



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: July 13, 2023

Re: Affordable Housing Overlay Design Consultation **AHO-6, 1627 Massachusetts Avenue**

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Overview

Submission Type: Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Advisory Design Review

Applicant: Homeowners Rehab, Inc. (HRI)

Zoning District(s): Residence C-2A; Basement Housing Overlay District

Proposal Summary: Renovation of an existing structure and new addition to create twenty-nine (29) new rental units under the AHO.

Planning Board Action: Review and comment on conformance with AHO

Development Standards, City Development Guidelines for the proposal area, Design Guidelines for AHO, and Citywide Urban Design Objectives.

Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

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

11.207.5 – 11.207.7 AHO Development Standards

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in (Zoning District)
Building Height & Stories Above Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally follows underlying District Dimensional Standard (e.g., where 40' is permitted, AHO Development can build 4 Stories Above Grade or 45 feet). • Five additional feet are permitted in some districts when the Ground Story contains a non-residential active use. • Stepdowns in height are required when the AHO Development abuts a residential use.
Density	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the underlying District Dimensional Standard establish a maximum FAR of 1.00, the AHO Development may not exceed an FAR of 2.00. Otherwise, there is no maximum FAR for an AHO Project. • There is no minimum lot area per dwelling unit for an AHO Development.
Yard Setbacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, 15' Front Yard, 7.5' Side Yard, and 20' Rear Yard. • Yards may be reduced if the underlying District Dimensional Standard is less. • Front yards may be reduced to the average of the four (4) nearest pre-existing principal buildings on the same side of the street.
Open Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally AHO Developments must have 30% open space to lot area or meet the underlying District Dimensional Standard, whichever is less. • Required open space is reduced to 15% when a historic building is being preserved as part of the AHO Development.
Existing Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The required dimensional characteristics of the existing building and site shall be those existing at the time of conversion to an AHO Development. • Certain modifications may be permitted as-of-right to an existing building for an AHO Development.
Parking and Bicycle Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no minimum off-street parking for an AHO Development. • For AHO Developments of twenty (20) or more units and less than 0.4 spaces per dwelling unit are provided, specific Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures are required. • Bicycle parking is required per Article 6.100, but additional flexibility is provided for the location, quantity and type (long-term and short-term) of bicycle parking required.
Transportation Demand Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where applicable, required TDM measures include complimentary annual Bluebikes memberships or 50% discounted MBTA passes for six months, and providing transit information to each household within the AHO Development.

Development Standard	Requirements for AHO Project in (Zoning District)
Site Design and Arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 in excess of 250’ in length shall provide forecourts to break up massing.
Building Facades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building facades facing public streets shall have a minimum percentage of glazing. • Building facades shall incorporate projections/recesses at regular intervals to promote visual interest. • Facades of ground stories shall have expanses of no more than 25’ with no windows or pedestrian entryways.
Ground Stories and Below Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground stories with non-residential uses must have a height of at least 15’ and a depth of 35’. • Ground stories must contain a non-residential use when located in a Business base zoning district, or where a retail/consumer service establishment has existed on the site in the last two (2) years.
Mechanical Equipment, Refuse Storage and Loading Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanical equipment shall be generally screened from view. Rooftop mechanical equipment must be set back from the roof line equal to its height.
Environmental Design Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Building Requirements as set forth in Article 22 shall generally apply to AHO Developments. • AHO Developments are exempt from the Green Roofs Ordinance.

AHO Design Guidelines

Site Design Objectives	
Response to Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design site layouts to harmonize with the neighborhood context.
Open Space & Landscape Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design open space to enhance the lives of residents and the broader community by offering aesthetic and environmental benefits. • Offer useful amenities to residents, provide opportunities to minimize the impact of new development on neighbors' privacy and quality of life, and contribute to the beauty of the city.
Circulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote non-motorized mobility by prioritizing pedestrian-friendly and bike-accessible site design.
Parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize the impact of parking and driveway.
Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize the visual, acoustical, and environmental impacts of essential utilities and services.
Outdoor Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide lighting for safety and functionality while minimizing energy use, light pollution, and other negative impacts.

