Providence
City Plan Commission

November 17, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 4 ▪ BROWN INSTITUTIONAL MASTER PLAN

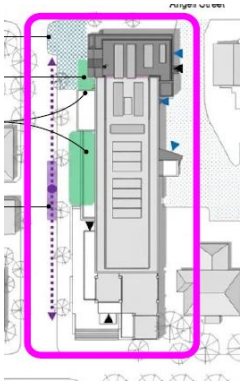


Economics building site plan



View down Brook Street and 75 Charlesfield Street





Central hub



Aerial view of economics building site

OVERVIEW			
Applicant:	Brown University	**Project Description:**	Institutional Master Plan Amendment for construction of new economics building and expansion of the central hub
Case no./Project type:	Institutional Master Plan Amendment		
Project location:	Multiple blocks on Brown's campus	**Recommendation:**	Approval of the Institutional Master Plan subject to the noted findings and conditions
Neighborhood:	College Hill	**Project planner:**	Choyon Manjrekar

Institutional Master Plan Amendment – Discussion

Section 1910 of the Zoning Ordinance requires all higher education institutions to file an Institutional Master Plan (IMP) with the City Plan Commission (CPC) that describes the institution's proposed development over the next five years or more. The IMP may be amended during that period. The applicant, Brown University, is requesting an amendment of their 2023 IMP for construction of a Central Thermal Energy Hub and an Economics building. The CPC will review the amendment for compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The amendment contains a summary of Brown's planning philosophy, schedule of public meetings for the amendment, updates on campus development projects and changes in its property holdings. This amendment is focused on construction of a central energy hub and a new economics building.

Central Hub

The amendment proposes a new thermal energy hub as part of the University's initiative to move away from fossil fuels to full electrification of the campus. The Central Hub will serve as a primary energy generation core and control center for the campus thermal heating network. The hub will be located at Page Robinson Hall. Two siting options are proposed, an outdoor addition of 14,000 SF or an addition to the rooftop. A dimensional variance for siting of rooftop structures will be required for the second option.

Economics Building

A four story, 56,000 SF economics building is proposed to consolidate Brown's economics department which is currently located in five separate buildings. It will be located at the corner of Charlesfield and Brook Streets, chosen for its proximity to the Watson School. The building is expected to conform to the dimension and design guidelines of the ordinance and employ sustainable features. Development will entail demolition of 75 Charlesfield Street and relocation of 71 Charlesfield to that site. Buildings at 277 and 281 Brook Street are also slated for demolition, but both houses will be made available for purchase and relocation prior to demolition. Both buildings will be offered to local organizations for architectural salvage if the houses are not purchased. The plan provides architectural profiles of the buildings on site and notes that the buildings are not in the in the College Hill National Historic Landmark District or the College Hill Local Historic District.

Traffic and Parking

A traffic memo evaluating changes to pedestrian and vehicle movement and parking as a result of the proposed changes has been provided. It is an update to the transportation study filed with the 2023 IMP. It finds that level of service (LOS) for intersections around the central hub and economics building are largely expected to remain unchanged and provides recommendations for more efficient traffic flow. The report reviews the LOS at intersections in and around the subject sites that will be affected by the IMP update. It finds that the level of service will largely remain the same with improvements in certain areas. Vehicular traffic at the intersection of Brook and Charlesfield Streets where the economics building is located is expected to decrease due to the displacement of parking spaces. Pedestrian traffic is expected to increase due to the consolidation of the Economics department in one building, particularly at the intersection of Brook Street with Benevolent and Charlesfield Streets. The plan suggests traffic mitigation measures like installing stop signs at the north and south bound approaches of the Brook and Benevolent Street intersection to make it a four way stop.

Development of the Hub is expected to temporarily displace some parking spaces and 47 spaces are expected to be lost at the development site of the Economics building. Brown can use alternate proximate spaces during construction the Hub. The spaces lost from the Economics building construction will be provided in the parking garage at 111 Power Street, which is underutilized according to the memo. The garage provides 410 spaces but the study observed only 46 vehicles parked during the afternoon peak. In addition, 76 parking spaces have been added around campus since the IMP was last reviewed.

Stormwater Master Plan

An update to the stormwater component of the plan is included, detailing improvements and installation of best management practices (BMP) made to stormwater infrastructure around the campus.

FINDINGS

Providence Comprehensive Plan

Objective LU-7 of the Comprehensive Plan is intended to manage institutional growth through use of tools like institutional zoning and requiring long range IMPs to ensure that there is limited growth and negative impacts on neighborhoods. In addition, IMPs are expected to be updated with any new developments between plans. Brown has satisfactorily described growth that has occurred since the plan was last presented. By addressing how new development will fit into the character of the surrounding neighborhood, the amendment is consistent with strategy C of Objective LU-7. The increase in pedestrian access to the economics building is consistent with objective M-3 which promotes an increase in pedestrian trips as a means of transportation.

Zoning Ordinance

This amendment follows the format prescribed by the Zoning Ordinance by addressing the required elements outlined in Section 1910 including a schedule of public participation.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the analysis and findings contained in this report, the CPC should approve the amendment to Brown University's Institutional Master Plan subject to the following condition:

The applicant shall work with the City Engineer to implement the traffic calming suggestions in the traffic memo.