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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 7, 2023

Re: **PUD Special Permit PB-175 Amendment 5 (Minor), 1 Leighton Street**

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## Overview

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Submission Type:	Request for Minor Amendment to PUD Special Permit
Applicant:	Leighton & Glassworks (MA) Owner LLC
Zoning District(s):	North Point Residence District / PUD-6
Proposal Summary:	Modification of forecourt design and landscaping, relocated and expanded ground story convenience store use, redesign of ground story community room, relocation of long-term bicycle parking, and reconfiguration of amenity spaces.
Other City Permits Needed:	None
Planning Board Action:	Approval of Minor Amendment with possible conditions
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	None

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## Background

This Planned Unit Development (PUD) was first approved in 2002 and included the construction of two residential buildings and the preservation of an existing commercial building on three sites, along with new street segments, utilities and open space; comprising approximately 870,000 square feet of total GFA and 830 dwelling units.

The original PUD was developed in two phases. Phase I consists of 1 Leighton Street (hereinafter “Elevate”), a 426-unit residential building with ground-story retail completed in 2006; as well the conversion of the Maple Leaf Building to a residential use was subsequently completed in 2014. Phase II included the construction of a residential building containing approximately 300 dwelling units.

The PUD has been amended four times and as recently as 2015, which was a major amendment to reduce the number of dwelling units and building height of the Phase II building. Previous amendments include a reduction in required parking and the use of a shared parking facility for multiple sites, and conversion of office space to residential use.

## Requested Amendment

The Applicant proposes a series of changes to the Elevate building, as follows:

- Redesign of the forecourt of the building, with new landscape, hardscape, seating areas and lighting.
- Relocation and expansion of the ground story convenience store use.
- Enlargement and reconfiguration of ground story community meeting room.
- Relocation and expansion of long-term bicycle parking and inclusion of a new Bluebikes station on the site.
- Conversion of a market rate apartment to a resident lounge on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor.
- Additional reconfiguration of some resident amenities.
- Modifications to exterior building lighting.

## 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.*

*(12.37.3) Major amendments represent substantial deviations from the PUD concept approved by the Planning Board. Major amendments shall include, but not be limited to, large changes in floor space, mix of uses, density, lot coverage, height, setbacks, lot sizes, open space; changes in the location of buildings, open space, or parking; or changes in the circulation system.*

The Board may approve a minor amendment on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members.

## **Zoning Comments on Proposed Amendment**

### *Entry Plaza Design Changes*

The forecourt of the building along Leighton Street is proposed to be redesigned with new hardscape, landscape, seating areas, and exterior lighting. The Special Permit granted a range of minimum Open Space to Lot Area of 20-24%, and did not specify a minimum amount of Private Open Space or Permeable Area. The proposed modifications do not change the amount of open space on the site, but the Permeable Area is proposed to decrease from 11,570 square feet at 1 Leighton Street to 10,604 square feet; a reduction of 966 square feet. A diagram of these changes is provided in Appendix DD.

### *Convenience Store Relocation/Expansion*

The Application proposes to relocate an existing 1,624 square foot convenience store use from the south portion of the site along Monsignor O'Brien Highway to the northwest corner of the site along Leighton Street and expand said use by 1,667 square feet to 3,291 square feet. The Special Permit authorizes up to 10,504 square feet of non-residential uses within the PUD, including convenience store uses (Condition #2 of original Decision dated September, 2002). The Application does not provide a reason for the relocation of the retail use, but EOD staff reviewed the proposal and support the proposed change.

### *Community Room Modification*

The original plans for the site included a multipurpose meeting room that is available for public use on the ground story fronting the forecourt along Leighton Street, consisting of approximately 900 square feet. The Application proposes to retain the space in the same location, but expand it by approximately 300 square feet and add an entry vestibule for energy efficiency. The Applicant notes that the space would serve a dual purpose as a leasing lounge, and that with reasonable notice could be modified to accommodate larger groups with soft seating and kitchenette facilities.

