



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: April 20, 2023

Re: **PB-231A Amendment 7 (Major), 75 First Street**

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Overview

Submission Type: Special Permit Application

Applicant: First Street – US Parcel E, LLC

Zoning District(s): Business A (BA) / PUD-4B

Proposal Summary: Construct a new residential building with 90 units and 3,600 square feet of ground floor commercial space at 75 First Street with the new building extending over the existing building and surface parking spaces at 85 First Street.

Special Permits Requested: Major Amendment to Final Development Plan (12.37); PUD 4B Special Permit (13.50); Project Review (19.20). *A summary of the applicable special permit findings is listed on the following page. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.*

Other City Permits Needed: None

Planning Board Action: Grant or deny special permit amending PUD Final Development Plan.

Memo Contents: Comments on development plan addressing planning, zoning and urban design.

Other Staff Reports: Parking and Transportation Dept. (TP+T) in separate document.

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Approval of a PUD Final Development Plan (Section 12.36.4)	<p>The PUD Final Development Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to conform to the criteria for approval of a Development Proposal. • Contains revisions to the Development Proposal in response to the Preliminary Determination.
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<p>The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30.</p>
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or (e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Overview

On April 25, 2023, the Planning Board will have the second hearing on First Street – US Parcel E, LLC’s (the “Applicant”) Final Development Plan application for a proposed Major Amendment to a Planned Unit Development (PUD) for sites along First Street, within the PUD-4B District. The first hearing occurred on January 31, 2023 where the Planning Board subsequently granted Preliminary Determination approval in accordance with PUD approval procedures.

The applicant proposes a Major Amendment to an existing, approved PUD by expanding the Development Parcel to include a new parcel (“Parcel E”) at the corner of First Street and Spring Street, abutting Parcel D. The revised development plan involves the construction of a six-story mixed use residential building across Parcels D and E, retaining the existing one-story retail on Parcel D but demolishing an existing 1 story brick retail building that is currently home to David’s Shoes. This proposal will include approximately 3,600 square feet of “commercial/residential/flex” space on the ground story and 90 residential units above. All other approved building sites within the PUD are either completed or under construction.

Since the initial hearing, the Applicant has met with Community Development Department (CDD) staff, including zoning, urban design, and TP+T. The intent of these meetings was to further discuss the set of issues raised by staff and the Board at the January hearing, and to discuss how the project would proceed if the Board granted the requested special permits. The Applicant has since submitted a Final Development Plan which is responsive to the initial comments in the Preliminary Determination.

Comments from Preliminary Determination

The Preliminary Determination notes that the proposal conforms to the provisions of the PUD-4B zoning and is broadly consistent with the City’s plans that are referenced in Section 13.50 of the Zoning Ordinance. At the hearing on January 31, Board members asked for the following information from the Applicant in addition to the comments and concerns raised by staff in its memos on the project:

- Provide additional details about the transformer location and screening viability with landscape.
- Clarify how the retail area will be serviced, including loading and trash collection.
- Explore further refinement of the corner tower to improve its relationship to the residential entrance.
- Refine windows proposed in 2-bed units in the corner.
- Explore the façade treatment to improve the residential character of the building with regard to material, color, glazing/fenestration pattern, etc.
- Change the color of the west elevation to more closely match the brick.
- Provide more pedestrian scale at the residential entrance through articulation of marble joints.
- Provide additional information on site access in and around the building, including access to the deck and available headroom/impacts on balconies.

- Provide more detail regarding the design of the wall behind the short-term bicycle parking on Spring Street.

The Applicant provided written responses to these and other questions in the Final Development Plan application.

Comments on Final Development Plan

The Applicant provided Final Development Plan materials on March 21, 2023 and a revised submission with new renderings dated April 11, 2023. As established in the Board’s Preliminary Determination, the plan conforms to the zoning requirements in the PUD-4B district and responds positively to the planning goals for the area (established in the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study or ECaPS) by including a mix of uses with a substantial amount of new housing. The Board’s approval of a Final Development Plan, which would grant the requested PUD special permit and other special permits being sought, takes into account whether the proposal continues to conform to the area plans and zoning requirements as well as the extent to which it addresses the issues identified in the Preliminary Determination.

In cases where the Final Development Plan contains only a single building site, the Planning Board’s approval of the Final Development Plan will often include approval of the building design as well.

Proposed Uses

Retail

The Preliminary Determination requested additional information about the anticipated mix of ground floor uses along First Street. The applicant reiterated that they are seeking approval of residential amenities, as well as all business and consumer uses permitted in the base zoning district.

The Application does not provide additional details on what specific activities might constitute “residential amenities”. Economic Opportunity and Development and Urban Design staff have raised concerns that a lack of clarity could result in accessory residential uses that do not activate the public realm.

