



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner

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Date: January 19, 2017

Re: Special Permit PB #321, "Mass + Main" – Continued Hearing

Update

Since the last Planning Board meeting, the Applicant has worked with staff to respond to comments and questions raised in the initial review of the application. The Applicant's recent submission provides additional information about the project in narrative and graphic form. This memo comments on the additional information and proposed changes. The applicant is in communication with Department of Public Works (DPW) and Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T). Previously submitted staff comments are also attached.

Planning Board Action

As a reminder, the project is proposing to demolish four existing buildings and construct a mixed use development consisting of two new buildings with ground-floor retail space and upper-floor residential units. One smaller existing historic building (currently the Apollo Dental site) will be retained, reused and incorporated into the new development. The proposal includes residential units, ground floor retail space, and associated parking and open space. One new building "B-1" contains a section proposed to have 7 floors with a functional green roof on top, whereas the other section rises up to 19 floors. The other new building "B-2" is proposed to be 6 floors high with a functional green roof proposed on the fifth floor of a section in the rear. Parking is proposed mostly within a below-grade garage, with some spaces provided on an existing surface lot at 65 Bishop Allen Drive. Bicycle parking will be provided within both new residential buildings.

The site is located in the Business B district and Central Square Overlay District, and subject to the regulations for the Mass and Main Residential Mixed Income Subdistrict (Section 20.307) as it meets the definition of a Residential Mixed Income Project. The project seeks a Project Review Special Permit for the construction of a new building of gross floor area greater than 50,000 square feet per Section 19.23 *Special Permit Threshold*. It is also seeking a Special Permit for exemption of functional green roof area from gross floor area calculation. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area, upon review of the traffic impact indicators analyzed in the Transportation Impact Study and mitigation efforts proposed. • The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30 (see appendix).
Floor Area Exemptions for Functional Green Roof Area (Sections 22.33)	<p>The proponent must demonstrate that the Functional Green Roof Area is designed such that the vegetation will withstand the foot traffic associated with its anticipated use. The Planning Board shall also consider the potential visual, noise and privacy impacts of the anticipated use on neighbors.</p>
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<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 (see appendix).</p>

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"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service

including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional use focused on existing campuses Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed Preservation of historic structures and environment Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing as a component of large, multi-building development Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
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"> Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks Provide wider range of activities

Central Square Design Guidelines, 2013 – Summary of Design Goals

<i>Streets and Sidewalks</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Mass Ave and Main Street as great public spaces in an improved system of streets and sidewalks. Enhance the street network to make walking more convenient, safe and fun. Balance the goals of active Street edges and residential privacy on streets other than Mass Ave and Main Street.
<i>Integrating Buildings with Public Places</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> As the design of existing public spaces is revisited and redevelopment of adjacent properties occurs, seek to improve the attractiveness and functionality of the open space at all levels. Create new outdoor and indoor gathering spaces.
<i>Ground Floor Design</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Storefronts should be oriented to the pedestrian and provide visual interest both day and night along Mass Ave and Main Street. Pedestrians should be encouraged to window shop by the provision of varied and interesting display areas and ground floor facades. Every effort should be made to create welcoming storefronts and to express an individual building or store identity.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">4. Windows should be expansive and illuminated from within to create interesting display or viewing areas for retail space.5. Provide a framework for variation in the design of the ground floor, so that the architecture of the building does not dominate the architecture of the street.6. Encourage expansion of the definition of ground floor articulation to the lowest 2 levels to further enhance the pedestrian experience.7. Pedestrian level treatments should relate to the human dimension and be rich in detail to enhance the pedestrian experience through the use of architectural elements such as trim, sills, lintels, awnings and canopies or, in more modern fashion, should be inviting and interesting through dramatic treatment of space, lighting, and signage.8. Enliven the public realm by expanding the publicly accessible private spaces along sidewalk, in association with the creation of retail, cultural and office space. |
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Built Form - height

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Variation of height is encouraged.2. While buildings are encouraged to align facade elements with tops of adjacent buildings, overall building height does not necessarily need to be uniform from one building to another.3. Allow the greatest height and bulk on Mass Ave with a diminution in height and bulk as the project approaches the lower residential uses in abutting areas4. Consider opportunities to maintain and enhance views to significant historic structures when composing building height and bulk. |
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Built Form - massing

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Continuation of a strong linear retail frontage is critical to preserving the strength and historic character of the commercial district.2. Building fronts should maintain a strong linear edge along Mass Ave.3. Adjacent structures should build to a common party wall, although occasional setbacks of up to 15 feet to accommodate outdoor dining or retail sales, integrated with ground floor design and programming, are encouraged.4. Alleyways between buildings are not encouraged except at identified locations where public pedestrian passages are desirable.5. Limit shadow impacts of new development on portions of neighborhoods outside the study area and public parks within approximately 1-2 blocks or 500 feet of development site. Shadow impacts should not substantially reduce the appeal of public spaces, nor direct sun access to neighborhood housing, during spring and fall. |
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Streetwalls and Bulk Control

