



To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: October 22, 2025

Re: Special Permit **PB-315 Amendment (Major)**, MXD Infill Development Concept Plan  
(IDCP) (continued from 3/25/2025)

## Overview

Submission Type:	Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Boston Properties Limited Partnership (d/b/a "BXP")
Zoning District(s):	Mixed Use Development (MXD) District: Kendall Center
Proposal Summary:	Alter the IDCP by providing a development alternative to Phase 4 to either proceed with approved redevelopment of 250 Binney Street ("Commercial Building D) as approved in Major Amendment #2 or use the remaining Utility Project GFA on both 250 Binney Street and 105 Broadway ("Commercial Building E")
Special Permits Requested:	Major Amendment to IDCP in MXD District (14.32.2.5); Reduction of Required Green Roof Area (22.35.3)
Other City Permits Needed:	N/A
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits.
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	None

<b>Zoning Section</b>	<b>Required Planning Board Findings</b> <i>(Summary - see appendix of previous CDD memo for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Major amendment to IDCP special permit (section 14.32.2)	<p>The IDCP meets the criteria in Section 12.35.3(3):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conforms with general PUD development controls and district development controls [in this case, requirements of Article 14.000].</li> <li>• Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for that portion of the city. [Per Section 14.32.2.2: “In making its findings, the Board shall consider the objectives set forth in the Kendall Square Final Report of the K2C2 Planning Study (“K2 Plan”) and the Kendall Square Design Guidelines.” Those documents can be found at: <a href="https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Planning/K2C2">https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Planning/K2C2</a>.]</li> <li>• Provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects, considering: quality of site design; traffic flow and safety; adequacy of utilities and other public works; impact on existing public facilities; potential fiscal impact</li> </ul> <p>The IDCP meets the criteria in Section 19.25:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• • The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30 (see following page).</li> </ul>
Reduction of Required Green Roof Area (22.35.3)	<p>The Planning Board may grant a special permit to reduce the required Green Roof Area, Biosolar Green Roof Area, or Solar Energy System below the area required by Section 22.35.2, provided that each square foot so reduced be compensated by a unit price contribution to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust. This unit price shall be determined based on the average costs to design, install, and maintain green roofs and rooftop solar energy systems in Cambridge using actual cost figures to the extent possible, shall be subject to annual adjustment based on standard construction cost indices, and shall be calculated, and recalculated approximately every three years, by the Cambridge Community Development Department. All such funds contributed to the Trust shall be</p>

<b>Zoning Section</b>	<b>Required Planning Board Findings</b> <i>(Summary - see appendix of previous CDD memo for zoning text excerpts)</i>
	dedicated to the design and incorporation of Green Roof Area, Biosolar Green Roof Area, or Solar Energy Systems into new or existing affordable housing developments.
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or</li> <li>(b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or</li> <li>(c) 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</li> <li>(d) 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</li> <li>(e) 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</li> <li>(f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.</li> </ul>

### Revised Proposal

The Applicant has submitted revised plans and an updated narrative to address the Board's comments from the initial hearing as summarized in the comment-response matrix.

### Zoning Comments

As explained in the previous report, the MXD zoning sets aggregated limits on development (in Gross Floor Area) by use but allows that development to be distributed flexibly within the district, subject to approval of an IDCP by the Planning Board and CRA Board. The new proposal is allowable because it remains within the commercial GFA limits of the district.

The previous memo listed some detailed zoning items that would need to be addressed within the revised plan if it moves forward. The following is an update on those items:

**Active Ground Floor on Broadway.** Because the proposed alternate plan would include a new building fronting Broadway (“E”), that building would be subject to section 14.38 requiring activity along at least 75% of the ground story building façade along that frontage. The earlier submission did not make it clear how that requirement would be met. The revised submission addresses this issue in a few places but remains somewhat unclear.

