

To: Planning Board

From: Community Development Department (CDD) Staff

Date: September 9, 2026

Re: Special Permit PB-410, 78R Cambridgepark Drive, 591, 617, 625, 641-643, 645, 689, 725 Concord Avenue, 77, 110, 125, 160, 180 Fawcett Street, 60 Loomis Street, 13, 45, 50, 52, 54, 61, 67 Mooney Street, 12, 24, 36, 60, 62, 68 Moulton Street, 11, 25, 26, 35, 49, 59, 61-67, 100, 127 Smith Place

Overview

Submission Type:	PUD (Planned Unit Development) Special Permit Application
Applicant:	Healthpeak OP LLC
Zoning District(s):	Office-1 (O-1) / Industry B-2 (IB-2) / Business A (BA) / Open Space (OS) / Alewife Overlay District - Quadrangle (AOD-Q) / Alewife Overlay District 5 (AOD-5)
Proposal Summary:	Develop multiple parcels into a mixed-use development including residential, retail, office and laboratory buildings, as well as municipal service facility site, publicly beneficial open space, and a pedestrian and bicycle bridge over MBTA railroad.
Special Permits Requested:	Sections 12.30 Planned Unit Development; 19.20 Project Review; 20.1100.4.3.1 Parking Principal Use; 20.1100.4.4 Neighborhood Uses Location; 20.1100.5.5.1 Building and Site Design Standards – Modifications; 20.1100.5.5.2.4 Build-to Zone Modifications; 20.1100.5.5.2.5 Minimum Build-to Percentage; 20.1100.5.5.2.8 Design of Front Yards; 20.1100.5.5.3 Minimum Ground Story Height; 20.1100.5.5.4 Limitations on Structured Parking; 20.1100.5.5.5 Entrances; 20.1100.5.5.6. Fences; 20.1100.5.5.7 Curb Cuts; 20.1100.5.5.8 Street Tree Planting; 20.1100.5.5.9.1 & 20.1100.5.5.9.3 Side Yard Waiver; 20.1100.6.3 Pooled or Principal Use Parking; 20.1100.6.4 Off-Street Loading Waiver; 20.1100.8 Planned Unit Development AOD-Q; 22.35.3 Reduction of Green Roofs requirement; and 22.84.3 Flood Resilience Standards Modifications
Other City Permits Needed:	Stormwater Control Permit, Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Plan, Historical Commission approval (demolition)
Planning Board Action:	Grant or deny requested special permits
Memo Contents:	CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report
Other Staff Reports:	Department of Transportation Dept. (DOT), Department of Public Works (DPW), in separate documents.

Melissa Peters | Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Sandra Clarke | Chief of Administration & Operations

Jennifer Caira | Deputy Chief of Planning

Overview

On September 15, 2026, the Planning Board will have the second hearing on Healthpeak's Planned Unit Development (PUD) special permit application for development of approximately 42 acres of land including approximately 5,037,040 square feet of residential and non-residential uses, as well as open space and roadways. The PUD approval process requires two public hearings.

The first hearing was on April 28, 2026. At that hearing, the Planning Board made a positive Preliminary Determination after finding that the PUD proposal is in general conformance with the zoning requirements and plans for the AOD-Q zoning district, and that it includes public benefits that will outweigh any adverse effects. The Board's Preliminary Determination included requests for modification and further study in preparing a Final Development Plan.

Since that time, the applicant team has met many times with City staff, including CDD (Zoning and Urban Design), the Department of Transportation (DOT), and Department of Public Works (DPW). The intent of these meetings was to discuss responses to the Preliminary Determination and conditions for ongoing review and mitigation to ensure that development will proceed according to City objectives after special permit approval.

The applicant provided a Final Development Plan in June and Supplement (incorporated into the Final Development Plan) in August. The Final Development Plan refines and improves many aspects of the proposal and responds to the comments and requests for additional information made by the Planning Board in the Preliminary Determination.

The following topics are covered in this memo:

- Summary of the findings that are required to grant the requested special permits;
- Summary of the issues raised at the initial public hearing;
- Staff comments on the additional or updated application materials, including overviews of how priority topics are addressed in recommended conditions establishing post-Special Permit process (with separate sections for Zoning & Development and Urban Design);
- Recommended conditions to regulate the PUD over time that would be part of the special permit approval.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) and Department of Public Works (DPW) have each provided separate memoranda detailing their comments and proposed conditions.

Summary of Findings

The complete set of findings the Board must make to issue the PUD Special Permit and other requested special permits are summarized below, with zoning sections included in their entirety in the appendix to this memorandum.

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix in previous memo for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Approval of a PUD Final Development Plan (Sections 20.1100.8.5.5.7 and 12.36.4)	The PUD Final Development Plan: • Contains the modifications or improvements requested in the Preliminary Determination (attached) • Continues to meet the criteria for approval of a Preliminary Determination: ○ Conforms with the development controls in the Zoning Ordinance ○ Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for the area ○ Provides benefits to the city which outweigh adverse effects
AOD-Q Special Permit Review Criteria (Section 20.1100.8.4.3)	The proposal: (a) Supports the purpose of the AOD-Q District (see Appendix – Zoning Text Excerpts) (b) Is generally consistent with the vision and goals of the Envision Alewife District Plan (2019) and the Principles of the Alewife Zoning Working Group (2023). (c) Is in general conformance with the Alewife Design Guidelines (2023) and the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30 of this Zoning Ordinance and advances the intent of those guidelines.
AOD-Q Phasing Plan (Section 20.1100.8.5.5.5)	The Phasing Plan ensures the district purpose will be met, with development providing uses and public benefits in a balanced manner.
AOD-Q Gross Floor Area (GFA) Criteria for Exemption (Section 20.1100.5.1.4.2)	The uses to be exempted are located and designed in a way to ensure long-term adherence to the purpose of the AOD-Q District.

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix in previous memo for zoning text excerpts)</i>
AOD-Q Pooled or Principal Use Parking (Section 20.1100.6.3)	The provision of parking in a pooled facility: (1) Advances relevant objectives of the Alewife District Plan; (2) Aids in implementation of effective Transportation Demand Management measures to reduce dependence on the single occupancy automobile; (3) Is appropriately located to serve the development; and (4) Is well designed and not diminish the pedestrian-friendly quality of the area around it, consistent with the Alewife Design Guidelines.
AOD-Q Off-Street Loading Requirements (Section 20.1100.6.4)	The proposed waiver to off-street loading requirements allows design and use that reduces the negative impacts of loading activities on the public realm.
AOD-Q Approval of Major Infrastructure (Section 20.1100.7.3.1)	The location and function of the major infrastructure component supports the vision of the Alewife District Plan and will be designed and constructed in an appropriate manner.
Project Review Special Permit – Review Criteria (Section 19.25)	• 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. • The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30 (see Zoning Text Excerpts).
Flood Resilience Standards Modifications (Section 22.84.3)	The proposed development and all relevant buildings are designed to meet the intent of the standards in a manner more suitable to the unique conditions of the Development Parcel.

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix in previous memo for zoning text excerpts)</i>
General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)	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 these criteria: (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or (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 (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 (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 (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Summary of Requests in Preliminary Determination

Below is a summary of the higher-level issues and requests for additional information discussed at the first public hearing and incorporated into the Preliminary Determination. The Preliminary Determination also references prior staff reports that include further detail.

General

- Identify and provide clarification and details related to requested relief, including dimensional relief allowed by Special Permit in the AOD-Q zoning district and relief from other any standards.

