



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

# PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

---

Date: September 27, 2017

---

Subject: MIT Volpe PUD-7 Zoning Petition

---

Recommendation: The Planning Board recommends ADOPTION, with suggested revisions.

---

To the Honorable, the City Council,

The Planning Board opened a public hearing of this zoning petition on July 25, 2017. At that hearing, the Board heard an overview by the Petitioner, received many comments from the public, and reviewed documents prepared by CDD regarding planning efforts for Kendall Square that have informed and led to the current proposal. The Board raised a number of questions and issues to be discussed further by the Petitioner and CDD.

The Board held a continued hearing on September 12, 2017, at which it received additional information from the Petitioner and from CDD in response to issues raised at the prior hearing (as well as the hearing held by the Ordinance Committee), and additional comments from the public. CDD provided a report containing background information on general issues that were raised and suggesting approaches to address specific issues in the zoning petition. The material provided by the Petitioner indicated agreement with many of these suggested approaches.

At the conclusion of the September 12 hearing, the Board voted to recommend adoption of the petition, subject to revisions that incorporate the aforementioned approaches suggested by CDD staff and agreed to by the Petitioner, as well as revisions reflecting the Board's policy recommendations on certain elements of the petition (summarized beginning on the next page).

Generally, the Board believes this zoning proposal, and the future redevelopment of the Volpe Transportation Systems Center site that it enables, is important to sustaining Kendall Square's role as a global center of technology and innovation as well as an economic and employment engine for the city. Given the geographical constraints of Kendall Square, the redevelopment of the Volpe site provides a rare opportunity to support future commercial growth at a location that is well suited for a higher intensity of use. Moreover, the redevelopment as proposed will provide many positive outcomes for the neighborhood and city, including additional housing, open space, active ground floors, tax revenue and other community investments. Important issues around transportation and environmental sustainability are addressed in the petition and will be subject to further study in the creation and review of a development plan.

The Board has been engaged in planning for this area for some time, including the foundational work of the most recent Kendall Square (“K2”) Study, and spent significant time in 2015 developing a zoning petition for this area. The current petition is broadly consistent with the approaches recommended in the K2 study and incorporates most elements of the 2015 proposal.

Regarding the specifics of the proposal, the Board made recommendations on a set of planning issues related to particular elements of the zoning petition, as summarized below.

- **Development parcel/master plan requirements.** The Board believes it is important to have a development proposal show a master plan for the entire parcel, so that the Board can understand the development as a whole in the review and permitting process. However, it is understood that the parcel would have two or three distinct parts, and that the future Federal portion of the site would need to be treated differently because it would not be subject to zoning controls. Still, the Board stressed the importance of considering the design of the Federal building and site when reviewing the development proposal for the MIT-controlled portion of the site, and therefore it is the Board’s hope that the Federal design will be advanced enough for the Board to consider it when the remainder of the project comes to the Board for review.
- **FAR.** Given the concerns that have been raised around interpreting and applying Floor Area Ratio (FAR) controls, the Board suggests that if development is required to come forward as a single master plan, then intensity controls don’t need to be based on FAR but could describe the allowed development program more simply in terms of Gross Floor Area (GFA). This approach is used in other districts where development is permitted in accordance with a master plan, such as the MXD district. The Board feels that either an FAR or GFA approach could work, but using GFA is simpler because it involves fewer steps to arrive at the allowed development program. The only complication is the one small parcel controlled by the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, which is not part of the 14-acre Volpe parcel and may or may not be incorporated into a development parcel. This detail is addressed in the attached text.
- **Limits on non-residential development.** The Board supports the proposed 60/40 ratio of commercial to residential use, with the important acknowledgement that 60% is viewed as a maximum for commercial and 40% is viewed as a minimum for residential.
- **Hotel use.** The Board believes that including a hotel could be beneficial in supporting the planning principles for the area, in terms of adding liveliness to the streets, promoting transit-oriented lodging, and contributing to the mix of uses in the area. However, the Board does not agree that hotel use should be fully included within the required residential uses because it would not provide the same types of benefits as housing. A hybrid approach is suggested, such as having up to 100,000 square feet (40% of a possible 250,000 square-foot hotel) count toward housing, with the remainder being counted toward the non-residential allotment, as included in the attached text.

