CITY OF CAMBRIDGE | CDD Community Development

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: November 5, 2026

Re: Affordable Housing Overlay Design Consultation **AHO-12** and Special Permit **PB-413, 350 Rindge Avenue**

Overview

Submission Type:	Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Advisory Design Review + Special Permit Application
Applicant:	350 Rindge LLC
Zoning District(s):	Residence C-1A, Mixed Use Residential (MXR) Overlay
Proposal Summary:	Construction of a 10-story building to create 92 affordable rental units and amenities under the AHO. Proposal includes a 5,000 square-foot retail grocery store on the first floor under a Special Permit.
Special Permits Requested:	Section 20.22 to allow a retail use exceeding 2,500 square feet of gross floor area on the first floor of a new residential building in the MXR District.
Other City Permits Needed:	Stormwater Control Permit
Planning Board Actions:	• For the residential building: Review and comment on conformance with AHO Development Standards, City Development Guidelines for the proposal area, Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing, and Citywide Urban Design Objectives. • For the retail use: Grant or deny requested special permit.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate document.

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The special permit criteria applicable to this project are summarized in the table below. Full zoning text excerpts are provided in the appendix below.

Zoning Section	**Required Planning Board Findings** *(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)*
MXR Special Permit Criteria (Section 20.25) – retail establishment exceeding 2,500 square feet in a new building	In granting a special permit, the Planning Board should take into consideration the following findings: 1. The proposed use will contribute to an environment that is supportive of residential uses; 2. The scale, design, operations and location of the proposed use on the lot will not significantly impair the health, safety and welfare of current residents or impair the prospects for construction of new residential uses on adjacent lots or within the district, or alternately will positively contribute to the health, safety and welfare of residents in the district; 3. The new construction design could be reasonably converted to residential use in the future; 4. If building on a vacant lot or expanding an existing non-residential facility by more than 15% of its existing GFA, the lot is not suitable for residential use per its location and surrounding uses. Where the lot may be suitable for residential use, the proposed construction is to serve an existing operation or enterprise found to be an important contributor to the Cambridge economy; 5. The design and layout of the new construction includes measures to mitigate or prevent negative impacts on present and future residential uses, such as visual and acoustical screening of mechanical equipment, enclosure of trash within the structure, and location of loading and delivery services in the least obtrusive areas of the lot.
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	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 following criteria: (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.
Conditional Retail or Consumer Service Establishments Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43.1)	In granting a special permit for Retail or Consumer Service Establishments, the following factors should be considered: (a) Anticipated delivery and loading operations, their potential impacts on neighboring uses and the overall neighborhood, and the extent to which those impacts are mitigated; (b) The extent to which neighboring uses would be impacted by environmental nuisance such as dust, fumes, odors, smoke, vapors, noise, vibration, flashing, light trespass, or glare, and the extent to which those impacts are mitigated; (c) The extent to which storefronts and other elements of the façade visible to the public are compatible with the visual character of the surrounding area and conform to the City's urban design objectives for retail uses in the area; and (d) Where citywide or neighborhood plans have been published by the City that identify types of retail uses that are preferred or desirable in the area, such plans may be considered in support of such identified uses where they are proposed.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Site & Zoning Context

Site Context

The site consists of two parcels fronting Rindge Avenue in the North Cambridge neighborhood, abutting the Fresh Pond apartments to the south. One of the parcels currently houses Ferro's Foodtown, a small single-story grocery store with a surface parking lot, while the other contains three 1 ½ to 2 ½ story residential buildings. Across the street there is an 83 MBTA bus stop between Jerry's Pond and Comeau Field, and a quarter mile north is the MBTA Alewife station. Alewife Brook Parkway is a couple of blocks west of the property, with Fresh Pond Mall about a 10-minute walk away. There is also significant open space access within half a mile, including Danehy Park, Fresh Pond Reservation, and Alewife Brook Reservation. The surrounding area is mostly residential, with buildings ranging from small homes to high-rise apartments, including several affordable housing complexes, along with a few small businesses.