Phasing

- Provide additional information on how interrelated components will be coordinated and how interim conditions will be treated.

- Identify procedures for reevaluating and revising phasing and design details to adapt to changing conditions.
- Provide additional details on how specific aspects of the PUD will be phased, including open space, building programming, the street system and connectivity, parking, and district-wide sustainability and energy approaches.

Urban Design

- Provide a vision for the neighborhood and how the PUD will impact future development and sense of place, and will tie the Quadrangle together.
- Update plans and update 3D massing diagrams to clarify how buildings will define, shape, and activate the Quadrangle's streets and open spaces, and shape and promote engagement in the public realm.
- Describe how sites are designed to encourage additional development within the neighborhood but outside the Development Parcel.
- Provide nuanced approaches to building massing to create coherent urban blocks that frame streets, parks, and other open spaces.
- Further develop the size and design of the pedestrian street (Main Street Plaza) to support additional space at the crossing with New Main Street.
- Describe how urban design standards will minimize the impact of parking and loading on the pedestrian experience.
- Provide clarity on access to elevated first floors and how connection and activity will be supported.
- Investigate how Building R2 could be redesigned to support stronger visual and physical connections across open spaces and transportation corridors, particularly the pedestrian/bicycle bridge and its connections to New Main Street and the diagonal park.
- Northwest Quadrant:
 - Continue to develop the design of the area to ensure its connection to the broader neighborhood.
 - Evaluate the C4 Building Site design to improve open space, retail access, and light.
 - Describe how the area will incorporate neighborhood uses and be activated.
 - Describe how architectural design will support a sense of place and define the public realm.

Open Space

- Identify the process to design and develop diverse types of open space.
- Clarify which publicly beneficial open space will be parks and which will be part of individual building sites.

- Provide an inventory of active-use open spaces within the development and in the surrounding area and identify gaps and neighborhood needs.
- Pursue additional active recreation spaces, including at Mooney Green and considering the tops of parking garages.
- Describe how open spaces will become integral components to mitigate heat and flooding impacts.
- Prioritize welcoming entrances to park spaces.
- Clarify maintenance procedures for landscapes.
- Identify site-specific strategies to frame streets and parks.
- Provide additional information about how the public realm ties the development together, with particular focus on open spaces and streetwalls creating an interior focus.
- Identify how Bend Park will initiate the development of the entire diagonal park as envisioned in planning documents.
- Identify how Smith Park will be effective as an initial component of the entire diagonal park envisioned in planning documents.
- Identify how Mooney Green will be designed to function as an integral part of the broader Quadrangle's public realm.
- Investigate the possibility of a park or square that will serve residents in the southeast portion of the Quadrangle.
- Evaluate the demand for dog parks near residential buildings.
- Clarify the treatment of New Main Street and whether it will be an open space or a street.

Parking and Traffic

- Clarify the maximum number of parking spaces for the PUD, including on-street spaces.
- Minimize parking for single occupancy motor vehicles and prioritize parking and traffic reduction.
- Show a range of strategies to improve shared or pooled parking and reduce parking over time.
- Provide additional information on interim transportation measures to support the development prior to PUD completion.
- Provide an updated parking program to show how shared parking is compliant with PUD zoning requirements for pooled/principal use parking.
- Clarify how existing uses and parking are treated to be consistent with PUD zoning requirements.
- Provide a PTDM Plan consistent with City regulations and community needs, including those identified in the Alewife District Plan.

- Provide an updated 40-Scale Street Plan to clarify dimensions, road details, street transitions, phasing, street functions, and urban design character.
- Establish Wilson Road Extension to be conveyed as a public street.
- Include mitigation details to reduce the project's TIS-related impacts.
- Include a Residential Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan approved by DOT.
- Update plans to be consistent with Electric Vehicle (EV) charging network needs.
- Include a truck route and signage plan.
- Minimize impacts of trucks and loading areas on the public realm.

Pedestrian/Bicycle Bridge and Neighborhood Connections

- Provide greater clarity on the commitments, process, timeline for completing the Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge over the railroad.
- Provide information about key connections to the PUD area, including those noted in the proposal that may be achieved in the future.

Connectivity

- Clarify how the PUD will better integrate the Quadrangle into the broader circulation system in Cambridge.
- Identify all routes to and from the DPW Site at all phases of the project.
- Improve sightlines and connections to the proposed Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge from New Main Street and Diagonal (Bend) Park; revise the design of the R2 Building Site if necessary to ensure sightlines and connections.
- Identify ways to connect Mooney Green to Smith Place.
- Identify and evaluate connections outside of the Development Parcel that the PUD may facilitate in the future.
- Include a preliminary Wayfinding Plan in the PTDM Plan.
- Provide a preliminary, pedestrian-scaled Wayfinding Plan to support nonvehicular modes of travel and access to key destinations.

Neighborhood Uses and Ground Floor Activation

- Clarify how Phase 1 development will be served by same-phase neighborhood uses in the Development Parcel.
- Provide additional details on the range of neighborhood uses and how they will support a self-sufficient neighborhood.
- Expand the range of potential neighborhood uses to include non-retail, community-focused uses like libraries and museums, co-working space, event or meeting space, childcare, and arts-focused spaces.

- Identify opportunities to dedicate additional ground floor areas to neighborhood uses, particularly on primary streets like New Main Street and Mooney Street
- Provide additional details in the “Neighborhood Uses and Open Space Advisory Committee Plan.”
- Provide design guidelines to ensure ground floors facing public streets and open spaces will be active and engaging, particularly where neighborhood uses are not feasible.

Housing

- Provide additional information on how the housing program will be developed in coordination with the City.

Infrastructure, Energy, and Sustainability

- Show how district-wide solutions and collaboration will be prioritized and incorporated into the development and phasing.
- Provide additional details on sustainability measures related to building and site design.
- Provide additional information on how the proposal will incorporate shared stormwater infrastructure.
- Include infrastructure modeling to confirm City infrastructure can support the full PUD buildout and identify opportunities for improvements.

Arts & Culture

- Identify how arts and cultural facilities will support the neighborhood and sense of place.
- Identify how arts and culture programs and spaces will be developed, supported, and administered.
- Describe how public art will be integrated into the project.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

Comments on Final Development Plan

As with the Development Proposal, the Final Development Plan continues to meet the standards of the AOD-Q district and is aligned with the current planning objectives for the Alewife area. The proposal includes a rail crossing between the Quadrangle and Triangle (and the future possibility for other major transit improvements, discussed below) as well as a permanent public works facility for the City. Both of these are major public benefits that the City has long identified as needs, and are incentivized by zoning because they would be difficult to achieve without a willing development partner. The proposal also creates capacity to serve future demand for both residential and commercial growth over the long term, and incorporates ground-floor uses and park spaces that are intended to promote a stronger neighborhood identity as the area transforms.

The Final Development Plan describes the project at a conceptual, master plan level. As with all phased long-term PUDs, staff expects that details of the plan will evolve over the expected development timeframe, and aspects of the plan will need to adapt to changing conditions. The detailed characteristics of buildings, sites, and open spaces will be addressed during the continuing design review process, in which the Planning Board will continue to guide development after the special permit is granted.

The submission is detailed, so staff comments focus on issues that will be crucial to the approval and ongoing implementation of the Final Development Plan.

