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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 1, 2022

Re: **Special Permit PB-386, 81-93 Mt. Auburn Street**

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## Overview

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Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Trinity Property Management
Zoning District(s):	Business B; Harvard Square Overlay District
Proposal Summary:	Construct an 87,494 square foot six story building for all uses allowed in Business B zoning district, including, but not limited to institutional uses, office and laboratory uses, and retail establishments.
Special Permits Requested:	Article 2.000 Exclusion of basement GFA from total GFA calculation; Section 19.50 Building and Site Plan requirements; Section 20.54.2 Additional height in Harvard Square Overlay; Section 20.54.4 Parking and Loading requirements; Section 20.54.7 Additional FAR in Harvard Square Overlay; and Section 22.35.3 Reduction of Green Roofs requirements
Other City Permits Needed:	Historical Commission Review
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	Department of Public Works (DPW) in separate document

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Requested Special Permits	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Special Permit for exemption of basement area in the calculation of Gross Floor Area (Article 2.000)	The uses occupying such exempted GFA support the character of the neighborhood or district in which the applicable lot is located.
Building and Site Plan Requirements (Section 19.50)	The project is consistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.
Harvard Square Overlay District: Building height up to 80 feet (Section 20.54.2)	<p>Those portions of the building in excess of 60 feet must be set back from the street line at least 10 feet and set back from one or more 45-degree sky exposure planes, unless otherwise permitted by the Planning Board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowed Special Permit exceptions to upper floor setbacks must successfully reduce the overall negative effect of multiple floor setbacks and enhance both the proposed building silhouette and townscape of the block.</li> <li>• Such architectural elements as pergolas, and occupiable corner pavilions, occupiable pavilion directly above the main building entry, and special features that animate the public domain experience.</li> <li>• All such exceptions are to be limited in scope and work cohesively.</li> </ul> <p>All approved facade setbacks are to provide accessible, useable balconies for tenants.</p>
Harvard Square Overlay District: Waiver of parking and loading requirement (Section 20.54.4)	<p>The use is contained in a new structure or new addition to an historic structure provided:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The subject lot is sufficiently small in size as to contribute to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures (for lots exceeding 10,000 square feet a specific finding shall be made that this objective has been met).</li> <li>• The building design is more appropriate to its location and the fabric of its neighborhood and that it is in conformance with the objectives and criteria contained in Harvard Square Development Guidelines.</li> <li>• No National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation as a National Register or contributing building.</li> </ul>

<p>Harvard Square Overlay District: Unlimited FAR (Section 20.54.7)</p>	<p>The use and design complies with the goals and design guidelines set forth in the Harvard Square Conservation District and provides additional public benefits commensurate with the additional development, such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ground floors that are devoted to retail and similar uses that activate the square and serve the needs of the surrounding community and visitors;</li> <li>• Commitments to recruit and retain small, local, and independent businesses, in part through maintaining 50 percent of first floor public frontage as commercial rental space of approximately 1,500 sq. ft.in size;</li> <li>• Creation of mixed-income housing;</li> <li>• Commitments to sustainable design that minimize greenhouse gas emissions and increases vegetation, and;</li> <li>• Investments into creating or improving public space.</li> </ul>
<p>Exemption of Required Green Roof Area (Section 22.35.3)</p>	<p>The Planning Board may grant a special permit to reduce the required Green Roof Area, Biosolar Green Roof Area, or Solar Energy System below the area required by Section 22.35.2, provided that each square foot so reduced be compensated by a unit price contribution to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust.</p>
<p><b>Applicable Special Permit Criteria</b></p>	<p><b>Required Planning Board Findings</b> <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i></p>
<p>General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)</p>	<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"> <li>(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or</li> <li>(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or</li> <li>(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</li> <li>(d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of</li> </ol>

	<p>the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or</p> <p>(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</p> <p>(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.</p>
<p>Harvard Square Overlay District: Criteria for Issuance of Special Permits (Section 20.53.2)</p>	<p>The special permit granting authority shall be guided by the objectives and criteria contained in the publication Harvard Square Development Guidelines [Document compiled from the Guidelines for Development and Historic Preservation as contained in the Final Report of the Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District Study Committee, dated November 29, 2000 and the Harvard Square Development Guidelines, 1986].</p>



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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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Date: February 1, 2022

Zoning Report: **PB-386, 81-93 Mt. Auburn Street**

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## Area Planning and Zoning

### *Site Context*

This site is located in Harvard Square north of Mt. Auburn Street between Dunster Street and JFK Street (see Figure 1). The area is composed of a mix of institutional, office, and retail uses, including many restaurants, shops, and uses affiliated with Harvard University. The site is also located across Dunster Street from the Harvard University Smith Campus Center, and Winthrop Park is on the opposite corner.



Figure 1. Aerial photograph of the area surrounding 81-93 Mt. Auburn Street. (Source: Nearmap, March 27, 2021)

### *Site Zoning*

The base zoning for the site is Business B (BB). BB allows a wide range of typical neighborhood business uses, such as convenience stores, pharmacies, and restaurants, as well as office and residential uses. It also allows institutional uses, such as schools, government buildings, and health care facilities, as well as hotels and theatres. The BB district development standards allow higher-density development, with maximum heights up to 80 feet and floor-area ratios (FAR) up to 3.00. BB districts are primarily located in Central Square and Harvard Square, where overlay districts further modify the base zoning.

