

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

# PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

2021 APR 14 PM 4:23  
OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

## NOTICE OF DECISION

Case Number:	370
Address:	51 Vassar Street (71 Vassar Street)
Zoning:	Residence C-3B District/ MIT Institutional Overlay District
Applicant:	Massachusetts Institute of Technology 77 Massachusetts Avenue, NW23-100, Cambridge, MA 02139
Owner:	Massachusetts Institute of Technology 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139
Application Date:	December 8, 2020
Date of Planning Board Public Hearing:	January 26, 2021
Date of Planning Board Decision:	January 26, 2021
Date of Filing Planning Board Decision:	April 14, 2021
Application:	Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20) and Special Permit for reduction of required off-street parking (Section 6.35.1) to construct a new building of 174,000 square feet of mixed institutional and academic uses including a publicly accessible café, 36 long-term and 71 short-term bicycle parking spaces as well as 2 loading bays.
Decision:	GRANTED, with Conditions

Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17 of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after filing of the above referenced decision with the City Clerk. Copies of the complete decision and final plans, if applicable, are on file with the Community Development Department and the City Clerk.

Authorized Representative of the Planning Board: Swaathi Joseph

For further information concerning this decision, please contact Swaathi Joseph at 617-349-4668, or [sjoseph@cambridgema.gov](mailto:sjoseph@cambridgema.gov).

## **DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED**

### Application Documents and Supporting Material

1. MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing Special Permit Application Volume I, dated 12/8/2020, containing, *inter alia*, the Special Permit Cover Sheet, Dimensional Form, Ownership Certificate, Community Outreach Summary, Project Narrative, Urban Design Objectives Narrative, Infrastructure and Utilities Narratives, Noise Mitigation Narrative; plan set titled 'MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing Volume II' prepared by VHB, dated 12/8/2020 (in association with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, REED Hilderbrand Landscape Architects, Nitsch Engineering, Inc., and ARUP); and MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing Volume III including Tree Study, Green Building Report Circulation and Access Study, and Community Outreach Summary.
2. Presentation slides shown to Planning Board on 1/26/2021.

### City of Cambridge Documents

3. Memorandum to the Planning Board from Department of Public Works (DPW) staff, dated 1/19/2021.
4. Memorandum to the Planning Board from Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP+T) staff, dated 1/19/2021.
5. Memorandum to the Planning Board from Community Development Department (CDD) staff, dated 1/20/2021.

### Other Documents

6. Memorandum to the Planning Board from Cambridge Pedestrian/Bicycle/Transit Committees, dated 1/21/2021.

## **APPLICATION SUMMARY**

The Applicant proposes to construct a new academic building to house the new Schwarzman College of Computing. The building will be approximately 174,000 square feet and will include a mix of office space, research laboratory space, academic space, function/event space, collaboration and meeting space, convening space, and café space. The proposed building will be eight stories tall, with a fully functional basement level. The site is located in the Residence C-3B base zoning district and the MIT Institutional Overlay District; it is located on the MIT campus and is surrounded by MIT buildings. The existing 22 surface parking spaces will be relocated to an off-site MIT parking facility that is part of the pooled parking facilities that exist to serve the entire MIT campus. The Applicant proposes to locate 36 long-term and 71 short-term bicycle parking spaces on the site as well as 2 loading bays.

## FINDINGS

After review of the Application Documents and other documents submitted to the Planning Board, testimony given at the public hearing, and review and consideration of the applicable requirements and criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance with regard to the relief being sought, the Planning Board makes the following Findings:

### 1. Project Review Special Permit (19.20)

*(19.25.1) Traffic Impact Findings. Where a Traffic Study is required as set forth in Section 19.24 (2) the Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area as analyzed in the Traffic Study. Substantial adverse impact on city traffic shall be measured by reference to the traffic impact indicators set forth in Section 19.25.11 below.*

While the Project requires a Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20), it is below the threshold that requires a Traffic Impact Study (TIS) for a College or University, which is the creation of 150 new parking spaces or the relocation of 250 existing parking spaces or any combination thereof. The Applicant will not create any new parking spaces and there are only 22 existing surface parking spaces that will be relocated. Though not required, the Applicant completed a Circulation and Access Study that evaluated the project's transportation impacts. The report concluded that the project will not have a significant adverse impact on traffic operations. The Board received comments in a memo from the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department dated January 19, 2021, which did not indicate any concerns about adverse impacts on city traffic but identified some specific aspects of the on-site circulation, access, and loading patterns that would be subject to further review by City departments.