Site Development Program

As in the Development Proposal, the Final Development Plan consists of 24 distinct building sites, 5 distinct park sites, a Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge across the MBTA rail tracks, and the construction/ reconstruction of several street segments within and surrounding the site. The building sites include a mix of new residential and commercial buildings, four standalone parking structures, three existing buildings to be retained, and a site conveyed to the City for a future DPW facility.

The Final Development Plan includes the following minor modifications from the Development Proposal:

- DPW Site – the site area has been increased slightly, to 1.27 acres, by adjusting the site boundary shared with the C5 parcel.
- Park Sites – the open space program has been clarified and updated to include the following sites, with updated calculations for the area of each:
 - Bend Park – approximately 1.62 acres.
 - Gateway Park (previously named South Smith Park) – approximately 1.09 acres.

- Pocket Park (previously described as a neighborhood park) – approximately 1.01 acres.
- Mooney Green (previously described as Mooney Quad) – approximately 2.86 acres as site boundaries of Building Sites in the northwest quadrant have been more precisely established.
- Main Street Plaza (new key open space) – approximately 0.35-acre linear plaza running across New Main St between Moulton and Fawcett Streets.
- Street Segments
 - New Main Street – Clarified as a primary street, not an open space.

Because of these updates, primarily the clarification that New Main Street is a primary street and does not contribute to open space calculations, the total proposed open space is slightly changed from approximately 13 acres to approximately 12 acres, but remains above the required minimum.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Each building site, including the building and surrounding open space not part of any park site, will be subject to Design Review approval by the Planning Board prior to issuance of a building permit, following the typical Design Review procedures for a PUD plan and consistent with the process proposed in the Final Development Plan (referenced throughout).
- Each park site (see below under “Open Space”) will also be subject to Design Review approval by the Planning Board. In general, open space and park site designs for a particular phase of development should be submitted for review prior to or concurrent with Design Review for the first adjacent building to be developed, regardless of whether that building is in the same development phase or not. However, the Planning Board may allow for flexibility in the review process.
- Small variations in square footage are typical as buildings are designed and built over time. Other PUD special permits have included a provision that variations of up to 10% in the approved GFA, height, and other dimensional aspects for each site can be approved by the Planning Board as part of the design review process, as long as no additional relief is required (or has been granted through this Special Permit). Given the project scale, staff would suggest a similar provision. To keep track, an updated Site Development Program should be provided with each Design Review submission.

Uses and GFA

The following table illustrates the proposed uses GFA for the overall development plan.

Use	Existing (SF)	Minimum / Maximum (SF)	Proposed (SF)
Commercial (Office/Lab/Tech Office)	109,000	No min. / 3,188,361	2,630,000
Residential	0	1,907,160 / 4,692,845	2,246,900
Neighborhood Use	84,500	75,630 / No max.	160,140 (75,640 new)
Total GFA	193,500	n/a	5,037,040
Total GFA (excluding exempt uses)	193,500	n/a	4,876,900
GFA Exemptions under 20.1100.5.1.4			
Neighborhood Use		75,630 / No max.	160,140 (75,640 new)
Municipal Service Facility		n/a	~55,000
Structured Parking		n/a	1,543,300

The Final Development Plan remains consistent with the AOD-Q zoning, which allows for increased non-residential GFA if a pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the railroad and/or a passenger rail station is completed and additional GFA for conveyance of land for public use.

The proposal allocates 46% of the new proposed GFA for residential use, surpassing the minimum 40% requirement for a PUD. The Final Development Plan shows more residential GFA than the Development Proposal (an increase from 1,985,000 SF to 2,246,900 SF), while the approximate number of units remains the same.

The Final Development Plan shows no substantive change in Neighborhood Uses, remaining above the minimum of 3% for a PUD. The AOD-Q zoning allows the Planning Board to exempt the GFA of Neighborhood Uses and municipal facilities from zoning limitations to support holistic neighborhood development and other public benefits.

The Board may also exempt GFA for structured parking if it serves the AOD-Q goals of limiting overall parking and providing shared facilities for greater flexibility.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- In addition to exempting GFA for the proposed 75,630 square feet of new Neighborhood Use, staff supports allowing exemption of additional Neighborhood Use GFA by Minor Amendment to facilitate future expansion (also see comments under “Neighborhood Uses and Activation”, below).
- Because the municipal service facility will be built by the City and is not yet fully designed, staff recommend that the special permit allow flexibility in the final

amount of exempted GFA and other dimensional relief that may be granted by special permit (see below).

- As with Neighborhood Uses, staff recommend conditions that would allow an increase in Residential Use GFA by Minor Amendment.
- To remain consistent with the intent, staff recommend that the exemption of GFA for structured parking be conditioned on design review approval for each facility and other conditions recommended by DOT (discussed below and in the DOT memo).

Temporary Use

The Final Development Plan includes a new request for temporary bus parking (or “Bus Yard”) at 127 Smith Place as an interim use before Buildings C4 and C6 are constructed. The request is based on “Parking as a Principal Use” being allowable by special permit in the AOD-Q zoning. Details are discussed further in the DOT memo.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Staff recommend conditions allowing the use with a time limit, which the Planning Board may extend by Minor Amendment finding that such an extension does not delay the development of Building Sites C4 and C6. However, there is also a question of whether this qualifies as an allowable use in the district or if it needs a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA), which will need to be reviewed by the Inspectional Services Department. Therefore, the approval should also be conditioned on any BZA relief that may be needed.

Dimensional Standards

The Final Development Plan proposes to meet most AOD-Q dimensional standards, with some requests for modification. The Final Development Plan provides additional detail to the requests in the Development Proposal.

- The proposal utilizes the additional story of height that is allowable on all development sites in exchange for the conveyance to the City of a minimum one-acre site to replace the existing municipal service facility on Mooney Street.
- The stand-alone parking garage site on P4 off Adley Road seeks modification to the front yard “build-to” standards and side yard requirements. This site does not have traditional frontage on a street, and a modification to the precise standards is intended to achieve an outcome more consistent with the area objectives. The residential buildings R6 and R7 off Adley Road seek modifications to the side yard requirement due to the same condition.

- Residential sites R1 and R4 propose a modification to the required 100-foot distance from an intersection to a curb cut to allow curb cuts that are within 92 feet and 69 feet of an intersection, respectively.
- On commercial sites, a modification is requested to the maximum 30-foot curb cut for loading areas in order to facilitate truck movement. DOT has reviewed and supports this request, subject to further detailed site review.
- Residential site R8, a corner lot, requests modification to the side yard requirements to allow less than a 15 foot setback along the length of the eastern lot line, which is more than 65 feet from Fawcett Street but within 65 feet of Smith Place.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Requested modifications are minor and mostly based on unique site conditions, but it is difficult to evaluate outcomes until final details for each building are provided. Staff recommend that any modifications be conditioned on design review approval by the Planning Board for each applicable building.
- Because the City will be designing and building the facility on the DPW site, which is still at an early stage, staff recommend providing as much dimensional flexibility as allowed by zoning, subject to design review approval. Because the site directly abuts a residential lot at 48 Loomis Street, the required side yard setback on that side could be maintained.

Open Space

Planning Board members requested additional information about the proposed open spaces, including clarification on which areas will be Park Sites and which open spaces will be parts of Building Sites, how open spaces sites will support an open space network throughout the neighborhood (particularly relating to the long-term diagonal park, which will connect Bend and Gateway Parks), clarification on New Main Street and the proposed pedestrian plaza, and updates to Mooney Green to support broader site activation, among others.

