



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: August 28, 2014
Re: **Case #198 Amendments – Cambridge Discovery Park**

We are providing the following material to assist in the Planning Board's review of the requested special permits for Cambridge Discovery Park. This memo addresses zoning and urban design issues. Supplemental memos from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) and Department of Public Works (DPW) address transportation and infrastructure/flooding issues, respectively.

Background

From the 1950s to the 1990s, the Acorn Park Drive area north of the Alewife Reservation was an office park that was most notably home to the Arthur D. Little (ADL) company, a consulting firm with connections to MIT. The campus was characterized by relatively low-scale buildings and large expanses of surface parking, some of which encroached into surrounding wetlands. Some parking was also on land controlled by state agencies (formerly the MDC, currently the DCR).

As ADL vacated its Acorn Park campus, the City planned for the site to be redeveloped in a way that would remove existing buildings and surface parking and restore surrounding wetlands. This planning culminated in a 2001 rezoning creating a new special district (SD-4). SD-4 allows a total of 900,000 square feet of development, excluding up to 400,000 square feet of structured parking, provided that wetlands and natural areas adjacent to the Alewife Reservation are restored according to a three-phase master plan. Parking would be concentrated into structures, with a maximum of 1,052 total parking spaces allowed.

In 2004, the Planning Board granted project review (Article 19), floodplain and other special permits to BHX, LLC (Bulfinch Companies) for a phased, master planned development on 26.5 acres of land. The plan included 819,916 square feet of new Gross Floor Area arranged into six office building sites and served by two parking garages and an internal circulation plan. To date, two office buildings and one garage have been completed, all former ADL buildings have been demolished, and wetland areas have been restored. The conditions to the special permit stipulate that amendments may be granted following the standards for approving a major or minor amendment in Section 12.37 of the zoning (otherwise, the requirements of Article 12.000 do not apply). To date, two minor amendments have been granted to approve modifications to the arrangement of buildings and circulation.

Current Application

Major Amendment

The Applicant is seeking to add hotel to the list of permitted uses within the development site. Hotel is an allowed use within SD-4, but was not specified in the original project approval. In 2013, the Planning Board considered a request to approve this use by minor amendment, but the Board determined that should be considered a major amendment.

The stated intent of the application is to develop one of the sites previously identified as office (Building 600) as a hotel. The total allowed Gross Floor Area would not change, and therefore any hotel use that is created would be offset by a reduction in permitted commercial GFA. However, the application seeks general approval to include hotel as a permitted use anywhere in the development parcel. Therefore in making a decision, the Planning Board would need to consider what conditions and limitations would be appropriate for such a hotel use, and whether future changes to the size or location of a hotel (or hotels, if more than one is contemplated) could be permissible by major or minor amendment.

Findings

The determination of whether a change to a development plan constitutes a major amendment is set forth in Section 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 original approval included the following special permits:

- Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)
- Special permit for 85-foot building heights and reduced yards in SD-4 (Section 17.42)
- Flood Plain Special Permit (Section 20.73)

In making its findings, the Planning Board should review the criteria for those special permits to ensure that they are still met given the addition of a hotel use. The specific criteria are attached as an appendix to this memo. The Project Review Special Permit covers urban design issues, discussed further in this memo, and traffic impact issues, discussed in the accompanying memo from TPT. The modifications within SD-4 are allowed to support the intent of the district, which is discussed on the prior page. As with other Flood Plan Special Permits, the criteria align with the Order of Conditions and rely on a report from the City Engineer. A memo from the City Engineer is attached.

Parkway Overlay District Modification (Section 20.63.7)

The applicant has identified a peculiar issue when addressing the design of “Building 600,” which is adjacent to Route 2. The portion of the site fronting Route 2 is actually in the Town of Arlington and is zoned for open space, which precludes providing access to the hotel from Route 2 because hotel is not an allowed use in that district. However, Cambridge’s Parkway Overlay District requires that entrances

to buildings be oriented toward the main roads, with the intent to provide a unified character to development along parkways that enhances the enjoyment of open space.

