



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026-298
IN CITY COUNCIL
October 19, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please see attached a memo from Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development, responding to Policy Order 26-81 and Awaiting Report 26-55 (Policy Order 26-148) regarding Multifamily permitting.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Melissa Peters, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: October 19, 2026

Re: **Multifamily Permitting Communication (POR 26-81 and POR 26-148)**

The multifamily zoning amendments transformed how Cambridge regulates housing development and created new opportunities to build housing across the city. With these changes comes a need for more accessible, transparent information about what can be built, how it is reviewed and approved, and where housing is being built. The efforts described below will provide greater access to information for community members, about the process, the zoning, and the details of specific development proposals. We welcome feedback on how to make these resources even more useful.

Housing Development Dashboard

The Housing Development Dashboard is an official city website that will be updated regularly with information on multifamily development. The Dashboard includes all projects that add or remove housing units throughout the city. It does not include renovations or minor modifications to existing residential units that do not include demolition or a change in the number of units. Responding to community members wanting more transparency about development throughout the city, this dashboard creates an accessible repository to better understand housing development activity.

The Dashboard displays projects geographically on a map and includes a list of projects. Users can filter the map and project list by status (pre-permit, permitted, and complete), elements (demolition, new construction, and rehab), affordable housing (AHO and inclusionary projects), and by location (residential districts vs. corridors). Stats and charts, which track total units, affordable units, and new units added are also updated accordingly depending on the selected filters.

Project status divides the development process into three phases: pre-permit, permitted, and complete.

- **Pre-permit projects** have begun some sort of official City review process, such as demolition, historical review, public or Planning Board advisory consultation, Planning

Board special permit, Board of Zoning Appeals special permit or variance, or a neighbor notification meeting. Pre-permitted projects only include those that have begun a city review process, it does not include properties listed for sale or where conversations or community meetings have happened outside of an official city process.

- **Permitted projects** have been issued a building permit and are approved to start construction.
- **Completed Projects** have been issued a certificate of occupancy and are ready for residents to move in.

The Dashboard will also link to where more information may be available for projects, such as a building permit (once publicly viewable), or another city webpage with information.

The Housing Development Dashboard is meant to provide a central source of information about development, while also tracking overall housing production progress. The Dashboard will continue to be refined, and it includes a link to provide feedback.

The Housing Development Dashboard can be viewed here: <https://housing-development-dashboard.viz.cambridgema.gov/>.

Multifamily Housing Community Liaison

In response to the volume of questions being directed to staff and City Councilors, it has become clear that, alongside improved public materials, additional resources are needed to better support community members. Marlees West Owayda, Community Engagement Manager in Community Development, will be temporarily acting as the community liaison for multifamily housing process questions. Marlees has extensive experience engaging with the community and translating technical information into plain language. She will be spending a portion of her time coordinating with staff to provide information to residents and to create new educational materials around multifamily zoning and the permitting process.

A new email address has been created, multifamilyhousing@cambridgema.gov. Residents who have questions about the multifamily zoning or about development happening in their neighborhood should email this address and Marlees will provide information, direct people to additional resources, and coordinate with relevant staff across departments. This will provide a centralized point of information for the community, while also freeing up time for staff who are doing the permit reviews. Having a single initial point of contact will increase accessibility for the community to better understand the process.

Multifamily Housing Neighbor's Guide

The Multifamily Housing Neighbor's Guide is a response to Policy Order 2026-81, which requested an accessible guide to respond to confusion and frustration from community members around what the multifamily zoning ordinance allows and how the process works. This guide is one piece of a coordinated effort to provide clarity on the permitting process for housing development, the goals and specifics of multifamily zoning, and the purpose of zoning more generally (see below for more information on the accompanying zoning primer). The guide will be a new website (launching Monday, October 19), which includes answers to the questions raised in the Policy Order such as details on the requirements and timing of the permitting process, how and when there are opportunities for community input, whether decisions are binding or advisory, construction information, and other details of the process. The guide is geared towards an audience that does not have zoning or permitting knowledge and wants to better understand the process.

The guide includes a graphic showing the typical timeline for the permitting process, descriptions of the types of reviews a project may undergo, opportunities for community input, details on the construction process, board/commission and departmental roles and responsibilities, and an FAQ. This guide is meant to be a living document and will be updated based on feedback and the types of questions we are seeing frequently asked.

The Multifamily Housing Neighbor's Guide will be available on Monday, October 19th here: <https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/communitydevelopment/neighborguidetohousingdevelopment>

Multifamily Zoning Primer

To supplement the above efforts, staff are also working on a short, visual primer that explains the multifamily zoning and what is permitted. The primer will be available from the Multifamily Neighbor's Guide website. This will include the goals for the multifamily zoning ordinance, zoning basics, where multifamily housing is permitted, and the allowable height and setbacks. This primer is still underway and will be updated accordingly if the multifamily zoning is amended.

Additional Permitting Information

Policy Order 2026-148 asks the City Manager to produce a publicly accessible resource that communicates the interdepartmental workflow for permitting to residents and developers. The above efforts address most requests from this Policy Order. A complementary effort aimed toward developers is currently underway and recommendations were presented to City Council in August (see [memo](#) and [presentation](#)). Communication efforts include new permitting guides with a map of the process and lists of review thresholds, a central website with links to applications and checklists and other resources, and an intake form to share information early with relevant city

staff, prior to submitting for a permit. Additionally, city staff are testing ways to incorporate AI to provide more tailored information and answers to questions.