



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: March 16, 2021

Re: **PB #141, 5 Broad Canal Way Amendment 4 (Minor)**

IRAM FAROOQ

Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE

Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

KHALIL MOGASSABI

Deputy Director
Chief of Planning

Background

The Final Development Plan for “Cambridge Research Park,” a mixed use development of life sciences research and office space, retail, and housing, was first approved by the Planning Board in 1999 (PB-141) and since that time has been modified three times through minor amendments. Most development in the PUD has been completed, and one remaining undeveloped site was the subject of a recently adopted rezoning (“Canal District Kendall”).

This application is seeking approval by Minor Amendment to convert a former restaurant space (3,642 square feet) into a dentist office. This would slightly change the relative mix of retail and office uses in the Final Development Plan and permit a non-retail commercial use in a space previously approved for retail (the building is primarily residential). No change is proposed to the approved total GFA of this development.

If the Board determines that the change constitutes a Minor Amendment, then the Board may approve the amendment on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members. Detailed information about the PUD Amendment Procedure is provided below.

PUD Amendments

An Amendment to an approved PUD can be found to be either a Major Amendment or a Minor Amendment. Per the general PUD provisions in Section 12.37 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board must determine whether changes to the Final Development Plan may be approved as a Minor Amendments. The following guidance is provided in zoning:

[Section 12.37.2] Minor amendments are changes which do not alter the concept of the PUD in terms of density, floor area ratio, land usage, height, provision of open space, or the physical relationship of elements of the development. Minor amendments shall include, but not be limited to, small changes in the location of buildings, open space, or parking; or realignment of minor streets.

344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
Voice: 617 349-4600
Fax: 617 349-4669
TTY: 617 349-4621
www.cambridgema.gov

Comments

The proposed conversion of 3,642 square feet from retail use to office use constitutes only 0.2% difference in total GFA allocation by use, and only about 5% of the existing retail space. It is relevant that the proposal would not add to the general office/laboratory development that makes up the larger part of this PUD, but would create a consumer-oriented office use providing medical services.

The location of the proposed dental office is in the center of a stretch of existing retail storefronts extending along the length of the building, mostly occupied by restaurants. The inclusion of a small number of consumer-serving offices within a series of retail storefronts is typical for many commercial districts in the city.

The office use requires a lesser number of car and bicycle parking spaces than the prior restaurant use. Parking for employees and customers will be accommodated in the existing garage, creating minimal additional transportation impact.

Urban Design

The dental office will occupy two storefront bays along Broad Canal Way, which pre-pandemic had been utilized as a restaurant. Each bay consists of an entry door flanked on either side by full-height, display windows.

Efforts have been made to make the entry/reception storefront more visually interesting. The double entry doors will be transparent, and the display windows will include an applied logo and a branded mirror. It is unclear how much of the windows will be transparent as the renderings indicate that vinyl will be applied to the glass. As recommended in the Kendall Square Design Guidelines, animated storefronts contribute to the vitality of the neighborhood and public realm, so transparency should be maximized.

At the patient wing, the egress door will be covered with a patterned, perforated vinyl. The side windows are proposed to be covered with perforated vinyl for their full height, and will either incorporate an artist or product display. While the need for privacy is understood, Staff question if these windows need to be completely covered with vinyl. An upper portion of each window could remain transparent without impacting patient privacy. Staff suggest that the Applicant work with local artists (similar to the public art along the canal) to help enliven the storefront. It would also be helpful to clarify how transparent the vinyl will be from the exterior as part of the continuing review process.

If the Board approves this request as a Minor Amendment, the following are recommended to be included as conditions for ongoing design review:

- Review of the final storefront design details, including vinyl specifications, lighting, and art displays and/or product displays.