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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board  
From: CDD Staff  
Date: October 21, 2014  
Re: **Amendment to PB #175 – 1-5 East Street**

### **Update**

At the last hearing on this case, Planning Board members did not make a preliminary determination on the Development Proposal.

Since the preliminary determination relies more on the broader issues of planning and urban design goals for the area rather than the specific design of a building, it might be helpful to provide more background information on the planning and zoning principles for the area. This information is provided on the following pages.

Below, a brief summary of the PUD approval and amendment process is provided.

### **Approval Process**

The request is for a Major Amendment to a PUD Final Development Plan, which follows the same process required for approval of an original PUD Final Development Plan. In total, approval of a PUD project follows a three-step process:

- **Development Proposal** – approved if the Planning Board makes a preliminary determination that the proposal is conceptually consistent with the plans, guidelines and zoning for the area and provides public benefits that outweigh its adverse effects. The Board's preliminary determination may suggest modifications to be made in preparing a Final Development Plan.
- **Final Development Plan** – approved if the Planning Board votes to grant a special permit, making the appropriate findings (including general findings in Articles 10, 12 and 19 and specific findings applicable to PUD-6, contained in Section 13.70) and attaching any appropriate conditions.
- **Design Review Approval** – while the Final Development Plan establishes the overall site plan, mix of uses, building scale and massing and other characteristics, a PUD special permit is usually conditioned on continuing Planning Board review and approval of the design of each building (as a determination). When a PUD special permit applies to only one building, the design can be approved at the same time as granting a special permit if the Board believes that the design has progressed to a sufficient level of detail, subject to continuing review by staff.

## Planning Goals

The planning principles and specific zoning requirements for the PUD-6 district were established in the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS) and associated rezoning adopted in 2001. The following development goals informed the zoning for the North Point area:

*The North Point area is envisioned as a mixed-use neighborhood with housing as a dominant use – a place to live, work, and enjoy a variety of parks and public spaces. ECaPS PUD zoning would:*

- *Require at least 65% residential development with a maximum of 35% commercial development and create an overall cap on non-residential parking for the district.*
- *Reduce automobile traffic generated by the site – by setting an FAR of 2.4 for a mixed-use project, but allowing FAR to increase up to 3.0 as the percent of residential use increases, since residential uses generate less peak hour traffic.*
- *Reduce the parking required on site by 20 percent from the Citywide Rezoning Proposal and require corresponding auto vehicle trip reduction measures.*
- *Establish lower heights closer to the East Cambridge residential neighborhood and taller heights farther away.*
- *Encourage retail uses to support the new neighborhood that will complement, not compete with, existing retail on Cambridge Street.*
- *Require the creation of a major new public park easily accessible from the relocated Lechmere T station.*

In addition, the following goals were incorporated into the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines to inform ongoing development review:

- *Create a lively new mixed-use district with strong visual and pedestrian connections to East Cambridge. The new district should be a place to live, work, and enjoy a variety of parks and public spaces.*
- *Create a new east-west main street through the center of North Point, connecting East Cambridge with the future MDC Park.*
- *Extend First Street into North Point to connect existing and new neighborhoods.*
- *Create a major new public park easily accessible from the relocated Lechmere T station, First Street, and O'Brien Highway.*
- *Create a new retail edge at the relocated Lechmere T station and at the intersection of First Street, Cambridge Street, and O'Brien Highway that will complement, not compete with, existing retail on Cambridge Street.*

## Zoning Height Limitations

Because the ECaPS goals encourage lower heights closer to the East Cambridge residential edge and taller heights farther away, the zoning requirements for the district create “height bands” allowing graduated height limits beginning at around 85 feet near Monsignor O’Brien Highway and extending to 150 feet along the railroad tracks, with allowances for some buildings at 220 feet with Planning Board approval. The height limits were adjusted in a 2012 zoning amendment proposed by the owners of the larger adjacent North Point PUD Parcel (PB #179), but the height limits for this Development Parcel (PB #175) were not affected. **See attached map.**

For this PUD project – which includes three different building sites – the height limits begin at 85 feet at the western end (step-downs to 65 feet are required adjacent to public open space), increase to 120 feet in the center, and reach a maximum of 150 feet with some portions allowed to 220 feet at the eastern end. The entire site of the proposed “Phase 2” building site is within the 85-foot height band.

The original “Phase 2” proposal (1-5 East Street), consisting of one building with a portion that exceeded 100 feet, made use of the waiver provision copied below. The Planning Board approved the additional height in granting the PUD special permit on the basis that it would result in a smaller building footprint and more generous open space.

### 13.74.35 Waiver of Height Limitations

In order to provide a limited level of flexibility in developing a comprehensive plan for currently vacant or underdeveloped parcels of land in North Point, the Planning Board may accept a (preliminary) Development Proposal and may approve a Final Development Plan in which one or more buildings or portions of buildings, no higher than one hundred and fifty (150) feet, do not conform to the height limitations set forth in Section 13.74.3 above, subject to the following limitations and conditions.

