



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BRIAN MURPHY
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: September 10, 2014
Re: **Proposed Amendment to #175 – 1-23 East Street**

Overview

This application follows the Planning Board's review of a request for a Minor Amendment to modify the approved massing and design of a proposed residential building at 1-5 East Street, part of an approved Planned Unit Development (PUD). The Board advised that such a change should be treated as a Major Amendment.

The application submitted to the Board serves as a "Development Proposal," which is the first stage in approval of a Major Amendment to a PUD. After holding a public hearing, the Board may make a Preliminary Determination approving the project, with conditions and requests for modification (see criteria on the next page). After the Preliminary Determination, the Applicant may prepare a Final Development Plan to be reviewed at a subsequent public hearing and considered for final approval.

Background

As outlined in the application, the PUD (Special Permit #175) was first approved in 2002 pursuant to the PUD-6 zoning regulations, which had been adopted in 2001. The original PUD conceived of two new residential buildings and the preservation of an existing commercial building (known as the "Maple Leaf Building"). The PUD also involved the construction of new roads, utilities and open space. The final design of each individual building in the PUD was made subject to review and approval by the Planning Board prior to seeking a building permit.

Along with a Minor Amendment to extend the time period for action on the special permit, the Planning Board has granted two Major Amendments, one to authorize a reduction in the minimum parking ratio to 0.8 space per unit for the whole development, and another to authorize the conversion of the Maple Leaf Building to residential use. Thus far, one new residential building has been constructed (One Leighton Street) and the conversion of the Maple Leaf Building is just now being completed. The Board last reviewed the proposed design of the final residential building, at 1-5 East Street, in 2012.

Current Request

The requested major amendment would effectively reduce the number of units and building height permitted on the 1-5 East Street site. Design review for the building can also be incorporated into the Major Amendment review. Because the original PUD special permit was also reviewed pursuant to the Section 19.20 Project Review Special Permit requirements, the applicable criteria in that section should also be reviewed prior to amending the special permit.

Criteria for Preliminary Determination

The Major Amendment process follows the sequence for approval of a PUD as set forth in Article 12.000 of the Zoning Ordinance. The first step is to evaluate the Development Proposal and make a Preliminary Determination. Section 12.35.3 provides guidance:

Approval of the Development Proposal shall be granted only upon determination by the Planning Board that the Development Proposal:

- (1) conforms with the General Development Controls set forth in Section 12.50, and the development controls set forth for the specific PUD district in which the project is located;*
- (2) conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for the portion of the city in which the PUD district is located;*
- (3) provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects; in making this determination the Planning Board shall consider the following:*
 - (a) quality of site design, including integration of a variety of land uses, building types, and densities; preservation of natural features; compatibility with adjacent land uses; provision and type of open space; provision of other amenities designed to benefit the general public;*
 - (b) traffic flow and safety;*
 - (c) adequacy of utilities and other public works;*
 - (d) impact on existing public facilities within the city; and*
 - (e) potential fiscal impact.*

Staff Comments

In most respects, the modified building design does not affect the criteria for approval of a Development Proposal. The proposal continues to conform to the controls in Article 12.000 and in the district. In some ways, new citywide zoning standards have been adopted since the original special permit was granted – most notably, the Green Building Standards (Section 22.20) and Bicycle Parking Requirements (Section 6.100). Those standards could be incorporated into the conditions of the Major Amendment.

The Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines (2001), along with the Citywide Urban Design Objectives, continue to inform the review of new development in the area. Those guidelines should be carefully considered prior to approval of a Final Development Plan and final design review.

Staff have had the opportunity to meet with the Applicant's team as they have developed their design concept thus far, and some initial comments are provided below.

Site planning and landscaping

At the site planning level, the proposal maintains the "L-shaped" form of earlier submittals, which is a good response to site constraints, including Monsignor O'Brien Highway and the elevated rail line. This also enables the creation of a generous landscaped open space area with maximum sun exposure as per the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.

Like a number of recent major projects in the city, urban design issues associated with very long and low buildings arise with this proposal. In a rather significant gesture, the much desired "break" in the building is to be provided through an archway, which now includes a double height opening that graciously exposes the Amelia Earhardt Finger Park and open space beyond. At the same time, the archway provides a mid-block connection through the site and therefore enhances pedestrian and bicyclist permeability. The design of the archway is of utmost importance as it has the potential to create a dramatic focal point that celebrates North Point. The architects have worked hard to meet this challenge and create a seamless flow from one side of the site to the other. It is proposed to accommodate the grade change into the design of the pass-through, which serves to integrate the arch into the overall site plan. The careful design and integration of ramps, seating benches, lighting and paving treatments to further announce the archway is also encouraged.

Several paths across the site are proposed to lead pedestrians and bicyclists through the archway, to building entries and to the new MBTA head house. A generous urban plaza associated with the latter is to be provided at the western end of the site in recognition of the expected high volume of pedestrian and bicycle traffic. At this stage, the relationship with the head house is not fully resolved and requires further detailed work to ensure that the negative aspects of the site associated with the elevated rail are ameliorated and the best possible plaza space is created. Likewise, the paved area extending from the archway appears extensive and should be reviewed to ensure maximum green space and meaningful landscaping is provided.

