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**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff

Date: July 29, 2020

Re: **402 Rindge Avenue – Staff Report**

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Submission Type: Comprehensive Permit Application

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Applicant: Just-A-Start Corporation

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Zoning District(s): Residence C-2; Parkway Overlay District

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Proposal Summary: Construction of two new buildings with a total of 101 affordable housing units and 42,500 SF of office space for educational functions. One existing building with 273 affordable housing units will remain. Reduction in on-site parking from 273 to 220 spaces; addition of 143 long-term bicycle parking spaces and increase from 26 to 48 short-term bicycle parking spaces.

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Permits Requested: Comprehensive permit (M.G.L. Chapter 40B) seeking relief from specific standards in Zoning Ordinance Articles 4.000 (office use), 5.000 (FAR, lot area per dwelling unit, yard setbacks, open space, height), 6.000 (parking), 20.000 (Parkway Overlay District standards), 22.000 (procedures for Green Building Requirements); non-zoning relief from stormwater and wastewater management standards.

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Planning Board  
Action: Advisory report/recommendation to the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA).

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Memo Contents: Review of area planning and zoning, comments on proposal addressing planning, zoning, and urban design.

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Other Staff Reports: Traffic, Parking and Transportation Dept. (TP+T), Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate documents.

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**IRAM FAROOQ**  
Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning

## Introduction

The Applicant is seeking a comprehensive permit for a low and moderate-income housing development under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B, Section 21, which allows an application for such housing to be made to the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) in lieu of separate applications to other applicable local boards. The Planning Board is not the permit granting authority, but reviews the case and may submit advisory recommendations to the BZA. The BZA holds a public hearing, considers the recommendations of other local boards, and acts as the permit granting authority for the application.

The Applicant has had extensive engagement with CDD staff on this proposal and has been very receptive to feedback. This project promotes the creation of new affordable housing and space to support education and workforce development programs, both major City goals.

## Area Planning and Zoning

### *Site Context*

The site is located in the Alewife area, close to the MBTA station and a confluence of high-traffic regional roadways. The area is an evolving mix of development types, with some low-density auto-oriented retail sites, some higher-density office and laboratory buildings, and several higher-density residential buildings constructed in recent years. Sites tend to have more parking than in many other areas of the city, both in parking structures and in surface parking lots.

The project site contains one of three buildings often referred to together as “Rindge Towers,” residential buildings constructed in the 1970s with time-limited affordability restrictions. The building and site at 402 Rindge Avenue were acquired by the non-profit Just-A-Start, in the 1990’s, which enabled the existing building’s affordability to be preserved.



### *Site Zoning*

The Residence C-2 district permits higher-density multifamily housing with a maximum floor area ratio (FAR) of 1.75 (not including the citywide 30% bonus for Inclusionary Housing Projects) and height limit of 85 feet. Front, side, and rear yard standards are based on formulas that require greater setbacks based on the height and length of the building – the required setbacks are highly variable based on site conditions, but can require approximately 20-60 feet or more separation from property lines. For residential developments, a minimum of 15% of the lot area is required to be private open space for use by residents.

The Parkway Overlay District creates additional design standards for lots directly fronting the regional roadway system in the Alewife area (Alewife Brook Parkway, Fresh Pond Parkway, Concord Avenue, and Concord Turnpike) with the goal of promoting a park-like character. Standards include 25-foot landscaped front yards, scaled-down building heights along building frontages, and standards for location and screening of parking. Normally, these design standards may be modified by special permit from the Planning Board if the proposed design is found to meet the intent of the district.

### *Area Planning Studies*

If a project of this type required Planning Board review through the Project Review Special Permit process, it would be assessed in relation to the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30 of the Zoning Ordinance (see appendix).