Open Space

The Applicant has since clarified that no portion of the proposed open space on the building site will be publicly-accessible.

Sustainability

Resiliency to Flooding

Through the Application materials and meetings with DPW staff, the Applicant has made revisions that adequately address the City’s Resiliency Standards. The DPW will work with the Applicant on the details of the proposal and will confirm at time of Building Permit Submission that resiliency measures are consistent with what is presented in this Application.

Street Trees

The Urban Forestry Division will work with the Applicant on locations for additional street trees along Spring Street and will review plans for work adjacent to abutting trees to ensure appropriate preservation measures are taken.

Green Building Requirements

The proposal for 75 First Street is expected to achieve LEED Gold certification with 71.5 credit points. The project is not seeking formal LEED certification with USGBC. The documentation provided by the Applicant met the Green Building Requirements at the Special Permit stage. Staff additionally recommended a voluntary submission of Environmental Product Declarations and a Life Cycle Assessment narrative. Per the Green Building Requirements, a revised submission with additional documentation will be required at the Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy stages. Additional detailed staff recommendations are provided in the Green Building Certification memo.

Transportation and Parking

The TP+T memo further discusses parking and transportation issues in detail. As part of the Preliminary Determination, CDD and TP+T staff requested additional clarification on the allocation of parking spaces, as well as a finalized program of transportation mitigation measures. No new residential parking spaces are proposed for the building at 75 First Street. Residents will be given an opportunity to lease spaces in the existing underutilized underground garage on Parcel B.

The TP+T memo includes specific recommended transportation mitigation measures that have been agreed to by the Applicant and, if the Final Development Plan is approved, will be made part of the Planning Board's approval.

Should the Board grant Final Development Plan Approval, the Board might consider including a condition that the parking provided could be converted to another approved use in the future, such as open space or additional programmable area, by Minor Amendment.

DRAFT Recommended Special Permit Conditions

The following list summarizes the general categories of conditions in the existing special permit that would need to be updated or changed based on this Major Amendment. These are not the final conditions, which will be subject to final drafting by staff and agreement by the Permittee prior to final signature by the Planning Board Chair. However, if the Planning Board has questions or concerns about any of these items, they could be discussed at the public hearing:

- 1) Approved Development Program** – The approved development characteristics of the PUD will be updated to identify the new Parcel E and its corresponding development program. The PUD approval will be updated to reflect the list of uses that are permitted on each parcel, as well as updated dimensional characteristics of the individual parcels and the PUD as a whole. Key elements of the development program would be attached as an Appendix for reference.

- 2) Design Review** – As mentioned earlier in this memo, should the Planning Board decide to move forward on the proposal, it will grant Final Development Plan approval and Design Review Approval of the Parcel E building. CDD staff would review and approve design details at the building permit phase. Specific areas of focus for detailed review could be identified in the Urban Design Report or by Planning Board members.

- 3) Traffic and Infrastructure Improvements** – Development would be conditioned on transportation and infrastructure mitigation measures identified in the TP+T memos, where applicable. These conditions will be certified by the relevant City staff at either the building permit or certificate of occupancy stage, as specified in the TP+T memo.
- 4) Sustainability** – Development will be subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20 and the sustainability measures in the approved Final Development Plan. This will be certified by CDD staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages.
- 5) Procedures for Granting Minor and Major Amendments to this Decision** – This section of the special permit would be updated to note that for Parcel E, the surface parking provided could be converted to open space by Minor Amendment, or to another future use subject to Planning Board’s determination as to whether such use would constitute a Major or Minor Amendment under the existing provisions of Article 12.
- 6) Conditions** – Except as explicitly set forth in Amendment #7, the Conditions of Special Permit Decision PB-231A and all subsequent amendments would continue to be in effect.

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

The applicant met with staff to review the revised design as it was developed in response to the Planning Board and staff comments made at the first hearing. Many of the changes recommended by the Board have been incorporated into the revised materials, and staff are generally pleased with the revisions.

Massing & Siting

Transformer

- The Board's main concern relating to siting and massing was the treatment of the transformer on Hurley Street. In the revised materials, a louver system, aligned with the massing of the stair above, will screen the transformer. As a result, the transformer feels integral to the building, which improves the project significantly.
- Staff recommends that consideration be given to plantings and other greenery, where possible, to help enliven the louver screens.

Tower

- As recommended by the Planning Board, the tower at the building's northeast corner has been brought down to grade on Spring Street. Its windows have been enlarged, additional brick detailing introduced, and the grey cementitious panel has been removed, which all help to unify and strengthen the tower's architectural character. However, the entrance into the potential retail/amenity space has been deleted, resulting in what seems to be an awkward sidewalk condition with no pedestrian benefit. The ground floor façade of the tower also feels dark and heavy without any glazing.
- Staff recommends that the entrance should be reinstated, and that recessing/notching the tower inboard at the ground floor be explored to help accommodate additional sidewalk width.

