

Planning Board Special Permit Application Instructions

This webpage has information about how to apply for a special permit from the Planning Board. For more information about special permits and other zoning requirements, see the [Cambridge Zoning Ordinance](#). For more information about the Planning Board, see the [Planning Board Rules](#). Both documents are available online and at the City Clerk's office.

General Notes

- Both the Planning Board and the Board of Zoning Appeal grant special permits. The Zoning Ordinance identifies which board can grant specific special permits. If a project requires special permits from both boards, then the applicant can choose to have the Planning Board review all special permits. Otherwise, the Planning Board and the Board of Zoning Appeal will review the special permits separately. (See Section 10.45 of the Zoning Ordinance.)
- Applicants are responsible for identifying all the approvals needed for a project. Use the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance to determine specific special permit or variance relief that may be needed.
- Applicants must submit a complete special permit application before it can be scheduled for a Planning Board hearing.
- If a development proposal requires more than one special permit, submit a single application.
- Only include information that is relevant to the requested special permits in the application.

Application Process

Application Materials

Relevant Documents

- Checklists – to be emailed to CDD staff with the application submission
- Forms – to be included in the application submission
- Certifications of Receipt of Plans - to be emailed to the appropriate City departments/offices with a copy of the application submission to collect staff signatures and signed certifications to be emailed to CDD staff

Contact Information

Zoning and Development Division in Community Development Department (CDD)

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Mon: 8:30 A. M. to 8:00 P. M.

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Fri: 8:30 A. M. to Noon

Application Process

1. Determine what Planning Board special permits are needed for the proposal. Consulting with CDD staff is recommended. **However, Applicants are responsible for determining what permits are required, including permits and approvals from other City agencies, and for specifying all the special permits being requested in an application to the Planning Board.**
2. Complete any Pre-Application review as may be required by the Zoning Ordinance and/or Planning Board Rules, including but not limited to community engagement meetings and review by City departments or agencies.
3. Prepare the submission using the descriptions in Application Materials.
4. Provide all materials in **electronic draft form** to be reviewed by CDD staff for completeness. **Public hearings will not be scheduled until all required application materials are received.** Electronic submissions should meet the following specifications:
 - PDF format, readable by Adobe Acrobat v.7.0 and later
 - All pages rotated so that the tops of all pages align with the top of the screen
 - File sizes minimized and set to a resolution of roughly 150 dpi.
 - No single file greater than 10 MB (volumes may be broken into separate files)
 - Scanned documents processed with optical character recognition (OCR) software
 - Do not write-secure (on request, City staff may secure files before posting to the website)
5. After the electronic submission is deemed complete by CDD staff, provide Certification of Receipt of Plans and a copy of all applicable project materials to the appropriate City departments/offices as required and noted in Certification of Receipt of Plans. Submit the Certification of Receipt of Plans with staff signatures to CDD staff before the public hearing.
6. The following are required for a final submission to be considered complete:
 - Electronic copy of all application materials certified complete by CDD in digital format (via email)
 - Three (3) original copies of forms with ink signatures & notarization (Coversheet & Ownership Certificate)
 - Ten (10) hard copies of Narrative Volume and Graphic Volume. Four (4) hardcopies of Appendices. Avoid binders, spiral binding, and plastic coversheet. Staples, velo binding or tape binding are preferred.
 - Application fee (by check made to City of Cambridge)
7. At least 14 days before the public hearing, post notification panels on the site as per [Section 10.42.1 of the Zoning Ordinance](#). Panels will be prepared by CDD staff and may be collected from the CDD office at 344 Broadway.
8. At least 4 days before the public hearing, provide an electronic copy of presentation materials in a PDF format single file no greater than 10 MB along with a list of names and email addresses of presenters. Unless waived, a physical model of the proposed development must be presented at the hearing as required by the Planning Board Rules. Also, present samples of exterior building materials.
9. A public hearing is held within 65 days of the complete application submittal. The Planning Board decision is filed within 90 days of the public hearing unless an extension is mutually agreed upon by both the Planning Board and the applicant at a public meeting.
10. Any supplemental or amended Application Materials (including materials provided for continued hearings) should include a memo listing the new materials submitted, responses to information requests, and any changes to the proposal along with a revised graphic volume with a full plan set to reference in the decision and amended versions of any other application components to reflect any changes to the proposal.