No plans or design guidelines have been developed for this specific site, but the surrounding area has been the subject of past studies. The 2005 Concord-Alewife Plan led to the establishment of zoning and design guidelines for the CambridgePark Drive “Triangle” area to the west as well as the Fresh Pond Shopping Center area to the south. More recently, the Alewife District Plan updated the recommendations of the Concord-Alewife Plan, also including the “Jerry’s Pond” area to the north of the project site. The Alewife District Plan articulated the following vision and goals for the area:

*“Alewife is a sustainable, resilient, mixed-used district with convenient and safe connections within the neighborhood and to the rest of the city along with amenities that support interaction and social ties among its residents.”*

#### *Goals:*

- *Build a Cohesive Mixed-Use District*
- *Integrate Alewife with the Rest of Cambridge*
- *Promote Economic Opportunity*
- *Create a District Resilient to the Impacts of Climate Change*
- *Enhance the Public Realm*
- *Encourage Sustainable Modes of Transportation*
- *Create a Continuous Open Space & Recreation Network*

## Planning and Zoning Comments

### *Overall*

The existing conditions on the site reflect many of the planning principles of the 1960s-1970s. The zoning at the time permitted tall, dense buildings and mandated wide separation between buildings and large amounts of parking, prioritizing access and egress by automobile. Although the zoning was later changed by imposing a height limit of 85 feet, the formula-based setback requirements and “one-to-one” minimum parking ratios remain in effect. A new development conforming to current zoning would likely be similar to what exists on the site today, but at a lower height and with slightly more required landscaping.

The existing development has undergone improvements in recent years, but the City’s current planning would encourage a different type of development pattern altogether. Current urban design objectives promote greater integration of a building with its surroundings, pedestrian orientation, and sustainable transportation modes over automobiles. Expansive paved areas are discouraged because they detract from the City’s urban design vision as well as environmental objectives for sustainable and resilient development.

It is important to maintain the existing development on the site because it serves an important housing need for the City. The “infill” development approach that is proposed would avoid altering the existing residential building, while increasing opportunities for affordable housing and new space to support community-serving programs.

With encouragement from staff, the Applicant has opted for an approach to infill development that differs from the current development patterns on the site by focusing on relationship to the street, pedestrian and bicycle orientation, and sustainable design. It also promotes a complementary mix of uses with the inclusion of workforce and education programs in addition to housing. Although this approach strongly supports many of the City’s planning objectives, it results in the need for zoning relief in many specific areas.

### *Requested Relief*

- **Use.** The proposal is mostly multifamily residential, which is allowed as-of-right in the district, but includes non-residential space to serve education and training programs offered by Just-A-Start and potentially other community programs as well. Some educational and institutional uses are allowed in the zoning district while others are not, and it can sometimes be difficult to anticipate how a use might be categorized. The Applicant is seeking relief for the space to be permitted as a general office use.
- **Height and Density.** The new infill development is proposed at a height that conforms to the zoning for the area, remaining within the 85-foot height limit in the district. The existing building on the site, at 193 feet, is much taller than what current zoning allows. The total density on the site will be approximately 10% (by dwelling unit count) or 20% (by total floor area) greater than what current zoning allows for the site as a whole.