- **Dormitory use.** There were varying opinions among Board members regarding dormitories, with some members viewing them a beneficial use that supports the city's overall housing policies. However, in this case, the majority view of the Board is not to count dormitories as part of the housing requirement, because the planning intent for this site has been to support urban mixed-use development and not to promote campus expansion. The Board noted that there are other places in the city that could be more suitable for additional student housing.
- **Affordable housing.** Given that the current inclusionary housing requirements were the result of extensive studies and reports that were recently completed, the Board believes that these are the appropriate requirements to apply at this time. The Board also believes that the City Council should have the ability to decide when and how those requirements might be changed in the future, and should not be constrained in its ability to do so. In no event would the affordable component be less than 20%.
- **Middle-income housing.** While the Board acknowledges that it may be challenging to require middle-income housing, there should be serious consideration given to providing incentives to encourage middle-income housing units. These are not incorporated in the proposed text, and the Council would need to consider what incentives would be appropriate, since they would likely involve further increases in height and/or density.
- **Height.** The Board is in favor of the proposed height limits, and continues to support its 2015 recommendation to allow one building that could reach up to 500 feet. The Board also agrees with the suggestion in the CDD memo that bulk control standards, such as having building floorplates get smaller as buildings get taller, should be incorporated into design guidelines for future project review.
- **Open space.** The Board supports the overall amount of open space required, and supports MIT's agreement to apply the open space requirement only on the non-Federal portion of the parcel. The Board also supports the concept that there should be some legal agreement, such as a covenant, to guarantee public access to the required open space. There are details that would need to be carefully considered in such an agreement, such as the allowances and limitations for programmed uses like outdoor dining and performances. In regard to the location and configuration of open space, the Board would stress the importance of allowing flexibility, because different arrangements will have different benefits and drawbacks, and the success of different approaches will depend on how the development plan works as a whole. However, open space should be informed by a guiding principle that it should not just support this particular area, but should be planned as part of a larger open space network that will draw in people from surrounding neighborhoods and across the City at large.
- **Parking and loading.** The Board supports the concept in the current proposal, which is derived from the K2 study, of requiring a transportation analysis with a development proposal to inform the Board in establishing the amount of parking that is permitted, within the broader limitations established by zoning. The Board also supports specifying that all parking will be below-grade except where it is authorized for on-street parking or interim facilities, with the caveat that a waiver might also be needed for accessible spaces. A

suggestion was made by Board members that underground loading and service be considered as part of a development plan, though the Board does not recommend this as a requirement.

- **Active uses.** The Board generally supports the idea of lowering the standard size for small, independent retail establishments from a maximum of 5,000 square feet to 3,000 square feet, but believes that flexibility is important because retail is likely to evolve over time and there will need to be exceptions to the rules. One difficulty with zoning, as pointed out in the CDD memo, is that decisions about GFA exemptions have to be made in the permitting process, and retailers are usually not secured until long after a project is permitted and will change over time. Staff suggested exploring approaches that would target 3,000 square feet or less as a desired size, but would allow flexibility and would give the Board the ability to approve variations to accommodate change over time that is consistent with the area goals.
- **Innovation space.** The Board supports the current proposal, and agrees that this is an area where the inclusiveness principles that have been discussed in the Volpe Working Group should be incorporated in an effort to make Kendall Square feel more open and accessible to individuals and businesses that have thus far not been included in Kendall Square's growing technological community and innovation economy.
- **Sustainability.** The Board supports the current proposal of requiring a LEED Gold standard for new buildings and working toward the city's Net Zero Action Plan and Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency goals, while emphasizing that district-wide solutions are going to be necessary to achieve these goals. The Board acknowledges that MIT seems committed to these larger-scale solutions to address greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, but that it should be articulated in the zoning as something that is a city priority in the future redevelopment of the district.
- **Funding contributions and community space.** The Board acknowledges that it is more in the purview of the Council to determine priorities for funding contributions resulting from this redevelopment. At the Permittee's suggestion, the attached text deletes the original provisions related to the funding of a community center, so that they can be further discussed and incorporated into a Letter of Commitment. The Board did make one suggestion, which is not offered as a zoning recommendation, that the Council and MIT might consider strategies to reach out to the large corporate entities that are increasingly making their home in Kendall Square to contribute to community-based programs, such as those included in a future community center on the site, in furtherance of their role as good corporate citizens. This approach would have the benefit of not just providing a funding mechanism, but also helping to integrate these companies into the life of the city.

The attached text incorporates these zoning recommendations, along with the approaches suggested by CDD and agreed to by the Petitioner, into specific amendments to the zoning petition to be considered for substitution by the Council.

Respectfully submitted for the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H Theodore Cohen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

H Theodore Cohen, Chair.