Page 32 of the revised graphic material shows a ground floor plan with an area labeled “Active Flexible use space for Potential Future Retail” occupying what appears to be roughly three-quarters of the frontage. The plan underlying that label still appears to have a demising wall separating “Active Use” from “Lobby,” each of which occupy roughly half of the frontage. The same area is shown on page 55 labeled as “Project Retail” within the overall retail plan for the district. Pages 97-98, within the Design Guidelines section, show an entirely different floor plan with chamfered corners at either side and areas labeled “Café Retail” and “Lobby” with a demising wall showing passage between the two. There is also a loading bay entrance shown occupying a portion of the chamfer next to “Café Retail.” The frontage of the section that is directly parallel to the street is dimensioned and labeled “Parallel Retail Frontage: 77%.” The Response to Comments narrative notes, “Zoning does not clearly define how the take off should be calculated when the building is not orthogonal.”

It is true that there is no explicit instruction for calculating the percent frontage in this instance. According to Section 14.38, the requirement applies where the building “fronts” onto Broadway. The term “front” is not generally defined except in the context of “front yard,” defined as “The yard extending across the full width of the lot and lying between the front street line, or the building line where such may have been established on the lot, and the nearest part of a building.” This is generally interpreted to mean the entire area directly between the street line and the building, including portions of the building that are not parallel to the street. In other instances where a street frontage requirement or limitation is imposed, such as Harvard Square, it is “measured horizontally parallel to that street,” meaning that where a portion of a building abuts a front yard but is not parallel to the street, the measurement is taken along the street alignment.

Although there may be some room for interpretation, it would not be consistent with the intent of the requirement to simply exclude any portions of the building that are not perfectly parallel to the street. A more reasonable interpretation would be to measure the entire front-facing façade parallel to the street, as if viewing the building straight-ahead in elevation. Moreover, Section 14.38 includes “active public gathering space (whether enclosed or open)” in the category of “Active Ground Floors,” so if the outdoor space shown adjacent to the “Café Retail” is intended to be activated and open to the public, that could also be included in the overall frontage calculation.

There is another element of uncertainty where there is not a clear separation between an active use and the tenant lobby. In some buildings, the lobby and adjacent retail space are not fully separated, allowing for flow between the two. It would be reasonable for some portion of the lobby to overlap with the designated active ground floor space; however, it is crucial to be clear about which portions of the lobby would be open to the public within the approved plan to avoid future uncertainty in enforcement.

It is important to remember that everything within the IDCP is subject to a holistic review process and approval by the Planning Board, and that the Board has discretion to approve “dimensional variations and alternate uses” if they serve the purpose and intent of the requirement. It may be less important to

resolve detailed interpretations of zoning text as it is for the Planning Board to make a general determination of whether the proposal is consistent with the intent of the zoning, and to make it clear what standards need to be met in order to avoid future uncertainty in applying the standards.

If the Board approves the alternate IDCP, here is a suggested approach that could be included in the conditions to inform ongoing review. This may be discussed further at the Board meeting:

- A minimum of 75% active use ground story building frontage is required, with the measurement taken along a ground story front façade elevation drawing running parallel to Broadway.
- Consistent with Section 14.38, the active ground story area may include retail and consumer service establishments along with adjacent lobby spaces that are accessible to the general public and adjacent outdoor areas that contain seating and are accessible to the general public.
- The design of the active ground story area and designation of spaces that are accessible to the general public shall be subject to Planning Board review and approval during the design review process.

**Green Factor.** As noted in the prior report, the Green Factor Standard was adopted after the earlier IDCP approval and would therefore apply if the alternate plan is authorized with a new special permit. The revised submission explains that “Commercial Building E is being designed to comply with Green Factor Standards” and includes a Green Factor / Cool Score submission for that site.