- **Setbacks and Open Space.** Relief is requested from the formula-based setback requirements, which result in required setbacks ranging from about 34 to 68 feet for the proposed new buildings. Because the lot is so large and the new buildings are oriented toward Alewife Brook Parkway and Rindge Avenue, the new buildings mostly conform to required setbacks on the sides but require front yard relief because they are oriented toward the street rather than positioned in the center of the site along with the existing building. The open space on the site will be increased somewhat, from 10% to 13% of the lot area, remaining slightly below the current district standard of 15% but improving upon the existing non-conforming condition.
- **Parking and Bicycle Parking.** The amount of parking on-site will be reduced to 220 spaces, resulting in a ratio of about 0.59 space per dwelling unit. Office users would use unused residential parking spaces during the daytime. New residential developments in close proximity to the Alewife MBTA station have typically been approved with reduced parking ratios – most recently, a residential project at 50 Cambridgepark Drive was approved with a ratio of 0.60 space per unit. The Applicant has also performed an analysis of existing parking demand on this site and comparable sites to support the reduction. Short-term bicycle parking is proposed to conform to requirements for the site as a whole, and long-term bicycle parking spaces are proposed to exceed the requirement for the two new buildings but not the existing building; nevertheless, bicycle parking would be made available to all residents of the site. A public bicycle sharing station (Bluebikes) is also proposed, which will provide more bicycling options. Additional comments are provided in the TP+T report.
- **Parkway Overlay District.** Much of the relief being sought is from the Parkway Overlay District design standards, including requirements for a step-down in height to 55 feet along the parkway frontage and a 25-foot landscaped front setback. The Planning Board can ordinarily grant modifications by special permit if the intent of the standards are met given the conditions of the site. In this case, there is the unusual condition that the site borders the approach to an elevated bridge, and there is both a horizontal and vertical buffer of landscaped public space between the sidewalk and the front lot line. Although the front setback is reduced, bringing the buildings to the lot line helps to screen the surface parking areas on the lot while still maintaining a green buffer between the sidewalk and buildings for most of the lot frontage. Requested relief from other detailed design standards of the Parkway Overlay District are largely explained by this unique condition where the lot abuts the parkway.
- **Green Building Requirements.** Since the adoption of revised Green Building Requirements in 2019, this is the first project to seek approval using the Passive House Institute, U.S. (PHIUS) rating system rather than the LEED system. Staff encourages the use of this system because it promotes energy efficiency and passive survivability, both key elements of the City’s climate change mitigation and resilience efforts. The request for relief is due to a procedural complication in the project phasing. Meeting the PHIUS criteria may rely on the completion of the photovoltaic solar array on “Phase 2” of the development, but for financing considerations it is important for the Applicant to certify that “Phase 1” will comply with all requirements at the time it is completed. Given the commitment to sustainability demonstrated by this proposal, staff is supportive of this relatively minor relief.

## Urban Design Comments

The Alewife District Plan (2019) and the draft Alewife Design Guidelines (2019) support the transformation of Alewife from an automobile dominated area with extensive surface parking and isolated buildings to a pedestrian friendly neighborhood with legible and welcoming public spaces, shaded streets and sidewalks, mixed uses with active ground floors, and greater protection from excessive heat and extreme stormwater events. This transformation accords with the objectives of the citywide Envision Cambridge plan. While the 402 Rindge site is outside the area specifically covered by the Alewife Plan and Guidelines, their goals, principles, and recommendations have informed the project's design. The project will do much to enrich the neighborhood and strengthen its connections to surrounding areas.

The applicant met with CDD staff multiple times during the course of design and made numerous adjustments to the project, including strengthening the relationships between buildings and open spaces and pedestrian circulation routes, and making improvements to the play area, the facades, building lobbies, and entrances.

### Program:

The incorporation of non-residential spaces, primarily to accommodate education and training programs, including the provision of active spaces on Building A's ground floor, accords well with the goals of the Alewife District Plan, and will help support the community.

The inclusion of 3-bedroom units, approximately 20% of the total, will help address Cambridge's shortage of larger units for families.

### Site Plan:

By locating the new buildings close to the perimeter of the site, the project deviates from the setbacks and setbacks prescribed by the Parkway Overlay Zoning District. Staff believes that these deviations are positive: By their alignment and height along Alewife Brook Parkway, the two proposed buildings will help frame the Parkway as a significant entrance to the city. Building A's north façade will improve the pedestrian connection to the MBTA station by creating a shaded and more pedestrian scaled experience. Building A's eastern wing along Rindge Avenue has a smaller scale and more complex massing, which relates to the smaller scaled existing residences just east of the site, and together with them will help create a sense of entry to the interior of the site. By creating more clearly defined open spaces within the interior of the site and visually screening them from Alewife Brook Parkway, the new buildings will contribute to a sense of place, and thereby promote a sense of community.

Note that the state controls the area between the western property line and the Parkway. This area is approximately level with the site near the intersection with Rindge Avenue, and has an increasing slope up to the Parkway as it approaches the bridge over the railroad line. It will remain a landscaped zone under state control; the existing trees will screen the lower residential units from Alewife Brook Parkway.