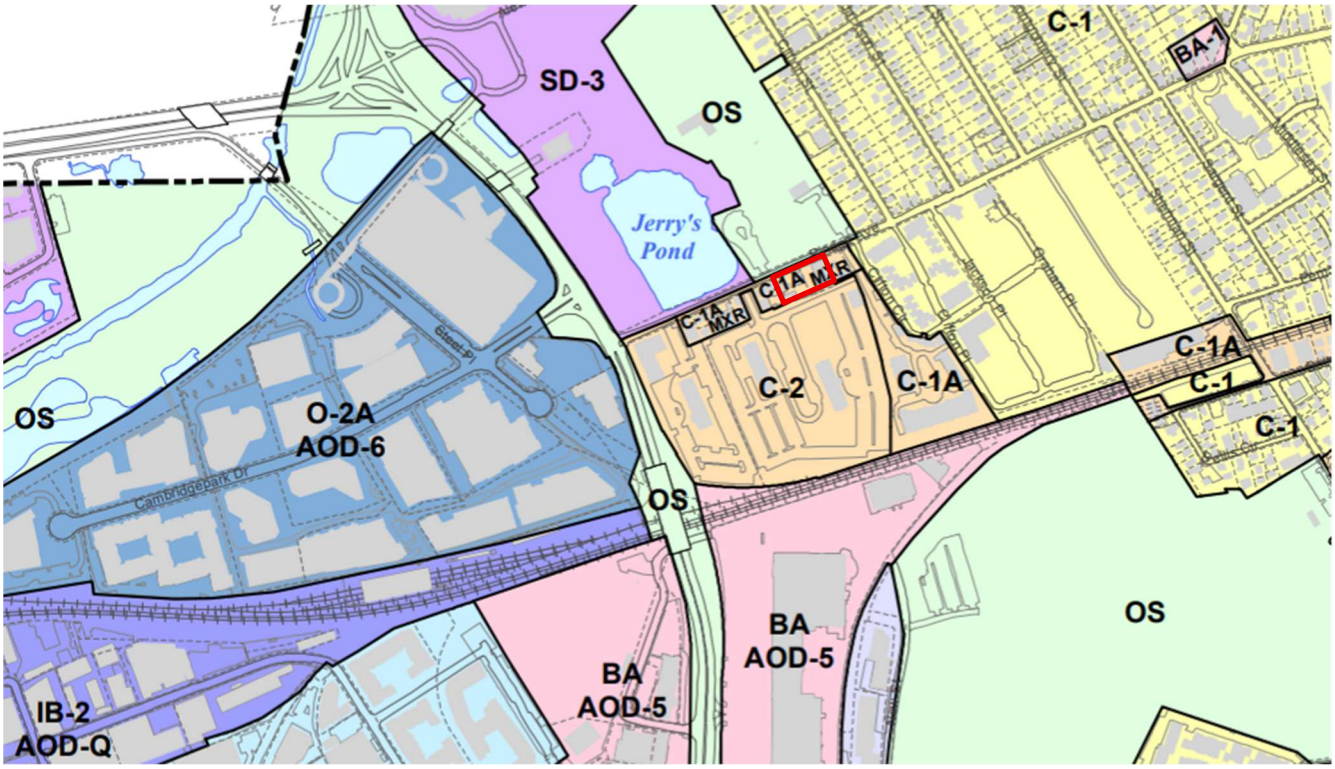


Context Map for 350 Rindge Avenue. Source: Nearmap Aerial Imagery, April 2026

Site Zoning

The site is located in the Residence C-1A zoning district and is being permitted under the Affordable Housing Overlay in Section 11.207 of the Zoning Ordinance. An AHO project in the C-1A district can be up to 13 stories and 150 feet in height. An AHO development exceeding 50,000 square feet of Gross Floor Area is subject to the two-session Planning Board Advisory Consultation process.

The AHO allows active non-residential uses that provide services to the general public on the ground floor if the use is allowed in the base or overlay zoning district, including all institutional and retail uses, and most office uses. While the C-1A zoning does not typically allow commercial uses in new buildings, the Mixed Use Residential Overlay District (MXR) permits additional non-residential uses as allowed in the Industry A-1 district, with limitations and in some cases requiring a special permit from the Planning Board.



Zoning Map. Source: Cambridge GIS, September 2026

Development Plans and Guidelines

The **Mixed Use Residential Overlay District** was established to support a mixed-use environment by allowing limited non-residential uses that might support existing or future residential uses in residential areas with an already substantial inventory of non-residential activities.

The 2025 Multifamily Design Guidelines provide standards for all types of multifamily projects, focusing on site design, building design, and sustainable and resilient site design. The guidelines particularly encourage a building design that incorporates ground level retail spaces to enliven the urban environment where appropriate to the context.