The site is also in the Harvard Square Overlay District (HSOD) as codified in [Section 20.50](#) of the Zoning Ordinance, which modifies many base zoning provisions. In some ways the HSOD is more permissive (e.g., increased FAR, waiver of parking requirements) and in some ways it is more restrictive (e.g., height limits, limitations on some uses), and some provisions require special permits from the Planning Board. The Planning Board must find that proposals seeking a special permit generally conform with the

[Harvard Square Development Guidelines](#) in addition to other relevant criteria. Special permits are also reviewed by the Harvard Square Advisory Committee, whose report is attached to this memo.

In addition, the site is in the Harvard Square Conservation District (HSCD), which is administered by the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) and is subject to regulations outside of the Zoning Ordinance. Development proposals must receive a Certificate of Appropriateness by the CHC as part of the HSCD permitting process.

### ***Area Plans and Studies***

The HSOD was created in 1986, following a planning study that established development goals and guidelines for the area. The zoning for HSOD was recently amended in 2020, concurrent with [a study of the Harvard Square Conservation District](#) that was conducted by the CHC. The specific design guidelines for Harvard Square are included in the appendix, and include encouraging strong retail frontage, providing visual interest and pedestrian orientation in storefront design, and taking advantage of existing public transportation.

The [Envision Cambridge](#) comprehensive plan (2019) established city-wide planning goals and recommendations, designating this area as one of several “Squares and Major Mixed-Use Corridors.” Envision Cambridge called for a balanced mix of development types that are sensitive to their context while still advancing the City’s goals in providing affordable housing, environmental resilience, cohesive urban form, and community wellbeing. It advocated for providing both commercial and residential development, as well as preserving and expanding the city’s open space network. In general, Envision Cambridge noted that any redevelopment of sites located in Squares and Major Mixed-Use Corridors should accommodate greater densities than surrounding neighborhoods to incentivize affordable housing, sustainable transportation modes, and a mix of uses. It also identified the importance of supporting independent retail businesses and improving the public realm to sustain thriving commercial districts.

## **Development Proposal**

### ***Project Description***

The proposal is to demolish most of the existing 78,300-square-foot building and reconstruct a new building in its place, while retaining the portion of the existing historic building at the corner of Dunster Street and Mt. Auburn Street that was built as a stable in the 1860s. The site later became a parking garage, but was converted to house an eclectic mix of retail and office tenants. The proposed building will contain 87,494 square feet, thus increasing the site’s gross floor area (GFA) by 9,194 square feet.

The proposed building has a height of 80 feet and six stories above grade. The proposed uses include office and retail, including restaurant. The site will not include any off-street parking. 27 long-term bicycle parking spaces will be provided within the building and the applicant will make a contribution to the City’s Public Bicycle Parking Fund in lieu of providing short-term bicycle parking on-site.

The Garage is a contributing building in the National Register-listed Harvard Square Historic District and is located in the locally-designated Harvard Square Conservation District. On January 6, 2022, the CHC granted a final Certificate of Appropriateness for this project. Approval was granted on the condition

that review and approval of construction and design details be delegated to CHC staff in collaboration with Community Development Department (CDD) staff. Such details shall include but are not limited to the masonry restoration, recreation of the missing elements of the stable building, color and texture of the terracotta and other materials based on an inspection of a physical mock-up, and details of the architectural lighting of the new building.

**Consistency with Planning and Zoning**

Overview

The proposal is generally consistent with the zoning district standards, but is seeking six special permits, including three based in the HSOD zoning.

Uses

As proposed, the new building would include any uses permitted in the Business B district, including but not limited to institutional, office, or retail use. The proposal does not specify the exact mix of uses in the existing building or proposed building, but a diagram on page 55 of Volume 2 labels the basement story as “retail/restaurant” along with mechanical services, the first story and part of the second story is labeled “retail/office,” and the remainder of the upper stories are labeled “office.”

The table below summarizes what uses are permitted in the BB district, as modified by the HSOD, and what limitations apply to particular uses.

**Examples of Uses Allowed in Business B**

Use Category	Use Types	HSOD Modifications
Residential	Multifamily dwellings; hotels or motels.	<i>n/a</i>
Institutional	Places of worship; educational institutions and day care centers; health care facilities; government and social services.	<i>n/a</i>
Office and Laboratory	Medical offices; professional offices; general offices; banks; technical offices or laboratories for research and development.	Banks are subject to frontage restrictions in Section 20.54.9, which can be modified by Planning Board Special Permit.
Retail	Retail stores; personal services, restaurants and other food service; theaters, fitness centers, other entertainment and recreation; art studios. Special permits required for craft beverage establishments, animal services, cannabis uses, outdoor entertainment.	Fast Order/Quick-Service Food Establishments may require a Special Permit if they fall under the definition of “Formula Business.”

Figure 2. This list is not exhaustive but shows some examples of uses allowed as-of-right in the Business B base zoning district. (Source: Cambridge Zoning Ordinance Sections 4.30 and 20.50)

The Harvard Square Development Guidelines encourage a strong retail presence on the street. The proposed building is designed to accommodate retail storefronts, but it is not clear how much of the ground story would be devoted to retail compared to office, and how that use mix might change over time. It is also unclear what types of office users would occupy the building (medical, professional, general, and/or technical/lab). Given the wide range of uses permitted in the district, the building's success in meeting the development guidelines will be affected by what mix of uses takes shape and evolves over time.

#### Basement GFA

The applicant is seeking to exempt the basement area from GFA calculations by special permit. The application narrative does not clearly state the amount of the requested exemption, although the table on page 55 of Volume 2 indicates that the basement is 16,649 square feet in area, which appears to include mechanical service areas that would generally not be counted as GFA.