Public Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrich the visual environment and strengthen the sense of place by incorporating art.
Building Design Objectives	
Massing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Configure massing for compatibility with the prevailing or desired pattern of neighboring buildings and open spaces. In established neighborhoods, relate to the existing pattern of streets and other open spaces, and prioritize compatibility with existing buildings. In evolving areas, configure new developments to help realize the City’s vision for urban form.
Facades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design facades to enhance and enliven the public realm. In established areas, emphasize compatibility and reinforce sense of place. In evolving residential and commercial districts, contribute to the transformation of urban form by setting precedents for design excellence. • Where appropriate, incorporate ground level retail spaces and common areas to foster a lively enliven the urban environment. • Provide daylight to interior spaces, avoid excessive energy use, and protect the privacy of residents of neighboring buildings. • Design facades to relate to the residential scales and patterns of Cambridge's diverse and historic neighborhoods. • Design street facades to offer a sense of civic presence and human scale, and visual interest as appropriate to their role in defining public space.
Architectural Details, Materials, Color, and Finishes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use materials that are warm, inviting, and compatible with surrounding existing buildings and the neighborhood context. Develop building facades of high-quality, durable materials and with colors, finishes, and textures appropriate to building contexts.
Building Interiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing, like all housing, should serve the needs of its residents while contributing to the residential character and sense of neighborhood within the area at large.
Sustainable Design Objective	
Site and Building Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve resilience measures to the maximum extent possible, including energy efficiency and measures to promote the health and wellness of residents.

The complete set of Design Guidelines for Affordable Housing (28 July 2020) can be found at:

https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/CDD/Housing/Overlay/zngamend_aho_designguidelines_20200728v2.pdf

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

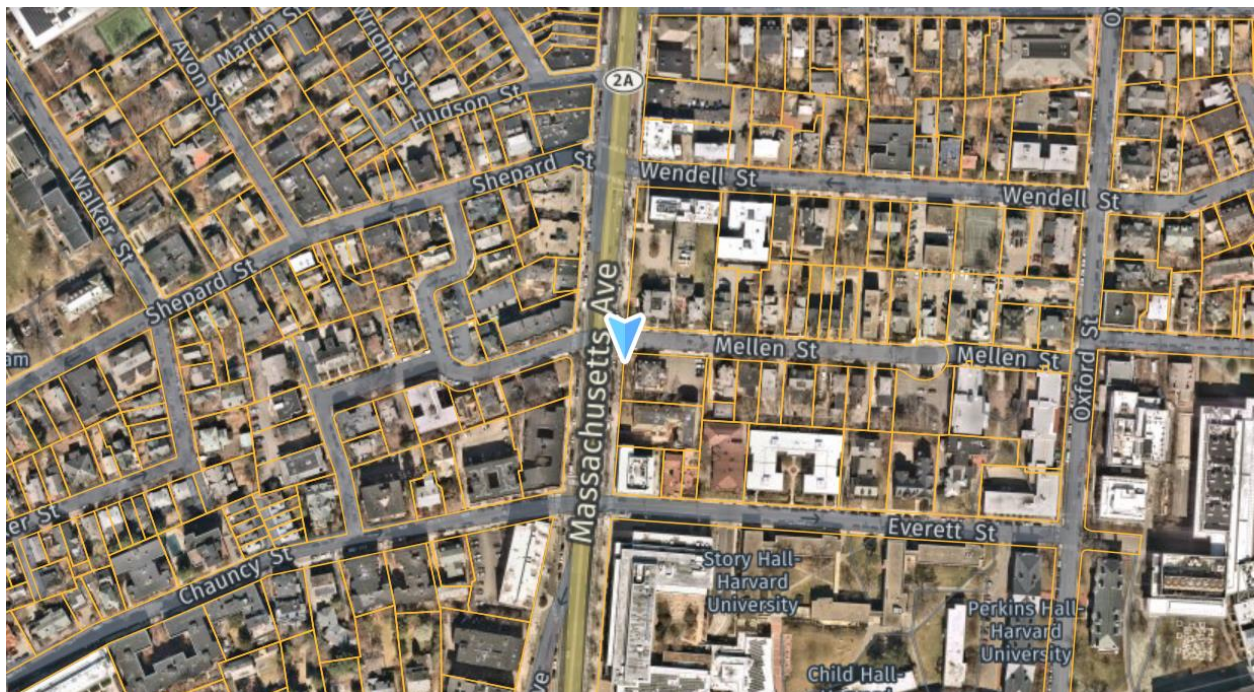
Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
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