The Applicant seeks to diverge from the Parkway Overlay Standards by special permit. To grant such a special permit, the following finding must be made:

The Board may grant such a permit upon its determination that the development proposed will better serve the objectives of this Section 20.60 than if the standards were followed and that the criteria specified in Section 10.43 will be satisfied.

Some comments are made in the following sections regarding ways to explore alternative means of pedestrian access from key points along Route 2 into the development site, given the noted constraints.

Minor Amendment

In an application that is separate from the Major Amendment, the Applicant seeks a Minor Amendment for changes to the footprints of the remaining Buildings 400 and 500, which are yet to be developed. Similar types of changes have been granted by the Planning Board via minor amendment for this project twice in the past. The criteria for determining whether a change is a minor amendment is set forth in 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.

Design Review

According to the original special permit, although all buildings are part of one permitted development site, each building must return to the Planning Board for design review prior to seeking a building permit. Because the Major Amendment Application seeks design review approval for Building 600 as a hotel, and the Minor Amendment Application seeks design review approvals for the additional undeveloped building sites, the Applicant is essentially asking for design review approval of the entire remaining development. Given such approval, a building permit could be sought for any of the remaining buildings (although the additional garage would be subject to limitations on the rate of new parking creation relative to new development).

The special permit includes a set of design guidelines that are meant to be applied during the design review phase. These are provided as a supplement to this memo (along with the original special permit in its entirety), and relate to the urban design comments on the following pages.

Urban Design Comments

From an urban design perspective, the development of Discovery Park is very much an outcome of the design principles established in the Cambridge Discovery Park Master Plan Design Guidelines. The Master Plan Design Guidelines seek to create a distinguished urban campus with new buildings and landscapes that “convey a sense of timelessness and elegance that will feel comfortable and inviting to all who work there, while respecting and enhancing the experience of visitors to the adjoining reservation”. In general, the amendments and building proposals put before the Planning Board have broadly responded to these principles. However, there are a number of areas where staff has suggested improvements that would serve the overall master plan outcome and implement the Master Plan Design Guidelines more fully. Staff has met with the proponent on several occasions and understands that these issues are being considered in revisions being prepared.

Site planning and landscaping

Overall site planning, circulation and open space design has continued the themes established in earlier phases of the project. While quality materials and landscape treatments are to be used, there is quite a large extent of paving in the internal courtyard area, which includes the hotel forecourt and surface parking, as well as several loading areas and pathways. The configuration of these internal spaces requires some additional thinking to ensure that the extent of hard surface is minimized, the relationship between new buildings and the landscape is softened and that communal gathering spaces are created.

The proposed approach to pedestrian circulation appears to be oriented toward the internal loop road rather than to the main pedestrian paths associated with the Alewife Reservation and connecting to the Alewife T. Pedestrian access from the reservation should be prioritized and the most desirable pedestrian routes factored into the overall site design and layout. In addition, while it is understood that pedestrian access to Route 2 from the site is limited over land in Arlington, the potential to provide a convenient pathway to the existing bus stop and pedestrian overpass is highly desirable and should be further considered.

The proposed retention of significant trees is a positive move and the establishment of shade trees along key pedestrian routes is also encouraged. Landscaping along Route 2 requires further detail to ensure that trees and taller plantings are used to break up the massing of the hotel and Garage B, rather than just shrubs and planting beds. This would also provide shade for pedestrians using the Route 2 sidewalk. For the remaining areas of the site, more detail is required to assess the proposed landscape architectural design.

