



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner
Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Planner
Date: July 20, 2016
Re: **PB #179 DivcoWest /HYM North Point Major Amendment –
Second Hearing**

Background

On Tuesday, the Board will hold the second of two required public hearings on a proposed Major Amendment to the North Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) Special Permit, PB #179. North Point is the largest approved PUD in Cambridge, authorizing about 3 million square feet of residential development and 2 million square feet of commercial development over twenty building sites. The PUD special permit was granted in 2003 and has been amended five times, most recently in 2015.

The proposal received its preliminary determination from the Planning Board on June 7th in accordance with PUD approval procedures. The amendment as proposed would not change the aggregate development characteristics of the project, such as the total amount of development, mix of uses or amount of open space. However, the proposal makes some significant spatial changes to the master plan, including adjustments to the street alignment, reparcelization of building sites, rearrangement of open space, changes to the use, height and massing of buildings, and revised project phasing.

Since the June 7th Planning Board Hearing, the applicant's team has had several meetings with staff, including CDD's urban design, and environmental and transportation planning staff, along with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) and the Department of Public Works (DPW). The intent of these meetings was to further discuss the set of issues raised by the Board and staff at the June hearing.

The purpose of this memo is to comment on the Final Development Plan and the responses provided by the DivcoWest/HYM team, and to provide the Board with recommended modifications to the existing special permit conditions.

Major Amendment Review

Approval of a Major Amendment requires two public hearings and the issuance of a new special permit following the procedures applicable to a new PUD special permit application. However, instead of reviewing the project as a whole, the Planning Board applies the special permit criteria (summarized on the following page) only to the elements of the Final Development Plan that are proposed to be changed.

Final Development Plan Review

While the Development Proposal stage is meant to consider the consistency of the proposal as a whole with the plans and guidelines for the area, the Final Development Plan review stage is meant to consider the particular elements of the proposal against those plans and guidelines, to determine if the Final Development Plan is responsive to the comments incorporated by the Planning Board into the Preliminary Determination, and to consider whether additional conditions should be applied to the project if the Major Amendment special permit is granted.

To assist the Board, this package contains the following information:

- Summary of special permit criteria
- Overview of PUD special permit conditions
- Comments on the Final Development Plan (focusing on responses to the Preliminary Determination)
- Preliminary Determination on present application, with selected elements of prior staff memos (Attachment)
- Copy of applicable zoning sections and guidelines (Attachment)

Additionally, if the Board decides to approve the Major Amendment, the following documents will provide guidance on what conditions might be included:

- Draft Urban Design Guidelines that update the originally prepared NorthPoint Design Guidelines

Requested Actions	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Major Amendment to PUD Special Permit (Section 12.35.3) – <i>Approval of a PUD Final Development Plan</i>	<p>The proposed amendment to the PUD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conforms with general PUD development controls and district development controls. • Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for that portion of the city (<i>see attached Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines summary</i>). • Provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects, considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ quality of site design ○ traffic flow and safety ○ adequacy of utilities and other public works ○ impact on existing public facilities ○ potential fiscal impact • Contains revisions to the Development Proposal in response to the Preliminary Determination.
Major Amendment to Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed amendment will not have substantial adverse impacts on traffic. (See TPT Memo) • Proposed amendment remains consistent with Citywide Urban Design Objectives. (See Section 19.30)

Special Permit Conditions for a PUD Final Development Plan

Since this proposal is a Major Amendment to the existing Special Permit PB #179 (which has already recorded several Amendments), there is already a detailed set of conditions that control the development process, including requirements for ongoing design review, traffic mitigation and public infrastructure improvements. If the current application is approved, then the current set of conditions would continue to apply, but in granting a Major Amendment the Board could modify, supplement or supersede the previous conditions.