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Site & Zoning Context

Site Context

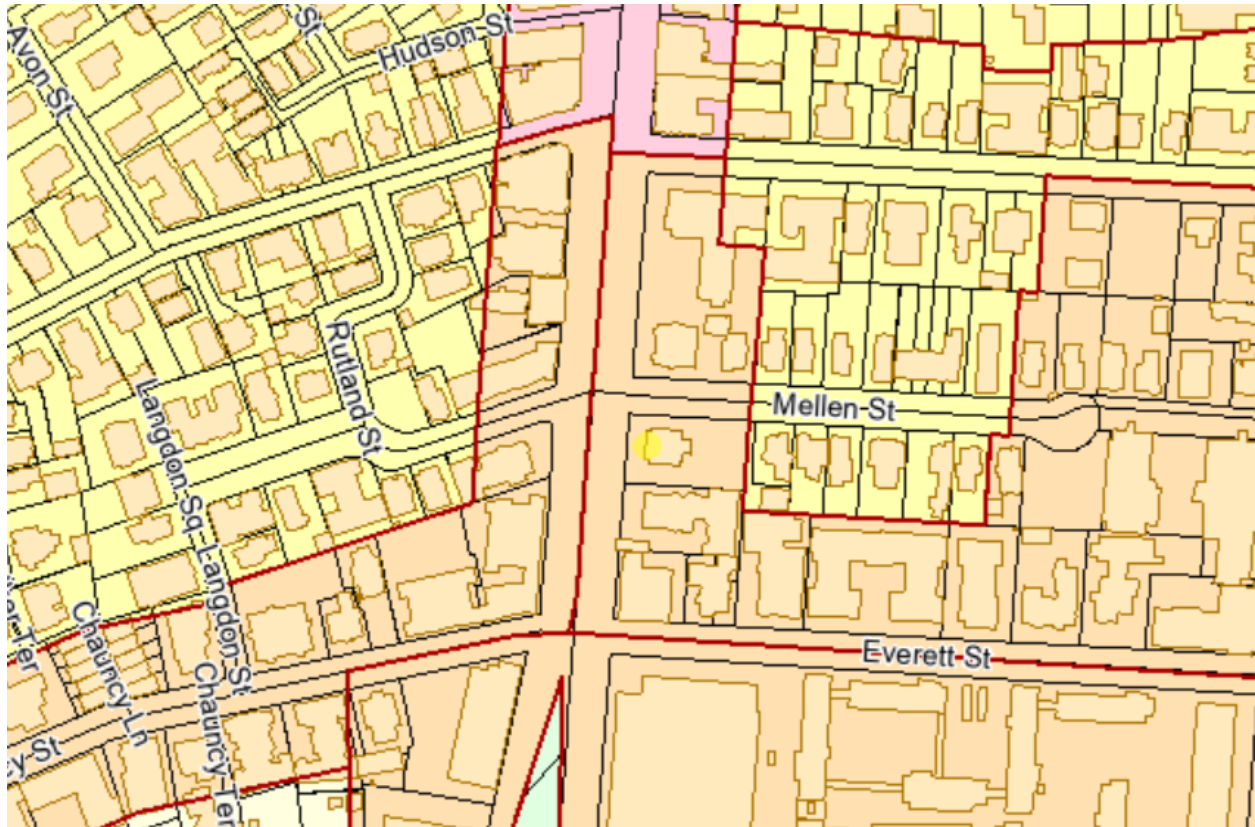
The site is located at the southern portion of the intersection of Mass Ave and Mellen Street in the Baldwin neighborhood, just north of Cambridge Common and Harvard Square. This portion of Mass Ave consists of a variety of development uses and scales, ranging from smaller, 1-story multi-tenant commercial buildings to higher density residential developments of six and seven stories. Many buildings are built to the lot line on Mass Ave, while others have smaller front yards or forecourts. The site is currently improved with an existing 3-story Second Empire Style structure known as the “Saunders House”, which currently contains institutional uses, as well as a surface parking area in the rear of the property.



(Source: Nearmap, 2023)

Site Zoning

The site is zoned Residence C-2A and is across the street from a Residence C-2 zone. The adjacent properties to the east along Mellen Street are zoned Residence C-1. Residence C-2A is a moderate-intensity residential zoning district which permits all types of residential uses, as well as some institutional uses and neighborhood-scale retail and consumer service uses. Development in the C-2A district is permitted to build up to sixty feet (60') in height, and to a density of 2.50 FAR, with a 10% minimum open space requirement.



(Source: Cambridge Cityviewer, 2023)

Comments on Proposal

Project Description

Homeowners Rehab, Inc. (“HRI” or the “Applicant”) is proposing to renovate the existing house into four (4) apartments, and construct a new addition on the rear of the property that would accommodate twenty-five (25) additional rental units. No vehicular off-street parking spaces are proposed for the site, but it will include thirty (30) long-term bicycle parking spaces, and four (4) short-term bicycle parking spaces.

The total Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the development is 35,263 square feet; 5,420 of which is accommodated in the existing structure and 29,843 square feet in the proposed addition. The existing building is forty-one feet (41’) tall, and the proposed addition will be sixty-nine feet eight inches (69’8”), stepping down to fifty-nine feet four inches (59’4”) within thirty-five feet (35’) of the Residence C-1 district boundary to the east. The Application notes that all of the apartments are planned to be affordable to families earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI), and 65% of the apartments will be two-bedroom or larger. The proposal also includes 700 square feet of amenity space on the ground floor.

Consistency with AHO Development Standards

The AHO development standards applicable to this project are summarized in the table in the introductory section of the memo. The following commentary provides a high-level overview of how the AHO standards compare to this development proposal:

- Use
 - Per the AHO regulations, the proposal for a multifamily dwelling is allowed as-of-right.