The creation of a more pedestrian-oriented site plan, including the reduction of broad paved areas, the considerable increase in bicycle parking, the provision of a Bluebike Station, the widened and improved sidewalk on Rindge Avenue, and the elimination of one of the two existing curb cuts on Rindge Avenue will all encourage the use of sustainable modes of transportation.

The proposed site plan will reduce the urban heat island effect by increasing the number of trees and reducing the amount of asphalt pavement, and the applicant has expressed a willingness to do more mitigation if feasible. A further increase in the number of canopy trees, and further reduction in the amount of pavement could be considered, and, if possible, a further reduction in paved area.

The site plan also responds to area planning for new multiuse bicycle/pedestrian pathways, anticipating a planned public pathway along the railroad line to the south of the site and creating pathways that could connect to such a future route.

*Façade Design:*

While the 402 Rindge site is outside the geographical scope of the Alewife District Plan and the draft Alewife Design Guidelines, their emphasis on providing ground floor active uses, and on using building massing and façade design to define and articulate public space are germane. Over the course of design, the applicant made numerous changes in response to suggestions, including changes to building entries, the sizes and arrangements of windows, the alignments of the projecting white elements on the west façade, and increased differentiation of the ground floor from the upper floors.

Staff supports the façade designs as a component of the building’s passive sustainability strategy and also as responses to the project’s context, in particular, the positive differentiation of the facades in response to the different scales, characters, and civic roles of Alewife Brook Parkway and Rindge Avenue. Further refinements, such as a simplified color scheme on the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> floors of Building A’s west façade, and the alignment of the white projecting elements, could be considered to even more strongly engage the project’s contexts by giving the Alewife Brook Parkway façade a large scaled consistency in contrast to the smaller scaled and more composite appearance of the building’s Rindge Avenue façade.

Staff supports the use of Building B’s first floor façade facing the playground as a “play wall”, incorporating features such as playground equipment and art. To further screen the parked cars under the building from the playground, a more opaque façade treatment could be considered.

If ventilation requirements permit, more extensive use of vegetated “green screen” material at both buildings’ ground level parking areas could be considered.

*Roof Design:*

The roofs of both buildings are significant both with regard to energy use and because they will be seen from the existing residential tower. White roofs are proposed, with some areas of green roof. The applicant’s intention to maximize the amount of photovoltaic panels is commendable; they will do so as part of meeting Passive House requirements.

**Continuing Review**

Staff are appreciative of the project team’s efforts to shape this proposal, and look forward to continued collaboration as the project moves forward. Staff are confident that design details such as colors and materials can be addressed through continuing review at the staff level.

**19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]**

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods</li> <li>• Consistency with established streetscape</li> <li>• Compatibility with adjacent uses</li> <li>• Consideration of nearby historic buildings</li> </ul>
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhabited ground floor spaces</li> <li>• Discouraged ground-floor parking</li> <li>• Windows on ground floor</li> <li>• Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways</li> <li>• Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access</li> </ul>
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location/impact of mechanical equipment</li> <li>• Location/impact of loading and trash handling</li> <li>• Stormwater management</li> <li>• Shadow impacts</li> <li>• Retaining walls, if provided</li> <li>• Building scale and wall treatment</li> <li>• Outdoor lighting</li> <li>• Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)</li> </ul>
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management</li> <li>• Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service</li> <li>• Efficient design (LEED standards)</li> </ul>
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional use focused on existing campuses</li> <li>• Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed</li> <li>• Preservation of historic structures and environment</li> <li>• Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities</li> </ul>
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing as a component of large, multi-building development</li> <li>• Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families</li> </ul>
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development</li> <li>• Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks</li> <li>• Provide wider range of activities</li> </ul>





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**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
Community Development Department

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**IRAM FAROOQ**  
*Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development*

July 27, 2020

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
*Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration*

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
*Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning*

Mr. Constantine Alexander  
Chairman, Board of Zoning Appeal  
c/o City of Cambridge Inspectional Services Division  
831 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02139

RE: Rindge Commons – Comprehensive Permit Application

Dear Mr. Alexander and Members of the Board,

On behalf of the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust, I am writing in enthusiastic support of Just-A-Start Corporation's application for a Comprehensive Permit for their proposed Rindge Commons development. This new construction project, located at the edge of of Just A Start's (JAS) existing 402 Rindge Avenue property, will create 101 new affordable rental units in two phases, along with non-residential space for uses which complement JAS's housing. The Trust has approved \$4,250,000 in funding for the first phase of JAS's development, and anticipates providing additional funding for the second phase.

