



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

## Housing Department

Christopher Cotter  
Director of Housing

### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust  
**From:** Christopher Cotter, Housing Director  
Cassie Arnaud, Senior Manager for Housing Development  
**Date:** August 1, 2024  
**Re:** Planning Board review of 21 Walden Square Road/Walden Square II

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Winn Development Company LP (Winn) has been working on plans to build two new buildings containing a total of 95 affordable rental units at the site of their existing Walden Square Apartments complex. CDD and Housing Department staff have worked with Winn as the team developed its plan, held community meetings, and recently completed the advisory design review process with the Planning Board under the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO).

The Planning Board held its second required advisory design consultation meeting on July 2, 2024 to review and comment on the revised designs for Winn's proposed development. The Board provided initial comments on the project in March 2024.

The AHO requires that the results of the design review process be shared with the Affordable Housing Trust. The final Planning Board advisory design report is attached and includes:

- Planning Board Final Report of Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Design Consultation (7/22/2024), including:
  - CDD Staff Memo (6/27/2024);
- Planning Board Initial Report of Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Design Consultation (3/22/2024), including:
  - CDD Staff Memo 3/6/2024).

As noted in the attached final report, the Board was supportive of creating affordable housing at this location and noted the positive changes to the facades of both buildings since the initial meeting in March, but advised that the project could benefit from continued design consultation with CDD and other City staff regarding certain aspects of the proposed development. The Board agreed with the comments made in the CDD memos which included a number of recommendations, with an emphasis on ways to improve circulation through the site by pedestrians and cyclists, and to canopy tree planting.

The following summarizes some of the specific recommendations, as described in more detail in the attached materials.

## Circulation

- Clarify the preferred route for east-bound people walking or bicycling from the western part of Walden Square Road to the Yerxa Road Underpass.
- Clarify the preferred route for east-bound people walking or cycling from the western part of Walden Square Road toward Raymond Street or to the bicycle storage room at the east end of Building A.
- Clarify the preferred route for people bicycling west-bound on Walden Square Road from Raymond Street to the bicycle storage room at the east end of Building A.
- Clarify the preferred route for people bicycling west-bound on Walden Square Road from Raymond Street toward Sherman Street.
- Consider adding a raised sidewalk at the south side of Building A and/or consider creating a more direct route to this path for east-bound pedestrians coming from the sidewalk on the south side of the western part of Walden Square Road.
- Consider adjusting the designs of the crosswalk which connects the path from the Yerxa Underpass to the east/west path on the south side of Building A and to the sidewalk on the east side of Building 21 to more strongly prioritize pedestrians over vehicular traffic and to create a more direct connection to the Yerxa Underpass.

## Façades, Landscaping, and Bicycle Parking:

- Additional consideration to treatment of facades in terms of color, materials, features and other elements in order to “create stronger relationships to the adjoining buildings and to emphasize the coherence of the site’s open spaces by giving them more consistent architectural frames”.
- Explore ways to make site mounted electrical equipment less prominent through relocation and/or increased screening.
- Continued consideration of certain landscaping features, including maximizing the number of canopy shade trees and considering potential to add additional play equipment to the playspace in Courtyard C.
- Consideration to providing more long-term bicycle parking spaces for Walden Square as a whole, including storage areas for e-bikes and cargo bikes, in addition to the 74 new long-term bike parking spaces and new 19- dock Bluebikes station already proposed, and 42 existing short-term bike spaces.

### Project Overview:

The proposal for Walden Square II consists of the new construction of two buildings, consisting of a total of 95 units, on portions of the existing Walden Square I campus. Building A is an approximately 91,000 square-foot, 7-story building with 60 affordable dwelling units and Building B is a 6-story building with approximately 49,000 square feet and 35 affordable units. Building A faces Raymond Street and straddles the existing internal Walden Square Road while Building B is set behind an existing 9-story building. The project will include 10 additional off-street parking spaces for a total of 200, 74 new long-term bike parking spaces, and a new 19-dock Bluebikes station. Under their AHO submission, all 95 units will be affordable to households earning at or below 80% of area median income (AMI), of which 44 units are anticipated to be affordable to those earning below 60% AMI and 24 of which are anticipated to be affordable to those earning under 30% AMI.

More information on Winn's proposed development, including material Winn submitted to the Planning Board and presentation materials, can be seen on CDD's Walden Square II project page at:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Housing/waldensquareii>

### Housing Department recommendation:

All approvals of Trust funding for AHO projects are conditioned on the Trust review and consideration of the final Planning Board report. To date, the Trust has received and considered the final Planning Board reports for six AHO projects and has voted to accept each report, thereby satisfying the funding condition. In each case, Staff continued to work with the developers to ensure that all remaining recommendations, most of which were fairly minor, continued to be considered and oftentimes were able to be incorporated into the final plan.

In the case of Walden Square II, the Trust approval of funding is contingent on the Trust's review and acceptance of the final Planning Board report. The Board's report notes a need for more review of aspects of Winn's proposed plan than we have seen in other reports. Winn will be meeting with City staff in the coming weeks to discuss opportunities to address the comments shared in the Planning Board's final report. Given this, and given the number of specific comments, particularly around circulation, Housing staff recommend that the Trust begin to review the attached report but wait to take a vote on accepting the report until Staff can bring back an update to the Trust on progress made by Winn to address the items noted in the Planning Board's final report.