CDD Staff Comments

As established in the Board’s Preliminary Determination, the amended plan conforms to the zoning requirements in the PUD-6 district and remains generally consistent with the objectives set forth in the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines and the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS). Staff comments on the Final Development Plan therefore focus on the particulars of the proposed new site design and how they respond to the Preliminary Determination. The Preliminary Determination and accompanying staff comments from the first hearing are attached, but those issues fall generally into the topics summarized on the following page:

- **Site Layout:** Layout of parcels, pedestrian and bicycle circulation.
- **Open Space and Public Realm:** The character and nature of all open spaces, particularly the “finger parks” and public edges; changes to the character of First Street; visual and physical connections to North Point Common and the “retail square” from the T-station; and the east-west public realm connections and experience.
- **Massing and Built form:** The impacts of the changed building height scenario and building footprints; edge conditions and street walls; wind impacts and mitigation strategies; the low-scale retail building typology; and creation of new view corridors and landmarks.
- **Traffic and Circulation** (primarily discussed in TP&T memos): Pedestrian and cyclist connections; roadway layout; multi-use path; and loading and delivery.
- **Retail Issues:** How the retail square will retain a local character, and not become destination retail that would predominantly attract more vehicle trips, as well as the need for an updated retail report.
- **Other Issues:** Information on the “I-cubed” application, the MBTA’s plans for a reduced design for Lechmere Station, Ownership and Title information.

Site layout

In response to Planning Board and staff comment, several refinements have been made to the layout of streets, including the realignment of West Boulevard to create a more urban edge to Parcels A and B, creation of additional pedestrian crossings, improved cyclist facilities, adjustment of the multi-use path alignment. Staff is very supportive of these changes and recognizes that these changes are a significant improvement.

Open Space and Public Realm

Board members raised several concerns regarding changes to First Street and what was felt to be a loss of the boulevard landscape character of the original master plan. To address this issue, First Street has been widened via an additional building setback line, with a double row of street trees proposed and extension of the raised cycle track further into the site. This creates a distinctive design feature with a more formal allee effect, and also provides enhanced opportunities for pedestrian amenities, such as outdoor dining and street furniture. Additional pedestrian crossings around the retail square have also been introduced, which will help further the vision of a traditional main street experience and enhance porosity between both sides of First Street. As described in the memo from the TP&T, the design of First Street will require further detailed discussion with City staff as projects move forward into design review.

The sidewalk on the north side of Dawes Street has been widened to accommodate additional public space per the Board’s recommendation. In some instances, the sidewalk will be up to 30 feet wide and again two rows of street trees are proposed. Perhaps this additional space could be thought of in a more creative way with potential to incorporate public art, social gathering spaces, playfulness, and additional

green infrastructure that activates the sidewalk and creates a unique pedestrian experience. In addition, on the north side of Dawes Street the proposal now clarifies the purpose of the spaces between buildings and clearly emphasizes the green connections between EF and G, and B and C. The other spaces will primarily serve as loading and access, which staff hopes will be well designed and also incorporate some landscape elements, rather than complete hardscapes.

The revised master plan proposes raised pedestrian crossings connecting to one of the proposed new finger park spaces (referred to as “Baldwin Park”), which will help to create a seamless, well-integrated network of open space. Some additional thinking regarding the role of “finger parks” and other open spaces has been included in the draft Design Guidelines. In response to Board member comments about the benefits of hardscape edges to open space, the Applicant proposes to include a straight pedestrian route down the side of each building. The new Design Guidelines incorporate several open space precedent images; however, it would be helpful to see more examples of building interfaces, as well as specific ideas for the pedestrian routes and how these spaces can be activated and made to feel public and welcoming. Also, as there is no separation proposed between buildings and the finger parks, and additional building height is proposed, the scale and massing guidelines for park edges should consider further upper level setbacks and/ or articulation to ensure the “finger parks” are not overwhelmed by built form. Cross-sections of these park spaces would help to evaluate this issue.

Massing and Built Form

At the first hearing, it was recognized by Board members and staff that in order to fully understand the massing and built form changes proposed, updates to the Design Guidelines and a physical model are needed. The Applicant will present a physical model at the Planning Board hearing. The Applicant has also prepared revisions and updates to the Design Guidelines, which are discussed below, but the final document remains a work in progress at the time of these comments.

