



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

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Re: **PB #179, Cambridge Crossing (North Point) PUD Minor Amendment 8,
Parcel Q1 Design Update and Station Plaza Design Review**

Background

The North Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) is an approved 45-acre, 5+ million square foot development project planned to be built out through 2030. The Final Development Plan was first approved by the Planning Board in 2003, and since that time has been modified several times through the PUD amendment process. The most recent minor amendment (proposed by the current developer, DivcoWest) was granted by the Planning Board on July 11, 2017.

DivcoWest is currently seeking Minor Amendment approval for changes to the timing of the Final Development Plan to coordinate the development of Parcels Q2 and R (included in Phase 2) with the development of the new Lechmere MBTA station, which will result in buildings on these parcels to be built before completion of buildings in Phases 1a and 1b. In addition, office use is proposed to replace the approved hotel use on Parcel Q2 to maximize transit utilization and activation to support the viability of the retail district. DivcoWest also seeks design review approval for the MBTA station plazas in addition to a design update in Parcel Q1 to accommodate a bicycle center with bicycle repair station, public toilet rooms, lockers, changing rooms, bicycle charging station, bicycle part vending machine, tire/tube recycling facility, bicycle air pump, public water fountain/bottle fill station, and 7 long-term bicycle parking spaces. This Minor Amendment requests that the proposed bicycle center in Parcel Q1 be considered as a retail use to count toward the combined 75,000 square foot retail requirement for Parcels I, N, Q1, R and W.

This memo summarizes the key areas of focus associated with the requested minor amendments.

Requested Minor Amendments

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 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.

Various conditions of the special permit decision (PB-179, as most recently amended) provide some guidance to determine what changes would constitute minor amendments, some of which relate to these requests.

- Condition 4-c. provides that hotel use is allowed on Parcel Q2 and that a Minor Amendment is required to allow an alternate, permitted nonresidential use.
- Condition 5 provides that the Phases as set forth in the application documents and approved in the Special Permit Decision may be changed and modified at any time as a Minor Amendment.
- Condition 5-c. provides that a building permit may be issued at any time for buildings on Blocks Q2 and R to be constructed in conjunction with the construction of the relocated Green Line T Station. However, without a Minor Amendment approval, no occupancy permit may be issued for any building in Phase 2 until an occupancy permit has been issued for all buildings in the preceding phases and all associated improvements in preceding phases have been completed.
- Condition 12-c.(iv) provides that the allowed 75,000 square feet of retail GFA on sites I, N, Q1, R and W may not be eliminated or relocated from those sites without a major amendment. In addition, the at-grade environment at these locations is intended to be attractive and lively and inviting to pedestrians from within and without the district. Hence it is important to consider whether the proposed bicycle center can be considered as a retail use to enrich the pedestrian experience.
- Condition 19-a. provides that a bicycle center, consisting of a public bicycle-sharing station and facilities for bicycle repairs and long-term bicycle storage, shall be provided in one of the buildings located in Parcels Q1, Q2, R and/or V, or in another location approved by the Planning Board. The Special Permit Decision does not specify whether a bicycle center would be considered a retail use, although it contains functions that would customarily be considered retail and consumer service.

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.

Comments

The proposed change in use of Parcel Q2 from hotel to office is the type of change that is contemplated in the special permit to allow flexibility to respond to changing demands over time. Given the site's proximity to transit and to the anticipated retail core of the site, staff believes the change to office will help the retail and restaurant establishments on a more daily basis, because retailers benefit from more consistent shoppers like office workers and residents.

Regarding the proposed change in phasing, there is a logical reason to align the construction of sites Q2 and R with the construction of the new Lechmere MBTA station, given their close proximity and the benefits of limiting the time when disruption would occur. However, the phasing of the project was established in part to ensure that the trip generation from new development would be accompanied by infrastructure improvements that would mitigate impacts throughout the course of the project.

Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) staff has reviewed the supplemental transportation analysis and provided comments to CDD staff. TP&T has requested that the traffic generation memo also include a table (similar to Tables 1 and 3) showing changes to the overall square footage approved since the original TIS but prior to this requested amendment, to better understand the changes. Also, the submission notes that observations of trip generation for Parcels S and T have been lower than projected, but no table is provided that compares proposed and observed trip generation for these parcels.

The following is a summary of additional staff comments for consideration by the Board regarding the proposed changes:

- Parcel Q1 is proposed to have a commercial building with a total area of 18,851 square feet, including 8,533 square feet for retail and the rest for office use. The area of the proposed bicycle center within the building is 710 square feet. The PTDM plan is being amended to update the revisions to the bicycle center. The bicycle center must provide on-site mobile repair services/personnel as part of the programming. This can be in the form of a full-service repair shop, repair services provided on-site by regularly scheduled mechanics, or a drop-off point for an off-site full-service repair shop. In communications with CDD, the Permittee has agreed to include this as a condition of approval.
- A detailed construction management plan is required to evaluate the interim measures to ensure safe and secure public access to and around the transit location. The construction management shall be submitted for approval by TP&T prior to issuance of building permits for parcels Q2 and R.
- The amendment proposes a few changes to previously approved locations of Bluebikes station. The final location of Bluebikes stations shall be approved by CDD prior to issuance of building permits for parcels Q2 and R. The Permittee has agreed to continue to work on this with CDD staff.

Parcel Q1 Design Update

The design for the Parcel Q1 Building was first reviewed by the Planning Board on July 11, 2017, with final revisions presented for approval at the January 2, 2018 meeting. Parcel Q1 is prominently located at the corner of the extension of First Street and North Point Boulevard. The site forms part of the new retail corridor, which will extend from Lechmere Station, to the end of North First Street.

The following is a summary of staff comments on the design changes associated with the bicycle center:

- The addition of this facility creates a more animated node at the southwest corner of the building, adjacent to the Plaza.
- The enlarged window and large awning help to demarcate the bicycle center, which is encouraged in the *North Point Design Guidelines*.

- Bike lockers, Amazon lockers and a bottle fill station are proposed next to the west end of the building. These seem to add clutter (see the perspective on page 9) and could be better integrated into the design of the building. Staff suggest further study of these elements, and that consideration be given to installing them within the volume of the building, with their doors/front panels flush with the façade.
- The space between Parcels Q1 and Q2 previously benefitted from trees and plantings with seasonal color (see perspective on page 8). That space, as shown on page 9, now seems a little bare and unfinished.
- The perspective on page 9 shows light fixtures at the top of the south façade. These seem too high on the wall and should be lowered to the second-floor level to have a pedestrian scale.
- To facilitate easy and convenient bike access into the bicycle center, a wider than normal door, should be provided.

MBTA Station Plaza Design Review

DivcoWest is also seeking design review approval for the open space plazas located on parcels Q1, Q2 and R, adjacent to the new Lechmere Station. The Planning Board's review of the open space designs is guided by the conditions of the special permit, which includes the goals and objectives of the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study, the guidelines established in the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines, and utilization of the North Point Design Guidelines as a design reference.

Station Plaza West

- The plaza is thoughtfully scaled and addresses several site constraints associated with the proposed MBTA North Headhouse. The moveable tables and chairs, umbrellas, and plantings add color.
- Some of the strips of brick pavement seem oddly located. The brick path running east/west aims at a U-shaped hedge in the MBTA bus drop-off area. This strip should be angled to the south of the hedge or should more closely align with pedestrian desire lines.
- The design of the space between the Q1 and Q2 buildings seems complicated and disconnected. It should be further studied so that improved connections with the MBTA drop-off area and the main plaza are achieved. Further clarifying the relationship between the proposed plaza's planted areas, and the hedges around MBTA infrastructure would also help. Opportunities to better align the location of the MBTA infrastructure and associated hedges with pedestrian paths should be explored. Safety and passive surveillance of open spaces should also be considered.
- Without knowing the details of the east façade of building Q2, it is unclear if the proposed design makes sense between the Q1 and Q2 buildings. For example, should the tree planted area extend up to the façade, and does the brick pavement running east/west aim at a door in the east façade of Building Q2?
- The pedestrian path appears to be less than 10-feet wide at the corner of the Q1 building/lockers and the planted area, which may be too tight for the expected pedestrian flow in the area.