Building uses

The Master Plan Design Guidelines encourage the first floors of buildings to incorporate active uses such as dining, fitness centers and other amenity spaces, as well as public/community rooms. The intent here is to recognize that the site is isolated and that there is a need to establish a sense of community and a welcoming environment for people to work and visit. While the hotel will provide 24-hour activity, which is advantageous in this location, the uses associated with the first floors of Building 400 and

Building 500 are undefined. Every effort should be given to enlivening the ground plane through the programming of amenities such as cafeterias, dining and more active uses in the first floors of these buildings. An active first floor would also assist with natural surveillance of the Acorn Park Drive sidewalk and the reservation. Given the growth in housing in the area, it may also be beneficial to investigate opportunities for convenience retail and/or café uses to service the growing worker and resident populations.

Building heights, setbacks, scale and massing

Generally, Buildings 400 and 500 are a complement to the elegant and simple architectural treatment already established in Discovery Park, and the notion of blending with the natural setting of the Alewife Reservation. Proposed building heights are in line with existing buildings, which is an appropriate response to the campus style development and the urban wilds setting. A minimum setback of 40-feet from the centerline of Acorn Park Drive is also provided in accordance with the Master Plan Design Guidelines.

At the pedestrian level, the scale of the buildings along Acorn Park Drive does, however, appear quite imposing. As suggested in the Master Plan Design Guidelines, there is a need to break down these forms to soften their monolithic presence and achieve a finer grain and human scale, particularly at the lower two floors of buildings. This is particularly important for Building 500, which announces pedestrian arrival into Discovery Park from the Alewife Reservation pathway.

In terms of proposed massing, Building 400 and 500 have the appearance of interconnecting volumes, which assists to break up the wall planes. This could perhaps be further strengthened to ensure that the volumes are read as distinct elements. Likewise, consideration should be given to setting back a portion of either Building 400 or 500 to provide a terrace adjacent to the reservation. Such a space could be used for informal seating and outdoor dining by tenants, which is encouraged in the Master Plan Design Guidelines.

While it is understood that the scale of the hotel has been reduced and opportunities for creative massing are limited because of the need to develop standardized rooms, the initial impression of the Hotel is that it has not met the standard of other buildings within the campus. Although Route 2 is currently not a pedestrian friendly environment, there is still a need to enhance this interface and make it more inviting and attractive. The flat planar nature of the proposed building results in the appearance of one continuous mass when viewed from Route 2 and even internally within the site. The massing approach requires further attention and consideration of ways to visibly articulate the unbroken wall planes. The relatively boxy and horizontal character of the hotel would be improved with some breaks in the wall plane, different materials or with the expression of vertical bays and more of a 3-dimensional quality to the façade.

Street wall and edge conditions

Like many of the buildings on campus, proposed Buildings 400 and 500 do exhibit a tripartite architectural configuration. However, some sections of the elevations are somewhat flat and it is

difficult to read the materials or degree of reveal on the submitted plans. North and west elevations have not been included in the application documents.

While transparent glazing is proposed on the south sides of Buildings 400 and 500 facing the Alewife Reservation, greater consideration of these elevations is needed. The Master Plan Design Guidelines emphasize providing direct access and a more inviting appearance along the park interface, which has not been fully realized by existing development or in proposed Buildings 400 and 500. Further attention to these elements is needed and could include more terracing, access points and areas for communal seating, as well as architectural treatments such as different materials and wrapping entry elements like canopies, or a trellis, around to the south elevation. This would also articulate the base in a more enriching manner, as well as soften the building edges so as to encourage a pleasant environment for people to walk.

The south elevations also appear to lack a strong connection to Alewife Reservation and the urban wilds. The planted berms act as physical, and once fully planted, potentially visual barriers, when they could be softened to provide more interesting and accessible transition zones between building and landscape. This would also help to relieve the impression that the buildings are sitting above and are out of reach to pedestrians on Acorn Park Drive.

Building 500

Building 500 has responded positively to its pedestrian gateway location with an inflection of the upper volume towards the Alewife Reservation pathway. However, the approach from the park reservation does not seem very inviting in the renderings. Consideration should be given to providing more of an announcement of arrival and a human scale to assist with orienting pedestrians and cyclists. The overhanging corner volume appears to be highlighting an entry point, but this is located on the internal loop drive.