The Final Development Plan, particularly the supplemental information provided in August, provides significant clarification on the treatment of Park Sites and open space, identifies individual Park Sites versus open spaces on Building Sites, updates design features based on feedback provided by the Board members, includes a PUD-level gap analysis, and provides information on public accessibility. It also identifies “Green Connectors,” which are intended to support long-term connectivity and access throughout the neighborhood. New Main Street has been clarified as a (private) street, rather than an open space,

although the perpendicular Main Street Plaza will remain a plaza-style Park Site that is treated as an open space and will receive individualized design attention.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- To ensure permanent public access to Park Sites and Green Connectors areas, recommended conditions include procedural and timing requirements for easements or other legal mechanisms to protect public access and connectivity throughout the site. The exact legal mechanism is not specified but is subject to review by the City’s Law Department and acceptance by the City. The expectation is that the legal mechanism for each Park Site or Green Connector be executed and recorded before each respective open space is completed, with flexibility to extend the timeline by mutual agreement.
- Park Sites and Green Connectors that are intended to be publicly accessible should follow City guidelines for Privately Owned Public Space (POPS), to be reviewed through the Design Review process.
- Park Site designs are expected to vary programmatically depending on site needs and community goals that are identified during the Design Review process. Recommended conditions allow for programmatic changes based on the findings of updated gap analyses to be completed at the time of design review, subject to Planning Board approval. (See Urban Design section for more discussion.)

Phasing and Timing

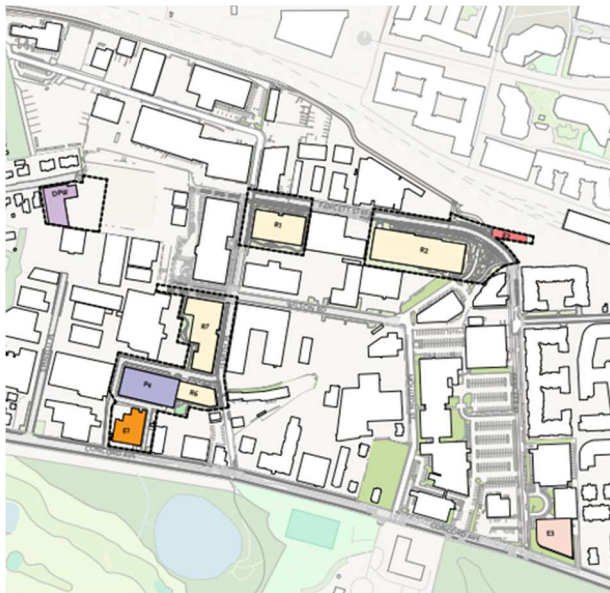
Phasing is a critical component of the Final Development Plan, as timing related to proposed buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure must be coordinated. Planning Board members requested additional details on the project’s phasing, including how interim conditions would be treated as development progresses.

The Final Development Plan’s updated Phasing Plan (Volume II, Section 1.11) reiterates the zoning requirements tied to Phase 1 and Phase 2. As requested by the Planning Board, the plan subdivides each phase to clarify timing of anticipated development within each phase and additional details about key components of the proposal. The updated plan (with images clipped from the Final Development Plan) is summarized below:

Phase	New Building Sites	Park Sites	New Streets and Infrastructure
1A	R1, R2, R6, R7, P4	Bend Park (upper portion)	DPW Site (w/temporary access)

Phase	New Building Sites	Park Sites	New Streets and Infrastructure
1B	C3, C4, C5, C6, P2	Mooney Green	Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge (start), permanent access to DPW site, New Mooney St, Fawcett Street Ext.
2A	C1, C2, R8, P1	Gateway Park, Pocket Park	Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge (completion), Smith Place Ext.
2B	R3, R4, R5, C7, C8	Bend Park (lower portion), Main Street Plaza	New Main St, Wilson Road Ext.

Phase 1A



Phase 2A

Phase 1B



Phase 2B



Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Development is expected to generally proceed in accordance with the proposed phasing plan, with the buildings, parks and open spaces, and other required benefits of one phase or subphase being completed and delivered prior to or concurrent with the start of the next phase. While the zoning requirements must be met, flexibility on timing and phasing is critical when permitting a project of this size and scope. Recommended conditions include flexibility to update the Phasing Plan by Minor Amendment if it remains consistent with zoning requirements. For example, construction of residential buildings, park sites and open space, and infrastructure could be adjusted to begin earlier than required.
- The program of required public benefits, improvements, and mitigation will be tied to the Phasing Plan to ensure that the sequencing of public investments aligns with completion of the new private development that will be supported by it. Additional details are provided in the DOT and DPW memoranda.
- While it is difficult to establish a firm construction timeline for a PUD, the Special Permit should set an “outer limit” after which the permit would no longer remain valid unless proactively updated. The Phasing Plan identifies an anticipated timeframe of 20-30 years, so staff recommend a completion date 30 years after the date of issuance. The Planning Board could extend the timeframe for good cause as a Major or Minor Amendment, depending on the circumstances.

Parking and Transportation

Planning Board members requested additional information on the anticipated maximum number of parking spaces for the PUD, including on-street parking spaces, and strongly

encouraged the reduction of parking for single occupancy motor vehicles to the greatest degree possible and minimization of the impact of trucks and loading on the public realm. Board members also asked for more details on the proposed parking program, the treatment of existing uses, the approach to pooled/principal use parking and shared parking, how impacts would be mitigated, and how the street designs would inform the urban character.

The Final Development Plan includes an updated Parking and Loading Plan (Volume II, Section 1.5) and an updated Transportation Plan (Volume II, Section 1.14). The proposed amount of vehicular parking is reduced from approximately 4,578 total private parking spaces to 4,482 total private parking spaces, summarized below:

Type of parking	Facilities	Spaces
Stand-alone garages (non-residential use)	4 buildings	2,972
Garages in new residential buildings	6 buildings	1,445
Spaces on DPW site	1 site	14
New on-street spaces (private streets)	4 streets	51
Total parking		4,482

The expectation is for stand-alone garages to serve primarily non-residential users, and for garages in residential buildings to serve primarily residents and users associated with those buildings. However, the application seeks approval of all structured parking as “principal use” to allow flexibility to accommodate a range of users.

The PUD is subject to the Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance. DOT approved the final PTDM Plan for the project on August 12, 2026, which is required before any permit (including a special permit) can be issued.

Updated plans also provide additional details on bicycle parking, including the locations of proposed Bluebikes stations.

The DOT memo supports the reduction in parking, treating the 4,482 spaces as a maximum that can continue to be reduced over time as the area transitions to less auto-dependence. The DOT memo also summarizes other transportation-related impacts and recommends conditions including a Transportation Mitigation Program to meet the transportation impact criteria for granting a Project Review Special Permit. The memo also discusses the parking plan and requirements for periodical review, transit improvements, loading and truck management, the proposed multi-use path, and construction management.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Recommended DOT conditions should be incorporated into the special permit decision, with the Transportation Mitigation Program incorporated by reference and attached as an appendix. Ongoing compliance with the PTDM Plan (which would not be attached, since it may be subject to change) would also be a condition. DOT would be responsible for ongoing certification.

Neighborhood Uses and Activation

Planning Board members requested additional information on neighborhood uses and how ground floors and the broader site would be activated. They also asked the Applicant to consider how proposed neighborhood uses and spaces would be located and developed to serve the neighborhood, rather than external visitors. The intent of Neighborhood Uses as permitted in the AOD-Q zoning is to facilitate the development of a fully functional neighborhood that supports daily life, including commercial and community activities.