The Green Factor – in particular, the Cool Score component – is generally calculated across the lot or, in the case of a PUD or other phased development, across the development parcel. Conceptually, it is keyed to open space, establishing weighted standards that are applied in proportion to the open space requirement. The MXD zoning regulates development at an aggregate level across the entire district rather than through “lot” or “development parcel” standards. It requires total open space “equivalent to at least fifteen percent (15%) of the land area (excluding road rights-of-way) within the District.”

There is no specific clarification for how to calculate the Cool Score in the MXD district, but the Planning Board has some discretion in applying Green Factor Standards within the context of special permit approval. As a practical matter, it has been the Planning Board’s practice in approving amendments to phased developments like PUDs to only apply new zoning standards to future phases of development and not to require substantial alterations to phases of the development that have already been built.

Staff would suggest the following approach to applying the Green Factor Standard, which could be codified into the special permit decision to avoid future uncertainty:

- Require a Cool Score submission taking into account the two undeveloped phases of development that would be affected by the Major Amendment (sites D and E). This should be provided before the design review submission for the next phase of development.
- For the purpose of the Major Amendment, if the alternate plan is pursued, the development on sites D and E would be conditioned on meeting the minimum applicable Cool Target based on the combined area of those lots and the 20% minimum standard applicable in Section 22.94.1, along with other requirements of the Green Factor Standard.

**Established Heights.** The proposed alternate development program in the revised submission continues to indicate the proposed heights of both buildings D and E as “up to 250 feet” while the illustrative plan shows Building D at 190 feet and Building E at 250 feet. To avoid future uncertainty during the design review and building permit approval process, it is important to be clear about what is approved.

If the Board grants the special permit amendment approving the alternate plan, it should be based on the heights shown in the graphic materials for the alternate Buildings D and E (190 feet and 250 feet, respectively). The special permit decision already provides that variations in the exact height of no more than 5% may be authorized during the design review process if they conform to zoning.

**Other Zoning Requirements** that become applicable if the alternate plan were to be approved and advanced, including Flood Resilience Standards and Green Roofs Requirements, are addressed in the submission and will be subject to further review at the design review stage.

### Design Comments

The intent of Amendment #3 is the same as in the previous hearing on March 25, 2025: to create the option of relocating already approved gross square footage from the Building D site at 250 Binney Street to the site at 105 Broadway. As before, this reallocation of building square footage would be an appropriate response to the site and context.

The submission shows two different versions of the building’s design, a generic boxy building and a proposed detailed massing, with correspondingly different site plans. While the issue at hand is simply the creation of an option to relocate the square feet, some comments on the detailed design may be helpful in anticipation of the design review process.

The detailed design responds to numerous comments from the first hearing and the staff memo:

- The impact of the previous scheme’s very broad curbcut for the loading docks and garage entry on the pedestrian realm has been reduced by dividing it into three separate curbcuts.
- Trees have been added along the portion of the East Service Drive that adjoins the project.
- An entrance from the “East/West Connector” has been added on the north side of the building.

Some of the comments on the detailed design from the March 20, 2025 memo still apply:

- The lobby occupies a large percentage of the building’s frontage, leaving only about 60% of the building’s full width available for retail. Consideration could be given to reducing the lobby’s width, and to increasing the amount of retail facing Broadway.
- Further consideration could be given to how the building engages the very different contexts on its four sides: how it defines the adjoining public spaces, how it functions as the southeast corner of the MXD superblock, and how it contributes to the coherence of the subsidiary block between the East Drive and the Sixth Street Walkway.
  - In the previous iteration of the detailed massing, the building was conceived as a pure object building: it was essentially the same on all four sides, all four corners were chamfered, and its symmetrically bulging profile emphasized its centrality.
  - The current version makes efforts to respond to the adjoining spaces and buildings, shifting to a more asymmetrical stance, with a more vertical expression on its east side,

and the recessed balcony at the fifth and sixth stories located at its southeast corner to function as a visual target when seen from Ames Street.