Aside from general special permit criteria, the only criteria to grant that special permit is that the uses occupying the exempted GFA support the character of the neighborhood or district in which the applicable lot is located. The space is labeled as “retail/restaurant” and the application narrative states that it will be used “as an entertainment venue or restaurant, or other allowed use.” Although this seems to indicate a desire for a certain type of use, any use that is permitted in the district could be possible.

The applicant notes that a basement-level retail space would likely be rented at a lower price point than a street-level retail space, which would increase the diversity of businesses in the building. The applicant also notes that the basement use has the potential to be active outside of typical office hours, thus generating more activity in the Square.

#### Additional FAR

The as-of-right FAR for this site is 4.0 for both residential and nonresidential uses. Assuming the exemption of the basement GFA is granted, the FAR of the proposed building would be 4.97, which is 17,062 square feet over the district FAR limit. If the exemption of the basement GFA is not granted, the FAR of the proposed building would be higher, depending on how much of the basement would be exempt as-of-right (see above). Therefore, the application seeks a special permit under Section 20.54.7, adopted in 2020, to allow additional FAR on the site.

This is the first time that the Board is reviewing an application for this special permit. The amount of allowed “Additional FAR” is uncapped by the zoning, though development is still subject to other dimensional regulations, such as height limits. In granting the special permit, the Board must find that:

1. The use and design comply with the goals and design guidelines set forth in the Harvard Square Conservation District, and that
2. The project provides additional public benefits commensurate with the additional development.

Because this application could set a precedent for future applications, it is worth giving these criteria special thought and consideration.



*Harvard Square Conservation District (HSCD)*

The CHC follows the standards set in the Order Establishing the Harvard Square Conservation District and the Final Report of the 2017-19 Harvard Square Conservation District Study Committee when reviewing applications for certificates of appropriateness, hardship, or nonapplicability in the HSCD. As a result, these are also the standards that the Planning Board must follow when reviewing special permit applications for additional FAR in the HSOD.

As stated earlier in the memo, this project received a Certificate of Appropriateness from the CHC. As part of the permitting process, the CHC specifically found that the request for increased FAR is appropriate. Most notably, the project is grounded in the restoration of the 1860s stable building at the corner of Mt. Auburn Street and Dunster Street.

The relationship of the proposed development to relevant design guidelines is also discussed further in the Urban Design Report section.

*Public Benefits*

The zoning suggests potential categories of public benefits, but otherwise leaves it to the discretion of the Planning Board to determine the scale and type of benefits that are appropriate to allow development that is above and beyond the normal zoning limitations. For guidance on how to evaluate potential benefits, the Board could refer to planning goals and objectives for the City as a whole and Harvard Square specifically, including [Envision Cambridge](#), the [Retail Strategy](#), the [Resilient Cambridge Plan](#), the [Net Zero Action Plan](#), and the various Harvard Square guiding documents mentioned earlier.

To guide the Board's discussion, City staff collected notes on potential types of public benefits, organized by the categories suggested in zoning. These ideas come from the work of various CDD divisions and City departments, informed by past discussions with community members, local business owners, and City advisory committees. The intent is to focus on benefits that this proposal might be uniquely suited to provide and would be mutually beneficial to the developer and the community, and to focus on commitments that are typical of comparable development projects seeking special permits for increased density.

1. Ground floors that are devoted to retail and similar uses that activate the square and serve the needs of the surrounding community and visitors.

The application states that the ground level of the building is designed to accommodate retail uses; however, it is not clear how much of the ground story would be devoted to retail over time. The HSAC has recommended that the ground-level storefronts be devoted to retail and active uses, which could include some non-retail uses that are accessible to the general public.

Some other examples of possible benefits to support the local retail ecosystem through ground floor design and programming include the following:

- a. Provide a publicly accessible bathroom. This has been identified by Harvard Square businesses as an important amenity.

- b. Design the ground-level building entrance area to be an indoor public amenity where people feel welcome to enter. It could also benefit retailers for there to be an entrance to their business from such a space, in addition to having an entrance from the street.
2. Commitments to recruit and retain small, local, and independent businesses, in part through maintaining 50 percent of first floor public frontage as commercial rental space of approximately 1,500 sq. ft. in size.

The application states an interest in providing small-scale commercial rental space on the ground level of the building but does not commit to specific measures. These are some examples of concrete ideas that could help to demonstrate a commitment to recruiting and retaining local businesses:

- a. Dedicate a minimum set-aside of space for preferential leases for locally owned businesses, nonprofit organizations, and/or businesses owned by people of color.
  - b. Commit to working with CDD's Economic Development Division to recruit and retain small and independent local businesses. This may include notifying CDD before any leasing opportunities are initiated in order to recruit local opportunities and providing a bi-annual marketing report over 10 years to review leasing efforts.
  - c. Despite the suggestion for smaller spaces, staff does not recommend limiting the size of retail spaces because local businesses and ground floor active uses may have a wide range of space needs.
3. Creation of mixed-income housing.

The project does not include a residential component. However, given the project's size, a Housing Contribution to the Affordable Housing Trust would be required per the Incentive Zoning Requirements in Section [11.202](#) of the Zoning Ordinance. Although there could be practical difficulties with including a residential component in a project of this type, it would be helpful to know if housing was considered as a use for the additional GFA.