Just A Start has a long and successful track record of developing and preserving affordable housing throughout the city. Given the need for new affordable housing and the challenges in securing new sites on the open market, we appreciate JAS's efforts to create new affordable opportunities on properties they own. Rindge Commons will create needed affordable housing that is near the many amenities of the Fresh Pond neighborhood with easy access to transit at the Alewife MBTA station.

Rindge Commons will also allow JAS to consolidate its many highly valued training programs into a single, well-designed space which will benefit both current program participants and the broader community which will be better able to access these resources in a centralized location near transit. JAS's development will provide community-wide benefits by addressing climate change mitigation and sustainability goals, and enhancing the experience of pedestrians and cyclists along Alewife Brook Parkway and Rindge Avenue.

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As you know, the need for affordable housing is as great as ever, as market rents in Cambridge continue to far outpace what low and moderate-income families can afford. The demand for affordable housing is intense, as demonstrated by the more than 2,650 applications submitted for the recently-completed affordable housing on Concord Avenue.

Unfortunately, we anticipate that the need for affordable housing will only intensify as an increasing number of residents experience job and housing insecurity due to the COVID-19 and the resulting economic fallout. The creation of more than 100 new affordable apartments at Rindge Commons will help address the long-term consequences of this need as we create housing for residents with a range of incomes along with job training space to help residents learn the skills needed to compete in the job market. We are very excited about this unique and impactful development opportunity, and hope to work with JAS to move this development forward quickly so that the community can soon benefit from both the new affordable housing and job training resources.

We appreciate the Board's longstanding support of affordable housing, and thank you for your consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Cotter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Cotter" clearly distinguishable.

Christopher Cotter  
Housing Director

cc: Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

# TRAFFIC, PARKING, + TRANSPORTATION

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Cambridge Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA)  
**From:** Joseph E. Barr, Director   
**Copy:** Cambridge Planning Board  
**Date:** June 24, 2020  
**Subject:** Comprehensive Permit Application for Rindge Commons (402 Rindge Avenue)

The Cambridge Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP+T) has been working with Just-A-Start Corporation on the proposed Rindge Commons project, a project to construct two new buildings at 402 Rindge Avenue in two phases, with a combined total of 101 affordable housing units and approximately 42,000 square feet of office space for education and training programs.

The site has an existing 22-story tower building with 273 affordable units; therefore, the Rindge Commons project will result in a future build condition of 374 total affordable housing units at the site. The existing site has 273 surface parking spaces which will be reduced to 220 spaces for a future 0.59 parking spaces per unit ratio. During the day, vacant residential parking spaces are expected to be available for the site's office users.

The project will add 134 long-term bicycle parking spaces and 22 short-term bicycle parking spaces. The project will also install a new Bluebikes bikeshare station on the site.

TP&T offers the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA) the following comments on this project.

Just-A-Start submitted a Transportation Impact Study (TIS) for the project which was completed by Vanasse & Associates, Inc. dated December 2019. TP+T believes that the TIS was a prepared in a complete and reliable manner.

The TIS was submitted with the Comprehensive Permit Application and indicated that the project will generate a total of:

- 928 daily vehicle trips, (85 AM Peak/72 PM Peak hour net new vehicle trips)
- 550 daily transit trips, (48 AM Peak/44 PM Peak hour transit trips)
- 218 daily pedestrian trips, (17 AM Peak 17 PM Peak hour transit trips)
- 20 daily bicycle trips, (1 AM Peak /1 PM Peak hour bicycle trips)

The TIS evaluated the area's transportation conditions, the site driveways, and intersection of Rindge Avenue at Alewife Brook Parkway. The TIS included the Project's trip generation and cumulative traffic impacts with the existing site conditions and other

development projects in the area. The TIS reviewed all modes of transportation (vehicle, transit, walking, and bicycling) and the project's service and loading operations.

