



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board
From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff
Date: April 29, 2021
Re: **2072 Massachusetts Ave – Update**

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The Planning Board originally reviewed this comprehensive permit proposal on December 1, 2020. After hearing a summary of the project by the Applicant as well as written and oral testimony from the public and written staff materials, the Planning Board unanimously voted to forward a positive recommendation to the Board of Zoning Appeal (attached) to grant the requested relief by the Applicant.

Since that time, the Applicant has revised the development program to be 9 stories along Mass Ave and 5 stories along Walden St, rather than 6 stories along Walden Street as previously shown. The Applicant requested that the revised design materials be provided to the Planning Board for review.

As a result, the overall unit mix has changed:

- Previously: 29% one-bedrooms, 42% two-bedrooms, 29% three-bedrooms
- Currently Proposed: 33% one-bedrooms, 42% two-bedrooms, and 25% three-bedrooms

Also as a result of this design change, the parapet on the Mass Ave portion of the building has reduced in height from 42" to 24", four windows have been removed from the east façade facing the Russell Apartments, and the 5th floor roof terrace has been reduced in size.

The new application materials also correct the renderings to accurately show the height of the adjacent Russell Apartments building.

The project is substantially similar to what was reviewed and discussed by the Planning Board in December 2020. In terms of zoning relief required by this proposal, the revised plans do not materially change the types of relief needed for the project to move forward.

The proposal also remains subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20. Staff has reviewed the required submissions to certify compliance with the Green Building Requirements.

Design comments on the revision are on the following page.

Urban Design

The building' overall massing strategy – tallest on Massachusetts Avenue and lower towards the residential neighborhood to the south – remains as it was in the scheme presented to the Planning Board in the December 1, 2020 hearing.

The Building's north wing, facing Massachusetts Avenue, remains at nine floors. The height of the south wing has been adjusted from six to five floors in response to the corrected height of the Russell Apartment building (which adjoins the east side of the site), closely matching it in height and reducing the shadows cast onto its south façade. With the exceptions of the changed height, a slightly reduced unit count, a slightly changed unit mix, and minor changes to parapet and rooftop terrace, the project is essentially similar to the previous version presented to the Planning Board. The façade patterns and materials are the same, as are the plans of the lower and upper floors.

As in the earlier scheme, the building's massing and height on Massachusetts Avenue is an appropriate response to the site, relating to other tall buildings along the Avenue, and providing a visual landmark at the slight bend in its course. The revised five-floor tall south wing has a more compatible relationship with the smaller scaled residences on Walden Street than did the earlier six floor version.

The height of the parapet on the nine-story portion of the building has been reduced slightly, and windows have been eliminated on the building's east façade to provide greater privacy to the Russell Apartment building. Both seem to be appropriate changes.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

December 8, 2020

To: The Board of Zoning Appeal

From: The Planning Board

RE: BZA-017326-2020 2072 Mass Avenue

The Planning Board reviewed this application for a comprehensive permit at its meeting on December 1, 2020. The Board heard a summary of the project by the applicant, received written and oral testimony from the public, and received written materials from the Community Development Department (CDD), Traffic, Parking & Transportation Department (TP&T), and Department of Public Works (DPW).

Planning Board members were supportive of the proposed project and recommended sending a favorable recommendation to the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) to grant the requested relief by a vote of 5-0.

Generally, Planning Board members were encouraged by the provision of affordable housing units, particularly family-sized units, in a development with convenient access to nearby transit. Board members commented that the proposed building is well-designed and will be an improvement over the current one-story commercial building and associated surface parking, which does not contribute positively to the intersection. Board members noted that the height of the proposed building is greater than the immediately surrounding buildings, but also noted that there are examples of buildings of this height elsewhere on northern Massachusetts Avenue. Board members also expressed the view that the additional density is not a concern in this location, and that the acute need for affordable housing justifies an exceptional approach in order to make developments feasible and serve the community to the greatest extent possible.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board
From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff
Date: November 25, 2020
Re: **2072 Massachusetts Ave – Staff Report**

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Submission Type: Comprehensive Permit Application

Applicant: CC HRE 2072 Mass Ave Tenant LLC

Zoning District(s): Business A-2; Residence B, Mass Ave Overlay District (MAOD)

Proposal Summary: New construction of a multifamily residential building with 49 Affordable Dwelling Units, a corner non-residential storefront space, 5 accessory parking spaces and 51 long-term bicycle parking spaces.