The Final Development Plan includes an updated Ground Floor Activation Plan (Volume II, Section 1.8) that provides additional information on types of uses that may be included, how implementation will respond to the market to support economic sustainability and a mix of uses, different approaches to specific portions of the Development Parcel, and maps that show both definitive locations of Neighborhood Uses and potential locations for additional Neighborhood Uses if viable. Two of these potential locations include retail “pavilions” within Bend Park and Mooney Green to support open space activation at critical points in the Development Parcel.

There is also an updated Neighborhood Uses and Open Space Advisory Committee Plan (Volume II, Section 1.9). The updated plan reviews how the Advisory Committee will be developed and how it will advise on neighborhood uses, open space, arts programs, and cultural initiatives. Staff supports the strong emphasis on the project’s arts and cultural program, which envisions a collaborative process with community stakeholders to identify opportunities to integrate public art, cultural programming, and creative spaces throughout the site.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- The special permit should affirm that the new Neighborhood Uses at the general locations shown in the Final Development Plan, at a minimum, satisfy the Neighborhood Use requirement for the PUD. In addition to authorizing additional exempted Neighborhood Use GFA (see Uses and GFA section), recommended conditions would allow expanded areas for Neighborhood Uses by Minor Amendment to support the evolving needs of the neighborhood. Removal of any

Neighborhood Use locations would need a Planning Board determination of whether they constitute Major or Minor Amendments.

- The goals of the Alewife District Plan and the AOD-Q zoning emphasize the importance of the redeveloped Quadrangle being a fully functioning neighborhood with a range of uses and active community spaces that serve the internal community, in addition to visitors. Because of the critical nature of neighborhood uses and open space, staff recommend the creation of the Neighborhood Uses and Open Space Advisory Committee prior to the first application for Design Review, earlier in the process than the Final Development Plan currently proposes. Recommended conditions also address the Committee’s membership, coordination and meetings, and input on the design and development of buildings and open spaces.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge (Major Infrastructure Component)

Planning Board members requested clarification on the commitment, review process, and timeline for design and construction of the proposed Pedestrian and Bicycle Bridge over the MBTA rail tracks, which qualifies as the Major Infrastructure Component required for an Infrastructure PUD Special Permit. The timing on construction and completion of the bridge is required to qualify as an Infrastructure PUD in the AOD-Q zoning.

Since the first public hearing, there have been several discussions among Healthpeak, the City, and the MBTA, which owns and operates the rail line and areas where parts of the landings and access to the bridge would be located. MBTA representatives expressed a strong willingness to work with the City and Healthpeak to enable this connection to take place. The MBTA is also conducting a study on potential improvements to rail service that could result in a new station serving Alewife, which is also a planning objective of the City and is incentivized by the AOD-Q zoning. If it advances, such a station could provide both a pedestrian/bicycle connection and transit service to support the area’s growth.

These discussions are a meaningful advancement in planning for a long-desired connection. Although it is unlikely that construction will be possible in the near future, the participation of the MBTA provides confidence that the connection, and possibly more, will be completed within the phasing of the PUD.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- The special permit should enable the construction of the pedestrian/bicycle crossing as proposed, but should also allow time for the completion of the MBTA’s rail study and the possibility of completing the crossing through participation in an MBTA project resulting in a rail station (both of which would satisfy the Infrastructure PUD requirement). Based on the current study timeline, staff feels

confident that an update could be provided in three years to clarify which alternative would be pursued.

- As recommended in the DOT memo, if a standalone pedestrian/bicycle crossing is pursued, it should be subject to further review by the Planning Board and City staff as it would ultimately be owned and maintained by the City.

Other Infrastructure

The Final Development Plan describes updates to existing streets and the construction of new streets, some to become public streets and some to remain private. It also proposes the conveyance of roads, rights-of-way, and utilities, that are to become public following construction.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Recommended DPW conditions should be incorporated into the special permit decision, which include procedures for compliance with applicable standards for each development site as well as conditions to review utility needs at an areawide level.
- Recommended conditions should confirm which new streets are to become public or remain private. The DOT memo recommends that Wilson Road Extension be a public way as it is a key connection through the district.
- In addition to design and construction requirements for streets and infrastructure, recommended conditions include interim and final requirements to ensure public access and maintenance as well as provisions for eventual conveyance of public infrastructure.

Sitewide and Building Sustainability

Planning Board members requested additional information on sustainability measures for building and site design, and how district-wide solutions will be incorporated into the development and phasing. All development in the Development Parcel will be required to comply with relevant City Ordinances, and the Final Development Plan has updated 1.12 Sustainability Plan to highlight approaches to holistic environmentally sustainable development.

The Final Development Plan confirms the development's compliance with the City's Fossil Fuel Free Ordinance, the Building Energy Use Disclosure Ordinance (BEUDO), and with the CZO Section 22.20 Green Building Requirements. All buildings are proposed to be entirely electric except for emergency generators, and all new buildings will target at least LEED Gold certification (commercial buildings) or Phius+ (residential buildings). The Final Development Plan shows compliance with the City's heat resilience zoning requirements

(Section 22.90 Green Factor Standard), with a proposed sitewide “Cool Score” that prioritizes trees and exceeds the minimum requirements.

The Application requests Special Permits to modify both the Green Roofs Requirement (CZO Section 22.30) and the Flood Resilience Standards (CZO Section 22.80). The Applicant has requested PUD-wide relief so each individual building may be evaluated at the time of Design Review, and so the Planning Board may allow for flexibility where necessary while continuing to ensure that building design meets the intent of the regulations. Additional commentary is provided in the DPW memo, and recommended special permit conditions address the limitations of relief and timelines for design review considerations.

City staff have met multiple times with both the Applicant and Eversource about the opportunity to install a substantial thermal energy network as part of the Alewife Quadrangle redevelopment. Office of Sustainability staff have identified the Quadrangle as the best opportunity in the City to install a neighborhood-scale thermal energy network. Such an investment would take pressure off the Eversource electrical substation and could help the new buildings (both in this proposed PUD and elsewhere in the Quadrangle) meet applicable energy requirements, and has the potential to make the Alewife Quadrangle a net positive energy source that could provide low or no carbon thermal energy to nearby residences and businesses. Although it is unclear at this time if a thermal energy network is practicable, the Final Development Plan highlights the Applicant’s active coordination with the City and Eversource to continue to explore thermal energy network as a potential district-wide energy solution.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- As part of the Design Review process, additional documentation related to each site will be required to establish site/building details and confirm compliance at the Design Review stage, as well as Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy.
- As with other long-term phased development projects, staff suggests that the special permit conditions include requirements that individual buildings and sites undergoing future design review adhere to the sustainable design standards applicable at the time of design review, provided that the construction begins within two years of the completion of design review. This ensures that new buildings would be meeting the same standards as comparable development throughout the city at that time.
- Any granted relief from Green Roof and Flood Resilience Standards should be conditioned on approval of the detailed design by the Planning Board. A Design Review submission would indicate how each building responds to the requirements and how any modifications are being applied. Relevant staff (particularly DPW for

Flood Resilience) would provide input to the Board on how any modifications impact the intent of the regulations, and the Board could request modification or mitigation based on that feedback. Recommended conditions include provisions for this review and approval process.

