understory trees and 1 canopy tree. The new roof will have an initial SRI of 99. • CDD has certified compliance.

Non-Zoning Requirements

As noted, the previous iteration of this project has already received a building permit from the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). This proposed building permit modification has been reviewed and approved by the Fire Department and Department of Public Works.

Advisory Review

The Applicant has had numerous advisory review sessions with staff, beginning in 2025 after the multifamily zoning amendments were adopted. Several more sessions were held after the Cambridge Street zoning was adopted, leading up to this special permit request.

Community Engagement

The Application summarizes the project team’s community engagement efforts. The Applicant held a community meeting on July 29, 2025 to discuss the building design, construction management plan, and anticipated development impacts. The meeting was advertised through direct mailings to abutters and an on-site notice. The project team presented project plans and drawings and answered questions from attendees at the meeting and have been available for additional questions following the meeting.

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:

1. **Approved Development:** Authorized development would need to conform with the submitted application materials. An Approved Dimensional Form would be attached as an Appendix.
2. **Permitted Uses:** The special permit would authorize multifamily dwelling 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.
3. **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.
4. **Transportation and Infrastructure:** Work being done on City property would be subject to review and approval by appropriate City departments, including DPW, DOT, and CDD.
5. **Sustainability:** Development will be subject to the Green Factor Standard in Section 22.90. These will be reviewed again by CDD staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages. Development will be subject to the Flood Resilience Standard in Section 22.80, which will be reviewed again by DPW staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages.
6. **Housing:** Development will be subject to Inclusionary Housing requirements, which will be certified by Housing Department staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages.
7. **Construction Management Program:** Per Section 18.20, staff would recommend a Construction Management Program be provided and approved by DOT, 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

Special Permit for Cambridge Street Districts Building and Site Plan Modification

- 17.705.1.3** The Planning Board may approve modifications to the standards of this Section 17.705 by special permit upon finding that:
- (i) the criteria in Section 17.707.2 are met and
 - (ii) such modifications respond to unique site specific conditions that result in a design that is equally supportive of the purpose of the Cambridge Street Districts.

Cambridge Street Districts General Special Permit Criteria

- 17.707.2** In granting a special permit under this Section or any other special permit granted by the Planning Board, the Planning Board shall find that the following criteria are met in addition to the criteria in Section 10.43 of the Zoning Ordinance and other criteria specific to the special permit being sought:
- (a) The proposal supports the purpose of the Cambridge Street Districts as described in Section 17.702.
 - (b) Development plans are in general conformance with the vision and goals of the Our Cambridge Street Planning Study (2023) and the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30 of this Zoning Ordinance and are consistent with the Citywide Urban Design Guidelines (2025) and Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing (2025) as applicable. 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.

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.

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities
Development should be resilient to the effects of climate change as anticipated in the <i>Resilient Cambridge</i> plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up-to-date projections of climate change impacts over the project's anticipated lifespan are incorporated • Flood Resilience Standard in Section 22.80 and the Green Factor Standard in Section 22.90 are met or exceeded • Use of strategies that have environmental co-benefits • Integrative approach to climate change resilience that accounts for the existing context and promotes the other design objectives of the area and the City.

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

Introduction:

Project Description

The 8 Winter Street project proposes replacing the current single-story commercial use and associated parking with a 6-story, 23-unit residential-only building. The building primarily orients itself toward Third St, with both resident and vehicular access located along this frontage. No off-street parking is proposed; however, the project is proximate to the Green Line Lechmere T Station as well as bus routes along Monsignor O'Brien Highway and Cambridge St. The project's design is subject to Article 19.30 – Citywide Urban Design Objectives of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, the Citywide Urban Design Guidelines (2025), and the Multifamily Design Guidelines (2025).

