



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 1, 2022

Re: Special Permit **PB-26 (125 Cambridgepark Dr)**, **PB-47 (150 Cambridgepark Dr)**, & **PB-82 (100 Cambridgepark Dr)**

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Overview

Submission Type: Special Permit Application

Applicant: PPF OFF 150 Cambridge Park Dr, LLC

Zoning District(s): Office 2A (O-2A), Alewife Overlay District 6 (AOD-6), Flood Plain Overlay District

Proposal Summary: Amend previously granted Flood Plain Special Permits to allow landscaping improvements including plantings, stonework, natural sculptural elements, and a pavilion.

Special Permits Requested: Flood Plain Special Permit (Section 20.73)

Other City Permits Needed: Order of Conditions granted by Conservation Commission in 2020

Planning Board Action: Grant or deny requested special permits.

Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Comments & Urban Design Comments

Other Staff Reports: Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate documents.

Requested Special Permits	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Construction in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 20.73)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No encroachment of the floodway or displacement of water retention capacity is allowed unless fully offset. • Flood water systems shall not cause nuisance, hazard or detriment to site or abutters. • Development is consistent with zoning, area plans and guidelines, and applicable laws including Wetlands Protection Act. • Review by the City Engineer and Conservation Commission are required.
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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.

Area Planning and Zoning

The site is located in the base Office-2A (O-2A) zoning district, and is augmented by Alewife Overlay District (AOD-6). A portion of 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). Projects within this district require a Planning Board special permit following technical review by the City Engineer and the Cambridge Conservation Commission to ensure that the development will not diminish the site's ability to accommodate the retention and flow of flood water. Approval is also conditioned on compliance with the Wetlands Protection Act, which could include an Order of Conditions imposed by the Conservation Commission and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. These requirements dovetail with city standards for stormwater management, which are included as requirements in the AOD zoning. The criteria for granting the special permit are primarily technical, but also align with many of the environmental goals in the Concord-Alewife plan.

Project History

100, 125, and 150 Cambridgepark Drive were first developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and required various special permits from the Planning Board:

- PB-26 (125 Cambridgepark Drive) – special permit to construct an office building and associated surface parking.
- PB-47 (150 Cambridgepark Drive) – special permit to construct an office building and expand surface parking within Flood Plain Overlay District.
- PB-82 (100 Cambridgepark Drive) – special permit to construct an office building and surface parking in the Flood Plain Overlay District.

There are few conditions in these original special permits, aside from compliance with the technical flood plain requirements. PB-47 includes the condition that “Significant alterations in the site plan, landscaping features, parking lot layout and grading, and proposed storm drainage systems shall require approval from the Planning Board.” PB-47 also makes the following statement in the Planning Board’s findings:

The Planning Board continues to be concerned that the open space and amenity objectives of the Alewife Plan have not been advanced with the first two phases of development at Cambridge Park. The Board recognizes that the early development of this part of Alewife must deal with disruptions due to the construction of the MBTA Red Line and uncertainties regarding use of the Red Line extension by employees in the near future. With those considerations in mind, the Board has been proposed to accept large expanses of parking at grade for the initial two buildings. However, with the initiation of active planning for future buildings, the Board will insist that flood storage advance the

overall open space and amenity objectives in the Alewife Plan. The Board is prepared to insist that a significant portion of the required storage capacity be accommodated within grassed areas, a resurrected Alewife Brook, new water bodies or other features even if such a requirement were met only through the reduction of desired surface parking spaces.

Many of these special permits have been amended over the past decade to modify the parking provisions for the site and to replace surface parking with additional residential development, structured parking facilities, and landscaping (150 Cambridgepark Drive, 160 Cambridgepark Drive, 130 Cambridgepark Drive, and 88 Cambridgepark Drive). In 2018, the Planning Board granted special permits to allow retail/restaurant uses at 125 Cambridgepark Drive. The Planning Board most recently reviewed special permit PB-47 on October 5, 2021 and approved alterations to the site plan, which included an elevator addition to the building at 150 Cambridgepark Drive, with continuing design review by CDD staff. These changes have largely supported the evolution of Cambridgepark Drive to a more mixed-use, transit-oriented area with improved landscaping, though it still has an ample parking supply in structured facilities.

Current Proposal

The applicant is proposing alterations to landscaping that includes plantings, stonework, natural sculptural elements, and a pavilion at 100, 125, and 150 CambridgePark Drive.

Flood Plain Requirements

Per Section 20.70 of the Zoning Ordinance, no building activity or earthwork may occur within the Flood Plain Overlay District without first obtaining a Special Permit from the Planning Board, with some exceptions for pre-existing single, two- and three-family dwellings and demolition of an existing structure.

The Applicant has provided floodplain certification and discussed the project with the City Engineer, who has provided a letter commenting on the project. The Department of Public Works has approved the plans as consistent with the objectives and requirements of the Flood Plain Overlay District as outlined in Section 20.70 of the Zoning Ordinance and issued a Stormwater Control Permit on 12/2/2019. Conservation Commission issued an Order of Conditions on 1/27/2020 for the project. No buildings are proposed in the floodplain and the project is not expected to result in any negative impact on flood storage. The applicant proposes adding an additional 1,702 cubic feet of flood storage.

Open Space

The applicant should submit a revised dimensional form to ensure that the new plan is not out of conformance with the Alewife Overlay District (AOD) requirement that 15% of the lot area is

open space and that 25% of the lot area is permeable. The Alewife Overlay Districts were adopted after these sites were developed, but any alterations should either remain in conformance with the AOD standards or not worsen any pre-existing nonconforming conditions. Although the proposed impervious walkways and other landscape features are unlikely to cause an issue with zoning nonconformance, additional documentation is needed to verify that is the case.

Urban Design Comments

The application materials provide some details and an overall landscape concept plan; however, the plans do not include specific site details, such as species selection and materials. The design includes a variety of seating and gathering areas that are connected by inclined walkways that guide people through the site and around the stormwater filtration areas. While a more traditional layout of linear pedestrian connections and trees may have been a typical response in an urban environment, the naturalistic design theme seems appropriate within the context of the nearby Alewife Brook Reservation. It also creates varied environments and experiences for users, and helps soften the harsh lines of the office buildings. It will be important to ensure that the walkways are universally accessible and that the public feels welcome accessing the various seating areas and site features.

No details of the pavilion have been provided in the application materials; however, it will be well set back from the sidewalk, tucked against the transformer enclosure. Like the other seating areas and nooks, the pavilion will enhance the amenity of the open space network for workers.

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:

- Impact of the pavilion and work pods on open space and flood water retention.
- Whether any proposed new paths or paving can be made impervious.
- Landscape design details, including species selection, locations of trees and other plantings, and details of hardscape, benches, and other features, etc.
- Confirmation that the walkways are universally accessible.
- Verification of compliance with the applicable standards of the underlying zoning district and Alewife Overlay District 6 (AOD-6) by providing a revised dimensional form and any necessary supporting plans.