The TIS indicated that the Planning Board Special Permit transportation criteria were exceeded in 5 instances.

- The criteria for Traffic on Residential Streets was exceeded for Rindge Avenue, between Alewife Brook Parkway to Clifton Street, because an estimated 53 new vehicles are anticipated to use Rindge Avenue in the AM Peak hour which exceeds the criteria of 40 new vehicles.
- The Pedestrian Level of Service (PLOS) criteria was exceeded for the AM and PM Peak hour at the Alewife Brook Parkway at Rindge Avenue intersection because of an existing level-of-service E for pedestrians crossing Alewife Brook Parkway and Rindge Avenue. The project will not change this condition. This intersection is owned by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). TP+T believes that the wait time for pedestrians to cross this intersection is reasonably balanced with the need to process vehicles through the intersection during the peak periods.

The TIS includes maps and tables showing the differences in vehicle and pedestrian delays at the Alewife Brook Parkway at Rindge Avenue intersection between the Existing and Build condition (i.e., delay due to project trips) and between Existing and a 5-Year Future condition (i.e., delay due to project trips, cumulative impacts with other development project trips, and a background growth rate of 0.5% per year for five years).

In addition to vehicle and pedestrian analysis, the TIS included a transit analysis of the MBTA buses in the area and the MBTA Red Line subway at Alewife station. The TIS indicated that there is sufficient bus and subway capacity to accommodate the project.

### **Automobile Parking**

In order to accommodate the two new buildings, approximately 53 surface parking spaces will be permanently removed due to construction. However, a parking study in the TIS found that not all of the existing parking spaces are used and that the proposed future parking supply should be able to accommodate the sites parking demand. Furthermore, because the residential parking demand peaks at night and office-use parking demand will peak during the daytime, parking spaces can be shared.

Overall, TP+T believes that the project's proposed parking plan is reasonable and sufficient. The 0.59 parking space per unit ratio will provide the parking spaces needed for the residents that need to own a car but by limiting the parking spaces it will also discourage automobile ownership and use. Typically, affordable housing projects located near a transit station have a parking demand of approximately 0.5 spaces per unit or less, but TP+T believes that a 0.59 parking ratio is reasonable because Just-A-Start must both balance the needs of existing residents that already own a car, and discourage existing and future residents from owning a car or a second car to support sustainable travel modes.

TP+T recommends that the BZA support the proposed parking plan in the Comprehensive Permit, including sharing of parking spaces between residential and non-residential uses at the site. TP+T also recommends that Just-A-Start be permitted to reduce the number of parking spaces over time as feasible, in order to replace any

future un-used parking spaces or parking areas with trees and green space, especially as transportation patterns change in the future (i.e., increase in biking, ride-hailing services, etc.). Parking at the site should be permitted to be as flexible as possible instead of locking the project into a specific number of parking spaces now. In other words, TP+T supports approving 220 spaces on the site, and also recommend that future reductions be permitted without needing zoning relief.

### **Bicycle Parking**

The project is adding long-term and short-term bicycle parking spaces to meet the zoning requirements for the two new buildings. Furthermore, to encourage the use of bicycling, the project is proposing to install a Bluebikes station on the site, which TP+T believes will be a great amenity for those living and working there.

The project will not be adding new long-term bicycle parking spaces to the existing tower building however, the existing residents will be permitted to park their bike in the new bicycle parking spaces created for the new buildings as available. There are some existing bicycle parking spaces for the existing tower. TP+T suggests that residents be surveyed occasionally, and bicycle parking monitored to determine whether the spaces are sufficient for the residents and that the project consider adding more bicycle parking in the future as needed. Survey and monitoring reports can be submitted to TP+T but are not required to be.