Context

8 Winter is located on the edge of the East Cambridge neighborhood at the intersection of three roads: Winter St, Third St, and Monsignor O'Brien Highway. Third and Winter Streets share a similar scale with a mix of 2-3-story buildings and a 45' wide right-of-way, however they differ slightly in character- Winter St is more consistently residential and terminates at Gold Star Mothers Park, while Third St supports a mix of uses and provides connections to the businesses along Cambridge St as well as Kendall Square.

Monsignor O'Brien Highway presents a substantially different scale at 100' wide and marks a distinct transition in the urban fabric between the dense, 2-4-story housing typifying East Cambridge to the south and the larger, 5-8-story hotels and post-industrial buildings to the north. The continued redevelopment of parcels fronting O'Brien Highway's southern side provides an opportunity to introduce buildings whose scale better corresponds to size of the public realm, and can help reinforce the road's continued evolution from a vehicle-focused highway into a multimodal boulevard.

Pre-existing Conditions

The program, siting, and massing of the proposed project represent a substantial improvement over the prior existing conditions. Previously, the site was occupied by a single-story retail space (Dunkin Donuts) with a suburban approach to siting in which all portions of the parcel outside the building were paved and utilized for parking. The building was set back from Third St behind a portion of that parking, and the curb cut to access these spaces extended the majority of the site's length along Third St up to the intersection with O'Brien Highway. The building failed to address Winter St in any substantial way.

In contrast, the site plan of the proposed building better aligns with the tenets of the zoning ordinance and urban design guidelines: that buildings should address and define the streets they front, that vehicular circulation and utilities should be minimized and shielded from view, and that both buildings and landscaping should enhance and positively contribute to the public realm.

Unique Considerations

The ability to influence more fundamental aspects of the project’s design such as building siting, access, and massing is complicated by the construction undertaken on the project to date. The foundation, elevator core, elements of the stair cores, the first floor, and the floor of the second floor have all been erected and are therefore relatively fixed conditions. Due to this, the comments in the following memo focus primarily on elements of the design that are still likely able to be modified without substantial reworking of those portions of the project that already exist.

Proposed Site and Landscape Design:

The building follows the L-shape of its site, with one leg of the “L” anchoring the frontages along Third Street and Winter Street, and the other extending back into the mid-block along Linehan Court. The building’s primary façade and entrance are located along Third St, which is logical given its longer length and greater visibility than Winter Street. The ground floor is set back roughly 7’-6” along Third St, providing opportunities for a planting zone which enhances the public realm and provides for a small entry plaza. The ground floor along Winter Street is set back 3’, with the building above projecting out to meet the lot line. This frontage has the unique condition of a large sidewalk extension (bulb-out) that extends the full length of the site, which is planted and hosts three large canopy trees.

The site slopes down roughly three to four feet heading north along Third Street, and an additional two feet along Winter Street. The project proposes to address this grade change through a series of brick retaining walls along the back of sidewalk which vary in height from two feet to six feet tall. Along Winter Street, an exterior staircase provides an additional means of access to the site, though there are no additional entrances to the building from the rear beyond an egress door to the west stair tower.

Long-term bicycle parking and trash storage are located at-grade beneath the rear leg of the building, enclosed by a 5-6’ tall fence. The transformer is located at the rear of the site where the proposed and neighboring buildings will shield it from view. Bicycle and vehicular access to the site is accommodated via both Linehan Court from Third Street and via a Private Way from Winter Street.

Comments on Site and Landscape Design:

- The entry plaza along Third Street could be designed to provide a more welcoming amenity space for the residents to gather. Consider including seating, potentially integrated with the proposed retaining walls, and ensure the short-term bicycle parking is holistically integrated.
- Where possible, reducing the height of the taller portions of the brick retaining walls along the back of sidewalk would provide a more pleasant experience for pedestrians. Incorporating textures, panels, or other modulating elements into the brick’s surface will help it read less monolithic. If possible, incorporate seating facing the sidewalk into the wall as a public amenity.
- Consider including a concrete sidewalk along the building’s south side connecting the sidewalk along Third St to the long-term bicycle storage. If preserving adequate width for vehicular access is a concern, this sidewalk could be designed to be flush with the adjacent paving.
- Integrate the exterior stairs that provide access from Winter Street into the design of the adjacent retaining wall.

