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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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IRAM FAROOQ  
Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

To: Planning Board  
From: CDD Staff  
Date: May 8, 2018  
Re: **PB #26, 125 Cambridgepark Dr. Amendment 5**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed changes to the project at 125 Cambridgepark Drive, the amendments being requested for the Special Permit PB-26, and related comments.

### **Summary of Proposed Amendment**

Special permit PB-26, granted in 1982, authorized the construction of an office building at 125 Cambridgepark Drive (known as 115 Rindge Avenue Extension at the time) served by surface parking on that lot and another lot across Cambridgepark Drive (formerly, Rindge Avenue Extension). The special permit was subsequently amended four times to modify the parking provisions for the site as the surface parking was redeveloped into office and residential buildings with structured parking facilities (150 Cambridgepark Drive, 160 Cambridgepark Drive, 130 Cambridgepark Drive, and 88 Cambridgepark Drive).

The current proposal is to allow portions of the first floor of 125 Cambridgepark Drive to be used as a café and a full-service restaurant serving alcoholic beverages.

### **Requested Amendment**

The site is located in the Office-2A (O-2A) zoning district as well as in an Alewife Overlay District (AOD-6) and originally received a Flood Plain Special Permit. The proposed retail uses are not allowed as-of-right in the base district, but the AOD provisions allow the Planning Board to approve retail establishments by special permit (Section 20.94.1), subject to certain limitations. While this is different from a Flood Plain Special Permit, it is being proposed as an amendment because it represents a change from the development authorized in the original special permit. The applicable Special Permit findings are summarized on the following page.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Modifications to Permitted Uses in Alewife Overlay Districts in base Office district (Section 20.94.1)	<p>For all uses listed in Section 4.35:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual establishment is not exceeding 10,000 sq. ft. in area.</li> <li>• Retail use is located on the first floor or basement of the building.</li> <li>• Total Gross Floor Area of retail uses does not exceed 10% of the total Gross Floor Area of the building.</li> </ul> <p>The Planning Board may waive above limitations if the project promotes the general interests of the larger commercial and residential neighborhood noted in Section 20.92.</p>
Construction in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 20.73)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No encroachment of the floodway or displacement of water retention capacity is allowed unless fully offset.</li> <li>• Flood water systems shall not cause nuisance, hazard or detriment to site or abutters.</li> <li>• Development is consistent with zoning, area plans and guidelines, and applicable laws including Wetlands Protection Act.</li> <li>• Review by the City Engineer and Conservation Commission are required.</li> </ul>
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43 (see appendix).

**Area Planning and Zoning**

The base zoning for the site is Office-2A (O-2A), which allows professional office and residential uses by right. The base zoning is modified by the Alewife Overlay District (AOD) zoning, which augments the base district zoning regulations in a way that allows greater density and more flexible dimensional requirements by special permit while imposing additional requirements and standards to respond to the unique issues identified in the Alewife area. It also allows ground-floor retail uses by special permit, with limitations. This zoning regime of a more restrictive by-right zoning, which can be more permissive by special permit, was one of the results of the Concord-Alewife Rezoning that was recommended in the 2006 *Concord-Alewife Planning Study*. As with much of the Alewife area, the site is located within the Flood Plain Overlay District, which encompasses areas designated as Flood Hazard Zones A and AE on

the Middlesex County Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The site lies within the interior of the “Triangle” (classified on the Zoning Map as the “AOD-6” subdistrict), which includes the area north of the Fitchburg rail line and south of the Alewife Brook Reservation, which has mostly transitioned from industrial use to a mix of office, commercial research labs, and housing. This area has good access to public transit through the Red Line and regional bus service. The area is currently experiencing a considerable amount of multi-family housing production, while there have also been recent renovation and improvement projects to the larger-scale office and R&D buildings that were developed in the 1980s and 1990s.

Some of the overall *Concord-Alewife Planning Study* goals related to development are to promote a mix of housing and commercial uses throughout the area, to manage traffic demand by supporting walking, bicycling and public transportation as alternative modes of transportation, and to promote stormwater management through increased landscape and permeable area, as well as engineered interventions. In the Triangle in particular, the planning goals strongly encourage transit-oriented development. The Triangle goals also support creation of public access to and between the natural reservation areas in the neighborhood and improved bicycle and pedestrian connections to the local and regional trail network.

This area is also included in the *Envision Alewife* planning study. While that study is still underway and the recommendations are not yet finalized, an emerging theme of that process has been to encourage new pedestrian-oriented amenities that will serve residents of the area.

### **Comments on Proposal**

The proposed retail uses are consistent with the planning goals for the district, support the existing residential and office uses in the area, and activate the street façade on Cambridgepark Drive. Both establishments are proposed to be on the first floor of the building and each less than 10,000 square feet in area. The application materials indicate that the total gross floor area for retail uses is less than 10% of the total gross floor area of the building. The applicant confirmed the total retail use area is 12,950 square feet, which is less than 10% of the total building area (184,000 square feet). Clarification is required whether the parking and loading requirements for the proposed uses will be accommodated within the existing parking and loading facilities. Additional information is needed regarding the construction of the proposed deck along Cambridgepark Drive and its impact on the flood plain.

The proposed café and restaurant would be welcome additions to the Alewife Triangle, given the current lack of such walkable retail establishments in the area and the demonstrated community desire to provide more neighborhood amenities for the district’s growing population. Not only will they offer eating and dining options convenient to office workers and residents, the restaurant and its outside terrace will enliven Cambridgepark Drive. These establishments will also complement the ground-floor retail uses permitted by the Planning Board in the 35 Cambridgepark Drive project, currently under construction. In general, the proposed use will be an improvement.

### **Continuing Review**

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the hearing to a future date, or as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Clarify parking and loading arrangements for the retail uses.
- Impact of deck construction on the flood plain.
- Materials of the deck and its railing.
- The relationship of the deck to the sidewalk on Cambridgepark Drive, whether any proposed new paths, paving, trees and other plantings, lighting, and pedestrian access/egress routes are proposed.
- Improvements to existing features, such as the electrical equipment located on the sidewalk near the southwest corner of the building, should be considered where practical.
- Details of the curtainwall and operation of overhead doors.
- Changes to the building's west elevation, if any.
- Outdoor lighting, if any.
- Location of kitchen exhaust vents.