- Recommended conditions include provisions for ongoing communication and coordination on energy infrastructure. Although energy infrastructure is not regulated by zoning, ongoing communication and, if possible, collaboration with the City and Eversource will be critical to ensure a strong energy infrastructure system that supports the Quadrangle.

Appendix – Zoning Text Excerpts

Special Permit for a PUD – Review of a Development Proposal

12.35.3 Approval of the Development Proposal shall be granted only upon determination by the Planning Board that the Development Proposal:

- (1) Conforms with the General Development Controls set forth in Section 12.50, and the development controls set forth for the specific PUD district in which the project is located;
- (2) Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for the portion of the city in which the PUD district is located;
- (3) Provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects; in making this determination the Planning Board shall consider the following:
 - (a) Quality of site design, including integration of a variety of land uses, building types, and densities; preservation of natural features; compatibility with adjacent land uses; provision and type of open space; provision of other amenities designed to benefit the general public;
 - (b) Traffic flow and safety;
 - (c) Adequacy of utilities and other public works;
 - (d) Impact on existing public facilities within the city; and
 - (e) Potential fiscal impact.

Special Permit for a PUD – Approval of the Special Permit

12.36.4 The Planning Board shall make the decision to approve or disapprove the application for a Special Permit to construct a Planned Unit Development no later than ninety (90) days after the public hearing concerning the Development Proposal. Approval of the Final Development Plan shall be granted only upon **determination by the Planning Board that the Final Development Plan meets the evaluation criteria set forth in Section 12.35.3 and contains any revisions to the Development Proposal required by the Planning Board**. If the Planning Board grants the Special Permit with conditions, the conditions must be agreed to in writing by the developer before the Special Permit is granted. The Planning Board shall make its final decision in writing and shall specify its reason for not granting a Special Permit to construct a PUD. If the Planning Board makes no decision within the specified time limit, then the Final Development Plan shall be considered approved and the Special Permit to construct a PUD shall be deemed granted. **[emphasis added]**

AOD-Q Purpose

20.1100.2.1

It is the purpose of the AOD-Q District to promote a development pattern that implements the vision and goals of the Envision Alewife District Plan (2019) and the Principles of the Alewife Zoning Working Group (2023), referred to herein as the "AOD-Q Principles." In summary, this Section is intended to achieve the following objectives:

- (a) Support the creation of a mixed-use environment with a balance of residential and non-residential uses.
- (b) Incorporate a variety of neighborhood-supporting uses that provide retail, services, recreation, culture, and employment opportunities to residents, employees, and visitors to the area, and help to activate the ground stories of buildings.
- (c) Promote the development of significant public infrastructure and open space in the District to improve physical access and connectivity, and to transform the area from an auto-oriented environment to one that prioritizes transit, biking and walking.
- (d) Address area-specific environmental concerns by promoting resilience to future flooding, reducing urban heat island effects, and managing stormwater with a focus on green infrastructure and mitigating impacts on public sewage and drainage systems.
- (e) Maintain and preserve a regulated transition between larger-scale development in the district and nearby smaller-scale residential neighborhoods and communities.
- (f) Review and permit redevelopment through a process that encourages comprehensive, long-range planning and urban design while providing sufficient flexibility to property owners to adapt to changing conditions over time.

AOD-Q – GFA Criteria for Exemption

20.1100.5.1.4.2

In granting exemptions from GFA calculations, the Planning Board shall find that the uses to be exempted are located and designed in a way to ensure long-term adherence to the purpose of the AOD-Q District. The special permit shall include a plan clearly depicting the areas to be exempt and the conditions shall set forth the range of uses permitted to occupy such areas in the future to ensure ongoing compliance. Any deviation from the range of uses permitted to occupy such areas as set forth in the special permit conditions shall require an amendment to the special permit.

AOD-Q Pooled or Principal Use Parking

20.1100.6.3

The Planning Board may, by special permit, allow accessory parking serving one or more lots or Development Parcels to be located in whole or in part in pooled parking facilities within the AOD-Q District, notwithstanding the limitations set forth in Section 6.22.1. The Planning Board may also, by special permit, allow a principal use parking facility as a component of a mixed-use PUD development. In either case, the number of parking spaces in the facility or facilities (whether accessory or principal) shall not exceed the maximum parking requirements for all other principal uses on the lots or Development Parcels, and the Planning Board must find that the provision of parking in a pooled facility: (1) Helps to advance the objective of the Alewife District Plan; (2) Aids in implementation of effective Transportation Demand Management measures to reduce dependence on the single occupancy automobile; (3) The facility is appropriately located to serve the development it serves; and (4) The facility is well designed, does not diminish the pedestrian-friendly quality of the area around it, and is otherwise consistent with the Alewife Design Guidelines.

AOD-Q Off-Street Loading Requirements

20.1100.6.4

Development in the AOD-Q district shall provide off-street loading as set forth in Section 6.80 of the Zoning Ordinance except that the Planning Board may, upon issuing a special permit, waive any requirements for the amount, location and design of loading facilities, and may permit loading facilities to be shared across various uses and lots within the AOD-Q District, upon finding that such waiver would reduce the negative impacts of loading activities on the public realm. The special permit may include conditions to ensure this criterion is met.

AOD-Q Approval of Major Infrastructure

20.1100.7.3.1

When approving a Final Development Plan for an Infrastructure PUD, the Planning Board shall find that the location and function of the infrastructure component supports the vision described in the Alewife District Plan (2019) and that it will be designed and constructed in a manner that conforms to applicable standards to support its function.

AOD-Q Special Permit Review Criteria

20.1100.8.4.3

In addition to the criteria in Section 10.43 of the Zoning Ordinance and other criteria specific to the special permit being sought, the Planning Board shall grant a special permit only if it finds that the following general criteria are met:

- (a) The proposal supports the purpose of the AOD-Q District.
- (b) The proposal is generally consistent with the vision and goals of the Envision Alewife District Plan (2019) and the Principles of the Alewife Zoning Working Group (2023).
- (c) Development plans are in general conformance with the Alewife Design Guidelines (2023) and the Citywide Urban Design Objectives in Section 19.30 of this Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Board may grant special permits for development that deviates from specific design guidelines if the Board finds that the proposal, on the whole, advances the intent of those guidelines.

AOD-Q Phased Development Plan Determination

20.1100.8.5.5.5

For a Phased Development Plan, the Planning Board shall also determine whether the proposed Phasing Plan will ensure that the purpose of this Section 20.1100 will be met over the duration of the development period, and that the mix of permitted uses and public benefits will be provided in a balanced and complementary way over time. The Planning Board may request changes to the Phasing Plan as part of a Final Development Plan submission.

AOD-Q Final Development Plan Approval

20.1100.8.5.5.7

The Planning Board shall grant a PUD special permit to approve the Final Development Plan, with conditions as set forth below, upon finding that it contains the modifications or improvements requested in the Preliminary Determination, and that the resulting plan is in conformance with the special permit criteria in Section 20.1100.8.4.3 above and the PUD approval criteria in Section 12.35.3 of this Zoning Ordinance. The Planning Board may simultaneously grant any other special permits required as part of the Final Development Plan approval upon finding that the criteria specific to those special permits are met.

Flood Resilience Standards Modifications

22.84.3 Upon granting a special permit, the Planning Board may approve modifications to the development standards set forth in Section 22.84.1 and 22.84.2 above after finding that a proposed development is designed to meet the intent of the standards in a manner that is more suitable to the unique conditions of the development or the site. No such modification may be approved under this section unless it has been reviewed and approved in writing by the City Engineer.