Building height, scale and massing

The reduction in building height to below 70 feet responds to the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines, which seek to provide lower heights around public spaces and close to the existing East Cambridge neighborhood. A modest transition in height is achieved across the site, with the western retail wing dropping to five stories. Another positive move is that a variable roofline is proposed, which creates visual interest from longer range views.

The project is conceived as an assemblage of four separate buildings, with a more formal building at the Leighton Street edge housing residential amenities, and a corner form providing the retail frontage anchoring the building at its western end. In between, two forms exhibiting a more domestic feel are separated by the archway. The Leighton Street wing replicates much of the massing, street patterning and detail of the first phase of the PUD. In contrast, the retail corner form has a more streamlined architectural treatment, which seems appropriate given its immediate interface with the head house

and urban plaza. The concept of separate buildings breaks up what could have been a long monotonous building. However, it could perhaps be strengthened to clearly express each as a separate volume rather than just through material changes. Notably, the retail space at the western end of the site could perhaps have more of a presence.

The archway is proposed to be fully glazed, including the underside, and expressed in a more contemporary design language. Such an approach has merit as the site lends itself to a “high-profile” design with significant presence and identity. Above the opening, residential apartments are proposed, and thus the degree to which the building “break” will remain transparent and open should be given further consideration. However, the revised archway treatment is considered a significant improvement on earlier proposals.

Street wall and edge treatments

The facades employ modulation and articulation, primarily through the expression of vertical bays and repeating elements (canopies and balconies), which adds variety, and achieves a nice rhythm and more human scale. There is also potential to utilize building entries and the lounge at the knuckle between wings to further articulate the facades and perhaps express the internal stairs and lifts.

Street enlivening stoops and porches are proposed on both the south and north elevations, which provides a level of domesticity and activity consistent with the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines. This is also consistent with existing streetscape patterns established on Glassworks Avenue. Some further work is necessary to ensure that building entries relate as directly as possible to crosswalks and expected pedestrian desire lines. Furthermore, some of the pedestrian entries are not that welcoming and have circuitous circulation paths. Providing more recessed and inviting lobbies, which could also provide adequate space for waiting areas should be considered. It is also unclear from the submitted information where the main building entry is located.

Detailed design issues

- Above the second floor, apartments are arranged off a very long, double-loaded corridor. Consider utilizing a series of foyer areas as break space from the long corridor, or providing windows at the ends, along corridors or around elevator lobby areas.
- Further detail regarding the proposed materials, colors and finishes is required. Staff would like to ensure that new development reflects the use of durable, high quality and attractive materials, which is characteristic of the North Point area.

Requests for Final Development Plan

The Development Proposal includes basic descriptions and illustrations of the modified building design, but more detail should be provided prior to approval of the Final Development Plan for the Major Amendment and/or the final building design. The following is a list of information that staff (CDD along with Traffic, Parking and Transportation) would recommend providing in a Final Development Plan:

Context

- Context map, analysis and photos.
- Existing site conditions map, analysis and photos.

Site Plans

- Detailed site plan, combined with ground floor plan. Include annotations and dimensions. Show adjacent building locations.
- More detailed landscaping plan with species and size notes, images of specified plants, design of seating, lighting and other features. More detail on hardscape materials.
- More detail on community path design including dimensions, paving materials and features.
- Plan of vehicular entrance/exit ramps including sight lines.
- Plan showing crosswalk and accessible path from the site to Amelia Earhardt Finger Park.
- Treatment on Leighton Street.
- Plan showing short-term bicycle parking locations.

Building Plans and Elevations

- More detailed floor plans with annotations and dimensions, clearly indicating openings, building entries and setbacks.
- Roof plan showing design and location of proposed mechanical equipment.
- Parking garage plan.
- Long-term bicycle parking plan at 1:10 scale.
- Elevations with annotations and dimensions, using shadows to show depth. (Label materials.)

Perspectives and Illustrations

- Perspective view looking down Leighton Street.
- Perspective view looking west on Glassworks Avenue showing corner treatment at Leighton St and Glassworks Ave.
- Perspective view towards the lobby.

- Perspective view from multi-use path showing the Leighton Street building wing frontage.
- 3D view of entire building showing adjacent context and buildings.
- Perspective(s) showing new MBTA head house.

Other Design Materials

- Materials, colors and finishes palette matched to applicable plans and elevations.
- Bicycle parking fixture design/specifications.
- Shadow diagrams.

Traffic and Transportation Materials

- Numbers of parking spaces and bicycle parking spaces.
- Memo describing the reduction of daily, AM peak hour, and PM peak hour trips associated with the reduction in units.
- Traffic monitoring report as required in the current special permit. (The latest report received by the City was done in 2008.)

Narrative Materials

- Explain conceptual thinking and massing concept.
- Discuss in more detail how the applicable design guidelines are being addressed.