Hotel and Garage

Both the hotel and Garage B are located in the Parkway Overlay District, which requires a more sensitive interface treatment and the creation of a park like setting. While Route 2 may be seen as a less than desirable interface, there is still a need to preserve and enhance the visual quality of this setting. The overall design treatment of the hotel is too simple and appears to contrast with the elegance and architectural detail provided to other buildings.

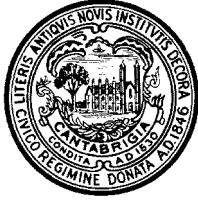
The east elevation presents as a blank wall for more than 50 feet at the eastern wing of the building. This is noteworthy as it is the main vehicular entrance into the site, as well as an entry point for pedestrians. Some further thought as to how this facade could be enlivened is warranted. In addition, if the principal entry to the hotel is to be on the south side of the building, perhaps this aspect of the design should be enhanced and celebrated with more of a direct pedestrian link to the Alewife Reservation. Balconies could also be used to provide more interest and animation across the elevations.

Garage B has generally been given the same architectural treatment as the existing garage. The view from Route 2 will be of key concern and no elevation drawing is included in the application documents.

Like Garage A, there is a need to consider different screening approaches at key viewpoints, including from Route 2 and within the internal courtyard network.

Other design standards

Because the original special permit was granted in 2004, the project was not subject to some design standards that are now codified into zoning requirements, specifically the City's updated bicycle parking requirements and green building standards that require buildings to be designed to meet LEED requirements at the Silver Level (although LEED registration is not required). These standards could be incorporated into conditions of the major and minor amendments, and could be certified prior to issuing building permits.



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MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Board
From: Susan Clippinger
Date: August 28 2014
Re: Discovery Park

Brief History of Parking and where things stand now.

In 1999 ADL sold their Acorn Park properties. They leased 625 parking spaces from MDC/ DCR on the north and west side of Acorn Park Drive. They had 427 spaces on their property for a total of 1052 spaces.

There was a strong desire among residents and environmentalists and the City to see the leased parking on MDC property returned to open space as part of the Alewife Reservation and in keeping with the MDC Master Plan.

The new owner wanted to maintain the total 1052 parking supply in the area without the relocation of spaces triggering PTDM. This was accomplished by the creation of Special District 4 in the Zoning Ordinance.

Planning board permit #198 issued in 2004 allowed up to 819,916 sf of office space originally envisioned in 6 buildings and up to 1,052 parking spaces. A key goal of the project as reflected in the permit language was the discontinuance of the parking on MDC/DCR land and the conversion of that space into permeable open space in keeping with the Alewife Reservation master plan. This was accomplished early in the project. The discontinued spaces were allowed to be relocated to the north and west of Acorn Park Drive. MDC elected to keep 25 spaces on their land to support parking for the visitors to the reservation.

Current status:

Building 100, Smithsonian and Building 200/300, Forrester, have been built as well as garage A.
363,248 sf of office space.

657 space garage.

7 surface parking spaces at building 100 [1 car share, 2 carpool, 4 disability spaces]

A surface lot at the future Garage B site which is not striped.

25 spaces - MDC/DCR lot

The special permit and its amendments have two key triggers for parking.

1. Total parking on site cannot exceed 706 spaces plus the DCR lot at the completion of buildings 100, 200, and 300.

Those buildings have been completed and parking on site is 664 spaces, plus the rarely used surface lot which is allowed for up to 42 cars. Peak utilization in the garage is currently reported at 62%. The proponent is in compliance with this requirement.

2. Before design approval of Phase III buildings (total sf over 526,000), the Special Permit in the decision item 7 and the attached memo from TP&T says:

“in advance of returning to the Planning Board for design approval of any new Phase III building, the proponent should prepare a report for city staff based on the trip monitoring program(item 5.a) that demonstrates whether TDM programs have reduced the maximum daily parking demand enough to have all parking accommodated on-site. If these goals are not being meant, the proponent must submit a detailed plan to the Board for their approval, scoped and reviewed by City staff, for how Phase III employee trips can be accommodated.