*(19.25.2) Urban Design Findings. The Planning Board shall grant the special permit only if it finds that the project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the city as set forth in Section 19.30. In making that determination the Board may be guided by or make reference to urban design guidelines or planning reports that may have been developed for specific areas of the city and shall apply the standards herein contained in a reasonable manner to nonprofit religious and educational organizations in light of the special circumstances applicable to nonprofit religious and educational activities.*

The Board finds that the proposed project is consistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30, as described below.

*(19.31) New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.*

The project fits well within the existing pattern of development on the MIT campus, as well as within the context of nearby building heights and existing streetscape. The exterior space along the building front provides an open space amenity to the public

realm and will improve the character of Vassar Street by creating strong axial and visual connections between the proposed building lobby and atrium lobby of the existing EG&G building. The existing curb, crosswalk, and on-street parking will remain, which will maintain the physical and visual connections along Vassar Street.

*(19.32) Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings. . .*

The primary pedestrian and bicycle improvements are oriented toward the connection across the railroad tracks to Albany Street and the planned Grand Junction Path. Maintaining the existing pedestrian/bicycle crossing of Vassar Street does not conflict with the vehicular access into the site, improving access for cyclists and pedestrians. The ground floor façade is highly transparent and active student spaces are provided to activate the public realm and enhance pedestrian safety in the area. The ground floor frontage and entrance will also create a more welcoming and safe feeling along Vassar Street.

*(19.33) The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors. . .*

The project is designed to minimize negative impacts on its surroundings and enhance the overall appearance of the existing streetscapes and open space. One third of the mechanical equipment will be housed on level 8 of the building and the remainder will be on the roof. The roof level also includes the elevator bulkhead and override space that rises above the roof level. The Tree Study shows that there are no significant trees on the parcel. The proposed tree replanting scheme will enhance the public realm and street space providing shading and increasing the street's tree canopy.

*(19.34) Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system. . .*

The project will meet all applicable standards for provision of public infrastructure. The DPW has provided comment to the Planning Board in a memorandum dated January 19, 2021 indicating that the Applicant is proposing to elevate their structure entrances to above the 2070-100 year flood event thus creating passive protection of the spaces from the flooding occurrence. The DPW will continue to review the plans to ensure that, as the proposal is developed, other critical infrastructure is also protected. The DPW also indicated in its memo that the proposed stormwater management system will meet the Mass DEP and City of Cambridge design standards using a combination of a green roof along with infiltration and detention BMP's to meet the City's water quality and quantity requirements.

The project will be subject to Green Building requirements pursuant to Section 22.20 of the Zoning Ordinance and the Applicant is seeking LEED Gold Certification of the project. As described in the TP+T memorandum, the project will not have a significant

impact on traffic operations as the service and delivery trips generated by the project can be accommodated by Vassar Street.

*(19.35) New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically. . .*

The project is consistent with City policies to encourage institutional expansion within existing campus areas. The building form and massing are appropriate and contextual, while still projecting a strong building identity and an iconic image. The design expands the space for the public realm at the building front by eliminating corner columns and providing an uninterrupted flow at the building corners while still expressing a structural purpose.

*(19.36) Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged. . .*

No housing is proposed as part of the project.

*(19.37) Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city. . .*

Publicly beneficial open space will be provided at landscaped areas along Vassar Street and the Albany Street corridor connection on the west side of the site. The proposed pathway connecting to Albany Street will be a significant amenity for the proposed Grand Junction path and will strengthen the campus's connections to the neighborhood. The transparent ground floor frontage will encourage the public to access the community convening space, lobby, and café while also having a positive impact on the pedestrian realm.

