



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: Jeff Roberts, Senior Manager for Zoning and Development
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Date: February 14, 2018

Re: **PB #294, 88 Ames Street Special Permit Amendment 1**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed changes to the project at 88 Ames Street, the amendments being requested for the Special Permit PB-294, and related comments.

Summary of Proposed Amendment

In March 2015, the Board approved this project at 88 Ames Street to construct a building with 280 dwelling units and 20,000 square feet for retail use. The project is currently in construction phase. The applicant is seeking a modification to include a bank, trust company, or other financial institution use within the 20,000 square feet authorized for retail use in the original special permit. The proposal is to locate such use on the second floor, with a small entrance and ATM vestibule on the ground floor. The remainder of the ground floor would be used for retail and a residential lobby, as approved in the original plans. The total size of the proposed bank use is not specified.

Requested Amendment

The project is located in the Mixed Use Development: Cambridge Center (MXD) district, and received a Project Review Special Permit per the district requirements. As per Section 14.21.2(2), the proposed bank use is allowed in the MXD District; however, banks are classified as office, not retail. The amendment is required because only residential and retail uses were authorized in the special permit. The applicable Project Review Special Permit findings are summarized on the following page.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area, upon review of the traffic impact indicators analyzed in the Transportation Impact Study and mitigation efforts proposed. • The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30.
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.

Comments on Proposal

The proposal remains in conformance with the MXD District requirements.

The Applicant has discussed the proposal with CDD staff, including staff within the Economic Development Division. While the original plans had envisioned the second-floor space being occupied by a large retail tenant, such as a pharmacy or convenience store, it appears that such a tenant could not be secured. The Applicant also explained that the proposed bank space would allow the relocation of an existing Bank of America currently nearby in Kendall Square. Therefore, the proposal would not add to the total number of banks within the square, although the new space would allow for an ancillary financial services office to be added.

As noted in other recent cases before the Board, the presence of banks within retail areas has been a subject of much discussion. The main concern has been the tendency for bank branches to occupy large storefront areas while generating relatively little foot traffic, thereby impacting the active retail character of an area. Zoning provisions limiting bank frontage have been adopted in areas including North Massachusetts Avenue, Central Square, and Kendall Square, and are currently under consideration in Harvard Square.

A typical standard, incorporated in the Kendall Square Design Guidelines and in the zoning for other areas of the city, has been to limit the linear ground-floor frontage of bank uses to 25 feet, allowing the Planning Board to approve increases to frontage by special permit if there are mitigating factors. In this case, the proposed bank use is limited to 21 feet of frontage on Ames Street, with ATMs located in the ground floor and all other business functions accommodated on the upper floor. This approach helps to mitigate the impact of the use on the ground-level retail fabric, while providing direct access to bank customers. However, the Kendall Square Design Guidelines also recommend retail on 75% of frontage on major streets (such as Ames Street) to be “retail uses such as cafes, restaurants and shops,” and the current proposal would leave approximately 60% of frontage for retail uses, with the remaining 40% for the proposed bank entrance and the residential lobby.

Rendered illustrations of the proposed bank entrance in relation to other ground-floor uses and the second floor have been provided. By utilizing the approved signage band and awning design, the proposal maintains the pattern of individual storefronts that was proposed at the time of the Special Permit. It is unclear what the small, ground floor retail space (shown in plan) to the north of the bank entrance is to be used for. Because this project is in the MXD District, it is not subject to the normal signage requirements of Article 7.000. Instead, signage is subject to review by the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA).

The proposed change of use is not expected to substantively change the transportation impacts of the project. In the MXD District, neither retail nor office uses are required to provide accessory parking. No parking is proposed to be added to the adjacent garage, but existing parking may be provided for the proposed bank, subject to the maximum applicable parking ratio for office uses. It may be helpful to know if the Applicant intends to provide dedicated accessory parking spaces for the bank use.

The special permit also includes the following transportation demand management requirements for retail uses. To maintain consistency with the original special permit, the conditions should specify if these conditions should be applied to bank uses as well.

For employees:

- A. Provide 50% subsidy of MBT A monthly passes to full-time employees.
- B. Provide Hubway membership (minimum Gold Level) for employees that become Hubway members.
- C. Provide corporate membership paid by the employer at a local carshare company to allow employees to use a carshare vehicle for work-related trips during the day instead of needing to drive private vehicles to work.
- D. Provide membership in the Charles River TMA, to benefit from its emergency ride home and ridematching programs.

For customers:

- A. Mount a real-time transportation information screen in a permanent and central location to show arrival times and availability for nearby buses, trains, shuttles, Hubway bikes, and carshare vehicles, etc.
- B. Not offer free or discounted parking to retail customers or charge customers below market-rate fees (no validation offsets).
- C. Provide home delivery service for non-automobile patrons, if type of retail involves purchasing goods (may not be applicable in the case of banks).

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 the use of the small retail space to the north of the bank entrance.
- Confirm the total area occupied by the bank use, and particularly on the ground floor.