### **Site Plan**

The project will close one existing curb cut on Rindge Avenue which TP+T believes is positive because it will remove a conflict point on Rindge Avenue. The project will also make needed landscaping improvements to the site which will improve the pedestrian conditions, reduce the heat island effect, and help with sustainability goals.

The project should update or reconstruct adjacent sidewalks and pedestrian ramps and make sure they are brought into compliance with City and ADA standards in coordination with TP+T and DPW. TP+T will work with the Applicant and DPW on the details of the building permit plan during the building permit process.

An important future goal for the area is the creation of a multi-use path along the Fitchburg railroad right-of-way adjacent to the site and another idea is a possible bridge over the railroad tracks to connect to the Fresh Pond mall. TP+T is pleased that Just-A-Start has been engaged in these important ideas which would provide tremendous access benefits for the site. Just-A-Start is currently working with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority on an Affordable Housing Open Space Connectivity Plan for Rindge Avenue that will help with visioning these projects. TP+T thanks Just-A-Start for their work and commitment toward advancing these ideas.

### **Loading and Service Delivery**

All loading and service deliveries will occur on the project's property and TP+T believes there will be no issues with accommodating the loading and service needs for this site. Resident move-in operations will be scheduled with building management and occur on-site as is the current practice.

## **Transportation Demand Management (TDM)**

Overall, TP+T supports this Comprehensive Permit Application for the Rindge Commons's 101 new affordable housing units and approximately 42,000 square feet of office space for education and training programs. Just-A-Start has established several important goals for the project and has committed to a program of Transportation Demand Management Measures aimed at reducing the project's transportation impacts as listed below.

### *Goals*

- Reduce congestion on Rindge Avenue, at the Rindge / Alewife Intersection, and throughout the City and Region.
- Reduce their carbon footprint and combat climate change.
- Pedestrians make for friendlier and safer streets.
- Encourage buying locally.
- Improvements to health and happiness through walking and biking.

### *Specific Transportation Demand Management Measures*

- Install a new Bluebikes bikesharing station on the site.
- Organize orientation sessions with residents to teach biking rules, safe biking measures, basic maintenance and repairs and help identify bike routes to various locations.
- Provide a wide and well-lit pedestrian connection from the Rindge Commons property to the Alewife and Rindge intersection.
- Install a Transit display screen in the lobby of the existing tower and new developments to make transit use more transparent and simpler to access with real-time information.
- Subsidize 100% of the cost of a MBTA transit pass for its employees or \$240 annual reimbursement for bike maintenance for employees who choose to commute by bike.
- Provide MBTA transit passes (up to 2 cards per household) to new residents upon move-in loaded with 2 months of full ridership access.
- Set aside parking spaces to serve car sharing service.
- Develop a carpool/vanpool board for residents and students at the site and coordinate with the Alewife Transportation Management Association to identify resources available to residents, students and employees.
- Provide electric car charging stations on-site.
- Participate in a study to look at connectivity for pedestrians and bikes and the potential of adding paths that would serve the residents of Rindge Commons, the adjacent towers, Jefferson Park and neighborhood at large. This study will include the concept of adding a path along the railroad right-of-way with possible connections west to Cambridgepark Drive passing under the Alewife Brook Parkway bridge and east to Sherman Street and even the possibility of a pedestrian bridge providing access to the Fresh Pond Mall and Denehy Park.

Finally, TP+T wants to thank Just-A-Start for working with us on this project and we look forward to continuing to work on this important project as it moves forward.



City of Cambridge  
Department of Public Works

*Owen O’Riordan, Commissioner*

147 Hampshire Street  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
theworks@cambridgema.gov

Voice: 617 349 4800  
TDD: 617 499 9924

July 28, 2020

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals  
  
FROM: Katherine F. Watkins, PE  
City Engineer

**RE: 402 Rindge Ave: Comprehensive Permit Application**

We are in receipt of the Comprehensive Permit Application for the Rindge Commons development located at 402 Rindge Ave, dated April 22, 2020.