Permits Requested: Comprehensive Permit (M.G.L. Chapter 40B)

Planning Board Advisory report/recommendation to the Board of Zoning
Action: Appeal (BZA).

Memo Contents: Review of area planning and zoning, comments on proposal addressing planning, zoning, and urban design.

Other Staff Reports: Traffic, Parking and Transportation Dept. (TP+T), Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate documents.

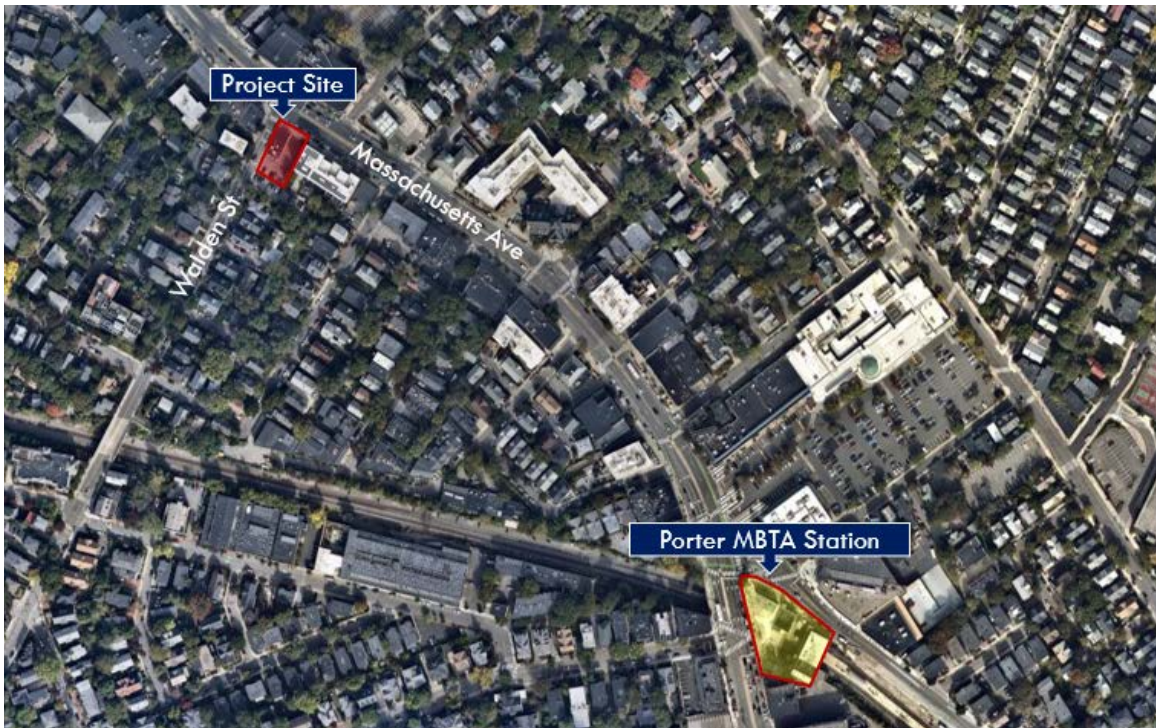
Introduction

Area Planning and Zoning

Site Context

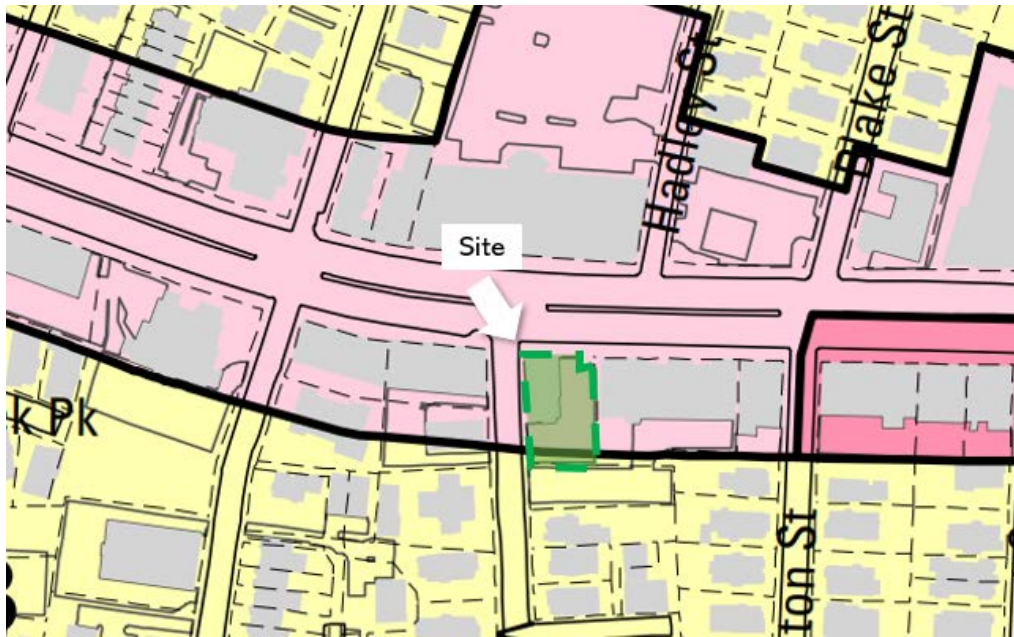
The site is located in the Porter Square area, approximately ¼ mile northwest of the Porter MBTA station. Development in this area is of mixed scales and intensities, with taller (4-7 stories), more dense commercial development directly along the Mass Ave frontage, and a transition to lower scale, primarily residential areas moving away from Mass Ave in either direction.

The project site is located directly across Mass Ave from the five-story Henderson Carriage building, and adjacent to the 6-story 2050 Mass Ave residential development. The project site is currently improved with a one-story commercial building and parking lot, with driveway access off of both Walden Street and Mass Ave. the current building is sited directly on the corner of Mass Ave & Walden, with minimal setback from either street.



Site Zoning

The site is located primarily in the Business A-2 (BA-2) zoning district and the Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District (MAOD), with a small portion at the rear located in the Residence B zoning district.



The BA-2 district is a low-to-moderate density mixed-use and commercial district, which permits development at a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.0 and height of 35' for nonresidential uses, and maximum FAR of 1.75 and height of 45' for residential uses.

The Residence B district is a single- and two-family residential district that allows for development up to a maximum FAR of 0.5 and a maximum height of 35', with a requirement for a minimum of 40% private open space to lot area.

The MAOD augments the BA-2 district for the purpose of protecting and enhancing the retail character along Mass Ave, encouraging good building design and an active pedestrian streetscape, and ensuring new development is of a scale and context that is responsive to the existing character of the neighborhood. Within the district, new development is required to contain non-residential ground floor uses fronting Mass Ave in the BA-2 base zoning areas of the MAOD, with minimum average depths of 40', minimum linear frontage of 75% of the total building frontage, and a minimum ground story height of 15'. These specific dimensions may be modified by special permit from the Planning Board. To provide dimensional flexibility for a new mixed-use building with ground-story non-residential use, the FAR for the project as a whole may be 1.75, the maximum height may be increased to 50 feet, and some other dimensional requirements are waived.

