



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

# PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date: November 12, 2013

Subject: Boston Properties Ames Street Zoning Petition

Recommendation: The Planning Board recommends ADOPTION.

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The proposed rezoning of the Ames Street District (ASD), a subdistrict of the Mixed Use Development (MXD) District in Kendall Square, is primarily intended to advance the development of a residential building in that district. Such a project has long been supported by the Planning Board, was specifically authorized in the Eastern Cambridge rezoning of 2001, and was reaffirmed in the Boston Properties MXD rezoning of 2010, which authorized the Broad Institute expansion but included a commitment from Boston Properties to begin the development of housing within a certain timeframe or pay a cash penalty to the City. The current zoning permits the square footage and height needed for the residential project. The purpose of the proposed rezoning is to resolve several zoning complications that would inhibit the creation of the project as it is currently envisioned, as a multifamily residential high-rise on Ames Street.

Because the proposed zoning changes are limited to the ASD, and the overall zoning for the MXD only allows an additional 200,000 square feet of residential development and a small residual amount of commercial development (much of which will be dedicated to ground-floor retail), there is little concern that the proposed rezoning would impact any development other than the proposed residential building.

It is important to note that adoption of the proposed rezoning would not constitute final approval of the project, which will still require a Project Review Special Permit from the Planning Board. The urban design and transportation characteristics of the project will be reviewed in greater detail at that stage. Also, other zoning requirements that are not mentioned in the proposed rezoning will be applied to the project at later stages of design, such as the Inclusionary Housing requirements in Section 11.200 of the Zoning Ordinance.

While the Board is generally supportive of the proposed rezoning and the project that it is intended to enable, we have also reviewed and discussed each element of the proposed rezoning to evaluate its benefits and potential drawbacks. That discussion is summarized on the following pages.

### Lot FAR Limitations

In the MXD District, density is controlled by an overall development cap that has been revised over time as the planning for Kendall Square has evolved. There are also lot FAR requirements in the MXD. Unlike in other districts where FAR is the primary control on development, in the MXD the lot FAR requirements serve to limit the scale of each building relative to the specific site on which it is located. The lot FAR requirement for multifamily housing is 4.0, which could only be achieved through mid-rise residential development on a large lot. This development type would be unrealistic given the current development patterns in the MXD.

The Board believes that high-rise residential development is appropriate for the site, and therefore finds it reasonable to remove the lot FAR limitation for multifamily residential. It is important to note that this will not permit unlimited development density, because the amount of residential development is still limited by the total development cap. This zoning change should not be viewed as a precedent for removing density limitations on development in the future.

### Lot Open Space Requirements

The current lot open space requirements, which apply in addition to the total public open space requirement in the MXD, have helped to encourage a distribution of open space throughout the district. However, they have also resulted in some instances where very small pieces of open space that are not of significant benefit to the public have been used to satisfy the requirement in a technical but not very meaningful way. Moreover, given the current conditions of the site, it would not be feasible to produce the required amount of open space on the same lot as the proposed Ames Street residential project.

As proposed, removing the lot open space requirements within the ASD and replacing them with an aggregated open space requirement would facilitate the construction of the intended residential project while ensuring that the amount of open space is not reduced. It would also provide flexibility to allow the City to acquire a section of land owned by Boston Properties to connect Third Street to Main Street, improving transportation patterns in the area.

However, the Board believes it is important to continue to support the goal of maintaining a connected, distributed and accessible system of publicly beneficial open space within the district. Rather than imposing specific requirements, it may be worthwhile for the Planning Board to review the district open space plan in a comprehensive and holistic way when reviewing the proposed residential project and any future changes to development within the district, as the Board currently does for PUD projects. This review could be informed by the Eastern Cambridge and Kendall Square Open Space (ECKOS) Study that is currently in its early stages.

### Parking

In general, the Board applauds the approach of limiting the supply of parking, encouraging shared use of parking facilities, and avoiding the development of additional parking where it is not needed. The current zoning in the MXD allows for pooled parking, which creates

opportunities to share parking among existing office and proposed residential uses and to utilize parking spaces in a maximally efficient way. It should be noted that residential parking may have different characteristics from office parking, given that many residents may own cars but not drive them every day, and that the proximity of parking may be of greater concern to residents than for office employees or retail patrons.

When determining the number of dedicated residential parking spaces that should be provided, the proposed 0.5 spaces per unit may be reasonable as a bare minimum, but it should be acknowledged that the actual number of dedicated spaces provided should be determined based on the particulars of the project, including the mix of unit types and the actual location where the parking spaces will be located relative to the residential units. The Kendall Square (“K2”) planning recommendations suggest a zoning minimum of 0.5 spaces per residential unit, but give discretion to the Planning Board in determining the final amount of required parking based on an analysis of the expected parking demand from all uses, with guidance from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.

#### Sharing of Loading Facilities

The Board finds that it is reasonable to permit flexibility in the sharing of loading facilities. However, the design of loading facilities should be carefully reviewed by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department to address functional matters as well as potential impacts on pedestrians, bicyclists and other vehicular travel patterns.

#### Fast Order Food Establishments

The current fast order food limitation in the MXD reflects past concerns that a proliferation of national fast food chains could negatively impact the character of commercial districts. Fast order food establishments require a special permit citywide, and are limited to a specific number in the MXD and the Central Square Overlay District. These regulations have been effective in some ways to serve the desired goals, but the Board also acknowledges that the restrictions on fast order food have been a hindrance to many local establishments as well.

The proposed zoning approach of raising the cap on fast order food establishments, instead of eliminating the cap entirely, is a reasonable approach in this case because it would continue to protect against over-proliferation and would retain the special permit review process to ensure that impacts on the character of the area would be mitigated. A more comprehensive approach to resolving issues around fast order food zoning would require more discussion and may better be approached from a citywide perspective.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,



Hugh Russell, Chair.