- Consider using the same style of fence for both the trash and long-term bicycle parking to visually unify them.
- Explore if additional plantings can be accommodated in the area in between the Proposed Canopy Tree along Linehan Court and the Transformer and Long-term Bicycle Storage.
- Wherever possible, select native plant species.

Proposed Building Design:

Massing

The building presents a strong streetwall along both Third and Winter Streets, with an overall height that bridges between the shorter fabric of East Cambridge and the larger scale of O'Brien Highway. Cantilevered portions above the ground floor along Third and Winter St add depth and shadow, and balconies oriented towards Third Street provide private outdoor spaces for residents that enliven and activate the façade. The balconies also serve the purpose of modulating the blank exterior wall of the eastern stair tower on the upper levels.

Floorplans

All units benefit from two exposures that allow increased access to daylight and cross-ventilation, and a high proportion contain two and three bedrooms, allowing families to be accommodated. While the ground floor interior lobby space has limited frontage along Third Street, windows have been included in that level of east stairwell to bring additional transparency and activation to the façade. Ample tenant storage is provided in the basement, which could also double as additional interior bicycle storage.

Façade Composition

The building creates a clear distinction between the ground floor pedestrian zone and upper streetwall levels, shifting materially from a brick to cementitious panel respectively. The ground floor height is proportionally less than might be recommended in relationship to the street wall above; however, it primarily contains residential units that require less clearance than active ground floor uses. Along Third Street, the two cantilevered bays and the balconies between them are unified into a single compositional element that projects from the building's primary volume. Different cladding patterns are applied to each elevation and the corners of the building- at some locations they extend across multiple floors, while at others each floor is distinguished individually.

Comments on Building Design:

- The intersection of Third Street, Winter Street, and O'Brien Highway is an important moment in the urban fabric that provides a prominent view of the site. Consider if adjustments to the upper level massing, façade design, and windows at this location could better anchor the intersection and create a stronger visual relationship to this corner at the scale of O'Brien Highway.
- The pattern of cementitious panels on floors two through six would benefit from a more regularized and simplified approach that highlights and reinforces the underlying composition of building volumes, bays, and balconies.
- Explore strategies to extend the apparent height of the ground floor, especially as the site slopes towards Winter St. Reducing the height of the retaining walls could expose more of the building façade and create a better proportional relationship between the ground floor and streetwall.

- Using different materials for the ground floor cladding and the retaining walls would more clearly distinguish the building from the landscape elements.
- Locating living spaces at the building corners could allow opportunities for additional glazing.
- Consider including additional windows in the middle portions of the South elevation.
- Including a canopy facing Third St would visually reinforce the building entrance and could enhance the design of the entry plaza.
- Consider specifying a more architecturally sympathetic material for screening the rooftop mechanical equipment than the proposed chain link fence slats.
- Consider including a green roof or rooftop photovoltaic panels to enhance sustainability.

Continuing Review

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

- Façade details.
- Further refinement of the landscape design, specifically the entry plaza, retaining walls, and plant species and locations.
- Clarification of the intended fencing for the trash storage and long-term bicycle parking areas.
- Further details on the proposed screening for the rooftop mechanical equipment.
- Physical samples of the proposed materials for Planning Board review and approval before materials are purchased, showing colors and details of cladding panels, trim, windows, etc.
- Ensure exterior lighting is programmable, dimmable, directional, and dark-sky compliant to minimize glare and light trespass.
- Coordinate the location, species, and size of the proposed street trees with the Department of Public Works.
- Coordinate the reconstruction of the sidewalk and roadway with the Cambridge Department of Public Works and Department of Transportation.