



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: January 12, 2021

Re: **PB #17, 4-6 Canal Park Amendment 11 (Minor)**

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Background

Thomas Graves Landing is primarily a condominium building with retail and office uses that was constructed prior to 1992 under a PUD special permit (PB-17). The Final Development Plan was first approved by the Planning Board in 1981, and since that time has been modified ten times through the PUD amendment process: nine minor amendments and one major amendment.

This application is seeking approval by Minor Amendment of a plan to redesign the entrance plaza to repair the underground structure and associated waterproofing. No changes to the approved GFA or uses of this development are proposed. The proposed redesign will create one handicapped-accessible parking space without changing the total number of permitted parking spaces and increase the amount of pervious area by about 122 square feet. It will also change some of the pedestrian and vehicular circulation patterns on the site. The original Special Permit Decision (PB-17) is attached.

If the Board determines that the change constitutes a Minor Amendment, then the Board may approve the amendment on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members. Detailed information about the PUD Amendment Procedure is provided below.

PUD Amendments

An Amendment to an approved PUD can be found to be either a Major Amendment or a Minor Amendment. Per the general PUD provisions in Section 12.37 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board must determine whether changes to the Final Development Plan may be approved as a Minor Amendments. The following guidance is provided in zoning:

[Section 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.

Comments

The proposed amendment relates to minor changes in the open space, which will increase the pervious area on the site by 122 square feet but remains in conformance with zoning requirements. The proposal eliminates eight surface parking spaces that are described as “not legal” and were not part of the total number of parking spaces previously approved for the site. It would not affect any other sections of the Zoning Ordinance.

The replacement of the underground garage’s waterproofing and repairs to its structure will require removal of much of the paving and landscaping in the building’s front setback, presenting the opportunity to improve pedestrian and vehicular circulation and accessibility in the building’s entry plaza and surface parking area.

The proposed changes to the sitework are fairly minimal. Most of the large trees (mostly London Plane and Norway Maples) along the front of the property are preserved. The parking/plaza area within the site is slightly reconfigured; the design of its new plantings is similar to the existing arrangement. More significantly for Cambridge’s public realm, changes are proposed to the vehicular and pedestrian entrance from Monsignor O’Brien Highway, including its pavement, plantings, site walls, and the building sign.

The curb cut will be reconstructed as part of MASSDOT’s improvements to the O’Brien Highway, which include the addition of separated bike lanes. The proposed configuration differs from Cambridge’s standards for curb cuts. City staff will engage MASSDOT regarding their design.

Two new curved low walls are proposed on either side of the vehicular/pedestrian entrance to the site, located close to the vehicular drive. Consideration could be given to providing greater width for pedestrian circulation between the low walls and the driveway’s curbs. The existing gatehouse in the center of the entry will be removed. A new building sign will be installed on the east side of the driveway.

The Urban Forestry Division of the Department of Public Works (DPW) has reviewed the Applicants Tree Plan, dated December 23, 2020 for compliance with the Tree Ordinance and approve the proposal for mitigation. At the time of the building permit submission, the Applicant shall provide confirmation that the Building Permit Plans are in conformance with the submitted Tree Plan or shall submit a revised tree plan for review and approval by the DPW.

The proposed changes to the driveway and sitework require that in addition to the replacement of the trees in the interior of the site, three existing trees along Monsignor O’Brien Highway - on the east and west sides of the entry drive and behind the existing guardhouse – need to be removed and new replacement trees will be planted in slightly different locations as described below:

- Due to the difference in grade between Monsignor O’Brien Highway’s sidewalk and the plaza level, the existing sidewalks leading into the site are steeper than allowed on an accessible route. Accordingly, a new accessible ramp is proposed on the west side of the vehicular entrance. Its construction necessitates the removal of a Norway Maple. Two Hornbeams (smaller trees, with a more columnar growth habit) are proposed to replace it.
- The Norway Maple behind the existing guardhouse will be removed to create a more direct vehicular route to the underground garage’s down ramp. A Little Leaf Linden is proposed to replace it, slightly closer to the street than the existing tree.

- At the east side of the site entrance, the construction of the curved site wall necessitates the removal of a Norway Maple. If possible, consideration could be given to adjusting the location of the site wall so as to preserve the tree. Three Hornbeams are proposed to replace it.

To more coherently frame this portion of Monsignor O'Brien Highway, consideration could be given to replacing the three Norway Maples with other varieties of Maples or with London Plane Trees, and to locating them in closer alignment with the property's other street frontage trees.

New precast pavers, in variegated greys, will replace the existing pavers in the both the pedestrian and vehicular areas. The proposed arrangement of pavers seems to guide vehicles to the eastern portion of the parking area, which is widened to create what appears to be a pickup/drop-off area along the front of the building. If the intent is indeed that short-term visitors to the site are meant to primarily use the east end of the parking area, consideration could be given to eliminating the turnaround at its west end, creating an opportunity to increase the site's permeable area.

Pole lights and bollard lights are proposed along the building-side perimeter of the parking/driveway area. Uplights are proposed under the new trees in the parking/plaza area. In response to dark sky concerns, consideration could be given to minimizing their use.

If the Board approves this request as a Minor Amendment, the following are recommended to be included as conditions for ongoing design review:

- Possible coordination with city staff on the design of the curb cut.
- Coordination with city staff on tree species and lighting.