



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

SANDRA CLARKE
Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

Date: October 4, 2023

Re: **PB-390 Design Update, 2nd Meeting (Continued from 9/12/23)**

The following comments reflect the CDD staff review of further revisions to the Design Update to PB-390 (57 JFK Street), which was initially presented and discussed at the Planning Board meeting on September 12, 2023. At that meeting, the Planning Board voiced the following concerns about the design proposal:

1. By filling in all of the existing entry space, it gives little back to the public realm of a major urban streetscape (JFK Street).
2. The proposal fails to replicate the existing entrance's sense of shadow and depth, space and rhythm.
3. It no longer responds to the scale of the streetscape and requires a stronger civic presence; it feels too diminished.
4. The proposal erases the reading of two separated volumes that reflect the scale of the buildings across the street.
5. It will still function as a primary building entrance given its orientation towards JFK Street and needs to be more inviting and exciting, instead of undistinguished and ordinary.
6. The landing at the top of the entry stairs needs to feel welcoming, well lit, and safe.
7. Concern about the design resolution of the asymmetrical column at the left of the entry.
8. A desire for the Cambridge Historical Commission to conclude their deliberation before the Planning Board moves forward with its decision.

CDD Staff have met with the Applicant twice since the Planning Board meeting, both times with members of the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) present. Staff feels the design has progressed substantively towards addressing the concerns of both the Planning Board and the CHC, which focused on the lack of civic scale, a sense of diminished presence, the loss of depth and shadow, and the need for an engaging and welcoming entrance. To that end, the following design elements have been modified by the proponent:

- **Second Floor Balcony** – The revised design no longer proposes enclosing the second floor. Instead, an open-air balcony allows the adjacent restaurant to spill out during warmer months. A low planter and wood-clad soffit underside employ a similar material language as the future residential balconies above. Staff feels this better captures the current sense of depth and shadow, and helps retain the reading of two volumes separated by a carved space.

344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
Voice: 617 349-4600
Fax: 617 349-4669
TTY: 617 349-4621
www.cambridgema.gov

- **Spandrels** – The spandrel between the second and third floor is now shown with an “I-beam” profile matching the future Winthrop Street entrance. It is set back 3-feet from the face of the building, and the entirety of the signage band is reserved for the building address. This profile and darker colored cladding are replicated at the balcony soffit above, which is held back from the primary façade as much as the structure allows. Staff feels the corresponding materials, profiles, and setbacks reinforce the reading of a cohesive 2-story entry volume and better addresses both the scale of JFK Street and the building.
- **Exterior Column** – The revised design retains the existing, freestanding exterior column and utilizes it both to reinforce the double-story reading of the entry space, and as an opportunity to include distinctive building signage. The color of its cladding now matches the darker bronze of the adjacent spandrels to visually unite them through a common material treatment. At the encouragement of the CHC, the Applicant has explored a signage design that aims to be unique and lend a civic presence to the entry. Staff feels this is an effective resolution of an existing idiosyncratic element and capitalizes on it as a design opportunity.
- **Stairs to Lower-Level Tenant** – The Applicant proposes installing a permanent, large-scale piece of artwork on the rear wall of the stairs to the lower-level tenant. Staff appreciates additional opportunities for art in the public realm and has encouraged the proponent to coordinate with the City’s Arts & Cultural Planning Staff.
- **Exterior Entry Stairs and Building Base** – The revised design retains the existing brick base of the building and proposes cladding the reconstructed exterior entry stairs in brick with granite treads. Both the CHC and CDD Staff agreed this is a positive change that retains the existing contextual material. While CDD Staff would prefer that the stairs be located further into the recess to provide more space between the bottom and the sidewalk, the current design replicates the existing condition and modifying it would necessitate major structural modifications