4. Commitments to sustainable design that minimize greenhouse gas emissions and increases [sic] vegetation.

The project is subject to the [Green Building Requirements](#) and to the Green Roofs Requirement, which require (respectively) design to a minimum LEED Gold standard and coverage of at least 80% of the available roof with Green Roof Area or Biosolar Green Roof Area. The applicant is proposing all-electric systems for heating, ventilation, and domestic hot water, which is an important recommendation of the City's Net Zero Action Plan and is above and beyond the zoning requirements. The applicant could consider these additional commitments to sustainability:

- a. Continue to pursue a reduction in embodied carbon, particularly through the use of a mass timber structure that could result in a 20% reduction in embodied carbon;
  - b. Provide off site solar options, since there are limitations for on-site solar roof installations;

- c. Provide updates on the projected building energy performance modeling results including projected Energy use, cost savings, and Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions during or at the end of the project’s design development phase;
  - d. Provide electric vehicle (EV) chargers for on-street parking spaces, in coordination with the City, which might be enabled by integrating the needed electrical infrastructure into the building;
  - e. Design the ground-level building entrance area to be an indoor public space that can function as a cooling center during a heat event;
  - f. Improve outdoor thermal comfort by providing shading in the public realm;
  - g. Provide a contribution to fund a Bluebikes station in Harvard Square;
  - h. Work with the City on street improvements to Mt. Auburn Street, such as creating grade-separated bicycle facilities;
  - i. Work with the City to improve bus access to the Square, which could involve creating a boarding island near the intersection of JFK Street and Mt. Auburn Street, and/or contributions to creating a bus queue jump or dedicated bus lane on JFK Street from Eliot Street down to Memorial Drive.
5. Investments into creating or improving public space.

The application notes that the project will include new sidewalks, protect or replace street trees, and restore the historic 1860s stable building at the corner of Mt. Auburn and Dunster Streets. These actions are tied to standards set by DPW and the CHC regarding construction mitigation and historic preservation. The following ideas could enhance and build upon those efforts:

- a. Extend the curb and re-align the crosswalks at the corner of Mt. Auburn Street and JFK Street, and at the corner of Mt. Auburn Street and Dunster Street, to improve pedestrian safety and comfort.
- b. Design the building corner at JFK Street and Mt. Auburn Street for better public realm circulation (see additional Urban Design comments).

If the Planning Board and Applicant are interested in pursuing any of these options, they could be discussed in more detail with the appropriate City staff.

### Building Height

The building height is proposed to be 80 feet, which is the maximum building height in the Business B district; however, the HSOD requires a Planning Board special permit for building heights exceeding 60 feet. Parts of the building above 60 feet must be set back from the street by at least 10 feet and must be set back from the street along a 45-degree sky exposure plane, but the Planning Board can approve modifications to those standards.

The site abuts three streets, and the proposed building design does not meet the upper-level setback standards on all three facades. The Board must determine if the design “successfully reduce[s] the overall negative effect of multiple floor setbacks and enhance both the proposed building silhouette and

townscape of the block.” The zoning further states, “All such exceptions are to be limited in scope and work cohesively,” and calls out desirable architectural features. In order to grant this special permit, the Board must also find that the façade setbacks serve to provide accessible, useable balconies for tenants. The Urban Design Report from CDD staff addresses these special permit criteria more in-depth.

#### Off-Street Parking

No off-street parking spaces or loading bays are proposed, and the application seeks a special permit through the HSOD zoning to waive all required off-street parking and loading. According to the dimensional form in the application, the project is required to provide approximately 98-191 off-street parking spaces and one loading bay. As noted above, there is no specified mix of uses in the proposal, so the required number of parking spaces cannot be determined exactly.

Prior to the March 2020 zoning amendment, applicants for such a special permit were required to either reduce the total site GFA to 80% of what is allowed by zoning or pay into a parking fund. That requirement was deleted, so the approval criteria currently focus on the urban design and public realm impacts of the project. Because the lot is larger than 10,000 square feet (the area is 17,608 square feet), the Board must find that the lot is small enough to contribute to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures.

The Board must also find that exempting the project from parking and loading requirements will lead to a building design that is more appropriate to its location and the fabric of its neighborhood. Specifically, the building design must be in conformance with the objectives and criteria contained in the Harvard Square Development Guidelines. There is currently no off-street parking or loading at this site, which is common for development in Harvard Square. Providing parking would have significant effects on the building design, including the ground story and probably the basement, which would impact retail activation and the opportunity to have other uses in the basement.

The applicant notes that an existing alley abutting the north edge of the project site off Dunster Street provides shared access for multiple properties to use for trash and other services. This proposal is not seeking a Project Review Special Permit and therefore has not provided a Transportation Impact Study for certification by the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP+T). However, TP+T has suggested that the Planning Board include a condition to provide a delivery management plan for approval by TP+T to ensure that the waiver of loading bays does not result in congestion or hazard.

#### Building and Site Plan Requirements

This project is not seeking a Project Review Special Permit but remains subject to the Building and Site Plan Requirements in Section 19.50. The applicant is seeking a special permit to deviate from the requirements in Section 19.59. It is also not clear from the submitted materials whether the proposal conforms to Sections 19.53, 19.56, and 19.58. These standards would need to be reviewed and certified before issuance of a building permit, unless the Planning Board grants a modification or waiver by special permit.

Section 19.59 requires that at least 15% of the lot be devoted to Green Area or Permeable Open Space, regardless of the use. This project would be required to provide approximately 2,642 square feet of

open space. As the application notes, there is currently no open space on the site since the existing building covers the lot. This is consistent with patterns of development in Harvard Square.

