



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

MELISSA PETERS

Chief of Planning Strategy
(Acting Assistant City
Manager for Community
Development)

SANDRA CLARKE

Chief of Admin/Operations

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: March 20, 2025

Re: **PB-315 Amendment (Minor), MXD Infill Development Concept Plan (IDCP)**

Summary

Boston Properties Limited Partnership (the Applicant, or “BXP”), has proposed an amendment to the Infill Development Concept Plan (IDCP) for the Mixed-Use Development: Kendall Center (MXD) zoning district, first approved in early 2017. The Board approved two major amendments of the IDCP, in 2019 and 2022, and a third major amendment is under review at this time.

This request is for a determination of a minor amendment for the following modifications:

- Allow three types of Office and Biotechnology Manufacturing uses to be located in approximately 12,132 square feet of the second floor of 325 Main Street building, where retail uses were previously approved.
- Reduce the requirement for active uses for this building façade from 75% to 70% to create an entry vestibule for this additional use.
- Approve changes to the qualifying criteria for Innovation Space to be leased for periods of approximately one month to up to ten years and allow a single entity to occupy up to 15,000 square feet at this location.

Criteria for Granting Amendments

Per the general provisions in Sections 14.32.2.5 and 12.37 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board determines whether changes to the Final Development Plan may be approved as minor or major amendments. The following guidance is provided in zoning:

(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.

(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.

Planning Board Action

The Board can take one of the following actions:

If the Board determines that the changes meet the criteria for a minor amendment, then the Board may issue a written determination making that finding on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members.

Alternatively, if the Board does not find that the changes meet the criteria for a minor amendment, the Applicant would need to apply for a major amendment and the Board would consider the proposal and grant or deny the major amendment according to the criteria in the Zoning Ordinance.

Proposal Overview

As described in the request, the intent of the proposed minor amendment is to accommodate a tenant called the “Fab Foundation,” described as a Boston-based educational non-profit which operates centers in various global cities under the name “Fab Lab.” The request describes the activities proposed at this location as follows:

- maker spaces such as a wood shop, metal shop and textile machine room;
- spaces that would include tools for rapid-prototyping and short-run production of functional systems (3D printing);
- an event space for classes, talks, workshops, demonstrations and collaborations related to the goal of enhancing maker knowledge and skillsets;
- office spaces for the Fab Foundation’s headquarters;
- a storefront selling products designed by the global network and produced locally and maker equipment; and
- a café space.

Zoning Comments on Proposed Amendment

There are two relevant zoning issues to this request: The request to approve a change in use as a minor amendment to the approved plan (which includes a related request to reduce the required active use frontage along Main Street), and the request to expand the criteria to qualify as innovation space.

Change in Use

As described, the Fab Lab would be a unique and exciting addition to Kendall Square. Like many unique uses, it is difficult to determine what zoning category it falls into. Within Article 4.000, it might fall under the general category of educational uses and might contain elements of an “Art/Craft Studio” or “Craft Retail and Production Shop,” both categorized as retail or consumer services.

However, Article 14.000 establishes a list of allowed uses that is distinct from Article 4.000. The request specifically asks to approve uses under Sections 14.21.2(1), (3) and (4), which permit “Business or professional offices,” “Research and development office,” and “Research, experimental and testing laboratory.” Separately, Article 14.000 does permit “Manufacturing: fabrication, assembly, finishing work (including packaging and bottling, but only as an accessory use) without limit as to category or product” but only permits “Educational uses exempt by statute” and does not explicitly authorize arts or crafts-related uses. Moreover, the Planning Board has broad discretion within the IDCP framework to approve uses that are not otherwise explicitly allowed by zoning, as stated in Section 14.21.8.

In the approved plan for this site (contained in IDCP Major Amendment #1 and the design of 325 Main Street), the location of a second-story retail and active use space next to the new public stairway connecting the Kendall plaza and roof garden was seen as an important benefit to the project. The open second-story public terrace in the 325 Main Street design was characterized as a “porch” that would be activated by a restaurant or café use next to it.

Staff have discussed the proposal with representatives of the Fab Foundation and BXP to better understand the proposed use and activity. If market conditions make it unlikely that a retail tenant (or tenants) would occupy the entire second-story space, then a use like the Fab Lab could have a similar benefit by providing inviting, community-based activities that would generate foot traffic and help to activate the public space around it.