## 2. Special Permit for reduction of required parking (Section 6.35.1)

*6.35.1 Reduction of Required Parking. Any minimum required amount of parking may be reduced only upon issuance of a special permit from the Board of Zoning Appeals. A special permit shall be granted only if the Board determines and cites evidence in its decision that the lesser amount of parking will not cause excessive congestion, endanger public safety, substantially reduce parking availability for other uses or otherwise adversely impact the neighborhood, or that such lesser amount of parking will provide positive environmental or other benefits to the users of the lot and the neighborhood, including specifically, among other benefits, assisting in the provision of affordable housing units. ...*

The Applicant seeks approval to reduce the required amount of accessory parking provided on-site from 98 to 0, while relocating 22 existing surface parking spaces off-site. Such relief is allowed by special permit pursuant to Section 6.35.1 and Section 10.45, which allows the Planning Board to grant special permits otherwise within the purview of the Board of Zoning Appeal for projects that are also subject to Planning Board special permit approval. Because educational uses in this district are permitted to meet their parking requirements in pooled

campus facilities, the request for relief simply means that MIT would not be required to add more parking spaces to their campus parking supply as a result of this project.

The rationale for the requested reduction is that MIT can meet the building's parking demands using its existing institutional pool of parking spaces. The site is also located near the MBTA Kendall/MIT Red Line Station and bus service as well as connections to existing and planned bike paths, which provide good access to alternative transportation modes. The current proposal to reduce parking for the proposed development is consistent with the city-wide goals to discourage driving and encourage other modes of transportation, and serves to reduce auto trip generation and thereby mitigate potential traffic impacts, as discussed earlier in these Findings.

In its memorandum to the Planning Board dated January 19, 2021, TP+T expressed general support for the Applicant's request to reduce automobile parking spaces because MIT can meet the building's parking demands using its institutional pool of parking spaces and does not need to provide parking on-site. In its memo, TP+T also expressed a desire to work with the Applicant, in coordination with CDD and DPW, to finalize the design for Vassar Street as part of the Project's Building Permit process, including the on-street parking spaces, curb regulations, any curb line changes, street trees, and any changes to the existing crosswalk. The Applicant has committed to working with City staff on these design changes, hence the Board finds that there will be minimum impact on availability of parking and no other adverse impacts on the neighborhood. The Board also finds that the reduction in parking will be reasonable in light of the considerations set forth below.

*... In making such a determination the Board shall also consider whether or not less off street parking is reasonable in light of the following:*

- a. The availability of surplus off street parking in the vicinity of the use being served and/or the proximity of an MBTA transit station.*

The project is within an area served by the MBTA Kendall/MIT Red Line Station and MBTA bus route stops serving Cambridge and surrounding towns. The Applicant will also make parking available off-site.

- b. The availability of public or commercial parking facilities in the vicinity of the use being served provided the requirements of Section 6.23 are satisfied.*

MIT has a pool of parking available throughout its campus for use by various MIT affiliates.

- c. Shared use of off street parking spaces serving other uses having peak user demands at different times, provided that no more than seventy-five (75) percent of the lesser minimum parking requirements for each use shall be satisfied with such shared spaces and that the requirements of Subsection 6.23 are satisfied.*

Shared use of off street parking spaces serving other uses has not been specifically proposed; however, MIT has a pool of parking available throughout its campus for use by various MIT affiliates.

- d. Age or other occupancy restrictions which are likely to result in a lower level of auto usage; and*

No such restrictions exist; however, the reduction in required parking anticipates a less auto-dependent future for the area as the Applicant has shown that its existing parking supply is sufficient for all MIT needs.

- e. Impact of the parking requirement on the physical environment of the affected lot or the adjacent lots including reduction in green space, destruction of significant existing trees and other vegetation, destruction of existing dwelling units, significant negative impact on the historic resources on the lot, impairment of the urban design objectives of the city as set forth in Section 19.30 of the Zoning Ordinance, or loss of pedestrian amenities along public ways.*

The reduction in parking is preferable because it prioritizes pedestrian, bicycle, and transit amenities and prevents the need to build additional parking on the campus, which positively impacts the urban design of the area.

- f. The provision of required parking for developments containing affordable housing units, and especially for developments employing the increased FAR and Dwelling unit density provisions of Section 11.200, will increase the cost of the development, will require variance relief from other zoning requirements applicable to the development because of limitations of space on the lot, or will significantly diminish the environmental quality for all residents of the development.*

No housing is proposed as part of the project.

### 3. General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit (10.43)

The Planning Board finds that the project meets the General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit, as set forth below.

*10.43 Criteria. Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:*

- (b) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or ...*



Upon granting of the requested special permits, it appears that the requirements of the Ordinance will be met. The project conforms to the use and dimensional requirements of the zoning district.

