



## Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit Process Guidelines and FAQs

Updated June 2025

*Note: on June 9, 2025 the Cambridge City Council voted to change the Cannabis Business Permitting Ordinance and remove the Host Community Agreement (HCA) requirement for all retail cannabis business uses. The below information reflects those changes. If you are a retail cannabis business with questions about what this change means for your existing business in Cambridge, please contact Christina DiLisio in the Economic Opportunity and Development Division of CDD at [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov) or 617/349-4601.*

All cannabis businesses, including Marijuana Treatment Centers (MTC), as defined in the [Cannabis Business Permit Ordinance](#), require a Cannabis Business Permit from Cambridge Inspectional Services Department (ISD) before opening. This city permit is different from the state Marijuana License application that is managed by the [Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission \(MA CCC\)](#). Before the MA CCC issues a final Marijuana License, they will request a copy of your Cannabis Business Permit.

This document is designed to help people applying for the Cannabis Business Permit only and does not offer guidance on the MA CCC Marijuana License application. Please review the Marijuana Establishment License application for your intended use before starting the Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit application.

Information in this document, and more, is available on the [Useful Documents & Resources section of the Cannabis Business Permit webpage](#). Prospective businesses are strongly encouraged to set a meeting with Christina DiLisio, [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov) or 617/349-4601, Economic Development Specialist in the Community Development Department (CDD) prior to starting an application.

### Tips for the Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit Application

The [Cannabis Business Permit application](#) is online and is complete when the applicant has provided business information, ownership information, operating information, and property information and has secured a Provisional Marijuana License from the MA CCC. These tips will help applicants gather information for starting the permit application.

**Read the requirements of the [Cannabis Business Permit Ordinance](#).**

- The Cannabis Business Ordinance details who can apply for a Cannabis Business Permit and how the business is expected to operate. If you have questions, would like help reading the

regulations, or would like translated copies of any documents, please contact Christina DiLisio at [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov) or 617/349-4601.

### **Get to know the Zoning Code.**

- Zoning regulates where different cannabis uses are allowed and whether a Special Permit is required. When you have found a potential location, check these zoning resources to ensure you're in the right area:
  - The [Zoning Ordinance](#)
  - Cambridge [Zoning Map](#)
  - [Table of Use Regulations \(Section 4.30\)](#)
    - This section explains which cannabis uses are allowed in each zoning district.
- Contact Inspectional Services Department (ISD) if you have any questions about your potential location. ISD is the City's enforcement agency for the zoning code and responsible for making determinations about uses within a zone. Reach them at 617/349-6100 or at [ISD@cambridgema.gov](mailto:ISD@cambridgema.gov)

### **Create an account on the [City's online permitting and licensing system](#).**

- If this is the first time you are applying for a Cambridge permit or license online, [you will need to create an account](#). Select an email address that you use regularly because messages and alerts are sent from the online system directly to your inbox. A second email address, for someone like an Attorney, can be added later when you begin the Cannabis Business Permit application.

### **Gather the documents and information needed for a complete application.**

- The following items are required on all Cannabis Business Permit applications:
  - 1) Supporting documentation that certifies eligibility as either a Priority A or Priority B applicant. Review the [Priority Applicant Documentation](#) sheet to see which items apply to you.
  - 2) Complete list of individuals and entities with a direct or indirect beneficial interest. Collect all names, addresses, social security/Tax ID numbers, types of interest held, and titles.
  - 3) Description of how the applicant will comply with employee pay standards set out in the City's Living Wage Ordinance.
  - 4) Description of how the applicant will hire at least 51% minority, women and/or veterans as employees, unless the applicant is held to different hiring requirements as set forth by the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission.
  - 5) Description of how the applicant, if they have a Board of Directors, will have a board makeup that will be at least 51% minority, women and/or veterans.
  - 6) The license number and type for any licenses held by the applicant issued by the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission.
  - 7) The license number and type for any cannabis-related license in any jurisdiction outside of the Commonwealth held by the applicant, any officers of the applicant, any member of the applicant's Board of Directors (if applicable), or any entity or individual having direct or indirect control of the applicant and by stating whether any such license(s) have ever been denied, revoked or suspended.