The potential concern is that if the activity were to change in the future, such as if a new tenant replaces the Fab Lab, then a future office or laboratory use in that space that does not contain similar community-facing activities could substantially change the activity in that location compared to what was envisioned in the approved plan.

Based on staff’s discussions with the Applicant, the Board might consider setting some parameters to ensure that a minor amendment approval would reinforce the active-use character of that portion of the building in ways that are consistent with the Fab Lab, thereby remaining consistent with the prior approval of the IDCP. Suggestions include:

- Ensuring that the use would contain fabrication and/or event spaces that are beneficial to the broader community, in accordance with the operating model described by the Fab Lab representatives.
- Ensuring that the office activities in the second-story space remain tenanted separately from the primary office tenants in the remainder of the building, to avoid the unintended outcome of the space being “absorbed” by the expansion of a larger office or laboratory tenant.
- Ensuring that the space directly adjacent to the public second-story terrace remains publicly accessible during the full hours of operation of the tenanted use, whether or not a future retail or café activity has further limited hours.
- Ideally, extending the publicly-accessible space for the entire length of the second-story eastern façade as originally proposed and including the interior stairwell and entry vestibule at the corner of the building, which was originally intended to allow interior public access to the restaurant space. This might require an alteration to the floor plan that is shown in the request and would need to be reviewed for feasibility.
- Ensuring that the design of the façade, including entrances and windows, is not changed without approval from the Planning Board and that visibility into the interior of the space is maintained.
- Making it clear that retail uses continue to be authorized to occupy that second-story space in the future, which is consistent with how the request is written.

Innovation Space

The concept of innovation space was part of the Kendall Square study process completed in 2013. The original intent was to reserve some space within the growing commercial areas of Kendall Square for small entrepreneurs and start-up businesses that were being increasingly priced out of opportunities to locate in the area.

The parameters for innovation space codified in the Zoning Ordinance anticipated small amounts of space within largely shared facilities offered on short-term leases, which would benefit very small, very early-stage companies or individuals who want to operate in a more communal working environment. Knowing that needs and expectations might change in the future, the Planning Board was given the ability to approve alternative models that are consistent with the overall intent. Recently, the Planning Board approved a modified approach to innovation space for the Volpe Exchange PUD that is based more around the needs of small-to-medium-sized life science companies, another segment of the market that has had difficulties finding affordable space in Kendall.

The current proposal suggests that the Fab Lab could meet the intent of innovation space, which would be another departure from the original concept because it would be serving an educational non-profit rather than small, early-stage businesses. However, the examples of innovation space provided in the Zoning Ordinance includes “facilities for teaching and for theoretical, basic and applied research, product development and testing and prototype fabrication or production of experimental products.” Moreover, the proposal aligns with the broader goals of providing spaces in Kendall Square for unique activities and experiences within the fields of science and technology that complement the activities of the larger commercial and institutional presences that predominate in the area.

The request would authorize by minor amendment an innovation space that could contain up to 15,000 square feet of space leased to a single tenant on up to a 10-year term. If the Board finds that the Fab Lab proposal is consistent with the intent of the innovation space requirement, this change would be reasonable to enable the Fab Lab to contribute to the required innovation space in the IDCP.

Again, the only concern would be to ensure that over time, the space would continue to meet the intent of innovation space if the type of activity or tenant changes in the future – for example, if the space were used as a more conventional commercial R&D space by a single company. A potential consideration would be to ensure that the space continue to contain facilities for teaching and shared resources for fabrication in order to remain consistent with the examples cited in zoning.

Urban Design Comments on Proposed Amendment

In addition to the suggested active-use parameters described above, the Planning Board could also consider requesting the following items for continuing review:

- Information regarding how the second story tenant space will be designed to connect with the public pedestrian connector located at the western end of the building. As originally approved, the second story tenant space was meant to have direct visual and physical connections with the north-south pedestrian connector.
- Proposed retail/coffee space signage as appropriate to ensure that such uses are accessible and welcoming to the public. This should include signage at both the ground floor and second floor levels.
- Information regarding how the terrace will be activated during the tenant’s hours of operation, including the use of outdoor furniture, signage, and possible interactive elements and programming, such as games and displays, that can help make the terrace feel public and inviting.