Area Planning Studies

A report containing [North Massachusetts Avenue Design Guidelines](#) was published in 1986, around the time the MAOD was established. That study articulated the following overall goals for the area:

1. Maintain a sense of diversity in use and physical character along the Avenue.
2. Encourage any new development to be compatible in scale and character with abutting residential neighborhoods.
3. Improve pedestrian environment. Encourage active uses at the ground level and physical improvements to the streetscape.

4. Set forth general architectural guidelines for both infill and larger scale development.
5. Encourage the retention of existing historic structures.

The [Envision Cambridge](#) (2019) comprehensive plan identified Mass Ave as a Major Mixed-Use Corridor, and noted that it contains underutilized sites which could be opportunities for redevelopment into more dense mixed-use development.

The following Housing, Mobility & Urban Form goals and strategies relate to the proposed project:

- Increase overall housing production
- Encourage affordable housing production for low, moderate and middle-income households
- Expand resources for affordable housing production and preservation
- Expand access to sustainable transportation choices and the physical reach of sustainable transportation infrastructure
- Increase density near transit nodes while accommodating the unique character of our squares and areas along the corridors
- Encourage activity on the ground floors of new buildings, particularly along mixed-use corridors

Planning and Zoning Comments

Overall

The current site, a 1-story, single-tenant commercial building with a large accompanying surface parking area, represents a past pattern of automobile-centric urban planning and development principles. Recent planning and zoning efforts point to a different kind of land use and development pattern in which commercial corridors provide opportunities for more dense mixed-use development that allows for safe and convenient multi-modal access to transit, jobs, and proximate community resources.

The proposed project is a building with eight (8) stories (about 90' in height) and 57,395 square feet of Gross Floor Area, of which 54,425 square feet will be dedicated to a residential use with 49 affordable housing units, and 2,970 square feet will be dedicated to commercial ground floor uses at the corner of Mass Ave. and Walden. The units would be about 29% one-bedrooms, 42% two-bedrooms, and 29% three-bedrooms, which is a higher percentage of two-bedroom and three-bedroom units than usual for new multifamily buildings. Five parking spaces will be provided in a ground-story garage, three of which are disabled-accessible and two of which would be used for short-term pick-up and drop-off. 51 long-term bicycle parking spaces are proposed in a below-grade garage per zoning requirements.

The project is proposed to meet Passive House (PHIUS+) standards, which is one of the paths to comply with the City's Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20 of the Zoning Ordinance. PHIUS+ is an aggressive standard focused on energy efficiency and resilience, and is supported by staff. The Applicant has submitted its initial-stage documentation to CDD in order to certify that it is on track to meet the required standards.

Overall, the proposed project is more in alignment with recent planning principles than the existing condition. The Applicant is proposing a taller, mixed-use building sited along the Mass Ave frontage that is suited to modes of transportation such as walking, bicycling, and public transit, with minimal on-site

parking. Such a proposal aligns with the aforementioned City planning goals by adding housing units near transit, increasing development density along major commercial corridors, and increasing the number of affordable housing units throughout the City. While the project is better aligned to City goals than the current site improvements, it will require zoning relief in several areas.

Design Revisions

At the time of this memo, the Applicant presented a possible design change to the proposed development, in which the massing of the structure would change. Under this new design, the portion of the structure fronting Mass Ave would contain nine (9) stories, and then transition down to six (6) stories as it progresses towards Walden Street. The footprint of the building would not be altered, and the overall number of proposed residential units would remain the same.

Such a change may not affect the project's alignment with area planning goals and strategies, as outlined above. However, the relief that may be required, such as height and gross floor area, may change. CDD will review any revised proposal more thoroughly as more details are available.