- (1) The building or portion of a building does not extend more than 100 feet into the adjacent, more restrictive height band as set forth in Section 13.74.3 and illustrated on Map 13.71.
- (2) The building or portion of a building extending into the more restrictive height band does not exceed the height limit established in the less restrictive height band from which it is being extended.
- (3) Such extensions are limited in nature, not inconsistent with the objective of establishing the height band provisions of Section 13.74.3, and are generally consistent with the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.
- (4) Other buildings proposed can be demonstrated to be lower than might otherwise be required should the height waiver not be granted by the Planning Board.
- (5) The applicant can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Planning Board that the requested deviations from the height provisions of Section 13.74.3 are reasonable in the context of the proposed Final Development Plan as a whole and permit an organization of buildings, streets, opens space and other features of the Final Development Plan that better serve the public interest and the objectives of the PUD than might otherwise be the case with strict adherence to the height limits established in Section 13.74.3

## **Design Guidelines**

The following provisions in the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines are most relevant in assessing the overall orientation, height, scale and massing of a proposed development:

### Site Planning and Open Space

- i. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to future regional pathways (Grand Junction railroad, North Point path).*
- ii. Provide strong pedestrian, bicycle and visual connections to the Charles River and public parks through view corridors, signage, and/or art installations.*
- iii. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing and new bus stops and to transit stations including Kendall Square, Lechmere, Community College and North Station MBTA stations. In particular, direct access from the residential neighborhood south of Msgr. O'Brien Highway and Cambridge Street to the new T station, if relocated, is desirable.*
- iv. Provide an attractive landscaped edge between the future Somerville regional bicycle path and the adjacent rail yards.*
- v. The provision of open space of diverse sizes and use is encouraged to enhance the public environment in the study area.*
- vi. The provision of interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections to neighborhoods and to encourage pedestrian movement.*
- vii. Where major new parks are required by zoning, provide programmed, multi-use open space for both recreational and cultural activities.*
- viii. For residential development, create semi-private open spaces (e.g. front and rear yards, porches, stoops, and patios) that create a transition from public sidewalks and courts to private interior spaces.*
- ix. Design residential courtyards to be visually accessible from streets to enhance safety and activity along the street.*

### Building Height and Orientation on Major Streets (including Msgr. O'Brien Highway)

- i. Set back any portion of the building above 65 feet by at least 10 feet from the principal facade.*
- ii. For retail and office uses, build to the lot line or provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces. Setbacks used exclusively for ornamental landscaping are not permitted but may be allowed to accommodate street furniture, street trees, or generous sidewalks. Awnings and canopies are encouraged to provide shelter and enliven the ground floor facade.*
- iii. For residential uses, provide small setbacks (5 to 10 feet) for stoops, porches, and front gardens.*
- iv. Driveway turnaround and vehicle drop-off facilities are strongly discouraged along public streets.*

- v. *Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.*
- vi. *In use, design, and entry, orient buildings towards corners.*