Station Plaza East

- The grade change between the North First Street sidewalk and the plaza, results in the plaza not being accessible from the southwest on North First Street. Consideration should be given to

providing direct access to the plaza from the southwest, coordinated with the crosswalks on Monsignor O'Brien Highway and North First Street. In addition, the need for a pedestrian path, aligned with the Monsignor O'Brien crosswalk, across the planter along the edge of the highway, should also be studied. The brick pavement should be realigned to connect with any possible new plaza openings and access points.

- The alignment of the western stone wall and the adjoining Bluebikes station should be reviewed so that the Bluebikes station does not appear to intrude into the pedestrian sidewalk zone.
- The brick path that runs from the northwest to southeast should align with the Monsignor O'Brien sidewalk, rather than a planting bed.
- Opportunities to make the plaza space more inviting and animated during non-market days should be explored. Possible ideas to consider include: art and lighting installations, play elements, and other programming initiatives.

Furnishings, Plantings and Materials

- The plans are unclear regarding seating locations and design. More comfortable seating opportunities, including benches with backs throughout both plazas, should be considered.
- While plantings under the viaduct are not possible, it appears that the west plaza and the edges of spaces could incorporate more greenery and less hardscape.
- Further details regarding the treatment of the concrete pavement, including how it will be visually appealing across such broad expanses, should be provided. The extent of permeable paving should also be clarified.

Appendix I - Relevant North Point Design Guidelines

Siting, Scale and Massing

Stand Alone Retail Building Massing and Articulation

- One and two story stand-alone retail buildings are created to activate the public realm and also create a sense of human scale that will balance the scale of adjacent buildings
- They should be shaped and oriented to enhance views and connections to North Point Common and open spaces in Parcel I
- The architectural language of these buildings should be distinctive from the overall architecture of North Point and should belong to and enhance the character of public realm
- These structures should have interesting roofscape as they will be highly visible from majority of the buildings at North Point
- Ground floor and second floor terraces are encouraged to engage and activate the public realm
- Design the building to accommodate changes in retailers and retail store size over time. This may entail making the ground floor retail facade bay structure flexible, so that in the future retail spaces can be demised to include multiple bays or portions of a single bay
- The location of any doors on buildings in the retail plaza abutting the multi-use path should be carefully considered. Doors may not open directly onto the path; facades must be set away from the path so that people are able to easily and safely get off the path and away from through-movement and have plenty of space to navigate.

Ground Floor Retail

- At least 75% of the street frontage of the proposed retail in “EXHIBIT: 10 CONCEPTUAL RETAIL PLAN” should be occupied by retail uses, including cafes and restaurants.
- Retail entrances should be located on public streets, or primary pedestrian uses and on corners wherever possible
- Retail entrances should relate to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit
- Retail within North Point should be as transparent as possible to maximize visibility of street level uses
- Ground floor facades should permit a clear view from the sidewalk to the interior space of the building (75% transparent surface is encouraged, and reflective glass is discouraged)
- Blank walls should be avoided along all public streets, courts, and pedestrian walkways
- Create a horizontal change in plane as the building approaches the ground plane
- Plan for tenant awnings or canopies that create a sense of enclosure over sidewalks and provide identity for tenants
- Design the building to accommodate changes in retailers and retail store size over time. This may entail making the ground floor retail facade bay structure flexible, so that in the future retail spaces can be demised to include multiple bays or portions of a single bay.