- 8) Evidence of the applicant holding a property interest or site control in the form of clear title, an option to purchase, a lease, a legally enforceable agreement to give title, or documentation evidencing permission to use the premises, that has been or will be submitted to the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission pursuant to State regulations.
- 9) A context map showing the proposed address for the Cannabis Business and demonstrating that the proposed address is not within 1800 feet of another Retail Cannabis Business (waived for Economic Empowerment and Social Equity applicants) nor within 300 feet of a K-8 school or facility serving children in grades K-8.
- 10) A detailed plan for opening day and times of high demand to show management of crowd control and lines of customers.
- 11) A detailed plan for storefront activation, including but not limited to, the placement of art or the inclusion of a separate small active use in front of the Cannabis Business in order to address the requirement that all cannabis products are kept out of plain sight and not visible from a public place pursuant to State regulations but to also align with the City's advisory Urban Design Guidelines for window and door transparency.
- 12) Detailed renderings of any internal or external layout designs requiring Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission approval as well as a detailed report on operating policies and procedures pursuant to State regulations for: a. Security; b. Prevention of diversion; c. Cannabis storage; d. Transportation of Cannabis, if applicable to state license sought; e. Inventory procedures; f. Procedures for quality control and testing of product for potential contaminants, if applicable to state license sought; g. Personnel policies; h. Dispensing procedures; i. Record keeping and maintenance of financial records; and j. Diversity plan to promote equity among minorities, women, veterans, people with disabilities, people of all gender identities and sexual orientation, in the operation of the Cannabis Business.
- 13) A description of qualifications and intended training(s) of proposed management team and employees pursuant to State regulations.
- 14) Hours of operation that are in accordance with State regulations.
- 15) A written copy, or video recording, of the required Community Outreach Meeting pursuant to State regulations that captures the time, place and subject matter of the meeting, what outreach the applicant conducted or publicity the applicant provided in advance of the meeting, how many people attended the meeting, how many people spoke at the meeting, and a summary of comments from the public both in support of or in opposition to the proposed Cannabis Business.
- 16) A detailed plan for repackaging processes to manage any potential odor nuisances within the proposed location of operations.

**Answer carefully to match what you provide the MA CCC for the Marijuana License application.**

- When starting the Cannabis Business Permit application, provide information and contact details for the **primary business owner (has 51% or more ownership)**. Lawyers, consultants, or other representatives **should not** use their personal or professional contact information for the application. Business name, address, ownership/investment team, and hours of operation can be changed in the future but must always match information provided to the MA CCC.

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

### **How long does it take?**

The following response times are for the Cannabis Business Permit only. It does not include estimated responses times for the Marijuana License steps managed by the MA CCC nor other city permits that are required as part of the normal process of opening a business (e.g. Building Permits, Certificate of Occupancy). Response time may be delayed if insufficient information has been provided.

- 1 day to return email
- 1 week to set meetings
- 1 week to review ownership status
- 1 month to review operating information
- 3-6 months for Planning Board Special Permit review (required only for Cannabis Production Facility)

### **Is there an application deadline?**

No, applications are reviewed on a rolling basis, in the order they are received. Starting an application does not secure “a place in line”.

### **Is there a cap?**

No, there is no cap on the total number of cannabis businesses that can operate in the City of Cambridge.

### **Can anyone apply for a Cannabis Business Permit?**

The Cannabis Business Permitting Ordinance establishes five (5) different ownership categories. They are:

1. Economic Empowerment Applicant
2. Social Equity Applicant that is also a Cambridge resident and has been for at least the previous three years
3. Woman or Minority Owned Business (WMBE) as certified by the State Supplier Diversity Office
4. Cambridge resident for at least the three previous years prior to application earning less than fifty percent (50%) of Area Median Income (AMI) in the three previous tax years
5. A Marijuana Treatment Center (MTC) within Cambridge that was licensed or registered by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health not later than July 1, 2017

Ownership categories are determined by the person or entity owning 51% or more of the business. Please review the [Priority Applicant Documentation](#) sheet to see which category applies to you. No other ownership types outside of these five (5) categories may apply for a Cannabis Business Permit at this time.