Envision Cambridge 2030 highlights the following relevant strategies and actions for this project:

- Advance citywide housing goals by supporting gradual change through infill development in residential neighborhoods that creates new housing opportunities for a diverse population and promotes equitable distribution of affordable housing throughout the city.
- Advance citywide mobility goals by expanding opportunities for walking and cycling through a connected network of open spaces and green pathways that improves access to public amenities and enhances health, well-being and quality of life.
- Incentivize the creation and preservation of affordable commercial spaces and ensure different local and independent retailers that contribute to a unique sense of place can start, grow, and remail in Cambridge.
- Accelerate the transition to net zero greenhouse gas emissions for all buildings in the city and support achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.
- Increase overall housing production to help address market affordability.
- Encourage affordable housing production for low-, moderate-, and middle-income households through regulatory and zoning incentives.

The Pedestrian & Bicycle Crossing of the Fitchburg Rail Line project, currently in the design process, is a bicycle and pedestrian overpass crossing across the commuter rail tracks. Together with the Danehy Park Connector, it is meant to improve connectivity from the Alewife and North Cambridge areas to open spaces such as Danehy Park and the Fresh Pond Reservation, and to work and retail opportunities.

The **Jerry's Pond Improvements** project, built by the developer IQHQ along with their Alewife Center development (PB-387), seeks to create opportunities for passive recreation and improve public access through new pedestrian and bicycle paths, boardwalks, expand connections to surrounding open spaces, and enhance ecological functions and resilience.

Comments on Proposal

Project Description

The applicant, Boston Communities and Affordable Housing Collaborative, is proposing to demolish the existing buildings, including the single-story retail store, and to construct a new 10-story, 125-foot-tall mixed-use building including 92 affordable rental units and approximately 129,000 square feet of gross floor area. The unit mix will include one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments ranging in size from 608 to 1,242 square feet, for households earning between 30 and 100% AMI. The project also includes indoor and outdoor resident amenities. Bicycle parking will be provided with 100 long-term and 12 short-term spaces. A garage on the first floor will provide parking for 17 vehicles. The project is proposing a larger front yard setback and redesigning the sidewalk to accommodate on-street parking for 3 cars. Part of the ground floor is proposed to be a retail space with approximately 5,000 square feet of area to accommodate the existing grocery store use. A path connecting Rindge Ave to the Fresh Pond apartments is proposed on the westerly edge of the site.

Process Requirements – AHO Advisory Review and Special Permit Hearing

The proposed development is subject to two concurrent review processes. First, as an AHO development, the project is subject to a two-session Planning Board Advisory Consultation process. The purpose of this review is for the Planning Board to provide advisory comments on the design and its overall conformance with the City's urban design objectives and guidelines. Because development under the AHO is as-of-right, the Board's input is non-binding and does not involve any approval or denial.

Second, the applicant is seeking a Special Permit under Section 20.22 to allow a retail establishment exceeding 2,500 square feet. As the special permit granting authority for this request, the Planning Board must determine whether the proposal satisfies the applicable Special Permit criteria and make the required findings in order to grant approval.

Consistency with AHO Development Standards

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

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in C-1A Zoning District	Summary of Proposal
Use	• Multifamily dwellings allowed • Active non-residential uses allowed on the ground floor as permitted in the base zoning or overlay zoning district	• Multifamily dwellings and residence amenities. • Retail use on the ground floor with approximately 5,000 square feet.