Requested Relief

- **Use.** While the BA-2 and MAOD districts permit multifamily housing, the Residence B district does not. The Applicant is seeking relief for the small portion of the southern edge of the site which is zoned Residence B. The Applicant is also seeking relief for the retail space, which may be used for catering or a commercial kitchen, which is classified as an industrial use and prohibited in the BA-2 district.
- **Height and Density.** The Applicant is seeking relief for additional height and density exceeding the limitations in the base zoning districts. As previously noted, buildings along this section of Mass Ave have a wide range of heights, densities, and types. At 8 or 9 stories, this building would exceed the 5 or 6 story height of immediately adjacent buildings and would match the heights of a few residential buildings further north along Mass Ave.
- **Setbacks.** The Residence B district establishes minimum front yard setbacks of 15' and side yard setbacks of 7.5' on each side, and a sum of 20' for both sides. In the BA-2 district, the minimum front yard setback is 5', and the minimum side yard setback is a sum of 10' for both side yards, although a side setback may be waived where it is possible to directly abut a neighboring building with an existing zero-side-yard condition. The Applicant is seeking relief for both front and side yard setbacks in these districts. A 3-to-4-foot front yard is proposed at the ground floor to provide additional sidewalk with and to accommodate street improvements along Walden Street (as discussed in the accompanying TP+T memo), and the building is proposed with zero side yards to abut the adjacent building along Mass Ave to the east and the City parking lot to the south.
- **Open Space.** In the Residence B district, the minimum private open space to lot area is 40%. This open space area must be accessible to all occupants of the building (except for balcony areas), and at least 50% of the open space shall be provided at the ground level. Further, areas designated as private open space must have a minimum width and length of 15', except for balconies, and not contain a slope greater than 10%. At least 50% of the required open space shall be Permeable Open

Space. The Applicant is seeking relief for both the total open space required, and the minimum length and width requirements of said open space. A green roof is proposed and potentially usable terraces (in the revised design).

- **Parking & Loading.** The BA-2 district requires a minimum of one parking space per dwelling unit for multifamily development. Article 6.000 contains standards for off-street parking spaces, including a minimum aisle width of 22' and driveways designed so as to provide a clear view to the driver of any car existing from the proposed development, or traffic on the street and of pedestrians. The Applicant is seeking relief from these standards, but has been engaged with TP+T in reviewing the parking proposal.
- **Project Review.** As is typical for projects seeking a Comprehensive Permit, the proposal seeks a waiver from any Planning Board Special Permits which may be triggered by Article 19 – Project Review. The Planning Board's advisory review is intended to inform the BZA of issues that may be relevant to the urban design review of the project.
- **Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District.** As mentioned above, the MAOD provides additional design requirements for projects with frontage directly on Mass Ave. The proposal contains a corner retail space with a significant amount of total frontage and an appropriate ground-story height, but the frontage along Mass Ave. is less than 75% of the total building frontage along Mass Ave. The Applicant is seeking relief from all applicable requirements of the MAOD that may be required. Under normal circumstances, most MAOD design standards may be modified or waived by special permit from the Planning Board if the goals of the district are otherwise being met.

Urban Design Comments

The project team has had several meetings with urban design staff to review and discuss the proposal. Staff strongly supports the design approach taken with this project. Its high-quality architecture and sensitive urban design will contribute to the character of the neighborhood while serving Cambridge's urgent need for affordable housing.

The project's overall massing and façade strategy is appropriate: the tall white metal-clad cubic volume at the corner of Mass Avenue and Walden Street - the building's second to eighth floors - relates to the scale of the nearby buildings along Mass Avenue; a slightly lower volume at the eastern portion of its Mass Avenue frontage is clad in horizontal grey siding and creates a transition in scale to the adjoining Cambridge Housing Authority building; a similar lower volume, also clad with grey siding, wraps around the south side of the building and faces the residential neighborhood along Walden Street. These volumes float above the building's first floor facades, which are clad in well-detailed masonry, and which incorporate a significant amount of transparent glazing.

While the proposed building is taller than the Henderson Carriage Factory building on the opposite side of Mass Ave, its scale and the orderly design of its facades seem compatible with it. Indeed, by restoring the portion of the Mass Avenue streetwall that was lost when the four-floor Odd Fellows building that previously occupied the site burned in 1968, it helps give spatial coherence to the street. Due to its location at the bend in Mass Avenue, the building will be a visual target for those entering Cambridge, and together with the Henderson building, will create a sense of entry to Porter Square.