North Point Design Guidelines

A preliminary draft set of guidelines has been prepared by the applicant and is attached. The updated guidelines generally include revisions to the existing language, as well as additional new language to reflect the proposed major amendment. New images, conceptual renderings, plans and diagrams have also been incorporated, which help to portray the urban design vision for North Point. Many of the massing and built form issues raised at the first hearing are addressed in the guidelines. Notably, ideas about ground floor retail, the glassy retail pavilions and the retail plaza are well defined and staff looks forward to seeing this new retail vision advance. Open space has also been expanded and many precedent images have been introduced, which helps demonstrate some of the ideas being considered for the public realm.

While significant progress has been made and staff appreciates the collaborative approach the applicant’s team has taken, some design issues have not been fully resolved at this stage and more time is needed for detailed review and refinement. Staff expect that the Applicant will continue to work with

relevant departments to look at these issues more carefully and ensure that they are appropriately addressed in the final Design Guidelines document. Some areas of refinement include:

- Text needs to more clearly retain features of the original guidelines, particularly pertaining to finer-grain residential streets and edges.
- Public realm section needs to be expanded to further define the character and nature of new open spaces with more clarity and specificity.
- All images and diagrams, including the Block Guidelines, require further detailed review.
- Photos of the physical model should be included.

Retail Issues

A letter from the Applicant's retail consultant, Graffito SP, has been provided along with the Final Development Plan application materials. This letter updates and further refines the retail strategy that was included in the original special permit approval. At the time of writing this memo, staff have not completed a detailed and comprehensive review of this report, but any particular comments or concerns may be raised at the hearing and addressed through continuing review.

Traffic and Circulation

Comments on the proposed changes to the roadway and circulation network, along with other transportation considerations, are included in the accompanying memo from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T).

Other Issues

The Applicant has provided written responses to the additional issues raised by Board members and the public at the first hearing.

Recommendations for Further Study

If the Planning Board decides to approve the requested Major Amendment, staff recommends incorporating the following modified conditions into to the special permit, to address the issues noted above.

- The Design Guidelines should continue to be refined, in consultation with staff, and a final version should be approved by the Planning Board prior to any new construction. This could be included as a condition of continuing design review.
- The design review condition contained in the existing Special Permit should be expanded to require the submittal of wind and shadow studies, an acoustical report and noise mitigation narrative, a lighting plan and a preliminary signage plan for each building.
- The revised retail report provided by Graffito SP should be attached to a new Decision in place of the prior retail report in the original special permit; however, it may be subject to further review and refinement if any additional issues or concerns are raised by staff or the Board.

PUD Special Permit – Final Development Plan

12.36.4 The Planning Board shall make the decision to approve or disapprove the application for a Special Permit to construct a Planned Unit Development no later than ninety (90) days after the public hearing concerning the Development Proposal Approval of the Final Development Plan shall be granted only upon determination by the Planning Board that the Final Development Plan meets the evaluation criteria set forth in Section 12.35.3 and contains any revisions to the Development Proposal required by the Planning Board. If the Planning Board grants the Special Permit with conditions, the conditions must be agreed to in writing by the developer before the Special Permit is granted. The Planning Board shall make its final decision in writing and shall specify its reason for not granting a Special Permit to construct a PUD. If the Planning Board makes no decision within the specified time limit, then the Final Development Plan shall be considered approved and the Special Permit to construct a PUD shall be deemed granted.

[prior reference]

12.35.3 Approval of the Development Proposal shall be granted only upon determination by the Planning Board that the Development Proposal:

- (1) conforms with the General Development Controls set forth in Section 12.50, and the development controls set forth for the specific PUD district in which the project is located;
- (2) conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for the portion of the city in which the PUD district is located;
- (3) provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects; in making this determination the Planning Board shall consider the following:
 - (a) quality of site design, including integration of a variety of land uses, building types, and densities; preservation of natural features; compatibility with adjacent land uses; provision and type of open space; provision of other amenities designed to benefit the general public;
 - (b) traffic flow and safety;
 - (c) adequacy of utilities and other public works;
 - (d) impact on existing public facilities within the city; and
 - (e) potential fiscal impact.