- Dimensional Standards
 - The AHO has dimensional standards that apply to existing buildings as well as additions and new construction. The proposed addition will have a sixth story for a portion of the building's footprint, which is below the AHO maximum allowable height of seven (7) stories, 80' in this district. Submitted plans show that the highest point of the lowest floor in the addition is exactly 4 feet above grade, making it a story below grade.
 - There is no maximum FAR for AHO projects in this District, and the proposal has a FAR of 2.1. The AHO does not limit the number of affordable dwelling units that can be built.
 - The AHO allows for a reduced front yard setback of 10 feet in the case of a project on a corner lot. The existing structure has a front yard setback of 26.9' and 16.4'. The façade of the new addition will maintain a compliant 10-foot front yard setback along Mellen Street.
 - The AHO allows for a 7.5-foot side yard setback. The western side of the site is defined as the side yard and maintains a compliant 7.6' setback from the neighboring lot line.
 - The proposed private open space will cover 36% of the lot area, which exceeds the minimum requirement of 15% in the AHO. All of the proposed open space is permeable open space at grade.

- Design Standards
 - The AHO establishes a number of design standards for facades facing public streets, such as minimum glazing requirements, façade recess/projection requirements, and landscaping requirements. These standards do not apply to existing buildings, so for this proposal, they are required only for the building addition along Mellen Street. By providing a fenestration that is twenty percent (20%) of the façade area facing a public street or open space (35% proposed at ground story), the developer satisfies the AHO standards that require a minimum twenty percent (20%) of these façade portions to consist of clear glass windows. The AHO requires projecting and/or recessing architectural elements of at least two feet for every forty (40) feet of a façade facing a public street. More information should be provided to determine compliance with this provision.
 - The AHO design standards also require rooftop mechanical equipment to be set back from roof edges and screened from ground-level view on public streets and abutting residential lots. The proposed building design includes a roof plan which illustrates that the elevator overrun and building condensers on the proposed addition will be located at least ten feet

from the roof line and cladded with a material that matches the façade design. The existing building will have no rooftop mechanical equipment, and is proposed to be modified to add a new skylight.

- Parking and Short-Term Drop Off Loading Areas
 - No off-street parking is required or provided. The AHO requires that any developments over twenty (20) units providing less than 0.4 off-street parking spaces per dwelling unit implement prescribed TDM measures. This development is therefore required to provide a TDM plan including measures to offer either a free annual BlueBikes membership or a 50% discounted MBTA pass for six months and to provide transit information on site and at the start of occupancy. The developer has committed to providing the required TDM measures and will additionally provide 100% discounted MBTA combined subway and bus passes for three months for up to two individuals per household.
 - If no off-street parking is provided for an AHO project of at least 20 units, the Cambridge Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department shall certify to the Superintendent of Buildings that the Project has access to either on-street or off-street facilities that can reasonably accommodate passenger pick-up and drop-off by motor vehicles and short-term loading by moving vans or small delivery trucks. Such certification would be made at the building permit stage. TP+T staff have reviewed this project with the developer and believe these activities can reasonably be accommodated on-street. The developer has requested a temporary loading zone on Mellen Street to facilitate pick-up and drop-off for the proposed building.
 - The AHO generally requires bicycle parking for new construction but allows for some flexibility in the required quantity (e.g., allowing a Bluebikes station to count towards long-term bike parking requirements) and location (AHO developments may place bicycle parking anywhere on the lot or an adjacent lot under common control). The proposal for 30 long-term spaces and 4 short-term spaces meets the minimum requirements for the 29 new units to be constructed in the Project. The bicycle parking that is provided still needs to meet the location, access, and layout standards of Section 6.100.
- Environmental Design Standards
 - This proposal is subject to the City’s Green Building Requirements as set forth in Section 22.20 of the Zoning Ordinance. The proposal is meeting this requirement by targeting Enterprise Green Communities certification, which is encouraged in the City’s climate planning goals. A Green Building Report has been submitted to the City. Prior to obtaining a building permit for the project, the City must verify that the necessary documentation has been submitted to certify compliance with the standards in Section 22.20.
 - The City’s Green Roofs Requirement is not applicable to an AHO project, but the proposal does include a plan for solar panels on the roof, as well as a commitment to sourcing low embodied-carbon materials for the building. The building will additionally use all-electric energy systems.

Recommendations (if any)

The following is a summary of recommendations that may be considered for revised submission:

- Additional details on the proposed rooftop mechanical screening, including measurements of setback line and perspective views from adjacent public streets to confirm mechanical equipment is fully hidden from view.
- Diagram of proposed transparency percentages for façade facing Mellen Street (new addition).
- Diagram of proposed projecting/recessing architectural elements on the façade facing Mellen Street (new addition) to determine compliance with Section 11.207.7.3.b of the AHO.