



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: March 13, 2024

Re: **PB-368, Third Street Park Design Review**

Update

During the Planning Board's September 26, 2023 meeting, the Board provided comments regarding the proposed design of the Third Street Park. The developer and architect team subsequently met with staff to review revisions to the design in response to the Planning Board and staff comments.

Planning Board Action

As a reminder, the Special Permit for PB-368 Planned Unit Development (PUD) was granted by the Planning Board in 2021. The special permit requires that both Building Sites and Park Sites are subject to design review approval by the Planning Board. MITIMCo, the developer for the project, requested design review approval for Commercial Building C1 and Third Street Park in 2023. Building C1 was approved with conditions, but the Board continued the discussion on the park design for the developer to refine the design in response to the comments from the Board and city staff.

Planning Board Comments from September 26, 2023

Generally, the Planning Board was supportive of the proposed design but asked the Applicant to further explore the following design elements:

- Green space – Opportunities to increase the overall green and pervious area within Third Street Park
- Retail Pavilion – Either eliminate the Pavilion entirely, or pursue strategies to better integrate it within Third Street Park, such as:
 - Reducing its overall footprint area,
 - Better integrating seating areas for the Pavilion into the park as a whole,
 - Providing additional information on planned programming of the Pavilion, with consideration for public uses and education opportunities.
- Park Circulation - Provide additional information related to pedestrian flow through and within the Park based on various users' needs and desire lines.

Revisions to the Proposed Design

The Applicant has made the following changes to the Park based on comments received from the Planning Board and staff:

- The size of the lawn has been increased by approximately 10%.
- The eastern edge of the park has been revised to accommodate the planned southbound bus lane and bicycle lane on Third Street while preserving the existing trees in this area.
- The Pavilion's footprint has been reduced by approximately 10%.
- The Pavilion's facades are more transparent.
- The Pavilion has a green roof.
- Broad Canal Way's paving has been refined to emphasize the connection between Third Street Park and Community Center Park.

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- Trees have been added along Broad Canal Way.
- Additional documentation has been provided regarding lighting and path widths,
- The locations of short-term bicycle parking areas have been adjusted.
- The Bluebikes Station that previously ran north/south along the path on the east side of Building C1 has been moved to the north side of Broadway's sidewalk.

Comments on the Revised Design:

The Park

The essence of Third Street Park remains the same as presented in the previous meeting. It is readily accessible from both Broadway and Third Street and presents a diagonal route from their intersection through the Volpe development toward Fifth Street. The center of the Park consists of an oval grassy space, framed by new shade trees and further framed by the existing trees along Broadway and Third Street. The oval will serve everyday activities and also organized events such as performances, festivals, concerts, movies, and markets. The Park's western edge is activated by Building C1's ground floor retail with its outdoor seating. Its northern edge is bordered by the new pedestrian-focused Broad Canal Way, including a retail pavilion, and offers outdoor seating under the shade of new canopy trees.

- Consideration should be given to making the park more unique, more varied, more innovative and memorable, and more playful both in its form and in its provisions for activity. Possibilities could include more varied types of seating; low walls; rock outcroppings or other naturalistic features; features conducive to play, discussion, and exercise; and engaging public art.
- Cambridge's "Healthy Parks and Playground" policies encourage play as an essential aspect of life for all ages, available to everyone. Consideration should be given to providing play and recreational amenities through the Volpe site, including in Third Street Park and along Broad Canal Way.
- Consideration should be given to providing additional seating around the oval and on Broad Canal Way.

The Pavilion

The Pavilion has been reduced in size and the number and size and number of its windows has been increased. Its green roof will enhance its appearance when seen from above. Further efforts could be made, however, to respond to the potential offered by its site.

- Consideration should be given to further reducing the Pavilion's size.
- Consideration should be given to giving it a more playful form, and to extending its roof form as a sheltering overhang. One possibility would be to respond to the curvilinear form and materials of Building C1's recessed sixth floor.
- Information should be provided on how the Pavilion's north and east sides will address Broad Canal Way and Third Street.
- Given the importance of the Pavilion's roofscape when seen from above, any rooftop building mechanical equipment should be carefully integrated into the design.
- Consideration should be given to providing public restrooms in the Pavilion to supplement those provided in Building C1.
- As noted in the previous staff memo, Kendall Square's lunch market is primarily only on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Non-food alternatives for the pavilion's use should be considered. One possibility would be an 'artist-in-residence' approach, where artists or cultural organizations would use the pavilion for predetermined periods and be responsible for the activation of the park.
- Staff is available for discussions of the type of tenant: food service, other types of retail, or non-retail cultural use, including ways the pavilion could complement the evolving 'Cambridge Creative Corridor' (<https://www.cambridgecreativecorridor.org/>), which is centered around Third Street.