Section 19.53 requires mixed-use developments with a retail component to ensure that at least 50% of the retail area fronts onto a public street. Section 19.56 requires developments that abut a public street to dedicate the portions of the building that face the street to uses that are regularly occupied by people, such as stores, offices, and housing. Section 19.56 also sets standards for the depth of those uses, façade transparency, individual storefront entrances, and building entrances. It appears that the intent of the project is to provide ground-level retail uses along JFK Street, Mt. Auburn Street, and Dunster Street, and the application narrative states, “At the ground floor, the building will contain multiple entries into likely retail uses, although no tenants have yet to be identified.” However, the application materials do not provide sufficient detail to show compliance with Sections 19.53 and 19.56.

Section 19.58 sets standards for mechanical equipment, trash, and loading areas. For example, the zoning requires that mechanical equipment is located at least 10 feet back from the property line and, when on the roof, is permanently screened from view with screening that is at least 50% opaque and uniformly distributed across the screening surface. The application narrative states that the project will meet the requirements, but the graphics do not provide sufficient detail to verify compliance. It would be helpful to see a roof plan that shows the location of rooftop mechanical equipment relative to the property line and renderings of the required mechanical screening from public vantage points that show the opacity.

#### Green Building / Green Roof Requirements

This project is subject to the City’s Green Building requirements, which mandate designing to a minimum LEED Gold, Passive House, or Enterprise Green Communities standard. Based on the documents submitted, the project is expected to achieve LEED Gold certification with 68 “Yes” points and 15 additional “Possible” points (60 points is the required minimum). The project is seeking LEED certification with USGBC. As noted earlier, the project is proposing an all-electric VRF heat pump system for heating and cooling, which supports the City’s future Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions goals.

The total roof area of the proposed building is 13,492 square feet. Approximately 10,460 square feet will be occupied by mechanical equipment, maintenance areas, and the fifth-floor roof deck, which is accessible to building tenants. Since the remaining roof area is 3,032 square feet, the applicant is required to provide at least 2,426 square feet of green roof area. The proposed roof plan shows 1,213 square feet of green roof area, and so the proposal is seeking a special permit to reduce the required green roof area by 1,213 square feet.

The Board may grant the special permit, in which case the applicant would need to make a unit price contribution to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust, as set forth in Section 22.35.3. In recent reviews of other special permits to reduce the required Green Roof Area, the Board has asked applicants to calculate the Cool Factor score of the proposed development, which takes into account green roof area in addition to other building and site design measures that help mitigate urban heat island effects, such as shading and vegetation. The Cool Factor is one of the recommendations of the Climate Resilience Zoning Task Force (CRZTF), but it is not currently a zoning requirement.

### **Special Permit Conditions**

If the Board decides to grant the special permit, the following list summarizes the general categories of conditions recommended for this development based on the requested special permits:

1. **Approved Development:** Authorized development would need to conform with the submitted application materials. An Approved Dimensional Form would be attached as an Appendix.
2. **Permitted Uses:** The special permit would authorize a specified range of uses. Unless limited by the Planning Board, the permitted uses would be any uses allowed as-of-right in the zoning district. In the future, uses that are allowed by zoning but not authorized by the special permit would require Planning Board approval, and uses that are limited by the Zoning Ordinance (e.g., requiring a separate special permit from the Planning Board or BZA) would need to seek the necessary relief.
3. **Design Review:** CDD staff would review and approve design details at the construction documents phase, prior to issuance of a building permit, to certify that the plans conform to the Planning Board's approval. Specific areas of focus for detailed review are identified in the Urban Design Report, and additional items could be identified by Planning Board members. To align with the CHC's approval, design review would be undertaken in consultation with CHC staff.
4. **Transportation and Infrastructure:** Work being done on City property would be subject to review and approval by appropriate City departments, including DPW, TP+T and CDD. As suggested in this memo, TP+T suggests that approval of a delivery management plan be a condition of the waiver of loading bays.
5. **Building and Site Plan Requirements:** CDD staff would review the Building and Site Plan Requirements in 19.50 at the building permit stage, except where the Planning Board has granted a modification or waiver.
6. **Sustainability:** Development will be subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20, which will be reviewed again by CDD staff at the building permit and certificate of occupancy stages. If the Board grants the requested reduction in Green Roof Area, then CDD would certify that the required contribution is made, and the remainder of the requirement is met at the building permit stage.
7. **Housing:** Development will be subject to the Incentive Zoning requirements, which will require a contribution to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust to be calculated at the time of building permit and paid before issuance of a certificate of occupancy. This will be certified by the CDD Housing staff.
8. **Public Benefits:** Commitments offered by the developer and agreed to by the Planning Board to meet the criteria for Additional FAR would be incorporated into the conditions, subject to certification by the appropriate City staff.
9. **Construction Management Program:** Per Section 18.20, staff would recommend a Construction Management Program be provided and approved by TP+T, DPW, and other applicable City departments before issuance of a building permit. This program would also include a community

outreach program designating a point of contact to provide information to the public during the construction process and notification panels posted on the site with project information.



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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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Date: February 1, 2022

Urban Design Report: **PB-386, 81-93 Mt. Auburn Street**

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## Introduction

The proposed project is located in Harvard Square, on the site currently occupied by “The Garage”. The site is bordered by Mount Auburn, JFK and Dunster Streets, its southwest corner faces Winthrop Park, and its east side faces Harvard University’s Smith Campus Center and the open space at the latter’s Mt. Auburn Street setback. The Garage building consists of the extant portions of an historically significant 1860s brick stable building plus large mid- and late-20<sup>th</sup> century additions. The project proposes to demolish the architecturally unremarkable additions, restore the Stable’s facades to their original appearance, reveal its original height and roof line, and build a large new mixed-use structure above and adjoining it, increasing the overall gross floor area on the site.