Spring Street

- The setback zone on Spring Street is much improved. A planter that also provides a seat wall is provided adjacent to the building entrance, which helps create a more welcoming, residential character and enlivens the edge of the building.
- Staff requests that Site Plan dimensions for the Spring Street sidewalk be provided, and if necessary, the planter should be further set back to provide more generous sidewalk width.

Ground Floor

- The new elevations (See Sheet A3.01A) seem to show a lower ground floor height (and a taller sixth floor) than was previously proposed. The Applicant should clarify this change as reducing the ground floor height is likely to make retail even less viable, creates a squat appearance and impacts the pedestrian experience of the building.
- The ground floor cornice that wraps down to grade at the ends of the building on First Street and Spring Street seems to create an unnecessary sidewalk obstruction. Additionally, the First Street one mimics the one on the Parcel D building. This mirror image effect seems to put the existing and proposed buildings in opposition, and emphasizes the narrow space between them, where the resulting recessed nook will likely gather trash and debris, and feel unsafe to pedestrians. Staff suggests that this feature of the ground floor cornice be removed.

Façades, materials and colors

- The fiber cement panels of the previous design have been replaced with metal panel cladding, which staff considers a significant improvement. Crisp detailing and edges are more likely to be achieved with this cladding material.
- The brick now turns the corners in a more meaningful way so that it appears more substantial. Brick detailing has also been introduced as a vertical element on the Spring Street tower and at the southwest tower (above the transformer) at Hurley Street.
- The grey and black color palette remains unchanged. While the wood introduced at the residential entrance has a positive impact, the renderings still seem very dark. Staff would have preferred to see something that moved beyond the typical “greyscale” scheme. The renderings also depict a strong contrast between the brick and metal panel color, which should be clarified by the applicant as such a difference is not evident on the existing Parcel D building.
- Staff recommends that additional refinements to the details and proportions of the façades should be explored, such as giving the projecting frames that combine the windows on the building’s north façade into 5 floor tall groups a thinner outer face, possibly reducing the widths of the railings at the Juliette balconies and giving the building’s cornice a thinner edge.
- Staff notes that the glazing should not be tinted as shown on Sheet A3.01A, and that only low-e coatings are acceptable. Ground floor glass should be low iron, and achieve a minimum VLT of 70% and reflectance of 15% or less.

Residential Amenity

- The second-floor units are several feet below the level of the proposed deck on the roof of the existing building. The third-floor balconies overhanging the roof deck have been removed so that more natural light reaches the units below. However, the second-floor units still feel a little sunken in section and in the perspective rendering (see Sheet A1.08A), especially when plantings are shown.
- Sheet A2.14A shows a typical 3-bed layout. Staff have concerns about the extent of borrowed light required for the third bedroom in the rear corner of the dwelling unit.
- Tenant access to the roof deck has been clarified with an additional lift and stairs provided (see Sheet A1.3A). This appears to negatively impact the useability and amenity of the Third Floor Studio unit immediately above.

Public realm/ landscape improvements

- The design of the adjoining Spring Street sidewalk, including street furniture and potential for additional street trees (also on First Street), will be finalized as part of the continuing review process, and following the results of the First/Second Street Corridor Study.
- Staff note that sidewalk control joints should reflect the City’s typical standard for continuity purposes, and not align with the building façade.
- The relocation of the existing light pole to the sidewalk on Hurley Street (see Site Layout Plan Sheet C-301) seems to create a pedestrian obstruction and should be reconsidered.
- The soffit lighting shown below the building looks harsh in the renderings. Exterior lighting should be dimmable and have a warm color temperature. Additionally, some of the existing bollards at the rear of the Parcel D building appear to require maintenance.

Continuing Review

The following are additional recommendations for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Updates to Sheet C-301 Site Plan layout to show the updated building footprint and sidewalk widths.
- Review of site design elements and landscaping details, including species and planting standards for trees and other vegetation, locations of trees, screening, and details of all hardscape materials.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials mockup to be reviewed by city staff and the Planning Board prior to any exterior materials being ordered.
- Review of glass specifications.
- Review of the detailed design of the ground floor and upper floor façades.
- Review of the First Street and Spring Street sidewalks, including trees, furniture, lighting, and other features, incorporating the results of the First/Second Street Corridor Study.
- Review of all exterior lighting.