Third Street

- The updated scheme provides the southbound bus lane, bike lane, and sidewalk that the City envisions for Third Street and also preserves both rows of existing trees.

- The scheme shows short-term bike racks on city property, outside the property line. Note that bicycle parking required for the project must be within the parcel boundaries.

Broad Canal Way

- More information should be provided on incorporation of public art as an integral part of the design, and additional opportunities beyond the “Feature Walk” and the trench drain cover should be sought out.
- Broad Canal Way would benefit from additional seating.

Broadway

As noted in the staff memo for the September 26, 2023 meeting, the project’s scope includes improvements to the full width of Broadway.

- The existing street trees should be preserved, and their exact locations should be verified.
- The applicant should continue to work with city staff on layout, dimensions, details, markings, existing trees, new plantings, etc.

Art, Culture, and Events

The design of the park derives in large part from the intention to provide flexible space for performances and recreational events.

- Additional information should be provided on how those events will be created, managed, and accommodated:
 - How will the Park complement the Cambridge Creative Corridor?
 - What entity will program and administer events, and how often will they be?
 - Where will equipment for events be stored?
 - How will accessibility be provided for both audience and performers?
 - How will electrical power and data connections be provided?
 - Where will equipment and structures for performances, festivals, recreational events, and play be stored?
- Additional opportunities for public art should be investigated.
 - A prominent art element should be considered at the entrance to Broad Canal Way from Third Street.
 - Other potential locations include the Park itself, Broad Canal Way, and the ground floor facades of Building C1.
 - Consideration should be given to additional types of art, including short-term installations.
 - The proposed “Feature Walk” should be more fully developed.
- Tenanting:
 - To contribute to the development of the Cambridge Creative Corridor, consideration should be given to incorporating creative businesses or arts organizations in the retail tenanting plan.
 - The operation of the pavilion should be considered in the context of the operations of the upcoming performance venue (<https://www.585arts.org/>), which will bring crowds to the area, primarily after 5:00pm.

Bicycle Parking and Bluebikes Stations

- The locations, details, and clearances of short-term bicycle racks should be reviewed.
- The application shows short-term bicycle racks on city owned property adjoining Broadway and Third Street. Note that short-term bike parking spaces allocated to the project must be within the property boundary.

Wayfinding and Signage

- The documentation indicates wayfinding installations at the northeast and southwest corners of the park. In response to anticipated pedestrian movement to and through the site, consideration should be given to also providing wayfinding at the southeast corner of the site, near the intersection of Third Street and Broadway.

- Consideration should be given to also providing informational signage. Potential topics include the topographic history of Kendall Square area, its industrial past and architecture, and its role in the innovation economy.
- The Volpe site's wayfinding plan should be designed to connect with the rest of Cambridge and particularly the other cultural venues along Third Street.
- Clear signage will be needed for delivery vehicles turning onto new semi-pedestrian way to ensure the safety of cyclists.

Amenities

- Consideration should be given to providing additional public restrooms on the site. One option would be to include them as part of the Pavilion.
- Additional benches and other seating options should be provided, including movable seating.
- Consideration should be given to providing additional tables for outdoor dining, work, and conversation.
- As noted in the previous meeting, public restrooms will be provided in the first floor of Building C1. It would be preferable if they were available to the public throughout the day – i.e.: not limited to the building's business hours.
- Water fountains should be provided.
- Consideration should be given to making electrical power available to the public.

Accessibility

- The Park's accessibility should be further studied, including audience and performer access to events in the central open space.

Continuing Review:

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the discussion to a future date, or as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to approve the park design:

1. Further development of the Park, with increased emphasis on play, inventiveness, and uniqueness, including consideration of different types of seating, more varied topography, rock outcroppings, art, and features that can be used for play or recreation,
2. Detailed development of paving, planting, seating, bicycle parking, in the Park, Broad Canal Way, and along Broadway and Third Street.
3. The design of the improvements to the full width of Broadway, including the vehicular roadway, separated bicycle lanes, striping, sidewalk, street furniture, curbs, curb cuts, crosswalks, and trees and their planting beds.
4. Locations and design of site furniture, water fountains, and the park's other features and amenities.
5. Further development of the Pavilion's architectural form and uses.
6. A mockup of the pavilion's exterior materials and colors, and a review of sitework materials, to be approved before purchase of materials.
7. Additional opportunities for public art.
8. Process for the acquisition of public art, its characteristics, and its integration into the design.
9. System for the administration of public events in the park, and provision of infrastructure and support for them.
10. Locations, dimensions, details, and clearances of short-term bicycle parking areas and of Bluebikes stations.
11. Accessibility, including for events on the oval lawn.
12. Development of locations, design, and content of the site's wayfinding system.
13. Review of resiliency and of stormwater and sewer infrastructure.
14. The species of trees and other plantings, the protection of existing trees, the precise locations of new trees, and planting standards.