Project Review Special Permit – Traffic Impact Findings

19.25.1 Traffic Impact Findings. Where a Traffic Study is required as set forth in Section 19.24 (3) above the Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area as analyzed in the Traffic Study. Substantial adverse impact on city traffic shall be measured by reference to the traffic impact indicators set forth in Section 19.25.11 below.

In areas where the Planning Board determines that area-specific traffic guidelines have been established in the Ordinance, the Board recognizes written agreements between project proponents and the City dealing with transportation mitigation strategies.

19.25.11 Traffic Impact Indicators. In determining whether a proposal has substantial adverse impacts on city traffic the Planning Board shall apply the following indicators. When one or more of the indicators is exceeded, it will be indicative of potentially substantial adverse impact on city traffic. In making its findings, however, the Planning Board shall consider the mitigation efforts proposed, their anticipated effectiveness, and other supplemental information that identifies circumstances or actions that will result in a reduction in adverse traffic impacts. Such efforts and actions may include, but are not limited to, transportation demand management plans; roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities improvements; measures to reduce traffic on residential streets; and measures undertaken to improve safety for pedestrians and vehicles, particularly at intersections identified in the Traffic Study as having a history of high crash rates.

The indicators are: (1) Project vehicle trip generation weekdays and weekends for a twenty-four hour period and A. M. and P.M. peak vehicle trips generated; (2) Change in level of service at identified signalized intersections; (3) Increased volume of trips on residential streets; (4) Increase of length of vehicle queues at identified signalized intersections; and (5) Lack of sufficient pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The precise numerical values that will be deemed to indicate potentially substantial adverse impact for each of these indicators shall be adopted from time to time by the Planning Board in consultation with the TPTD, published and made available to all applicants.

Project Review Special Permit – Urban Design Findings

19.25.2 Urban Design Findings. The Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the city as set forth in Section 19.30. In making that determination the Board may be guided by or make reference to urban design guidelines or planning reports that may have been developed for specific areas of the city and shall apply the standards herein contained in a reasonable manner to nonprofit religious and educational organizations in light of the special circumstances applicable to nonprofit religious and educational activities.

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives

The following urban design objectives are intended to provide guidance to property owners and the general public as to the city's policies with regard to the form and character desirable for new development in the city. It is understood that application of these principles can vary with the context of specific building proposals in ways that, nevertheless, fully respect the policies' intent. It is intended that proponents of projects, and city staff, the Planning Board and the general public, where public review or approval is required, should be open to creative variations from the detailed provisions presented in this Section as long as the core values expressed are being served. A project need not meet all the objectives of this Section 19.30 where this Section serves as the basis for issuance of a special permit. Rather the permit granting authority shall find that on balance the objectives of the city are being served. Nor shall a project subject to special permit review be required to conform to the Required Building and Site Plan Requirements set forth in Section 19.50.

Further indicators of conformance with these policy objectives shall be found in planning documents and plans developed for specific areas of the city or the city as a whole, to the extent that they are not inconsistent with the objectives set forth in this Section 19.30. These documents include the *Harvard Square Development Guidelines*, the *Central Square Action Plan*, the *Central Square Development Guidelines*, the *North Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design Guidelines Handbook*, the *University Park at MIT Urban Design Guidelines*, the *North Point Policy Plan and Design Guidelines*, the *Cambridge Institutional Growth Management Plan*, the *East Cambridge Riverfront Plan*, the *Eastern Cambridge Plan*, the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines*, the *Alewife Revitalization, Alewife Urban Design Study Phase II* and its Draft update of 1991, and *Toward a Sustainable Future: Cambridge Growth Policy Document*.

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities

General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

- 10.43** *Criteria.* Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:
- (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or
 - (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or
 - (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or
 - (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or
 - (e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and
 - (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.