- (c) *traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or ...*

As discussed earlier in these Findings, the traffic generated will not have any substantial impact on traffic patterns and thus will not create any new congestion, hazard, or change in neighborhood character. Systems of access and egress for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles have been designed in consultation with TP+T and will be subject to continuing review.

- (d) *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 ...*

The proposed institutional use conforms to the allowed uses in this district, and hence will not adversely affect adjacent uses that exist or are anticipated in the future. The Inspectional Services Department (ISD) will determine if the proposed food service is permitted by zoning. The proposed project will be compatible with the use and scale of surrounding lots and will improve the streetscape as well as connections to other parts of the campus.

- (e) *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 ...*

The proposed institutional use will not create nuisance or hazard, and all development activity will adhere to applicable health and safety regulations.

- (f) *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 ...*

Expansion of university uses within existing campus areas is consistent with long-standing City policies and objectives for institutional growth. The construction of an academic building that will be actively used and positively relates to its surroundings will benefit the district as a whole.

- (g) *the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.*

The project is consistent with the City's Urban Design Objectives as set forth in the 19.30 Findings above.

## DECISION

Based on a review of the Application Documents, testimony given at the public hearing, and the above Findings, the Planning Board hereby GRANTS the requested Special Permits subject to the following conditions and limitations. Hereinafter, for purposes of this Decision, the Permittee shall mean the Applicant for the requested Special Permits and any successor or successors in interest.

1. All use, building construction, and site plan development shall be in substantial conformance with the Application Documents and other supporting materials submitted to the Planning Board, and the additional Conditions of this Special Permit Decision. The project plans hereby approved by the Planning Board specifically include all information in the plan set titled 'MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman College of Computing Volume II' prepared by VHB, dated 12/8/2020 (in association with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, REED Hilderbrand Landscape Architects, Nitsch Engineering, Inc., and ARUP). Appendix I summarizes the dimensional features of the project as approved.
2. The project shall be subject to continuing design review by the Community Development Department ("CDD"). Before issuance of a Building Permit for development authorized by this Special Permit, CDD shall certify to the Superintendent of Buildings that the final plans submitted to secure the Building Permit are consistent with and meet all conditions of this Decision. As part of CDD's administrative review of the project, and prior to any certification to the Superintendent of Buildings, CDD may present any design changes made subsequent to this Decision to the Planning Board for its review and comment.
3. The Permittee shall address the following design comments through the continuing design review process set forth above. Each of the below items shall be provided to CDD for review and approval of the final design details:
  - a. Details on how the "Accessible Roof" adjacent to the green roof is in conformance with Section 22.34.1 of the Zoning Ordinance.
  - b. Further review of the column design and lighting scheme on the north elevation of the building facing the Grand Junction Path.
  - c. Further review of the rear façade and design of the long-term bicycle parking area in relation to visibility from the public realm and the Grand Junction Path, safety and security, and opportunities to enrich the design.
  - d. Updated plans and elevations clearly showing key dimensions, scale and north arrow, including a bicycle parking plan at a 1:10 scale, a site plan identifying the location of the dedicated entrance to the long-term bicycle parking, and a mechanical penthouse plan.