### *Automobile & Bicycle Parking Modifications*

The overall number of automobile parking spaces will remain at 434 spaces, which exceeds the minimum requirement of 0.8 spaces per dwelling unit but is less than the maximum requirement of 1 space per dwelling unit. 10 existing spaces will be converted to EV spaces. The Applicant is requesting the elimination of a previous approval condition that the project provide two (2) car share spaces.

There are currently 214 long-term bicycle parking spaces provided in the first level of the underground parking garage, and an additional 14 short-term spaces provided on the exterior of the building. The Applicant proposes to remove 12 of the spaces in the garage for a new pet wash amenity space, and an additional 14 will be removed to accommodate a new bicycle repair station in the garage. The Applicant proposes to create a new long-term bike parking area on the first floor of the building consisting of eighty (80) new long-term bicycle parking spaces and expand the available short-term bicycle parking by thirty (30) spaces to 44 total spaces. These modifications result in a net gain of 84 new bicycle parking spaces at the project, which staff supports. The Applicant also proposes to locate a 19-dock Bluebikes station on the site. The final details and location of the Bluebikes station will be reviewed prior to issuance of a building permit.

*Apartment to Resident Lounge Conversion*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> floor, one market rate apartment will be converted to a resident amenity space, adjacent to the existing roof deck. No other modifications are proposed to the number of dwelling units, and no changes will be made to the overall number of inclusionary units in the project.

**Design Comments on Proposed Amendment**

*Interior changes to the Building's Plan*

The proposed changes to the interior of the first floor and basement will be welcome amenities for the building residents and the neighborhood, moving the retail space to a location where it will bring more life to Leighton Street and be more directly related to pedestrian activity in Cambridge Crossing's Commons, giving the new residential lobby and its entrance a more prominent location roughly in the center of the forecourt's east side, removing package delivery parking from Leighton Street, providing more space for community events, and providing a pet wash room and a bicycle repair room.

*Plaza – Layout of the Leighton Street Forecourt and Sidewalk*

In terms of the project's impact on the public realm, the changes to the forecourt and Leighton Street sidewalk are the most significant. The existing forecourt is enclosed by the building's west and south wings and (partially) by the elevated Green Line. Its northern end incorporates a paved area, roughly symmetrical on the building's existing entrance, a fenced grass area, and several relatively small trees. Three existing ventilation structures for the building's underground parking project slightly above grade. The proposed reconfiguration of the forecourt responds to the relocated residential lobby and to a desire to make more of the space feel accessible to pedestrians. A paved area, roughly in the center of the forecourt and averaging about 40' wide, extends from Leighton Street to the new lobby entrance. Numerous irregular polygonally shaped planting islands, many of them incorporating benches, are distributed on the north and south sides of the central paved area, separated from each other by additional paved paths. The specific geometries of the islands seem in many cases to be at odds with each other, making the paths between them seem merely residual areas of pavement, rather than places whose configurations contribute to their identities. Consideration could be given to arranging and shaping the planting islands to create a more coherently defined central area, perhaps contrasting with more romantic or whimsical arrangements in the northern and southern portions of the forecourt.

The planting islands and other elements of the forecourt appear to compromise the continuity of the sidewalk along Leighton Street, intruding into it and creating the appearance that the project's semi-private realm takes precedence over the public realm. Consideration should be given to providing a wider unobstructed sidewalk with a more consistent eastern edge by more consistently aligning the project's tree wells, benches, planting zones, etc. on its east and west sides. If the ramp at the northwest corner of the building cannot be moved east so that its west face aligns with the projecting portion of the building's west façade, consider providing a curb or bench and planting aligned with the ramp's west face for the width of the proposed retail façade.

Compared to the forecourt's existing arrangement, the proposed scheme has more pavement and less planted area. Several existing (but fairly small) trees are removed and new ones are added (see

Appendix BB). Consideration could be given to reducing the amount of pavement and increasing the areas of planting, and to providing larger areas of uninterrupted planting.