The building facades are elegantly designed. The variations in the joints of the white volume's vertically grained metal cladding system will enliven the regular arrangement of its large windows. The window to wall ratios are pleasing, and the windows themselves are well proportioned and detailed. The scale of the windows and their gridded arrangement relate well to the façade of the Henderson Carriage Building immediately across Mass Ave. The use of brick bond patterns in the first-floor façade, and the joint patterns of the aluminum cladding, enrich the façade and add interest to the pedestrian realm. Staff anticipates that the facades will get even better as materials and details are further developed.

The plan of the ground floor has undergone careful study in collaboration with staff. Changes included relocating the residential entrance from Walden Street to Mass Ave following recommendations of neighborhood groups. Staff thanks the applicant for collaborating with the city on the proposed widening of Walden Street to a full 30' curb to curb dimension in order to achieve standard lane widths and ameliorate the existing difficult traffic conditions, and for also slightly widening the sidewalk along Walden Street. (See the separate memo from TP+T and the Sustainable Transportation section below for more detail.) To achieve these, the ground floor of the building has been moved approximately 4 feet inside of the property line, and an easement has been created granting the widened sidewalk to the City. Staff worked with the applicant to minimize the amount by which the building's upper floors overhang the easement while also maintaining the desired number of residential units.

The proposed green roof, rooftop solar, and stormwater management system, proposed as part of the project's PHIUS strategy, are all welcome features.

On the ground floor, the project incorporates a retail/community use space and a resident amenity space, both with glazed street facades that will help activate the adjoining street. Consideration could be given to giving the retail space at the building's northwest corner a somewhat broader frontage on Mass Avenue by narrowing the residential entrance. The possibility of adding more street trees on the Mass Avenue frontage (in coordination with city staff) could be considered.

The recently proposed possible change to the massing: adding a floor to the white metal-clad north facing volume on Mass Ave, and shortening the grey siding clad rear volume at the south side of the building by two floors, seems a positive change. It would further strengthen the white volume's scenographic role at the bend of Mass Ave and also reduce the building's height as it faces the residential neighborhood to the south, while maintaining the same number of residential units.

Staff appreciates the project's significant contribution to Cambridge's affordable housing, including its provision of family units; its responsiveness to urban design considerations; and its high architectural quality. Accordingly, Community Planning staff supports the proposal for being consistent with the city's planning and urban design goals, either in the case of the scheme shown in the application or in the case of the recently proposed alternative plan.

Sustainable Transportation

Following discussion with staff and feedback from neighbors, the Applicant has agreed to implement changes to the configuration of Walden Street and the abutting sidewalk that will improve access and safety for all users, including drivers as well as people walking and bicycling, by providing additional width along that edge. The TP+T memo elaborates on the benefits of this change in greater depth.

The proposed removal of the driveway access on Mass Ave is of particular benefit for the safety and comfort of all users. Mass Ave supports the highest number of people walking and bicycling in Cambridge, as well as those using buses; turning vehicle conflicts at driveways for people on foot and on bicycle are a significant source of conflict. The design of this building, with the primary orientation on Mass Ave, is also ideal in terms of being pedestrian-oriented.

Continuing Review

Staff are appreciative of the project team's efforts to shape this proposal, and look forward to continued collaboration as the project moves forward. Staff are confident that design details such as colors and materials can be addressed through continuing review at the staff level.

Other topics that could be considered as the project develops include:

- The materials and colors of penthouse enclosures and screening and the potential visibility of the rooftop solar PV panels.
- Changes to the adjoining city sidewalks, including potential trees, coordination regarding underground utilities, and the requirements for the bus stop.
- Materials and design of the soffit of the overhanging second floor.
- Exterior lighting, if any is proposed.

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