- e. All external lighting, including conformance with technical guidelines recommended in the proposed Cambridge Outdoor Lighting Ordinance, with consideration given to facade lighting and tree up-lighting, and use of timers to minimize light trespass.
  - f. Details on how the lighting placement ensures that the short-term bicycle parking spaces located near the Albany Street garage meet the dimensional requirements specified in Section 6.100 of the Zoning Ordinance.
  - g. All proposed public realm, open space, streetscape improvements and landscape details, including seating, screening of any new transformers, and fence details, including plans for the connection space between Vassar Street and the Grand Junction Path, and plans for the Vassar Street public realm frontage.
  - h. All building exterior materials, colors, and details, including a description of how selected materials will mitigate bird kills and improve energy performance, and details on the blinds system.
  - i. Parking, bicycle parking, access and egress, especially the final curb cut width, Vassar Street crosswalks, pedestrian ramps, emergency vehicle access, and public parking and loading zone on Vassar Street, to be reviewed by TP+T.
4. The Permittee shall consult with the City Arborist and other DPW staff to ensure that the Building Permit Plans are in conformance with the submitted Tree Plan and/or the current Tree Ordinance; if needed, the Permittee shall submit a revised Tree Plan for review and approval by the DPW.
  5. All authorized development shall abide by all applicable City of Cambridge Ordinances, including the Noise Ordinance (Chapter 8.16 of the City Municipal Code).
  6. Throughout design development and construction, the project shall conform to the Green Building Requirements set forth in Section 22.20 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. CDD shall certify that the applicable requirements are met prior to issuance of a Building Permit, and again prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, for development authorized by this Special Permit.
  7. The Permittee shall be required to prepare and implement a Construction Management Program in accordance with Section 18.20 of the Zoning Ordinance, which shall be reviewed and certified by DPW prior to issuance of a Building Permit for development authorized by this Special Permit.
  8. Prior to the final selection of colors and textures for façade materials, the Permittee shall erect a mock-up(s) of an exterior wall section, including rooftop screening elements, on or near the building site to be reviewed by CDD for comment. Members of the Planning Board shall be notified when the mock-up is erected and given an opportunity to view the materials and transmit any comments to CDD.

Voting in the affirmative to approve the Development Proposal were Planning Board Members Louis Bacci, Jr., Catherine Preston Connolly, H Theodore Cohen, Steven Cohen, Mary Flynn, Hugh Russell, and Associate Member Corinne Espinoza, appointed by the Chair to act on the case, constituting at least two thirds of the members of the Board, necessary to grant a special permit.

For the Planning Board,



Representative to the Planning Board, authorized by Catherine Preston Connolly, Chair.

A copy of this decision PB #370 shall be filed with the Office of the City Clerk. Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17, Chapter 40A, Massachusetts General Laws, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after the date of such filing in the Office of the City Clerk.

ATTEST: A true and correct copy of the above decision has been filed on April 14, 2021 with the Office of the City Clerk, by Swaathi Joseph, duly authorized representative of the Planning Board. All plans referred to in the decision have been filed with the City Clerk on said date.

Twenty days have elapsed since the above decision was filed in the office of the City Clerk and:  
\_\_\_\_\_ no appeal has been filed; or  
\_\_\_\_\_ an appeal has been filed within such twenty days.

The person exercising rights under a duly appealed special permit does so at risk that a court will reverse the permit and that any construction performed under the permit may be ordered undone. This certification shall in no event terminate or shorten the tolling, during the pendency of any appeals, of the periods provided under the second paragraph of G.L. c. 40A, §6.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, City Clerk