Project Review Special Permit – Review Criteria

19.25 *Review Criteria.* In granting a special permit under this Section [19.20](#) the Planning Board shall make the following findings.

- 19.25.1 Traffic Impact Findings. Where a Traffic Study is required as set forth in Section 19.24 (3) above 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.

In areas where the Planning Board determines that area-specific traffic guidelines have been established in the Ordinance, the Board recognizes written agreements between project proponents and the City dealing with transportation mitigation strategies.

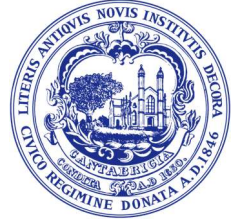
- 19.25.11 Traffic Impact Indicators. In determining whether a proposal has substantial adverse impacts on city traffic the Planning Board shall apply the following indicators. When one or more of the indicators is exceeded, it will be indicative of potentially substantial adverse impact on city traffic. In making its findings, however, the Planning Board shall consider the mitigation efforts proposed, their anticipated effectiveness, and other supplemental information that identifies circumstances or actions that will result in a reduction in adverse traffic impacts. Such efforts and actions may include, but are not limited to, transportation demand management plans; roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities improvements; measures to reduce traffic on residential streets; and measures undertaken to improve safety for pedestrians and vehicles, particularly at intersections identified in the Traffic Study as having a history of high crash rates.

The indicators are: (1) Project vehicle trip generation weekdays and weekends for a twenty-four hour period and A. M. and P.M. peak vehicle trips generated; (2) Change in level of service at identified signalized intersections; (3) Increased volume of trips on residential streets; (4) Increase of length of vehicle queues at identified signalized intersections; and (5) Lack of sufficient pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The precise numerical values that will be deemed to indicate potentially substantial adverse impact for each of these indicators shall be adopted from time to time by the Planning Board in consultation with the TPTD, published and made available to all applicants.

- 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.

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	• Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	• Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	• Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	• Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	• Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	• Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	• Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities
Development should be resilient to the effects of climate change as anticipated in the <i>Resilient Cambridge</i> plan published by the City.	• Climate projections (especially heat, flooding, drought) incorporated into design • Flood and heat resilience standards met or exceeded • Strategies incorporate environmental co-benefits • Integrative approach addressing context & design goals



Urban Design Staff Report

Introduction

As noted in the Urban Design Staff Report for the PUD's Preliminary Hearing on April 28, 2026, the Alewife Quadrangle represents an extraordinary opportunity for Cambridge. Its overall area is almost as large as Boston's Back Bay from the Public Garden to Massachusetts Avenue. Originally a marshland, the Quadrangle was landfilled in the early 20th century, creating a low-lying landscape that is increasingly vulnerable to flooding. Its irregular, discontinuous street network, shaped by decades of piecemeal development, lacks strong connections to the rest of Cambridge, and prioritizes vehicles over pedestrians and bicyclists. Extensive surface parking lots and limited tree cover make it one of the city's worst urban heat islands. Today, the Quadrangle contains a mix of uses, ranging from old low-rise light-industrial buildings to new residential, lab, and office buildings.

Healthpeak's Planned Unit Development (PUD) proposal will make significant progress to making the City's long-term planning goals of the Alewife Quadrangle a reality. It will add almost 5 million gross square feet of new construction (exclusive of parking structures) across about 45% of the Quadrangle over the next 20 to 30 years. The project will reduce the Quadrangle's urban heat island effect; make it more resilient to flooding; improve existing streets; introduce new street and path connections within the Quadrangle and to surrounding areas, including a bicycle/pedestrian bridge across the Fitchburg Railroad line (potentially anticipating a future commuter rail station); provide a location for a new DPW facility, and create new public parks and open spaces. It will create a pattern for the transformation of the entire district, establishing precedents and parameters to transform it into an active, walkable, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use area—a new urban center in Cambridge to complement areas such as Central, Kendall, and Harvard Squares, Cambridge Crossing, and the East Cambridge riverfront area.

Once the Final Development Plan is approved, the building and park sites within the project will be subject to design review prior to construction. The focus of this memo is to ensure that the process for future design review is set up for success, and will address the comments and feedback from staff and the Planning Board up to this point.



Healthpeak's Proposed Site Plan

In addition to the AOD-Q zoning adopted by the City Council in 2023, the design of the PUD will be guided by plans and studies created by the City over the course of several years, including:

- Envision Cambridge 2019
- Envision Alewife District Plan 2019
- The Alewife Design Guidelines 2023
- Design Guidelines for Multifamily Housing 2025
- Shaping Our City - Citywide Urban Design Guidelines for Cambridge 2025
- City of Cambridge Open Space and Recreation Plan 2025-2032



The Quadrangle's Open Space Plan from the Alewife District Plan (2019)



Artist's Rendering of the Future Quadrangle from the Alewife Design Guidelines (2023)

Along with these past plans and studies, staff have included and appended to this memo an Urban Design Appendix [A], which is intended to centralize several of the key planning recommendations and provide focused guidance on main urban design considerations for the Healthpeak project as it moves from the special permit review stage to the design review stage of development.

Urban Design Comments on the Final Development Plan:

The Healthpeak PUD will be the seed for the transformation of the entire Quadrangle. Based on new organizational principles, it will gradually transform an aging, underutilized industrial and warehouse area into a walkable, vibrant urban district with a strong sense of place. This district will offer residents, employees, and visitors the quintessential urban experience: streets, parks, and squares of diverse sizes and characters framed as three-dimensional spaces by streetwall facades. The public realm will be activated by first-floor building uses, enriched by well-proportioned architecture, and enhanced by pedestrian sidewalks shaded by curbside trees and well-equipped public parks.

As the project is built over the course of many years, more detailed review will be made of the form, character, and programming of its open spaces, and of the massing and siting of its buildings, with the intent of creating a public realm of beautiful, meaningful, and active public places. The emphasis of that future review should be on maintaining a holistic approach to the district's urban form, an approach in which the form and function of each element—whether building, park, street, programmatic use, or infrastructure component—is designed as part of a well-integrated whole.

Civic Structure

A city's public realm: its streets, parks, squares, plazas, and courtyards, together with the urban blocks that frame them and the exceptional buildings that articulate them, constitutes its *civic structure*. Our daily experience of the city is one of moving through these spaces as we enjoy its varied facilities and amenities, live in its dwellings, and work in and benefit from its businesses. The Final Development Plan has made several adjustments to address this challenge since the proposal received its Preliminary Determination; such as increasing the potential locations of neighborhood uses, adjusting the siting of some of the proposed buildings to maximize visual connections and increase the area of open spaces, and updating the Final Development Plan's building and massing diagrams to include information requested by staff and the Planning Board. As the project moves towards the Design Review phase, staff encourages the Permittee to continue to push in a direction to ensure the open spaces and public realm be the primary elements of the composition such that buildings do not appear to stand as independent from each other. To assist in this process, staff recommends:

- The massing and siting of the PUD's buildings should create coherent urban blocks; they should frame the district's public realm with facades and massing at scales compatible with the dimensions of its streets, parks, and squares; and should enhance the connectivity of the Quadrangle by emphasizing critical locations in its civic structure.
- Buildings and sites should be designed to ensure that the PUD is a walkable pedestrian-friendly district, with safe shaded streets, shaded by street trees; active uses in the first floors of its buildings; and accessible parks with a wide range of features and amenities.
- These spaces should be organized and designed to give the PUD (and by extension the Quadrangle) a memorable identity and a compelling sense of place.
- The features and facilities provided by the PUD's parks should be developed to fulfill the needs of the PUD's expected population, expanding on the existing facilities in and near the Quadrangle.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

To ensure that the overall development continues to be guided by an overarching vision as its design is developed over the project's long-time frame:

- The FDP's "Massing Strategy" diagram should be tuned up to more forcefully convey the PUD's intended *civic structure*: the basic organization of the PUD's streets, parks, and other open spaces in contrast to its urban blocks, and the most important architecturally defined edges of those open spaces.
- The "Block Guidelines" should be adjusted to convey how the massing of the PUD's buildings will fit into the proposed civic structure and respond to and contribute to their contexts.