*Building Height and Orientation on Park Edges*

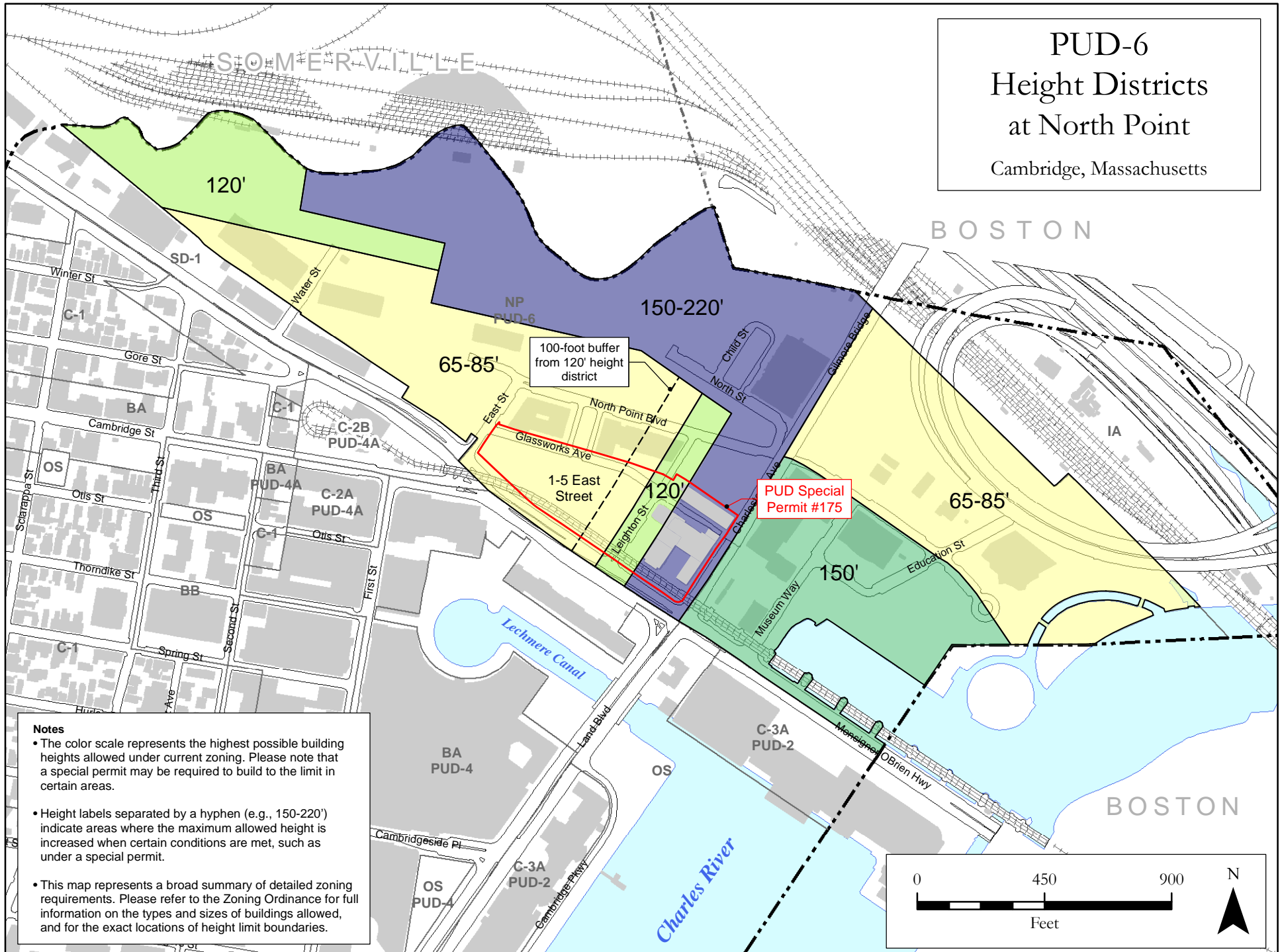
- i. *The height of the principal façade of buildings surrounding a park should be no greater than 1/3 the width of the park. For additional height above this limit, buildings should be stepped back by at least ten feet from the principal facade. Greater height without setbacks may, however, be appropriate at corners or in specific locations to create architectural variety. The buildings must conform to overall district height limits in the zoning.*
- ii. *Locate buildings to minimize shadows on the park, especially in the afternoon.*
- iii. *Surround public parks with uses that create an active environment throughout the day and evening and increase safety for park users, such as:*
  - *Buildings should be designed with individual units and front doors facing the street, including row house units on the lower levels of multi-family buildings. Where residential lobbies face the street, doors should generally be spaced no more than 75 feet apart.*
  - *Shops, cafés and other public uses that enliven the street.*

*Building Scale and Massing*

- a. *For new development sites, the block size should be similar to the existing East Cambridge blocks. An attempt should be made to reduce the distance that pedestrians have to walk to a crosswalk in order to safely cross the street.*
- b. *Buildings should avoid continuous massing longer than 100 feet facing residential streets and 200 feet facing mixed-use and retail streets. If massing extends beyond this length, it should be made permeable and visibly articulated as several smaller masses using different materials or colors, vertical breaks, bays, or other architectural elements.*
- c. *In addition to the above limits, buildings should reflect a rhythm and variation appropriate to the urban context. For example, this can be achieved by expressing bay widths of 16 to 25 feet along residential streets and 25 to 50 feet along mixed-use and retail streets.*
- d. *Buildings should have a clearly expressed base, middle, and top. This may be achieved through changes in material, fenestration, architectural detailing, or other elements.*
- e. *Use variations in height and architectural elements such as parapets, cornices and other details to create interesting and varied rooflines and to clearly express the tops of buildings.*
- f. *Emphasize corners using taller elements such as towers, turrets, and bays*
- g. *Taller buildings should be articulated to avoid a monolithic appearance: Taller buildings should be point towers instead of slabs, and should have smaller floor plates instead of larger floor plates.*

# PUD-6 Height Districts at North Point

Cambridge, Massachusetts



**Notes**

- The color scale represents the highest possible building heights allowed under current zoning. Please note that a special permit may be required to build to the limit in certain areas.
- Height labels separated by a hyphen (e.g., 150-220') indicate areas where the maximum allowed height is increased when certain conditions are met, such as under a special permit.
- This map represents a broad summary of detailed zoning requirements. Please refer to the Zoning Ordinance for full information on the types and sizes of buildings allowed, and for the exact locations of height limit boundaries.