	• MXR allows limited retail as-of-right or by Planning Board Special Permit (see below)	
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	• Up to 13 stories, 150 feet	• 10 stories, 125 feet
Yard Setbacks	• No Front or Side Yard requirements • 5' Rear Yard required	• 10-foot front yard • 5-foot side yards • 10-foot rear yard
Open Space	• 15% (district requirement)	• 15%
Parking and Bicycle Parking	• No minimum off-street parking. • Min. 97 long-term bicycle parking spaces • Min. 13 short-term bicycle parking spaces	• 17 off-street parking spaces. • 100 long-term bicycle parking spaces • Clarification needed on number of short-term bicycle parking spaces (appears to comply)
Site Design and Arrangement	• Front yards may be landscaped or hardscaped but cannot be used for off-street parking. • Pedestrian entrances shall be visible from the street. • Buildings with front facades more than 250' in length shall provide forecourts to break up massing.	• The proposal meets all the Site Design and Arrangement requirements.
Building Facades	• Building facades facing public streets shall have a minimum percentage of 20% glazing. • Building facades must include projecting and/or recessed elements of at least two feet on an average interval of 40 linear feet along a Public Street, and 80 feet elsewhere. Such projecting or recessed elements do not apply to the lowest or highest Story Above Grade. • Facades of ground stories shall have expanses of no more than 25' with no windows or pedestrian entryways.	• The proposed project meets all the Building Facades requirements. • The proposed building consists of 26% glazing facing Rindge Ave.
Ground and Below Grade Stories	• Ground stories with non-residential uses must have a height of at least 15' and a depth of 35'.	• The ground story serving the grocery store has a proposed height of 16 feet and minimum depth of 43-1/3 feet.

	• Portions of ground story facades with non-residential uses shall have a minimum of 30% glazing.	• The proposed portion of the ground story facade serving the grocery store consists of 40% glazing.
Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage and Loading Areas	• Mechanical equipment shall be generally screened from view. • Rooftop mechanical equipment must be set back from the roof line equal to its height. • Screening for at grade equipment should use materials comparable in quality to the building's principal facades.	• Rooftop mechanical equipment is set back 10 feet in most parts and concealed behind the tall parapet walls. • Ground story mechanical equipment and trash room are enclosed within the building. • The transformer is enclosed within the building and screened with similar facade materials.
Environmental Design Standards	This AHO project is subject to the following Sustainable Development Standards: • Section 22.20: Green Building • Section 22.80: Flood Resilience • Section 22.90: Green Factor	• The Project intends to meet Green Building requirements by targeting Passive House certification. A Green Building Report will be required ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation. • A statement of intent to comply with Green Factor Standards has been submitted and complete documentation showing compliance will be required ahead of the final Planning Board Advisory Consultation.

Special Permit for Retail Use

The applicant proposes approximately 5,000 square feet of retail space for the continuation of the existing Ferro's Foodtown grocery store. The proposed retail space meets the MXR district criteria by being at the ground story and occupying less than 25% of a residential building; however, the proposed establishment exceeds the 2,500 square-foot limit permitted as-of-right under Section 20.22 and therefore requires a special permit. The inclusion of the grocery store currently on the site into the new development would be compatible with and support the future residential use in addition to continuing to serve other residential uses and the neighborhood at large. The proposal would also allow an established neighborhood-serving business to remain in the district.

Community Engagement

The Application summarizes the project team's community engagement program as required by the Planning Board Rules and the zoning requirements for a Planning Board Advisory Consultation. The team hosted two meetings: the first was a virtual Zoom meeting on June 3, 2026, and the second was an in-person meeting on August 5, 2026. It is not clear how many people attended the meetings. These meetings were advertised by a certified mailing, and an invitation flyer was provided to CDD for posting on the City's website. See submitted summary of community engagement for more details.

Requested Clarifications

The following issues should be clarified in a revised advisory review submission:

- There are some discrepancies between figures provided in different parts of the narrative, graphics, and appendices. In some cases, the figures do not accurately reflect applicable district standards, and some figures are missing. Ensure the final submission is consistent across all the different documents and sections and accurately reflects the proposal to facilitate the review process.
- The short-term bicycle parking seems to be miscounted, though the number of spaces provided seems to be compliant. Ensure calculations consider final square footage of retail use and final residential unit count, and any fractional value shall be rounded up.
- Review the spacing of the short-term bicycle racks to confirm it has not been oversized, which could potentially allow for more racks closer to the main building entrance.

Transportation Comments

The Department of Transportation (DOT) staff has been working with the applicant and provided the following comments related to the requested special permit:

- DOT understands the project intends to provide compliant bicycle parking spaces within the project site. Nonetheless, support for a Bluebikes station at this location or nearby would be a positive element in this area if an agreement with the City can be made.
- DOT believes that the proposal to set the curb on Rindge Avenue back to accommodate a few on-street parking spaces appears feasible. Final curb and sidewalk design must be reviewed and approved by DPW, CDD, and DOT during Building Permit application phase.
- Specific pavement marking layouts, parking signage, and curbside regulations shown in plans are placeholders and will be fine-tuned by DOT in later stages of project development and implementation in coordination with the project team.
- Consider allocating excess on-site parking spaces to serve the needs of all site users, including retail patrons, as feasible and allowed under zoning and PTDM ordinances.
- The two proposed most easterly on-street spaces should be considered for use as a loading zone to support delivery needs of the proposed retail use.