- The design should seek the optimal balance between the architectural identity of the building and that of individual retailers. Where appropriate, provide a facade bay structure that relates to the architecture of the building while allowing for signage, and storefront architecture within each bay that provides an opportunity for the individual expression of each retail storefront.
- Signage and graphics create both retail identity and a lively streetscape. Base building design should consider tenant signage visually as well as structurally. Signage in multi-tenant buildings should be coordinated and incorporated into the building's architecture

Public Realm

Public open space is a central to the identity of North Point. All open spaces will be open to the public and designed to encourage public use. Open spaces including North Point Common will be designed to support, enhance, and balance the commercial and residential development at North Point.

- The provision of open spaces of diverse size and use is encouraged to enhance the public environment at North Point. All open spaces at North Point shall be designed to be public in nature, creating an open environment that the public can easily identify that is welcoming for everyone's use.
- The provision of an interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections both to neighborhoods and within North Point so as to promote pedestrian movement.
- A large park is required by zoning, and North Point Common will provide naturalistic, multi-use open space for both recreational and cultural activities.
- The major new park required by the zoning code should be located convenient to the Lechmere T station in order to link East Cambridge and future neighborhoods at North Point.
- In addition to the large park, the creation of a series of smaller open spaces such as pocket parks, public plazas, active recreation areas, courtyards, play areas and gardens is encouraged. A second large park on Parcel I is located along the central main street, conveniently close to the neighborhood access from Water Street.
- These spaces shall be articulated throughout North Point through wayfinding and signage measures including space types, themes and program
- Open spaces shall be visible and accessible from public streets

Plazas

- The Retail Square will be the heart of North Point, and should be designed to become a vibrant public gathering place, where open space, retail activities, and public events come together. The Retail Square is the point at which the First Street corridor and the east-west open space spine and Community Path cross each other, and clear pedestrian connections and lines of sight should be encouraged to facilitate pedestrian movement between the two. The retail pavilions should be configured to promote activation of the public plaza and park spaces through restaurant and café terraces, and activity areas. Trees and built shade structures are encouraged to create a strong green connection, and a comfortable micro-climate during the summer months. Great care should be taken in the design of plazas and paths to minimize the potential for unsafe conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists.

Wayfinding

- Provide appropriate and approved wayfinding signage for bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles.
- Provide information kiosks that show walking and biking distances to major destinations such as Lechmere Station, Community College Station, North Point Park, etc.
- Accommodate the installation of real-time transit and Hubway monitors/screens where feasible.

MBTA Facilities

- The open spaces on parcels Q and R should be vibrant, active, safe public spaces for people, designed with an eye to accommodating multimodal transportation needs such as benches and shade for pedestrians, shelters for bus riders, covered and uncovered bicycle parking for cyclists, on-street parking for motorists, safe site lighting and wayfinding signage for all.
- The plazas should be made universally accessible.

Parcel Q1 Block Guidelines

- The design of the building should recognize its significant presence on the corner of North First Street and North Point Boulevard and the role of green connectivity down First Street to North Point Common.
- In designing these buildings, it is important to shape them to maintain visual connections to North Point Common from First Street and the Retail Square.
- Special consideration should be made to the relationship to the MBTA Green line viaduct to the south.
- The configuration shall positively use the orientation and exposure to sun by means of balconies, terraces and bay windows and minimize shadows on parks and surrounding buildings.
- Special corner treatment should be considered on North Point Boulevard and North First Street.
- The building design shall give special consideration to the streetscape, scale and character of First Street and the retail plaza; retail frontage should be maximized along all sides with a high level of transparency.
- Second floor terraces for restaurant seating are encouraged.
- These structures should have interesting roofscape as they will be highly visible from the majority of the buildings at North Point.
- Building design shall accommodate new T Station to positively define the public realm. It should contribute to the activities, character and the scale of proposed Lechmere Square.
- Building design shall accommodate the activities of First Street that is designed as a major transit transfer and retail hub. It shall give special attention to interface with the T line to reduce noise and vibration by thoughtful building design and acoustical treatments.
- The building mass on First Street will be set back from the street to allow for gracious sidewalks.