



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: 7/9/26

Re: **PB-179 – Cambridge Crossing**

- **Parcel 1-C Design Review**
- **222 Jacobs Street Use Determination Request**

This memo contains an overview of the site improvements at Cambridge Crossing Parcel 1-C, the relevant design guidelines, and related comments. It also includes comments regarding the use determination request associated with 222 Jacobs Street, part of Cambridge Crossing Parcel JK.

Design Process and Staff Review

Over the past several months, the Applicant has met with staff regarding these two items. The submission package to the Planning Board includes design changes and updates that are made in direct response to the comments and issues raised by staff during these meetings.

Planning Board Action

North Point Planned Unit Development (PUD), now known as Cambridge Crossing (CX), was originally approved by the Planning Board in 2003, and has been amended several times through the PUD process (most recently in 2025).

DivcoWest, the developer for the project, is seeking design review approval for site improvements on the Parcel 1-C. CX's special permit requires that the Planning Board review and approve any associated parks, public spaces, street segment cross-sections, streetscape details, and other physical improvements directly tied to a site under review.

The developer is also proposing a dentist office use, which is consistent with the objectives of the PUD-6 district, in a portion of the first floor of the building located at 222 Jacobs Street (Parcel JK). In the base zoning district, a medical (including dentist) office is only allowed within a building in existence as of 2001. As per Section 13.73, the Planning Board may approve the use by a written determination upon finding this use is compatible with and advances the policy objectives of the [Eastern Cambridge Plan](#) and that it is necessary to support the predominant residential use in the PUD in the North Point Residence District.

Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

Jennifer Caira | Deputy Chief of Planning

344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139

617-349-4600
cddat344@cambridgema.gov

www.cambridgema.gov/CDD

CX Parcel 1-C Design Review

Relevant Design Objectives and Guidelines

As part of the original PUD approval in 2003, design guidelines specific to Cambridge Crossing were developed and amended as recently as 2016. The most relevant design guidelines for Parcel 1-C are summarized below:

District-Wide Goals:

- Create a lively new mixed-use district with strong visual, bicycle and pedestrian connections to East Cambridge. The new district should be a place to live, work, and enjoy a variety of parks and public spaces.

Open Space:

- The provision of open spaces of diverse sizes and use is encouraged.
- All open spaces at North Point shall be designed to be public in nature, creating an open environment that the public can easily identify that is welcoming for everyone's use.
- The provision of an interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections both to neighborhoods and within NorthPoint so as to promote pedestrian movement.
- A large park is required by zoning, and NorthPoint Common will provide naturalistic, multi-use open space for both recreational and cultural activities.
- In addition to the large park, the creation of a series of smaller open spaces such as pocket parks, public plazas, active recreation areas, courtyards, play areas and gardens is encouraged.
- These spaces shall be articulated throughout North Point through wayfinding and signage measures including space types, themes and program.
- Open spaces shall be visible and accessible from public streets.

Staff Comments

The Parcel C-1 open space is located beneath the Gilmore Bridge towards the northern edge of the North Point district. It is an unusually shaped parcel, adjoined by driveways and streets on three sides, with utility structures and a maintenance storage area to the north. Strategically, this parcel integrates Cambridge Crossing with the remaining portions of the North Point district and the EF campus to the east. The *North Point East Cambridge Design Guidelines, 2016* do not provide specific recommendations for this location.

While the space is currently underutilized and visually dull, the proposed improvements, including a new granite landscape feature, updated bicycle infrastructure, and graphic art on the bridge piers and underside, represent meaningful enhancements. These interventions have the potential to transform a residual under-bridge space into an inviting, comfortable, and safe environment with a distinct identity.

As with many Cambridge Crossing open spaces, the design incorporates reclaimed granite. In this design, the blocks are arranged into a terraced, landscape feature that introduces verticality, partially screens maintenance activities, and provides opportunities for seating and informal play.

Staff support this multifunctional approach but recommend further review refinement to clarify pedestrian circulation and reduce the potential for concealed spaces between the maintenance yard and the stone feature. Clear sightlines and good lighting are essential to promoting visibility and a sense of safety in under-bridge spaces.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant design approval:

1. Review of all proposed landscaping design details, including granite block layout, plantings, lighting, graphic art, and hardscape materials.
2. Review of all bicycle infrastructure, signage, and community path and sidewalk design details by the Department of Transportation and DPW.

222 Jacobs Street Use Determination Request

Relevant Objectives and Design Guidelines

As recommended in the Eastern Cambridge Plan, the goals for North Point include:

- Encourage retail uses to support the new neighborhood that will complement, not compete with, existing retail on Cambridge Street.
- Encourage retail uses at the relocated Lechmere T station to connect North Point and Cambridge Street
- Encourage new retail that promotes a lively and active pedestrian environment in Eastern Cambridge.
- Encourage strong pedestrian and bicycle connections to East Cambridge.
- Extend first street into north point to connect existing and new neighborhoods.

The primary urban design considerations relate to ground-floor activation and transparency. The City's Design Guidelines emphasize transparent and visually engaging ground floors, particularly between 2 and 10 feet above the sidewalk, to support neighborhood vitality, walkability, and safety. For the North Point district specifically, the guidelines recommend achieving approximately 50 to 75% ground floor transparency and avoiding blank wall conditions in retail areas.

Staff Comments

The proposed dentist will occupy two and a half storefront bays along North First Street, the primary retail corridor for the district. Opening this long-vacant storefront will help strengthen the corridor, increase daytime activity, and provide a useful service for the neighborhood.

The proposal incorporates several design elements that support urban design objectives and contribute positively to the pedestrian experience. The main entry doors and guest lounge will remain fully transparent, providing visual connection between the interior and the street. Areas requiring patient privacy are proposed to be screened with three-quarter-height opaque window film, with the upper glazing/transom windows remaining clear. Staff appreciate the applicant's efforts to preserve transparency where feasible and note that the incorporation of graphics within portions of the window film will add subtle visual interest.

While these measures help balance operational needs with the City's urban design objectives, staff have concerns that the overall storefront treatment will appear largely opaque at the pedestrian level. Given the site's location along the district's primary retail corridor, staff encourage the applicant to explore additional design strategies that provide privacy while creating a more engaging pedestrian experience. In similar projects, integrated public art, window displays, decorative screening elements, or other creative treatments have successfully introduced depth, texture, and visual interest without compromising privacy.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to approve the use:

1. Review of the final storefront design details, including window film specifications, lighting, signage, art displays and/or product displays.