Special Permit Conditions

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

1. Approved Development: The development of the proposed retail space 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 a grocery store on the ground story with approximately 5,000 square feet. 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 for the retail space substantially 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.

Appendix - Zoning Text Excerpts

Special Permit for Permitted Non-Residential Uses and New Construction in the MXR

20.25 Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit. Designation of the base residential zoning district expresses the policy objective of the City of Cambridge that new construction in the district should principally be for residential use, or for other uses permitted in the residential base district. However, recognizing the present land use character of the area, this Mixed Use Residential Overlay District provides flexibility such that existing non-residential uses may continue to operate without unreasonable regulatory impediment provided they do not now or will not in the future hinder the expansion or introduction of residential uses to the district. Therefore, in granting a special permit under this Section 20.20, the Planning Board shall take into consideration the following and make appropriate findings related thereto:

1. The proposed new use or expansion of an existing use will contribute to a physical and use environment that is supportive of residential uses, as for example the introduction of ancillary retail and consumer services;
2. In its operations, scale, building design and location on the lot, the proposed use or new constriction will not significantly impair the health, safety and welfare of current residential occupants of the district or impair the prospects for construction of new residential uses on adjacent lots or within the district, or alternately will positively contribute to the health, safety and welfare of residents in the district;
3. In its design, the new construction could be reasonably converted to residential use in the future;
4. Where it is proposed to construct a building on a vacant lot or where it is proposed to expand an existing facility not used for residential purposes by more than fifteen (15) percent of its existing gross floor area, the lot is not suitable for residential use as indicated by its location and surrounding uses. Where the lot may be suitable for residential use, the proposed construction is to serve an existing operation or enterprise now in the district. That operation or enterprise shall be found to be an important contributor to the Cambridge economy, through the provision of employment, the generation of new ideas, products or processes, and through the potential to expand and grow elsewhere in the city in areas intended for non-residential development;
5. Special attention is paid in the design and layout of the new construction to mitigate or prevent negative impacts on present and future residential uses, including among other measures screening of mechanical equipment for visual or acoustical reasons, location of refuse management systems within the structure, and the location of loading and service delivery systems in the least obtrusive areas of the lot.

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

(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.

10.43.1 *Conditional Retail or Consumer Service Establishments.* Where a special permit is required for a Retail or Consumer Service Establishment listed in Section 4.35 or 4.36 of this Zoning Ordinance, the special permit granting authority shall consider the following factors when evaluating the criteria in Section 10.43:

(a) Anticipated delivery and loading operations, their potential impacts on neighboring uses and the overall neighborhood, and the extent to which those impacts are mitigated;

(b) The extent to which neighboring uses would be impacted by environmental nuisance such as dust, fumes, odors, smoke, vapors, noise, vibration, flashing, light trespass, or glare, and the extent to which those impacts are mitigated;

(c) The extent to which storefronts and other elements of the façade visible to the public are compatible with the visual character of the surrounding area and conform to the City's urban design objectives for retail uses in the area; and

(d) Where citywide or neighborhood plans have been published by the City that identify types of retail uses that are preferred or desirable in the area, such plans may be considered in support of such identified uses where they are proposed.

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	• 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.	• 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.	• 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.	• 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.	• 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.	• 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.	• 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 *Resilient Cambridge* plan.	• 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 – Affordable Housing Overlay Design Consultation AHO-12

Urban Design Comments

The proposed building occupies much of the site with a rectangular footprint, while incorporating landscaped setbacks on three sides and streetscape improvements along Rindge Avenue. At 10 stories, the project will provide 92 affordable housing units, resident amenity spaces, 17 resident parking spaces, and a retail space intended to replace the existing grocery store.