Application Materials

NARRATIVE VOLUME

Item	Description
<p>Application Forms <i>Email Application Checklist and List of City Departments to CDD staff.</i></p>	
Cover Sheet	Contains basic information including the project location with parcel addresses (can be found using Zoning Viewer), zoning districts, contact information, applicant name and address, and a list of the specific permits being sought (with references to the applicable zoning sections). Final version must be signed by the Applicant.
Dimensional Form	Summarizes the existing, allowed and proposed dimensional characteristics of the site, including lot size, use types, gross floor area (GFA), dwelling units, yard setbacks, building heights, parking and bicycle parking.
Ownership Certificate(s)	Provides signed authorization by the landowner(s) to seek special permits, specifying the parcel deed(s) and title(s).
Fee Schedule	Calculates the fee requirement for the requested special permit(s). <i>Full payment must be included with the final Special Permit Application submission.</i>
<p>Project Narrative <i>Provides the rationale for granting a special permit. It should, at minimum, contain the following sections.</i></p>	
Project Overview	Summarizes the key characteristics of the project, including the project location and surrounding context, existing conditions, and proposed uses (as listed in the Zoning Ordinance Article 4.000 - Use Regulations with GFA allocated to each use) in existing and proposed new structures. Include a list of City departments that have received relevant project plans or other application materials.
Zoning Conformance	Summarizes how the proposed project meets the intent and standards of applicable base and overlay zoning districts; specifies what Planning Board special permits are being sought for the project and why they are needed; specifies any variances that will be sought from the Board of Zoning Appeal; specifies if the project is subject to the PTDM Ordinance (Chapter 10.18 of the Cambridge Municipal Code) and if the draft PTDM Plan has been submitted to the PTDM Officer; specifies if the project has been reviewed and approved by the Conservation Commission; specifies if the project has been reviewed and approved by the Cambridge Historical Commission .
Project-Specific Criteria and Guidelines	Describes how the project meets all applicable criteria and guidelines, making reference to plans and guidelines for the area as well as approval criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance for the requested special permits.
General Special Permit Criteria	Describes how the proposed project meets the general criteria for issuance of a special permit as set forth in Section 10.43 of the Zoning Ordinance .
Urban Design Objectives Narrative	Describes how the proposal responds to the Citywide Urban Design Guidelines set forth in Section 19.30 of the Zoning Ordinance and the specific urban design objectives and guidelines established by the City for that area.
Summary of Community Engagement	Describes efforts that were made to inform and gather feedback from community members, including meetings and other forms of outreach. At least one pre-application community meeting must be hosted by the developer per the Planning Board Rules. See CDD Community Engagement Guidelines for more information.

GRAPHIC VOLUME

These maps and plans are required, although additional illustrations may be provided if they address the requirements and criteria for granting the requested special permit(s). Each map or plan must have a clear and unique title with record date, must include a graphic scale bar and north arrow, and must label surrounding streets for orientation purposes. Text and dimensions in plans and elevations must be legible.

Plan/Illustration	Description
Site Locus Map(s)	Map(s) showing an approximately one-eighth to one-quarter mile radius around the project site (may be larger or smaller depending on project scale), labeling the project site, streets, and major land uses in the area such as transit stations, employment centers, institutions, shopping districts, residential areas, &c. For new construction projects, show the locations of Registered Solar Energy Systems in the vicinity (contact Inspectional Services Department for a list).
Existing Conditions and Context Plan(s)	Plan(s) showing the boundaries of the development parcel and illustrating the existing conditions on that parcel, adjacent streets, and lots abutting or directly facing the development parcel across streets.
Proposed Site Plan(s)	The following must be shown on a plan or series of plans depicting the development parcel, adjacent streets, and abutting or facing portions of lots: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • proposed subdivision, if any; • zoning boundaries, if any and parcel boundaries; • site access/egress points and circulation routes for pedestrians, bicyclists, passenger vehicles and service/delivery vehicles; • new buildings and existing buildings to remain on the development parcel, clearly showing points of entry/exit; • other major site features within the parcel or along its perimeter, including but not limited to trees, fences, retaining walls, landscaped screens, utility boxes and light fixtures; • spot grades or site topography and finish floor level • open space required or provided on the site; and • any existing and proposed easements or rights of way.
Proposed Floor Plans	Schematic drawings of each interior floor of each proposed building, including basements.
Proposed Roof Plan(s)	Schematic drawing(s) of the roof surface(s), identifying roofing materials and appurtenances such as mechanical equipment, visual or acoustical screening devices, light fixtures, green roofs with area calculation and dimension (Section 22.30 of the Zoning Ordinance), usable outdoor terraces and parapets.
Proposed Landscaping Plan	Schematic drawing(s) illustrating and clearly labeling all landscape features, including hardscape materials, permeable areas, plant species and light fixtures.
Proposed Elevations	Schematic drawings of each exterior façade of each building, identifying floor levels, materials, colors, and appurtenances such as mechanical vents and light fixtures.
Parking and Loading Plans	Plans of all parking, loading, and bicycle parking facilities located on the surface or within a structure, showing the dimensions of spaces, driveways, access aisles and access/egress points. Include line-of-sight and turning radius along with length and type of delivery truck.
Bicycle Parking Plans	Plans of all bicycle parking facilities located on the lot and within any structure, shown at a 1" = 10' scale, including the dimensions of spaces and access routes and type of equipment (e.g., racks) to be used for compliance with Section 6.100 of the Zoning Ordinance .
Existing Condition Photographs	Photographs showing conditions on the development parcel at the time of application and showing structures on abutting lots.
Proposed Perspective Renderings or Photo Simulations	Drawings (hand-drawn or digitally rendered) from one or more prominent public vantage point illustrating how the proposed project will appear within the context of its surroundings.
Proposed Materials and Color Palette	Graphic information showing façade materials and color samples. Include VLT, VLR, and color of proposed glass.

