



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

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Re: **PB-364, Cambridgeside PUD Amendment 2 (Minor)**

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Background

The Special Permit for the CambridgeSide Planned Unit Development (PB-364) was granted by the Planning Board on December 22, 2020. This plan involves retaining the core part of the mall building and constructing four new buildings around its perimeter, attached to the mall and fronting First Street, Cambridgeside Place, and Land Boulevard. It also involves improvements to Lechmere Canal Park (which is owned by the City, but maintained by private abutters) and the creation of new open spaces along First Street. In 2022, the Board approved an amendment (minor) to the Final Development Plan to relocate the new residential building to the corner of First Street and Cambridgeside Place.

The Special Permit authorized development in two phases:

1. The Initial Phase Buildings are 20 Cambridgeside Place and 60 First Street, containing all office/laboratory development. These buildings were approved by the Planning Board in 2021 and are currently under construction. Improvements to Lechmere Canal Park (which is owned by the City, but maintained by abutting property owners) are also part of the Initial Phase, to be completed concurrently with the buildings, but have not yet been reviewed by the Planning Board. The Permittee is working with a community advisory committee and will submit plans for review at a later time.
2. The Subsequent Phase Buildings are 80 First Street and 150 Cambridgeside Place, which include office/laboratory development along with mixed-income housing. These buildings were approved by the Planning Board in 2022.

The Board's action in 2020 also clarified the relationship between special permit PB-66, which permitted the parts of the "core" mall building that would remain, and the new development plan.

PB-66 was amended so that it would no longer apply to the mall building; instead, the PB-364 Final Development Plan and associated conditions would apply to the future use of the pre-existing core mall building as well as the four new buildings. PB-66 had been amended by the Planning Board in 2019 to permit a conversion from retail to general office use of 140,000 square feet of floor area on the third story of the mall. The PB-364 Final Development Plan continues to authorize 140,000 square feet of general office use on the third story of the mall building.

Requested Amendment

New England Development is currently seeking a Minor Amendment to locate 84,000 of technical office/lab use on the existing third floor of the mall building (100 Cambridgeside Place) in place of general office. The proposed amendment will reduce the amount of general office space from 140,000 sq.ft. to 56,000 sq.ft on the third story. This allocation will not increase the total office use and lab use beyond 1,100,000 sq. ft. that is approved in the Final Development Plan and will not change the Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the existing building. The PUD special permit currently authorizes a total of 685,000 square feet of technical office/laboratory use and 415,000 square feet of other office use. Due to minor changes in the size and allocation of office and laboratory space in the four new buildings, the resulting Final Development Plan would still contain only 685,000 square feet of technical office/laboratory use, but some of that use would be contained in the core mall building.

Criteria for Granting Minor Amendments

Per the general PUD provisions in Section 12.37 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board determines whether changes to the Final Development Plan may be approved as minor amendments. The following guidance is provided in zoning:

(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.

Condition 2 of Special Permit PB-364 (Approved Development Program) also provides the following guidance:

Any further change to the Approved Site Development Summary Table that does not increase the GFA of any phase by more than 10% or reconfigure the boundary line of any one or more sites may be approved by the Planning Board as a Minor Amendment pursuant to Condition #15 of this Decision.

If the Board determines that the changes are minor, then the Board may approve the minor amendment on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members.

Zoning Comments on Proposed Amendment

The proposed conversion to technical office/lab use would not alter the overall GFA of the Final Development Plan. It would affect about 7% of the PUD's total commercial office/lab allocation and 18% of the GFA of the core mall building. From a zoning perspective, it is within the parameters of PUD zoning for the area and would not affect the conditions of the special permit apart from authorizing a new use on the core mall site. The change is not likely to have a significant effect on broad considerations such as transportation impacts and site planning. The main substantive effect would be the need for additional mechanical systems for the building, which is addressed in the design comments.

Design Comments on Proposed Amendment

The programmatic change of the third floor from office to laboratory use appears to have little impact on the physical public realm. With the exception of rooftop mechanical equipment and its screening,

the building's exterior appearance will remain the same. The building's circulation systems: the elevators, escalators, and the balconies overlooking the atrium remain unchanged.

In meetings with staff, discussion focused on the size, location, and visibility of the new mechanical equipment that will serve laboratory uses. In addition, staff suggested that a green roof be provided to reduce cooling loads, screen mechanical equipment, and serve as an amenity for the occupants of the adjoining buildings.

As shown in the application, the new "core and shell" rooftop mechanical equipment (serving the base building) is too distant from the southern edge of the roof to be seen. While it will be visible from Canal Park and the Graves Landing residential building to the north, it is held back from the northern edge of the roof and screened by trees in planters along the roof's curved edge nearest Lechmere Canal Park. It does not appear that the mechanical equipment will have a significant visual impact from the public realm.

In addition to the areas indicated for the "core and shell" equipment, areas are indicated for future tenant equipment. Some of these are closer to the roof edge than the "core and shell" equipment, and the amount and sizes of the tenant equipment are not yet known.

1. Visual and acoustical screening should be considered for the mechanical equipment, including the tenant equipment,
2. More consistently massed plantings may be appropriate in response to the continuity of the building's curved façade below and to better screen the rooftop mechanical.
3. Consideration could be given to planting a double row of trees along the northern edge of the roof, instead of the single row shown in the application.
4. The tree species suggested for the rooftop planting are capable of growing to considerable heights. Their viability and suitability for this location and planting system should be verified.
5. Consideration could be given to providing additional areas of green roof in the central portion of the flat roof area, and at its southern edge.

The atrium is an important component of Cambridge's public realm, linking Cambridgeside Place to Canal Park. As shown in the application's perspective views, the third-floor interior facades facing the atrium appear to be fairly opaque. While the third floor interior facades facing the atrium will be less visible to the general public than the first and second floor facades, they could still play a role in visually activating and enriching the atrium.

6. Consideration should be given to increasing their transparency, including by reducing the extent and opacity of vinyl graphics applied to the glazing.

Conditions

If the Planning Board approves the change as a Minor Amendment, no conditions of the special permit would be affected, except that the Development Summary (Appendix A) would be revised to reflect the specific GFA of office use and lab use for the Core Mall.

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 meeting to a future date, or as items for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to approve the amendment:

- Plant species and locations, to best screen the mechanical equipment and to complement the building's north façade and the ground level plantings.
- The possibility of providing additional areas of the green roof.
- Review of the quantity, locations, and potential noise output of future tenant rooftop equipment to the extent that this can be predicted, and of the potential benefits of visual and acoustical screening for both the tenant equipment and the "core and shell" equipment.
- Review of the third floor interior elevations overlooking the atrium, with the goal of increasing transparency.