The site is located along Rindge Avenue, an important residential and transit corridor in North Cambridge. The surrounding context includes a wide range of building types and scales, including traditional 2½-story wood frame homes, 22-story brick buildings at Rindge Towers and Fresh Pond apartments, and the recently completed 6-story residential building located at the intersection with Alewife Brook Parkway. Further along Rindge Avenue is Jefferson Park, which is an affordable housing complex with a range of 3 to 5-story buildings. Jerry's Pond and Russell Field lie to the north of the project site. The urban development pattern around the site differs significantly from nearby neighborhoods. To the south, buildings are very large in scale and are arranged as objects within open space, landscaping, and parking. This varies significantly from the finer-grained residential neighborhoods found elsewhere in Cambridge.

The applicant team has met with City staff throughout the design process, and the proposal has evolved positively in response to feedback. The team's collaborative approach and willingness to refine the design have helped advance the City's planning and urban design objectives.

Consistency with Citywide and Multifamily Design Guidelines

The design as proposed generally adheres to the applicable principles outlined in the Citywide and Multifamily Design Guidelines by:

- Enhancing the public realm with active ground floor uses, higher levels of transparency, high quality materials, significant streetscape improvements, and landscaped open spaces,
- Modulating the massing to respond to the scale of nearby buildings,
- Creating visually interesting façades.
- Providing internal and exterior common spaces to build a sense of community,
- Achieving high levels of energy efficiency and minimizing greenhouse gas emissions, and
- Carefully screening mechanical equipment, utilities, and services areas.

Both the Updated Affordable Housing Overlay and the Multifamily Zoning allow for potentially larger and taller residential buildings than the existing context in an effort to address Cambridge's critical housing shortage. Within this context, successful design requires creative strategies that

help mediate between differing building scales. While new development need not replicate its surroundings, it should respond thoughtfully to its context, creating meaningful relationships with neighboring buildings and contributing positively to the city's character, beauty, and livability.

For reference, the complete set of Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing can be found here.

Site Design

The project establishes a strong streetwall along Rindge Avenue at a height that generally reflects the adjacent building scale, with a tower set back above the podium. The building's front façade is set back approximately 15 feet from the property line, allowing for an expanded sidewalk zone, enhanced landscaping, and the addition of street trees. The project also incorporates on-street parking, loading, and drop-off areas along the frontage. Short-term bike parking is conveniently located close to the front and rear residential entrances.

The residential entrance is located at the center of the ground floor, while the retail space at the western end, with its multiple entrances, also supports pedestrian activity. Parking, utility functions, and the transformer have been internalized and screened from public view, reducing their impact on the public realm. A 15-foot setback along the western property line creates a pedestrian connection through the site, linking Rindge Avenue to Fresh Pond Apartments, and the rear residential entrance. Additional resident amenities include a south-facing terrace at grade and an amenity deck atop the podium.

Recommendations

- Consider adding additional street trees on either side of the parking driveway to enhance the public realm and help soften the visual impact of the adjacent parking façade.
- Consider incorporating canopy trees within the setback area west of the building to provide a more substantial landscaped buffer for the neighboring property.
- Study opportunities to enhance the small plaza areas at both the retail and residential entrances, created by the sidewalk cut out needed for the on-street parking. These spaces could incorporate additional planting, seating, public art, or other amenities to reduce the extent of hardscape and create more inviting places for gathering and lingering.
- Review the location of bicycle parking at the residential front entrance, as it appears to obstruct access.
- Clarify discrepancies between the proposed landscape plan and ground floor plan, particularly regarding the width of the accessway along the west property line and the landscape treatment at the base of the retail façade.
- Include adjacent sidewalk conditions along Rindge Avenue in future drawings to ensure the proposed streetscape improvements align seamlessly with existing and planned pedestrian infrastructure.

Building Design

At the massing level, the proposed design incorporates several strategies to reduce the perceived scale and bulk of the building while strengthening its relationship to the surrounding context.

- The building reads as a well composed tower-on-podium with a clear base, middle, and top, rather than a monolithic slab.
- A substantial step-back is introduced along the north façade facing Rindge Avenue to reference the scale of nearby buildings, creating a more sensitive transition to the neighborhood.
- While the upper building volume takes cues from nearby Rindge Towers, it's perceived length and visual impact are further moderated through two vertical recesses.
- The narrow ends of the upper volume are articulated vertically and stepped inward, visually breaking down the overall mass into four distinct volumes rather than presenting as a singular, monolithic slab.

Collectively, these strategies introduce variation, depth, and articulation to the building form, helping to break down its overall scale and establish a more contextual relationship with the surrounding urban fabric.