The restoration of the stables will enhance its contributions to the pedestrian experience and to one’s sense of Harvard Square’s history. The replacement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century portions of the Garage Building presents the opportunity to maintain and increase the activating presence of ground floor retail on the street, to strengthen the adjoining open spaces and streets, and to add visual interest to them with new, more aesthetically ambitious facades.

## Summary of relevant design objectives and guidelines

The overall goal of the Harvard Square Conservation District is to protect the District’s distinctive physical and experiential characteristics and to enhance the livability and vitality of the District. Means include the preservation of historically significant buildings and creative design that provides a diversity of development and open space patterns, offers a diversity of architectural scales and ages, and supports a pedestrian friendly and human scaled mixed-use environment. Secondary goals include to:

- Preserve historically or architecturally significant buildings.
- Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements and contributes to its immediate neighbors and the character of the District.
- Build on and sustain the diversity of existing building form, scale, and material.
- Enhance the pedestrian experience by creating a high-quality public environment with attractive and compatible materials, lighting, and street furniture.
- Encourage creative solutions to the District’s parking and transportation issues.

The proposed building makes use of a composite compositional strategy, one that enables it to incorporate the original Stables building and respond to the variety of open spaces and buildings around it. Its massing and facades are articulated and differentiated in response to Winthrop Park, the open space at the south end of the Smith Campus Center, the scale and design of the Smith Center’s south façade, and the series of smaller buildings of varying character that line the opposite side of Mt Auburn Street.

The new portions of the project are clearly contemporary in character, but have a level of detail compatible with the older buildings of the context. Street facing ground level retail space can be accommodated in the restored Stables and the new addition.



The project makes use of a zoning provision that allows additional gross floor area if public benefits are provided. Suggestions for what these benefits might consist of are included in the comments below and in the Z&D memo. It would be helpful to know if housing, rather than office use, was considered for the additional GFA.

CDD Staff and CHC staff met with the applicant numerous times over the last several months for productive discussions of the project's contribution to the built fabric, streets, and open spaces of Harvard Square and its strategy to incorporate and feature the façade and massing of the original 19th century Stable building.

### **Siting and massing**

The proposed building essentially fills the site, as does the existing building, framing the pedestrian realm on the three streets it addresses with streetwall facades.

While the proposed massing extends beyond the as-of-right height limitations, the setbacks, and the sky exposure planes established by zoning, the building's height and massing appears to be compatible with the neighboring buildings and spaces. On this particular site, at the south side of its block where it will not shade the primary adjoining street, with the tall Smith Center setting a precedent for height on the opposite side of Dunster Street, and in consideration of the way the building's composite massing reduces its sense of bulk, the additional height seems appropriate.

The proposed building comprises three distinct masonry volumes: the historic Stable building with its thick brick bearing walls, deep façade relief, and restored gable facade and roof; a new volume, raised above and set back behind the Stable's Mt. Auburn Street gable end and extending for the length of the Dunster Street façade at the fourth, fifth, and sixth floor levels; and a second new volume, located at the corner of Mount Auburn and JFK streets at the second, third, and fourth floor levels. The heights and massings of these elements appear to be compatible with the neighboring buildings and spaces:

- The four-floor tall streetwall on JFK Street relates to the height of the building on the opposite side of the street and presents a strong corner to the diagonally opposite Winthrop Park.
- The six floor tall streetwall on Dunster Street responds to the height of the Smith Center, helping to frame the open space in the latter's south setback.
- The varied distances of the façades facing Mt. Auburn Street from the curb, and their varied three-dimensional forms respond to the scale of the smaller individual buildings on the opposite side of the street, while also constituting a streetwall continuous enough to frame a coherent pedestrian realm.

Between, below, and above these three masonry volumes, glazed areas serve as a kind of glue, linking them together:

- The highly glazed lobby at the middle of the Mt. Auburn Street façade.
- The glazed ground level storefront at the corner of JFK and Mt. Auburn Streets.
- The area of vertically grained curtainwall extending above the restored Stable's roof to the new masonry volume above it.
- The glazed and set back volume at the western part of the fifth and sixth floors.

A screened mechanical penthouse, setback from the street facing facades, runs most of the length of the rooftop. The plans are unclear on the location of mechanical equipment and on the locations and extent of the screening.

### **Architectural character**

Staff greatly appreciates the project's respectful restoration of the Stable Building. Not only does the building constitute an important connection to the history of Harvard Square, its masonry details and the vigorous depth of its facades offers a degree of visual interest uncommon in contemporary buildings. The building's restored gable façade and sloped roof will give it a presence in the Harvard Square streetscape that it currently lacks.

A terracotta cladding system, with faceted three-dimensional modeling, is proposed for the two new masonry volumes, offering unique visual interest and a sense of permanence. Two different versions have been depicted: one in the application to the Planning Board, dated December 6, 2021, the other in the presentation to the Harvard Historical Commission, dated January 6, 2022.

1. The more varied and hierarchical faceting of the latter, with its planes of different widths and its attention to the meeting of vertical and horizontal members, seems preferable.
2. The precise color of the terracotta will be of great importance. In some of the renderings, it seems more orange than may be desirable. A variety of color samples should be reviewed prior to the construction of a mockup.
3. Consideration could be given to providing more contrast between the width of piers and the heights of spandrels.

The façade bays closest to the intersection of Mount Auburn Street and JFK street are wider than the others, resulting in an atypically broad window pane closest to the corner.