#### *Features and Amenities of the Forecourt*

Consideration should be given to providing benches with backs. Features conducive to play could be considered, perhaps with an emphasis on naturalistic elements that are integral with the landscape concept rather than traditional specialized equipment, integrating playful design elements such as whimsical artworks, swinging benches, etc. Short-term bicycle parking spaces are provided at the southern end of the forecourt, a location that offers convenient access while minimizing disruption to the forecourt. Note that the location of the project's Bluebike Station is unresolved (see below). If it were to be located in the forecourt, considerable changes to the courtyard's layout may be required.

#### *Changes to Ground Floor Façades*

The proposed changes are minimal, focused on the relocated building entries at the forecourt. The existing canopy at the existing residential lobby entrance is removed and curtain wall provided at the double height ex-lobby. A new canopy and signage emphasizes the new residential lobby entrance and the exterior entrance to the Community Meeting Room. Consideration could be given to further emphasizing the residential lobby entrance by the treatment of the doorway and the adjoining wall surfaces.

#### *The South Courtyard*

The south courtyard, located at second floor level, faces the elevated Green Line extension. It will be an amenity for building residents. Its proposed new landscaping does not appear to appreciably affect the public realm.

#### *The Service Entry*

The building's primary service access will remain on Glassworks Avenue on the north side of the site. In addition, small package delivery will be moved from Leighton Street to Glassworks Avenue, reducing conflicts on Leighton Street.

#### *Changes to the Upper Floors*

The proposed Resident Skyline Lounge and renovated roof terrace at the 21<sup>st</sup> floor will be welcome amenities for residents, but do not appear to appreciably affect the public realm.

#### *Bicycle Parking*

As noted above, additional long-term parking spaces are proposed on the first floor, and most of the existing long-term spaces in the basement are retained. Together these result in a net increase of 54 long-term spaces. A bicycle repair room is added in the basement. 30 new short-term outdoor spaces are proposed, including 20 at the southern edge of the forecourt.

#### *Bluebike station*

The application indicates a Bluebike station located in the MBTA easement next to Msgr. O'Brien Highway. Staff understands that this location is not possible. Note that an alternative location in the

Leighton Street forecourt would impact the forecourt's design. Staff welcomes the opportunity for further input.

### *Lighting*

The proposed conversion of the exterior architectural lighting to dimmable and programmable white LED fixtures should reduce the building's energy use and light trespass. A warm color temperature would be preferable. To further reduce light trespass, consideration could be given to eliminating the high-level exterior lighting entirely.

### **Conditions**

If approved, this Minor Amendment would authorize the following modifications to the Final Development Plan. Except as modified, the conditions of special permit PB-175 would remain in effect:

- The approved dimensional form would be revised as shown in the Application Documents. The number of dwelling units would be changed from 830 to 829 and the permeable area would be changed from approximately 11,570 square feet to approximately 10,604 square feet.
- The previous special permit condition of providing two carshare spaces in the underground parking garage of 1 Leighton Street would be eliminated.

If the Minor Amendment is approved, staff recommends the following items be subject to continuing staff review prior to issuance of a building permit:

- Zoning conditions.
  - The Applicant shall submit 1:10 scale plans of the proposed long-term bicycle parking for zoning compliance review and approval.
  - The final details and location of the proposed Bluebikes station shall be subject to review and approval by CDD staff.
  - The Applicant shall work with CDD staff on solidifying efforts to make the public aware of the availability of the community meeting room space on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor.
- Design conditions.
  - Review of the design of the Leighton Street forecourt along with the sidewalk and curb along Leighton Street.
  - Review of the location of the Bluebike Station
  - Review of long-term and short-term bicycle parking
  - Review of exterior architectural lighting
  - Review of plant materials
  - Review of exterior materials, including glazing, mullion, and canopies