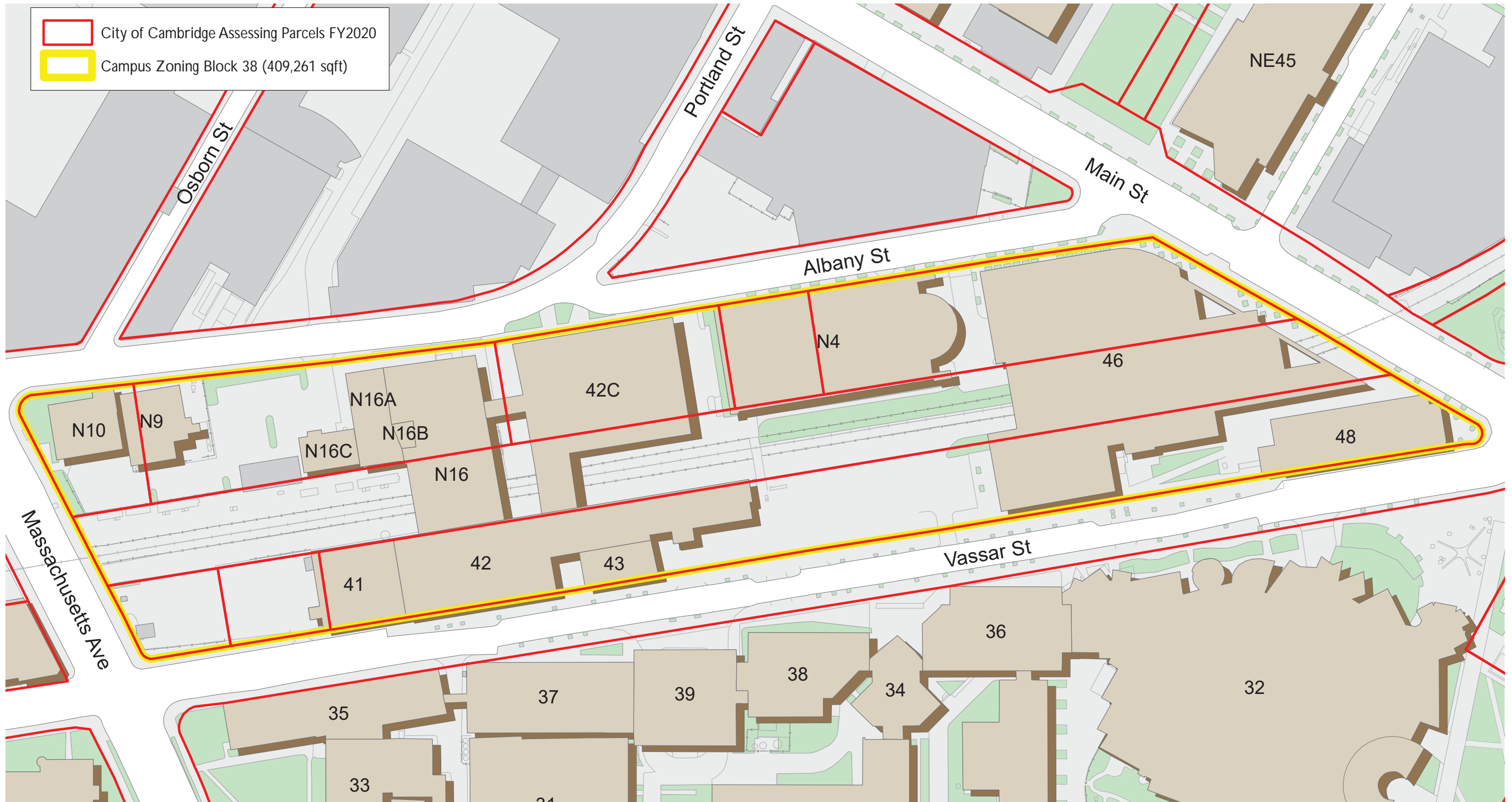
Appeal has been dismissed or denied.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, City Clerk

**Appendix I: Approved Dimensional Chart**

	Existing	Allowed or Required	Proposed	Permitted
Lot Area (sq ft)	409,261	5,000 (min.)	409,261	No Change
Total GFA (sq ft)	496,124	1,227,783	670,124	174,000 net new
Residential Base	0	N/A	N/A	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Non-Residential Base	496,124	1,227,78	670,124	
Inclusionary Bonus	0	N/A	N/A	
Total FAR	1.21	3.0	1.64	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Residential Base	0	N/A	N/A	
Non-Residential Base	1.21	3.0	1.64	
Inclusionary Bonus	0	N/A	N/A	
Total Dwelling Units	0	N/A	N/A	0
Base Units	0	N/A	N/A	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Inclusionary Bonus Units	0	N/A	N/A	
Base Lot Area / Unit (sq ft)	0	N/A	N/A	
Total Lot Area / Unit (sq ft)	0	N/A	N/A	
Lot Width (ft)	Not specified	50	No Change	No Change
Height (ft)	N/A	120	120	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Front Setback (ft)	N/A	10	10	
Side Setback – East (ft)	N/A	N/A	0	
Side Setback – West (ft)	N/A	27'-6"	27'-6"	
Rear Setback (ft)	N/A	27'-4"	27'4"	
Open Space (% of Lot Area)	Not specified	Not required	Not specified	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Private Open Space	Not specified	Not required	11,853 sf	
Permeable Open Space	Not specified	Not required	2,668 sf	
Off-Street Parking Spaces	22	105	0 <sup>1</sup>	0 <sup>1</sup>
Long-Term Bicycle Parking	0	36	36	Consistent with Application Documents, and other applicable requirements
Short-Term Bicycle Parking	0	71	71	
Loading Bays	0	2	2	

<sup>1</sup> Required parking is waived by this Special Permit. Parking is to be accommodated off-site within existing institutional pooled parking.



Source Info: MIT

Figure #1.2b  
Parcel Plan



MIT Stephen A. Schwarzman  
College of Computing  
Cambridge, Massachusetts