



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Community Development Department

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Community Development

DESIGN REVIEW REPORT TO THE PLANNING BOARD

Date of Report: *August 26, 2013*
Project: *SP# 283* Address: *300 Mass Ave*
Proponent: *Forest City*
Application: *Project Review: THIRD REVIEW*

There have been a series of reviews of this project over the last couple of years. Most recently, the building now proposed for 300 Mass Ave had been reviewed by staff (see attached memo) in preparation for the August 6 Board meeting. At that meeting, the Board expressed several additional concerns--this memo explains subsequent staff reviews leading up to the September 3 Board meeting.

In the big picture, the Board said the August 6 design was not enough a "Mass Ave/Central Square/ Lafayette Square" building, it was too much a "University Park" building, and that context had not been adequately presented. While staff had been very positive in its review of that submission and the Board was overall supportive, we now believe that the Board's thoughtful comments have led to an even stronger proposal. The proponent has made numerous new perspectives that show the newly revised design relating much better to its multifaceted context.

In retrospect, it seems that the extensive use of glass on the building produced the overly corporate image. The revised design subtracts glass and adds terra cotta in an effectively nuanced way. Sections of the building closest to Mass Ave and to Green Street employ the "punched window" approach, where masonry and glass are roughly in equal proportion. This helps strengthen the relation of the building to the public way. The layer of the façade set back from Mass Ave uses a "rib" of terra cotta along with glass. This distinguishes the setback portion of the building from the streetwall portion. Along Blanche Street, the use of "ribs" softens the glassiness of the curve, while continuing the dynamic treatment of the building alongside the shared-street design (aka "woonerf") proposed for Blanche.

Another Board concern was that the design strategy for the mechanical equipment needed more work, particularly on the Mass Ave elevation where the glassy appearance was too prominent, partly because the occupied space and the mechanical space were treated too much the same. By using the "ribbed" terra cotta on the setback part of the building occupied by people, the highest part of the building used for mechanical equipment does not now seem to be so extensive—there is a better balance between those parts.

In summary, staff feels that while the project design has benefitted from the extensive reviews, it retains the design integrity that is so important to creating successful architecture.

ATTACHMENT: SECOND REVIEW
DESIGN REVIEW REPORT TO THE PLANNING BOARD

Date of Report: *July 1, 2013*
Project: *SP# 283* Address: *300 Mass Ave*
Proponent: *Forest City*
Application: *Project Review*

The building proposed by Forest City for Millennium at 300 Mass Ave has been reviewed several times by staff and the Board over the last two years as the design was modified to reflect the zoning proposal changes.

As shown in the Mass Ave perspectives, the design directly reflects the features of the zoning that modulate the massing, with the lower masonry element relating well to the existing residential neighbor, the higher elements set back, and the rooftop mechanicals carefully integrated into the architecture.

Throughout, there are very careful uses of materials, both glassy elements and more solid masonry elements, that make the building interesting, but not in an arbitrary way. The result is a remarkably strong and lively architectural solution that creates the significant amount of space needed for its biotech function while also being a good neighbor. This positive outcome is a huge improvement from the initial diagrammatic sketches that accompanied the original zoning proposal.

The Blanche Street view and the Green Street perspective illustrate the transformation of Blanche from an alley into a pleasant walking street leading to a well-landscaped corner, and also show that the character of the building changes on every side to reflect its context.

The substantial amount of ground floor retail relates well to Mass Ave with a sidewalk wide enough for outdoor seating, and turns the corner onto Blanche, helping bring a new focus on the supermarket, which has previously been a little hard to find. The building has a subtle curve at that corner, which creates space for additional outdoor seating where a café is expected.

This very positive review reflects the extensive work that has been put into the proposal over a long period of time--not every building gets this much scrutiny before coming to the Board for a special permit. Staff recommends approval of this project, with the usual proviso that the proponent continue to review design refinements with staff, and that anything significant will be brought back to the Board. For such a prominent project, a materials mock-up on the site will be important, as will the review of a more specific landscaping plan.