### **How much does it cost?**

The Cannabis Business Permit fee is \$350. The fee is waived for Priority A Applicants who are Economic Empowerment Applicants as certified by the MA CCC. The Special Permit application fee is \$.10/square foot of the proposed space. The associated Traffic Mitigation is \$70,000.00 or \$35,000.00 for Economic Empowerment Applicants. The Special Permit and associated Traffic Mitigation fees are only required for Production Facility uses.

### **When does it expire?**

The Cannabis Business Permit renews every year on March 1.

### **What if I need to change information on my Cannabis Business Permit application?**

Select information can be easily changed by using the [Info Change Request Form](#). The form can be found on [the Useful Documents & Resources section of the Cannabis Business Permit webpage](#).

### **Where can I locate my cannabis business?**

Cannabis businesses (except for Production Facilities) are now allowed “as of right” in select zones, which means they no longer require a Special Permit from the Cambridge Planning Board per the Zoning Code. However, it is still important to [review the Zoning Code](#) for two reasons:

- 1) Confirm that your proposed location is within zones where Cannabis businesses are allowed.
- 2) Review buffer distance regulations that apply to all cannabis uses.
  - a. A Cannabis Retail Store and Cannabis Production Facility cannot be within 300 feet of a school or playground.
  - b. A Cannabis Retail Store cannot be within 1800 foot of another retail cannabis businesses. \*\*\* This regulation is waived if Retail Store applicants are 51% or more owned by Economic Empowerment or Social Equity applicants (as certified by the MACC). Additionally, this regulation does not apply to Courier, Delivery, and Production Facilities uses regardless of ownership type of applicant.

### **How can I double check if I am within 1800 Ft of another retail store?**

To see where existing retail cannabis businesses are presently located or about to open so you can calculate the 1800-ft buffer, please consult the map found on [the Useful Documents & Resources section of the Cannabis Business Permit webpage](#).

### **Is there a Host Community Agreement (HCA)?**

Cambridge no longer requires a Host Community Agreement (HCA).

### **Do I have to go in a certain order?**

Yes. Please follow this order:

- Start the Cannabis Business Permit application online and be approved as an eligible applicant.
- Secure a Special Permit (required for Production Facilities only).
- Finish the Cannabis Business Permit application online (if questions remain to be addressed).

- Apply to the MA CCC for a Marijuana License. Upon receipt, the MA CCC will notify the City of Cambridge and allow 60 days for Cambridge to confirm that “local ordinances” have been met. The City of Cambridge does not require a Host Community Agreement (HCA) and will provide the MA CCC with a copy of an HCA Waiver at this time.
- Secure a Provisional License from the MA CCC. A copy is provided to the City of Cambridge.
- A paper copy of the Cannabis Business Permit is then issued for posting in the business.
- Apply for a Cambridge Building Permit from ISD.
- Obtain a Certificate of Occupancy from ISD upon completing the work under the building permit.
- Schedule final inspections with the MA CCC, and upon a satisfactory inspection, be issued a final Marijuana License from the MA CCC.

### **How can I cover my windows to meet The MA CCC requirements for screening product?**

[All of the state legislation, statutes, and regulations for adult use are available to view on the MA CCC website.](#) While the MA CCC requires marijuana product to be screened from view from those walking by, the City of Cambridge has citywide urban design objectives that encourage window and door transparency. In practice, this means that you should not fully cover or block the glass in your windows and doors. For certain areas of the city, additional restrictions apply. City staff can assist with questions about how to design an internal layout that allows for windows and doors to meet the City’s minimum transparency requirements.

### **How do I learn more about the Special Permit requirement for Production Facilities?**

[Planning Board Special Permits - CDD - City of Cambridge, Massachusetts \(cambridgema.gov\)](#)