This language was included in the permit because the project’s traffic study analyzed the SOV mode share the project would need to bring the parking demand down to the available and permitted parking supply. Currently the SOV mode share is 54%, below the 57% requirement for construction up to 526,000 sf. At full build out the SOV rate will have to be 45% for the available parking to be sufficient to accommodate all parking on site.

This condition is triggered when proposed new building(s) exceed 163,000 sf of additional space. An 82,000 sf Hotel does NOT trigger this requirement. The design approval of Buildings 400 and 500 does.

Proposed Discovery Park Planning Board applications:

1. Change of use to include Hotel.

The application is for an 82,000 sf Hotel at the site of building 600 replacing the previous envisioned 120,000 sf office building.

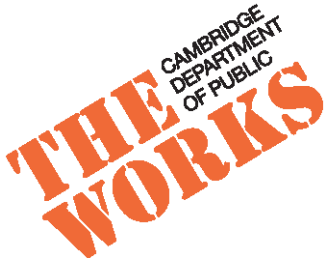
- Minimum parking for this use at 82,000 sf per zoning is 85 spaces.
- Parking is proposed to be accommodated by use of 60 spaces in Garage A and 25 spaces in the surface lots adjacent to the Hotel.
- The new use needs 25 less parking spaces than was anticipated for the office building. [Assuming all parking was equally shared by all buildings.]
- The proponent is requesting no reduction in the parking supply.

2. Design review of buildings 400, 500 and Garage B.

- Required report before design approval of more than 526,000 sf has not been submitted. Building 400 and 500 trigger this requirement.
- Target SOV mode share of 45% SOV has not yet been achieved.
- Garage B can be up to 362 spaces if the surface parking for the Hotel is relocated into the Garage B.

Other Issues of concern related to the two applications:

- The TDM strategies of the project would be enhanced by the installation of a Hubway station near the heart of the campus.
- Access for pedestrians to/from the MBTA bus stop on Route 2 at the pedestrian overpass should be provided. Currently there is a gate in the Discovery Park fence that allows access to the stop and a concrete bus shelter.
- VOXon2 pedestrians can access the Discovery Park sidewalks to get to the pathway to the Alewife T station. Similar access should be provided for bicycles that get them directly to the street rather than having to share the sidewalks with pedestrians.
- The urban design opportunities in front of the Hotel could be much improved if the 10 space surface parking lot was relocated to the area with the 15 spaces adjacent to the Hotel or into Garage A. The turnaround is needed, but the 10 spaces do not need to be placed in front of the Hotel where there are opportunities to enhance urban design treatments.



City of Cambridge
Department of Public Works

Owen O'Riordan, Commissioner

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August 28, 2014

TO: Planning Board

FROM: Katherine F. Watkins, PE
City Engineer

RE: PB 198 – Discovery Park Amendments

The Department of Public Works received the Planning Board Major and Minor Amendments for Discovery Park on August 20, 2014 and the Conservation Commission Notice of Intent (NOI) application for an Amendment of Order of Conditions on August 21, 2014.

DPW has not had sufficient time to review the information and is not currently in a position to submit a report with recommendations to the Planning Board, per Section 20.74.1. While I do not anticipate significant issues with the proposed amendments, DPW and the Conservation Commission need more time to properly review the plans and submit a report to the Planning Board.

The review will focus on:

- Impacts of any changes in building footprints in the floodplain.
- Impacts / modifications in the flood plain; including the amount and accessibility of the compensatory storage.
- Confirmation that the modifications to the buildings do not impact the previously completed and FEMA approved modeling.

I anticipate issuing a report to the Planning Board by mid-September.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katherine F. Watkins".

Katherine F. Watkins, P.E.
City Engineer