- Consideration could be given to further exploration of massing options so as to more strongly frame the Sixth Street walkway, engage the view from Ames Street, provide a stabilizing counterpoint to the irregular profile of the forthcoming building at the southwest corner of the Volpe site, and relate to the rectilinear massing of the existing (and perhaps someday the future) building at 115 Broadway to the north.
- Consideration could be given to relocating the lobby entrance to roughly the center of the Broadway facade. This would create a more direct route to the elevators, allow the lobby's width to be reduced, and allow retail space to be located at the building's southeast corner. If the triangular terrace in this location were eliminated by continuing the plane of the primary Broadway facade all the way to the building's southeast corner, the building would more assertively define Broadway as a public space, and further activate the pedestrian realm.
- Further consideration should be given to how the separate elevated terraces at the building's southwest and southeast corners will be accessed from Broadway, including by people using wheelchairs, how movement between the two terraces should best be accommodated, and to whether additional plantings would be beneficial, including at the ramp to the lobby's terrace.
- The design of the sidewalks, plantings, and bike lane on Broadway should be coordinated with the city's plans for the street.

A detailed review of the site and building design is not appropriate given the focus of Amendment #3. Staff will have further comments at the Design Review Phase, but the following additional questions and comments seem relevant at this time:

- Will the building need exterior bulk gas storage tanks? If so where they be located? What plans could be made to accommodate them if they are needed at some point in the future?
- How does the site plan respond to Universal Design Principles?
- Staff recommend that the sidewalk at the east side of the East Drive be continuous, rather than be divided into segments by the three driveways to the loading docks and garage.
- Truck turning movements should be investigated.
- Staff recommend that further consideration be given to the details of the area where the East/West Connector meets the East Drive and the southeast corner of the Central Plaza so to emphasize pedestrian connectivity.
- How can the impacts of rooftop mechanical on the neighboring residential building be minimized?
- The shadow studies indicate that the building will cast significant shadows on the Central Plaza. While changes to building massing may reduce their extent, consideration could be given to other ways to improve the Plaza, including its connectivity to other public spaces and the quality of the pedestrian experience along the East and West Drives.

## Planning Board Action and Conditions

Since the IDCP special permit already contains standard conditions for a phased development, if the Planning Board approves the requested amendment then most of those conditions would remain unchanged with the proposed amendment. Below is a summary of how the conditions would need to be amended if the Board approves the alternate plan.

1. **Approved Development Program.** The plan would be modified as per the current proposal, with the clarification that the alternate program would only become the approved plan if and when the 105 Broadway site reaches the 75% design stage.
2. **Open Space.** The program of open space would be updated per the current proposal.
3. **Design Review.** These procedures would remain unchanged. If the alternate program is pursued, then a design update should be provided for 250 Binney Street.
4. **Sustainability.** The current requirements would remain. Additionally, under the alternate plan, development would be subject to Flood Resilience Standards and Green Factor Standards.
5. **Traffic and Infrastructure Improvements.** TP+T and DPW memos provide input on recommended changes to the program of transportation and infrastructure mitigation under the proposed alternate plan.
6. **Retail and Active Uses.** These general conditions would continue to apply and compliance with the requirements of Section 14.38 is required for the 105 Broadway site.
7. **Housing.** These conditions would continue to apply.
8. **Construction Management.** These conditions would continue to apply.
9. **Other Municipal Ordinances.** These conditions would continue to apply.
10. **Timing and Phasing.** The alternate plan would add a phase of development (building “E”) and extend the date of final completion to 2038.
11. **Amendments.** In addition to other allowable amendments, changes between the proposed alternate plan and the “baseline” plan could be approved as minor amendments.
12. **Additional Requirements for Phase 1 Development.** These conditions would not change.
13. **Additional Requirements for Phase 2 Development.** These conditions would not change.
14. **Additional Requirements for Phase 3 and 4 Development.** These conditions would not change, but would be extended where applicable to apply to the 105 Broadway site.
15. **Subdivision of the IDCP Parcels.** These conditions would not change.