APPENDICES (OTHER SUBMISSIONS)

These materials are frequently required for projects seeking Planning Board Special Permits. However, this is not a comprehensive list of all materials that might be required. ***It is the Applicant's responsibility to review the [Zoning Ordinance](#) and all other applicable requirements to determine the requirements for all permits being sought.***

Item	Description
Transportation Impact Study (TIS) and TP+T Certification	Projects subject to a Project Review Special Permit exceeding specific thresholds set forth in Section 19.23 are required to submit a transportation impact study (TIS). The requirements are in Section 19.24(2). The Applicant should consult with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) to determine the scope of the TIS prior to beginning the study, and TP&T must certify that the TIS is complete and reliable before the Planning Board accepts the application. <i>The completed and certified TIS should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>
Tree Study and City Arborist Certification	Applications for a Project Review Special Permit, Multifamily Housing Special Permit, or Townhouse Special Permit are required to include a tree study demonstrating that the project meets the requirements of the Tree Protection Ordinance, Chapter 8.66 of the Cambridge Municipal Code. The City Arborist at the Department of Public Works must certify the tree study prior to issuance of a special permit. <i>The completed and certified Tree Study should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>
Sewer Service Infrastructure Narrative Water Service Infrastructure Narrative	Applications for a Project Review Special Permit must include a report detailing the anticipated impact of the project on the city's sanitary, stormwater, and combined sewer infrastructure. The requirements are set forth in Section 19.24(5). <i>This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix. The Department of Public Works must receive a copy of the application.</i> Applications for a Project Review Special Permit must include a report detailing the anticipated impact of the project on the city's water delivery infrastructure and supply. The requirements are set forth in Section 19.24 Paragraph (6). <i>This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix. The Cambridge Water Department must receive a copy of the application.</i>
Noise Mitigation Narrative	Applications for a Project Review Special Permit must include a report detailing conformance to the requirements of the Cambridge Noise Ordinance. The requirements are set forth in Section 19.24 Paragraph (7). <i>This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>
Shadow Studies Wind Studies	Graphical representations of shadow impacts may be required where shadow impacts are relevant to the criteria for issuance of the special permits being sought. <i>This study should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i> Wind study report may be required where wind impacts are relevant to the criteria for issuance of the special permits being sought. <i>This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>
Green Building Report	Projects with 25,000 square feet or more of floor area are subject to the Green Building Requirements of Section 22.20. A Special Permit Application for a project subject to 22.20 must include CDD certified Green Building Report with supporting materials in accordance with Section 22.20. <i>The Green Building Report must be submitted to the Community Development Department at least 30 days before an application is submitted. This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>
Green Factor Documentation	Projects subject to the Green Building Requirements, new construction, enlargements of existing buildings with increase in footprint by 50% or more, or creation of new surface parking. A Special Permit Application for a project subject to 22.90 must include CDD certified Green Factor Documentation with supporting materials in accordance with Section 22.90. <i>The Green Factor Documentation must be submitted to the Community Development Department at least 30 days before an application is submitted. This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>

Flood Resilience Documentation	Projects subject to the Green Building Requirements, new construction, enlargements of existing buildings with increase in footprint by 50% or more, or creation of occupiable or habitable space in basements exempt from Gross Floor Area. A Special Permit Application for a project subject to 22.80 must include DPW certified Flood Resilience Documentation with supporting materials in accordance with Section 22.80. <i>The Flood Resilience Documentation must be submitted to the Department of Public Works at least 45 days before an application is submitted. This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>
Flood Plain Documentation	Development subject to a Flood Plan Special Permit as set forth in Section 20.70 must submit elevation data and other technical documentation, prepared by a registered professional engineer, as specified in Section 20.74. The plans must also be received by the City Engineer and Conservation Commission and their recommendations submitted prior to issuing a special permit. <i>Applicants should consult with the City Engineer and Cambridge Conservation Commission staff prior to applying. This report should be included in the special permit application as an appendix.</i>