4. Other solutions should be considered.

The terracotta façade over the Stable's Mt. Auburn Street elevation is three bays wide. The broad central bay seems to compete with the broad proportions of the Stable's façade below.

5. Consideration could be given to dividing this façade into more and narrower bays – bays with more vertical proportions that would contrast more distinctly with the breadth of the restored Stable's façade.
6. To further break up the building's sense of bulk, consideration could be given to making the façades over the Stable more different from the facades facing JFK Street and the western part of the Mt. Auburn frontage.

The new masonry volume over the Stable incorporates a few recessed balconies in random locations. These exceptions to the regular overall pattern of window openings helps enliven its façades.

7. The materials of their soffits and the details of their railing should be further developed.

In the western portion of the building, a fifth floor level stepback facing JFK Street and Mt. Auburn Street creates a terrace, usable by tenants. It is shaded by two trellis-like shading structures facing JFK Street.

8. Additional consideration should be given to the design of the shading structures and their length along the facade.

The entrance to the building's main lobby on Mt. Auburn Street is expressed as a double height pavilion nestled in the small, recessed forecourt between the Stable and the new masonry volume at the western half of the site. It helps mediate between the scale of the pedestrian and the building's larger volumes, and its extensive glass responds to the glass building directly opposite across Mt. Auburn Street.

9. The lobby entrance is an opportunity to offer additional visual detail and expressive structure. As the design is developed, additional attention should be paid to its precise form, mullion pattern, materials, colors, and details.

The vertical mullions in the curtainwall zone above the Stable are given projecting fins, echoing the projecting vertical sunshades on the south façade of the Smith Center. This affinity between the two buildings will help frame the open space at the south side of the Smith Center, giving it more cohesive quality than it would otherwise have, and will give Mt. Auburn Street a sense of variations on a theme, especially when considered in connection with the vertical wooden slats at the entry façade of the Cooper Gallery building farther west on the street.

10. As the design is further developed, one expects that the design of the glazing and its various fins and metal supports, as well as the expression of the structural columns supporting the upper masonry volume and the way they meet the ceiling become increasingly rich and nuanced.

The terracotta cladding system frames horizontally proportioned window openings with large glazing units. Their mullion pattern seems atypical in Harvard Square: the assertive vertical two mullions in each opening, and the suppression of the edge and knee-level horizontal mullions give an odd emphasis to the vertical linkages between the windows.

11. Consideration could be given to using a more directionally neutral pattern, for more consistency with the buildings of the context and more compatibility with the bi-directional pattern of the terracotta cladding.

The vertical mullions of the curtainwall zone above the Stable currently align with those of the windows in the masonry volume above.

12. If the curtainwall zone instead had a more independent expression, it could allow the masonry volume to float more lightly over the Stable. Consideration could be given to varying their spacing to suggest more independent relationships between the Stable, the curtainwall zone, and the new terracotta clad volume above it.
13. Consideration could be given to more closely spacing the vertical mullions/fins to enhance their visual affinity with the sunshading fins on the Smith Center.
14. Consideration could be given to extending the fins farther out, closer to the plane of the terracotta façade above.

The structural columns supporting the upper masonry volume will be visible through the curtainwall.

15. Their cladding and other aspects of their visual expression, including the way they meet the ceiling or soffit above, could present an opportunity to further express the new floors above as a conceptually semi-independent volume.
16. If a mass timber structural system is used, its visibility through the curtainwall would further enhance the project's appearance.

The bays closest to the intersection of Mount Auburn Street and JFK Street are wider than the others, resulting in an atypically broad pane closest to the corner.

17. Other solutions should be considered.

The elevations show screening for rooftop mechanical equipment.

18. Greater clarity should be provided regarding the screening, including the appearance of the screen walls, their opacity or transparency, their height, their setbacks and locations in plan, and the height of the equipment they enclose.

### **Ground Floor Design and Uses**

While the project is described as “mixed-use,” and the plans show multiple sidewalk entrances to the ground floor, the application is unclear as to what the ground floor uses will be, or even if they will be retail, active uses, or other public uses rather than office uses.

19. The retail, restaurant, and office uses that the application lists as possibilities are appropriate for Harvard Square, but greater specificity regarding the types, sizes, and ownership of ground floor uses should be provided.
20. Staff encourages that retail or other active uses be provided, that they be sufficiently small in scale to ensure frequent entrances along JFK and Mt. Auburn Streets, and that retail businesses have local character.
21. Other ground floor uses, such as public bathrooms or public uses of the lobby or other interior spaces should be considered as public benefits in response to zoning requirements.
22. The application states that entry to the basement program space will be through an entrance on Dunster Street. If the basement space is to be retail, consideration could be given to giving it greater visibility by entering it through the main lobby on Mt. Auburn Street, and perhaps to creating a double height space linking the basement with the ground level lobby.

While the ground floors of the new construction incorporate a high percentage of glazing as recommended by guidelines, the description of the uses they will accommodate is ambiguous and their graphic depiction is diagrammatic.

23. As the design is further developed, additional attention should be given to enriching the pedestrian experience by the design of the retail shopfronts. Consideration should be given to providing engaging detail, color and material selections, the design and locations of entrances, mullion patterns and profiles, the designs and locations of entry doors, lighting, and by using glazing with a high Visible Light Transmittance (VLT) and low Visible Light Reflectance (VLR).
24. Consideration should be given to the location of retail signage and its general parameters.
25. Consideration could be given to providing canopies where the building’s facades are slightly set back from the property line.