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. Building facades along Mass Ave and Main Street should both reinforce the traditional 55 foot height range of traditional buildings, and introduce variation in height.2. Added height is especially encouraged where it can help buildings serve as attractive landmarks.3. Streetwall height should step down towards the neighborhoods. |
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4. Relate architectural elements of new construction to significant architectural elements, including cornice heights, on adjacent buildings.
<i>Building Façade</i>
1. Respond to orientation with regard to environment, place, and site, while providing context by acknowledging the importance of building profile, edges and corners. 2. New projects should be conceived with enduring and durable qualities, such that, many years from their conception, they are seen as strong contributors to the liveliness of the Square and to its role as presenting a diverse set of architectural statements over a century or more.
<i>Parking and service areas</i>
1. Off-street parking and service areas should be screened from the public realm wherever possible 2. Enrich neighborhood walkability with safe, green streets. Promote use of transportation modes other than driving.

Planning Board Comments from First Hearing

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the November 15, 2016 hearing. The Applicant has provided some responses in the submitted materials.

- Review the long term impacts of vehicular access to the development via the city's parking lot parcel.
- Refine pedestrian circulation routes through and around the development.
- Refine landscape elements such as short-term bicycle parking layout, outdoor lighting, trees, and outdoor furniture.
- Revisit the proposed width of the Columbia Street sidewalk to ensure a comfortable pedestrian experience and provide street trees if feasible.
- Explore options for year round use of the central market arcade in relation to the surrounding retail spaces.
- Review building design features, including tower design, façade materials, architectural character, fenestration, penthouse treatment, etc.
- Provide a response to public comments made about building height.
- Clarify how the highly transparent storefronts will not be compromised.
- Provide construction management plan to support proposed project phasing.
- Explore additional sustainability features, including energy efficiency and flood risk mitigation, and be more ambitious, innovative and creative.

Staff Comments on New Materials

The additional material dated December 8, 2016 primarily addresses relevant concerns that were raised by the Planning Board. The supplemental material dated January 5, 2017 provides further clarification including construction phasing plans, existing plan for off-site parking at 65 Bishop Allen Drive, strategies to accommodate climate change impacts, and updated ground floor plan for B-1 building indicating

different types of canopies proposed. The building program for B-2 building has been modified to add two additional residential units on the second floor of Apollo Building, increasing the total from 283 to 285 residential units in addition to increasing long-term bicycle parking from 298 to 302 spaces and short-term bicycle parking from 38 to 40 spaces. The proposed open space ratio has been revised to 12% after deducting the covered central market area.

Coordination with the public infrastructure project on the city parcel is critical to the project. The Applicant has met with city staff to discuss ways to improve the interface between the municipal lot and the project site, in order to ensure adequate vehicular access and pedestrian/bicycle circulation, and without precluding the potential future redevelopment of the municipal lot. Achieving this result may require the Applicant to redesign some portions of the municipal lot. If the vehicular easement is required by the conditions of the special permit, it would be worthwhile to allow enough flexibility for the Applicant and the city to arrive at an optimal design outcome.

Site design

An updated concept plan for the Main Street sidewalk and street improvements, including raised bicycle track, has been prepared. Staff is generally comfortable with this conceptual approach, subject to continuing review by the Department of Public Works, Traffic Parking and Transportation, and CDD. It is noted that further consideration should be given to providing additional benches along the tree planters to accommodate overflow seating during public events, and ensuring that an adequate pedestrian travel zone is provided and clearly demarcated. The Board may also want to review the measures taken to improve the public realm along the new alignment of Coolidge Place. Opportunities to enhance, and perhaps green, the blank wall of the adjoining building should be explored.

The layout of short-term bicycle parking has been further refined with the majority of spaces provided on site. These spaces seem to be in logical locations, which balance transportation needs and urban design goals such as creating a welcoming and expanded public realm, and active retail frontages.

At the hearing, the Board raised concerns about the narrowness of the Columbia Street sidewalk and asked that the applicant review this condition. The additional information shows that the proposed setback of storefronts results in at least an eight-foot wide sidewalk being achieved for a good distance of the building. However, it is a little unclear what is happening at the northern end of the site, where the existing sidewalk tapers to seven-feet.

Architectural design

At the November 15 hearing, staff (see attached memo) were supportive of the more subdued and contextual design approach adopted by the Architect. The Board expressed several additional comments and some concerns primarily associated with Building-1. These included comments about the use of brick and its architectural character, and some varying opinions about the tower design, its vertical proportions and role within the urban environment. The rhythm and proportion of openings across the facades were also discussed. Members were generally supportive of the overall geometry, while others asked for more creativity, and something more interesting and “Central Square”.

