



Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit Process Guidelines and FAQs

Updated September 2023

Note: on September 18, 2023 the Cambridge City Council voted to change the Zoning Code and remove the Special Permit requirement for all retail cannabis business uses except Production Facilities. 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 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. Both applications ask for similar information, but they are not identical. Failure to submit accurate information for the Cannabis Business Permit can result in significant processing delays. Information in this document, and more, is available on the [Useful Documents & Resources section of the Cannabis Business Permit webpage](#).

Tips for the Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit Application

The Cannabis Business Permit is online and is complete when the applicant has provided business information, ownership information, operating information, and property information as well as executed a Host Community Agreement (HCA) and 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 or 617/349-4601.

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 itself.

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 a Priority A applicant. Review the [Priority A 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.
 - 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) Description of how the applicant will work with the Cambridge Public Health Department to create and distribute educational materials to its customers as directed by the Cambridge Public Health Department.
 - 7) Description of how the applicant will comply with directives of the Police Commissioner and of the Director of Traffic Parking and Transportation, or their designees, regarding traffic measures to be taken at and near the Cannabis Business site.

Answer carefully so that your information will 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 contact information for the application. Business name, address, ownership/investment team, and hours of operation can certainly change but whatever information you provide to the state it must match what you have provided to the city. *Discrepancies across documents will significantly delay processing time.*

Tips for the Host Community Agreement (HCA) stage

An executed Host Community Agreement (HCA) is required before the Cannabis Business Permit is issued by Cambridge Inspectional Services Department (ISD). The HCA has its own application, the Statement of Interest form, and is complete when the applicant has provided information that satisfies all criteria in the Statement of Interest. City staff will request follow-up, or additional information, from applicants if any criteria has not been satisfied.

Review the [Request for Statement of Interest for Cannabis Business Host Community Agreement \(HCA\) form](#).

- The purpose of the Statement of Interest is to gather detailed information regarding the proposed Cannabis Business's planned leadership structure, safety and security, operations and management, and overall community impact.

Plan for your Community Meeting (required by the MA CCC and the Cambridge HCA Statement of Interest).

- To have a productive meeting with the public, the applicant should have:
 - A location with some documentation showing landlord agreement
 - An owner or ownership team that meets the Priority A Applicant criteria
 - A draft mockup of the building exterior and interior layout
 - A draft timeline for opening
- Both the MA CCC and the City of Cambridge (through the HCA) require applicants to document key aspects of the community meeting so be prepared to record:
 - Any outreach or publicity to advertise the event

- Meeting time and place
- Number of attendees
- Number of speakers
- Summary of any comments

Draft your Operations and Logistics Plan that the Cambridge Traffic, Parking, and Transportation (TPT) Department and Cambridge Police Department will review.

- The Operations and Logistics Plan is required per the Cambridge Zoning Code (see 11.804 c) and shall include the following information using narratives and graphics:
 - Hours of operation and anticipated numbers of employees and consumers on-site during operating hours.
 - Expected frequency of loading/unloading trips by delivery and service vehicles.
 - Access and egress routes for customers and employees.
 - Locations of parking and bicycle parking areas for customers and employees.
 - Number of delivery vehicles, where applicable, and locations where they will be stored on-site.
 - Locations where loading/unloading and service activities will take place and a description of how such activities will be conducted.
 - A description of transportation options for customers and employees, including public transportation services, on-site and off-site parking facilities, transportation demand management measures to encourage and support sustainable forms of travel for employees and customers, and short-term and long-term bicycle facilities.
 - Specific measures that will be employed by the Cannabis Use to prevent adverse impacts on the public way including but not limited to sidewalk crowding, blocking of vehicular or bicycle travel lanes, potential safety hazards, and other issues identified by City departments.
 - A specific plan for the initial opening period that includes measures to identify and respond to unexpected impacts.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

In addition to the questions below, applicants might find the January 2023 Joint Committee Meeting presentation to be helpful. To view the meeting and download the associated presentation slides, please see [the Useful Documents & Resources section of the Cannabis Business Permit webpage](#).

Question: 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”.

Question: Is there a cap?

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

Question: 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.

Question: When does it expire?

The Cannabis Business Permit renews every year on March 1. The Host Community Agreement renews every 5 years from the date of execution.

Question: 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](#).

Question: 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.

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](#).

Question: Do I have to go in a certain order?

Yes. For both the Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit and the state Marijuana License applications approvals move in a step-by-step way. If you plan to operate a Production Facility, you can pursue the Special Permit while also starting the Cannabis Business Permit application but for all other applicants this is the order to follow:

- Start the Cannabis Business Permit application online and be approved as an eligible applicant.
- Secure a Special Permit (required for Production Facilities only).
- Execute a Host Community Agreement (HCA) with the City of Cambridge.
- 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 by the applicant. For Cambridge, “local ordinances” means that the applicant is eligible for a Cannabis Business Permit and has an executed Host Community Agreement. Upon confirmation, applicant is then eligible for a Provisional License from the MA CCC.
- Secure a Provisional License from the MA CCC. A copy is provided to the City of Cambridge.
- The Cambridge Cannabis Business Permit from ISD is then complete and a paper copy is issued for posting.
- 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.

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

[All of the state legislation, statues, and regulations for adult use are available to view on the MA CCC website](#). While the MA CCC requires 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.

Question: How do I learn more about the Special Permit requirement for Production Facilities?

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