Green Building Requirements - Article 22.20, Section 22.24 of Cambridge Zoning Ordinance
Certification for Green Building Report - Special Permit Stage (Design Review)

Project: 75 First Street

Date: February 7, 2023

CDD Determination and/or comments for Project Special Permit submission – Design Review

Project summary: 75 First Street is a six-story new construction residential building of approximately 91,549 SF, consisting of 90 residential units of a mix of studio, 1, 2, and 3-bedroom apartments and amenity and retail spaces at the street level.

Green Building Report: 75 First Street is expected to achieve LEED Gold certification with 71.5 credit points. The project is not seeking formal LEED certification with USGBC.

Status: The Community Development Department (CDD) received the Green Building Report (GBR) for the Special Permit (Design Review) stage. Pursuant to Section 22.25.1 of the Zoning Ordinance, CDD staff have reviewed the project’s GBR and provide the following Determination, Summary of Compliance and Comments.

CDD Determination: **The documentation provided by the Applicant is adequate to process for the Special Permit (SP) stage. A revised submission with documentation including EPDs, LCA narrative maybe be required in the SP continued design review process. A revised submission with additional documentation will be required at the Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy stages.**

Summary of Compliance:

Green Building Professional Affidavit Certification

Ann John, LEED AP Homes of CLEAResult, has been identified as the Green Building Professional for the project. The affidavit states that this professional has reviewed all relevant documents for this project and confirm to the best of their knowledge that those documents indicate that the project is being designed to meet the LEED BD+C: Multifamily Midrise V4 requirements per Section 22.24 under Article 22.20 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance.

LEED Rating System Checklist, LEED and Net Zero Narrative

- Rating System: LEED v4 BD+C Multifamily Midrise.
- ASHRAE editions used = ASHRAE 90.1-2010 for LEED and ASHRAE 90.1-2013 for code compliance.
- Energy use savings = 9.5%.
- Site EUI = 31.2 kBtu/SF-yr & Source EUI (Stretch Code standards) = 87.2 kBtu/SF-yr.
- GHG emissions reduction = 9.4%; and GHG intensity = 2.7 kgCO₂/SF.
- Window-to-wall ratio = 22%; and U value for window = .3
- LEED categories and their credit points:
 - Integrative Process – 1 point
 - Location and Transportation – 15 points
 - Sustainable Sites – 4 points
 - Water Efficiency – 8 points
 - Energy and Atmosphere – 22.5 points
 - Materials and Resources – 3.5 points
 - Indoor Environmental Quality – 10.5 points
 - Innovation – 4 points
 - Regional Priority – 3 points

Total credit points = 71.5 points

Green Building Requirements - Article 22.20, Section 22.24 of Cambridge Zoning Ordinance
Certification for Green Building Report - Special Permit Stage (Design Review)

Project: 75 First Street

Date: February 7, 2023

Cool Factor Score =1.38

- Total lot area = 18,846 SF
- Open Space % proposed (including privately owned-publicly accessible) = 20%
- Portion of lot area using green strategies = 28%

Comments:

As part of its continued design review, CDD staff is providing the recommendations below for the project team to further improve energy efficiency, reduce embodied carbons and improve occupant health and wellbeing. The applicant/CLEAResult has responded to most of staff recommendations, requests for information or clarifications in an email of November 18, 2022. However, some of the applicant responses will need to be confirmed moving forward.

1. Staff highly recommend the design team to pursue formal LEED certification. A formal third-party rating certification helps streamline staff's green building review process and reduce the amount of documentation materials required. If certification is not pursued, CDD staff may require documentations like those required by LEED to verify compliance/certiability.
2. Staff recommend using environmentally friendly products/materials that are preferable products/materials per LEED credit. Staff believe material consumption can be effectively reduced via recycled/recyclable content. Pursuing only .5 point in the MRc2 credit is very low considering the impact of building components on the environment. Staff urge the team to also pursue option 2 in the credit in addition to Option 1. And include framing and gypsum board as well as interior sheathing as part of local production.
3. Staff recommend the sustainability design team to consider the supply chain impacts of GHG emissions by conducting Life-cycle assessment of products using embodied carbon calculators. The Planning Board has expressed interest in seeing how development projects make design choices addressing materials structural materials such as concrete, steel wood and including the building envelope components (i.e., glass, aluminum, thermal insulation, and gypsum board).
4. Staff recommend strategies to creating an environment conducive to improving health and wellbeing of tenants including pursuing the following:
 - a. Low to zero emitting products and materials i.e., using zero to no VOC.
 - b. Using MERV 13 and higher especially in residential buildings.
 - c. Using aluminum frame windows in lieu of vinyl or fiberglass window frames because of their problematic recyclability.
5. Staff highly recommend reducing construction waste by recycling and diverting from landfills to the maximum extent possible.