The DPW, along with with other City Departments, has meet with the Applicant, Just- A-Start Corporation, on numerous occasions to review the proposal. The Applicant and their team have been responsive to comments and concerns and have presented a proposal that strives to meet all of the DPW requirements while acknowledging the constraints of the parcel.

The Applicant and their consultant team have demonstrated a general understanding of our Department’s requirements for development projects and have indicated a willingness to work with the DPW to meet the requirements and to address our concerns, to the extent practicable. With the understanding that the project will be subject to a thorough and complete engineering review at the time of the Building Permit Application, we anticipate continuing to work with the Applicant . Key items that have been discussed have been highlighted below.

**Stormwater Management:**

The development will be required to obtain a Stormwater Control Permit prior to the issuance of a Building Permit which will include a detailed review of the proposed stormwater management system. As part of our discussions with the Applicant, they have advanced their civil site plan and stormwater management system design to level that has allowed them to make specific requests for relief from our standards. The specific requests that have been presented in the Comprehensive Permit Application are for relief from the City’s detention requirement for stormwater runoff quantity and from the phosphorous removal requirement for stormwater runoff quality.

The DPW supports the requested relief as part of this Application based on the following:

- The current proposed Stormwater Management system results in a significant improvement in conditions at the site over current conditions.

- The current proposed system is consistent with meeting the standards to the extent practicable for an infill project at an active housing development and on a parcel with other environmental and physical constraints.
- The Applicant continues to work with the DPW as the project is advanced to look for opportunities for improvements in stormwater run off quantity and quality.

### **Climate Change / Resiliency:**

The project parcel has been identified by the City's November 2015 *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment*, as those at risk for increased future flooding as a result of storm events anticipated as a result of Climate Change. The Applicant has acknowledged the 2070 flooding events in the application and has presented a plan that meets the DPW's recommendations for addressing these flooding concerns. The project has committed to establishing the finished floor elevation of the structure impacted (Building A) at the elevation of the 2070-100 year event, protecting the structure from anticipated flooding events. The Architectural sections are showing that there will be the exception for portion of the instructional spaces that need to relate directly to the adjacent surface for loading. This area, by nature of being the wood shop, will need to be designed to allow for a quick recovery from a flood. As important, the residential spaces in the structure will not be located on the ground floor and thus will be protected.

The DPW will review the Building Permit plans to confirm that the final plans are meeting the commitments of the proposal and will continue to work with the Applicant on implementation of resiliency measures.

### **Tree Canopy / Heat Island Impacts:**

While exempt from the City Tree Ordinance, the DPW has been working with the Applicant to address the proposals impact on the sites tree canopy. As is indicated in the Application, while looking to maintain as many of the existing trees as possible, there are tree removals proposed to support the infill project. The Applicant was responsive to the concerns of the DPW and other City departments related to this issue and is proposing tree plantings to mitigate the loss. The proposed planting plans looks to improve tree canopy shading over impervious area throughout the entire parcel.

### **Public Right of Way:**

While not clearly outlined in the Application, the City has been working with the Applicant on the projects proposed impacts on the Public Right of Way.

To support the project and to establish a better pedestrian connection to the site and the proposed front structure, the project will make improvements to the Rindge Ave sidewalk. The Applicant has also been working the DPW and the City Traffic Department to provide improvements to the accessibility of the pedestrian crossings at the projects corner of Rindge Ave and Alewife Brook Parkway.

DPW will review and evaluate all proposed work and impacts in the public right of way, as the design is developed. Connections to both public and private utilities as well as all proposed



disruption in the public right of way shall be reviewed as part of the Building Permit and construction permit processes.

In summary, as related to the interests of the DPW the proposal will result in improved conditions over the current conditions of the site. We look forward to working with the Applicant and other City Departments on this project. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns related to the comments or information provided above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Katherine Watkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Katherine" and last name "Watkins" clearly distinguishable.

Katherine F. Watkins, P.E.  
City Engineer