Recommendations

- The tower's vertical recess, at 3 feet in depth, appears relatively subtle given the overall scale of the building. Consider increasing its depth to create a stronger visual break and enhance perceptions of slenderness.
- Additional consideration could be given to the transition to adjacent lower-scale residential development, particularly the 2½-story homes to the west. Opportunities to further soften that relationship through massing refinements, setbacks, landscaping, or other design strategies could be explored to help mediate the contrast in scale.

Façade design

The façades establish a clear pattern of vertical bays that help break down the building's overall width and reinforce vertical proportions and finely grained architectural expression. The grouping of windows within fields of dark brown cladding helps mitigate the relatively low window-to-wall ratio and further emphasizes the building's verticality. Ribbed panel elements add visual texture and depth, contributing to a richer façade composition.

At the western end of the tower, the undulating "ripple" effect across portions of the north and west façades provides additional visual interest and helps reduce the perceived scale of the building. The contrast between the darker infill cladding and lighter framing elements creates a clear architectural hierarchy and a sense of visual order. Overall, the materials palette is thoughtfully composed with its warm tonal character providing a reference to the area's historic association with brick manufacturing.

Recommendations

- In some longer views, the eye is drawn more to the white framing elements than to the overall building composition. The horizontal bands may begin to compete with the intended vertical rhythm. Further study of the band thickness and coloration is recommended.
- The change in articulation at the third floor amenity space appears successful and helps break up the repetition of the façades. Consider exploring additional opportunities for similar interventions elsewhere on the building façades.
- While the façades read well from a distance, they appear relatively planar at the pedestrian scale, particularly along the western half of the building where the "ripple" effect is absent. It would be helpful to clarify the depth of window recesses and consider deeper articulation or other shadow-producing elements to enhance visual interest and character.
- Show the façade "ripple" elements on all floor plans for consistency and clarity.

Ground floor

The proposed grocery store occupies a substantial portion of the street and walkway frontage, which will help contribute to a vibrant pedestrian environment. Both the residential lobby and retail entrances are oriented toward the street, reinforcing an active and welcoming ground floor. Additionally, the generous ground floor height, expansive window openings, and prominent corner glazing at the retail space are positive design elements that provide visual interest, support pedestrian activity, and strengthen the building's relationship to the public realm.

Recommendations:

- While parking, services, and utility functions are internalized, which is a positive design outcome, a large proportion of the ground floor façade is occupied by inactive frontage. Further development of these façades, in terms of materials, colors, three-dimensional relief, green walls, or public art, is recommended to enhance the pedestrian experience on Rindge Avenue and around the site.
- The lobby appears relatively narrow, and its recessed location may limit its visibility. Consider incorporating additional glazing into the package room, with windows oriented both toward Rindge Avenue and within the recessed entry area, to strengthen the lobby's presence.
- Treatment of the walls flanking the entry recess appears unresolved in the submitted materials. As depicted, they appear somewhat austere, creating a potentially harsh condition at a key point of arrival. Further refinement of the material treatment is encouraged to provide a more inviting, pedestrian-scaled entry sequence.
- As the project advances through design development, careful attention should be given to the lighting design within the ground floor garage area to ensure unwanted light spill is mitigated.

Environmental considerations

Sustainable Design

The design as proposed generally follows the principles outlined in the Multifamily Design Guidelines:

- The building is designed to meet Passive House standards.
- The building is all-electric.

Recommendations

- Determine if including sun shading devices on the south elevation, and a trellis over the terrace, would reduce undesirable solar gain.
- Consider including a green roof.
- Ensure the seventeen in-building parking spaces can charge electric vehicles.
- Include frequent outlets in the bike room to allow residents to charge their electric bicycles.

Shadow impacts

Citywide urban design objectives seek to minimize shadow impacts on adjacent open spaces and solar energy systems. The submitted shadow study indicates that the project will have minimal shadow impacts on Comeau Field and the future Jerry's Pond boardwalk during the spring, summer, and fall months. These are the times of year when these important community resources see the greatest levels of recreational and outdoor use.

Pedestrian Wind Conditions

Tall buildings, particularly towers, can sometimes create adverse pedestrian wind conditions in lower-scale neighborhoods. While the proposed podium should help mitigate downdrafts and wind acceleration at sidewalk level, a qualitative pedestrian wind study is recommended to confirm that conditions around the site will be comfortable for pedestrians.