### **Materials, Colors, and Details**

The building’s context includes the concrete Smith Center and the glass 90 Mt. Auburn Street Building across the street with its elegant mullion system, in addition to Guy Lowell’s 44 JFK Street building at the intersection of JFK and Mt. Auburn streets and numerous pre-WW2 masonry buildings. The terracotta cladding system, the details of curtainwall/fin system, and the visible structural columns supporting the new volume above the Stable constitute creative contemporary approaches to design that relate to the modern buildings nearby and also provide a level of detail compatible with Harvard Square’s older buildings.

26. As the design develops, the ground floor facades, the details of the terracotta cladding, the fenestration within the terracotta system and in the larger glazed areas, the vertically finned

curtain wall system above the Stable, and the possibility of a mass timber structural system visible through it should be studied in more detail.

### **Open Space and Public Realm**

As an urban streetwall building, the building occupies most of the site up to the property line. Adjoining public spaces will be a focus for improvements to the public environment, and may be considered as public benefits to satisfy zoning requirements.

27. Consideration should be given to providing more sidewalk width along JFK Street and at the intersection of JFK and Mt. Auburn Streets by recessing the ground floors of the new portions of the building more deeply behind the plane of the upper floors, and/or by chamfering the ground floor façade at the building's corner.
28. Consideration should be given to improving the adjoining sidewalks. Possibilities include adjustments to crosswalk locations at the intersection of JFK and Mt. Auburn Streets for smoother pedestrian traffic flow and bulb-outs at the intersections.
29. The existing building on the site sponsors outdoor sidewalk seating for its ground floor restaurant, screened from traffic by planters, and sheltered by umbrellas and trees. Consideration should be given to providing such amenities on the adjoining public sidewalks as part of the proposed project.
30. The existing street trees should be protected, and additional ones should be considered where sidewalk width, pedestrian traffic flows, and underground features allow.
31. The landscape design of the small forecourt at the main lobby entrance should be studied for its potential to accommodate benches, plantings, or other pedestrian friendly features.

### **Parking and Loading**

Long-term bicycle parking is provided inside the building. As the proposed building essentially fills the site, outdoor short-term bicycle parking spaces are precluded. The project will instead make a financial contribution to the City's bicycle facilities fund.

The application requests exemptions from parking and loading requirements. It seems preferable to not provide on-site vehicular parking, as a parking entrance and its curb cut would negatively impact the adjoining streets. The proposed building will utilize the existing small loading/service courtyard inside the block, accessed by an alley from Dunster Street.

32. As noted in the Z&D memo, TP+T suggests that a delivery management plan be provided for their approval.

### **Environmental Impacts**

While taller than the existing Garage, the proposed building seems not likely to create significantly different wind conditions.

33. A wind study should be provided in confirmation.

As the building is located at the south end of its block, the majority of the shadows it will cast will be onto the neighboring buildings within the block. Its JFK Street façade is similar in height to that of the existing building, and so does not seem likely to create new shadow impacts on the street. Dunster Street is fairly narrow, and is currently shaded by both the Smith Center and the existing buildings on its west side. The proposed taller façade on the project's east side will cast more afternoon shade than the existing Garage, but seems not likely to create significant problems.

34. A shadow study should be provided in confirmation.

The application shows façade uplighting that emphasizes the horizontal terracotta members and a roof level cornice.

35. As the lighting design is developed, consideration could be given to controlling brightness and adjusting fixture locations to avoid a harsh effect.

### **Sustainability**

The building is designed to meet LEED Core and Shell Gold certification. Mechanical systems will be all electric. The building will have a high-performance envelope. See the Green Building Report for more information.

1. Consider off site solar options, since there are limitations for on-site solar roof installations.
2. The possibility of dedicating additional roof area to green roof by reducing the footprint of rooftop mechanical equipment and/or more fully utilizing available space should be investigated.
3. The possibility of utilizing a mass timber structural system should be pursued for further reduction in embodied carbon.
4. Additional sustainable features and systems could be considered as public benefits in response to zoning requirements, see the Z&D memo for possibilities.

### **Continuing Review**

The following is a summary of issues that may be addressed further at the public hearing, or may be incorporated into conditions for continuing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

1. The design of the building's facades as they are further developed, including the details and materials of the ground floor facades; fenestration; the three-dimensional shaping, finish, and color of the terracotta cladding system; and the mechanical penthouse.
2. Review of all exterior building materials, colors, and details, including review of a materials mock-up by city staff and the Planning Board prior to any exterior materials being ordered. The mockup should represent cladding materials, glass, fenestration, balcony railings, ground floor façade, brick and mortar, penthouse screening, etc. The design of the mockup should be included in the building permit submission. A range of color and finish samples for the terracotta should be reviewed prior to the construction of a mockup. Given the limited space available on the site, it may be necessary that the mockup be movable or located off-site.
3. Improvements to the building's site, with focus on the public sidewalks adjoining the building and their potential to both improve pedestrian flow and activate the public realm.
4. Review of exterior lighting, including consideration of the Draft Outdoor Lighting Ordinance.
5. Review of wind and shadow studies if requested by the Planning Board.
6. Review of mechanical screening for its location, appearance, and acoustical properties.
7. Review of additional materials addressing noise impacts on the public realm.
8. Review of the location of exhaust vents for potential ground floor food service uses.
9. Review of bicycle parking facilities for conformance with City standards.
10. The extent and design of the proposed shading structures at the fifth-floor west terrace.
11. Collaboration with city staff on potential improvements to the sidewalks adjoining the building, in coordination with a study of the street's overall design.
12. Collaboration with the Cambridge Historical Commission on repair and restoration of the Stable building, with particular attention to the aesthetic and technical considerations of its brick.