In response, the applicant has provided some further details, which generally clarify the design intent, but has not made any significant design changes. The specific brick type and possible colors have been identified, and material samples will be available at the hearing. Norman bricks are often considered more elegant because of their linear form, and the brown, iron spot will contrast with nearby brick facades. It will be important to view the proposed colors and textures in natural light to ensure the final materials are not too dark or heavy. The mortar color will also be an important element of the continuing review process. In addition, bringing more depth and richness to the brick facades should be explored to help provide texture, liveliness and more of a human scale to the lower levels of the building.

Based on recent meetings with the Applicant, it is anticipated that further design details associated with the proposed materials, windows and character will be presented at the hearing. With continued work by the applicant on these details, staff is confident that these will show considerable progress towards addressing the concerns previously mentioned.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the hearing to a future date, or as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Review of all proposed public realm, open space and streetscape improvements, including a more specific landscaping plan.
- Review of pedestrian connections through the parking lot and the width of the Columbia Street sidewalk.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials mock-up of all wall assemblies on the site.
- Review and approval of the public realm activation around the retail area by the Economic Development Division.
- Review of all alterations and restoration work proposed for the Apollo building with staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission.
- Review of rooftop HVAC and mechanical equipment screening and penthouse treatments.
- Review of parking, bicycle parking, access and egress by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.
- Review of stormwater management by the Department of Public Works.

Staff Comments from Previous Memo dated November 10, 2016

- The Net Zero Action Plan also recommends that new buildings be “solar ready,” meaning that the building includes rooftop space with maximum solar access and designed to accommodate the future installation of solar energy equipment such as photovoltaic panels. While this is not required, the Applicant has indicated that roof mounted solar panels may be installed on building B-2 and staff highly recommends pursuing this objective.
- It is recommended that the applicant discuss retail marketing efforts with the City’s Economic Development Division (EDD) staff at the stage when spaces are being marketed but before potential tenants are selected, in order to understand what types of businesses are being contacted and to provide information about potential business owners and other resources that would help to ensure a good ground floor mix.
- It is recommended that there be further discussion of how the requirements for local retail are being applied. In the proposed “Central Market” area, more opportunities can be explored for test/startup retailers, pop-ups, seasonal activities, and art spaces. Because these unique uses may not always fall within the strict zoning definitions for retail, it may be important to discuss these at the special permit phase so that they are clearly authorized in a final decision.
- To ensure the uses and activities in the Central Market meet the needs of the community, staff recommends that the developer create a Central Market committee (including an area resident, Arts Council representative, Central Square Business Association representative and EDD staff) to meet twice a year to discuss the market’s retail mix and/or the indoor and outdoor events space.
- “Central Market”, as the mid-block connection will be known, has the potential to create a very unique experience in Central Square with its more intimate scale, fine-grained retail and decorative paving adding elements of surprise and diversity to the built environment. To ensure this connection continues through the site to Bishop Allen Drive in a welcoming fashion, the width of the sidewalk down the side of Building B-2 should be reviewed. Opportunities to create an attractive destination, or celebrate the vista, at the end of Central Market should also be explored.
- The direct ground floor lobby connections through each building enhance visual permeability through the site and the sense of connection between back and front. While it is understood that these connections will primarily be lobby spaces for residents, staff encourage investigation of the potential for the Building B-2 lobby to be more of a publicly accessible pedestrian space.
- Staff has concerns about the placement of street furniture, bicycle racks and other objects within the street furniture zone as it may contribute to clutter within the public way. In addition, there is a need to ensure that the sidewalk, including the expanded public realm, looks and feels like a welcoming public place. It is therefore suggested that as the project evolves, the design of proposed street and sidewalk improvements should continue to be coordinated with DPW, TPT and CDD staff.

- The rooftop has some variety, but is generally expressed as an element of the overall tower, rather than a celebrated top. Further information regarding materials and design details of the penthouse screening are needed to review the success of this approach.
- The lower-rise Building B-2 incorporates step backs at the fifth floor, which help to mitigate building bulk and transition to low-rise residential buildings to the north. Perhaps there are further opportunities to create more significant changes in plane where material transitions take place, such as the white panel to wood cladding change at the fourth floor on the Bishop Allen Drive façade, and the dark vertical notch above the main entrance. The latter could be carried up to the roof, creating diversity in roof form.
- There are opportunities to improve the ground floor area that faces the parking lot. The potential to make the long-term bicycle parking more transparent should be considered.
- Rooftop mechanicals appear sufficiently set back from building facades and well screened; however, further information regarding screening materials and details should be provided, and the inconsistencies between elevations and sections addressed.
- Reliance on streets trees within City sidewalks should be carefully considered as a dependable form of wind mitigation. In addition, further information regarding the wind screens should be included in the application materials.