- The overall aerial views of the PUD should be revised in accord with the Massing Strategy and Block Guidelines diagrams.
- These should be supplemented by comparative examples of successful urban districts and interventions at a similar scale.
- The “Massing Strategy” diagram, “Block Guidelines”, and the aerial views should be living documents, updated as appropriate in response to changing conditions, and submitted to the Planning Board prior to the first building or open space of each phase of the PUD.
- See the Urban Design Appendix [A] for more detail.

Open Spaces: Parks, Squares, and Plazas:

The quality of an urban environment derives from the coherence and legibility of its public spaces – spaces that have unique and memorable identities by virtue of their varied forms, sizes, shapes, plantings, and the facades of the buildings that border them.

As part of its Preliminary Determination, the Planning Board recommended that the Applicant further explore how to best frame its open spaces, maximize visual and physical connectivity across the district, expand Main Street Plaza and identify opportunities for additional active recreation spaces in the PUD.

The FDP includes developed designs for the PUD’s four proposed parks: Bend Park, Gateway Park, Mooney Green, and the Pocket Park in the western part of the Mooney Street area. These list an inventory of needs and show numerous proposed features in the parks.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- As part of the design review submittal for a park site and before the PUD’s parks and open spaces are fully designed, the Permittee should conduct a “Parks and Open Space Gap Analysis” to inform the park’s design and programming. The optimal combination of facilities and amenities in a particular park should be determined in consideration of its location and size, the dimensional fit of programmatic elements, their locations relative to likely users, and their impacts on existing and future neighbors.

Built Form – Architectural Massing, Facades, and Character

The Planning Board recommended that the plans and three-dimensional massing diagrams of the PUD’s buildings (see Application Volume 2 Figures 1L.6a and following) be updated to clarify how buildings will define, shape, and activate the Quadrangle’s streets and open spaces, and shape and promote engagement in the public realm, and how their massing will create coherent urban blocks.

- The plans and building massing diagrams in the FDP have been updated to indicate the proposed locations of significant facades or landmark elements. As the project enters the

design review phase, they could be further modified to provide more information on how the PUD's buildings should respond to adjoining streets, parks, and neighboring buildings. See the Urban Design Appendix [A] for additional aspects of built form to address at this diagrammatic level.

To create the high-quality pedestrian environment envisioned by the Alewife District Plan and the Alewife Design Guidelines, parking and building service should impinge as little as possible on the Public Realm. The board requested that the impact of parking and loading be minimized.

- The FDP depicts includes parking garages that occupy most of the lower three floors of the project's residential buildings, and the loading docks of the commercial buildings are located on major streets. Careful design of these spaces in the design review phase of the buildings will be important to minimize any potential detrimental effects.

The Board requested study of how the PUD's buildings could read less as single-building superblocks, and to consider courtyard-oriented development.

- The Urban Design Appendix [A] offers some strategies for breaking down the scale of the proposed buildings. The Permittee should review and consider utilizing one of these strategies as part of design review of the individual building sites.

The Board specifically mentioned evaluating the C4 building at the southeast corner of the Mooney Green Block to improve open space, retail access, and light, and describing how architectural design will support a sense of place and define the public realm.

- Building C4 has been moved to the southeast corner of the Mooney block, with the benefits of creating a stronger sense of arrival at the intersection of Smith Place and Fawcett Street, a more positive sense of entry to Mooney Green, and a larger open space between it and building C6.

The Board requested that Mooney Street area be further developed to make it that it appear less like an office park enclave and be a fully integral part of the neighborhood.

- As noted above, the new location of building C4 promises to create more continuity between the Mooney area and the rest of the Quadrangle. The FDP provides enlarged plans of all four of the proposed parks (including Mooney Green), showing numerous amenities that will draw the public to them. As the buildings around Mooney Green and Mooney Green itself advances to the design review phase, further examination of the siting, massing, and facades of the buildings around Mooney Green should be undertaken to help the buildings that surround it to frame and engage the space.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At the beginning of each phase, the "Massing Strategy" plan and the building massing diagrams (the "Block Guidelines") should be further developed to more fully convey these |
|---|

strategies, and the overall three-dimensional drawings of the PUD should be updated to reflect them.

- In revising the diagrams, a variety of strategies should be employed as appropriate to the unique circumstances of each building. They will respond to the scale of adjoining streets, parks, or other open spaces to define them as volumetric spaces by providing streetwalls of appropriate height; they will enhance pedestrian connectivity and wayfinding by emphasizing and articulating critical junctures in the district's pattern of streets and other open spaces; they will create a dialog between the building and its neighbors that will contribute to the definition of their urban block.
- Strategies to minimize the visual impacts of parking and loading structures on the public realm need to be clearly explained and shown in the building design for each building for design review.
- See the Urban Design Appendix [A] for a more extensive description of built form and building site plans with respect to the quality of the public realm.

Neighborhood Uses, Arts & Culture

A lively and welcoming pedestrian realm depends in part on the activation provided by first floor uses. A fully functioning neighborhood needs businesses, institutions and community facilities that serve daily needs.

The Planning Board requested a description of potential means to dedicate more of the PUD's first floor area to Neighborhood Uses, going beyond the minimum required by zoning, particularly in the New Main Street and Mooney Green areas. They recommended expanding the range of neighborhood uses that are considered.

- The FDP shows additional spaces labeled "Potential Neighborhood Use" (volume 2, figure 1F.2).

Public art and a lively cultural environment contribute to a fully functioning neighborhood and a sense of place. With a few exceptions, the Alewife District is a cultural desert, with a significant lack of cultural assets such as libraries, galleries, music schools, community centers, and other community-beneficial spaces compared to other areas of Cambridge. The PUD presents an important opportunity to introduce much-needed cultural amenities. These types of spaces are also incentivized by zoning: if they are designated as Neighborhood Uses, floor area exemptions and bonuses are available.

The Planning Board requested more information on how arts and cultural facilities will be integrated into the project to support the neighborhood and the sense of place, and how programs for them will be developed, supported, and administered.

- The FDP adds a description of the Permittee’s support for arts and cultural facilities (Volume 1 section 2.6.3) but does not provide detail on the development, support, and administration of arts programs.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Staff have recommended conditions that require further detail on how public art and cultural uses will be incorporated into site design at each Design Review for both buildings and park sites, and how the sites address relevant guidance from the Neighborhood Uses and Open Space Advisory Committee. Staff suggest an overall plan illustrating opportunities for public art and arts and cultural uses within the PUD could be a helpful guiding document as the project develops over time.

Environmental Safety and Comfort

The PUD will make great improvements to the comfort and well-being of its residents and workers. Beyond the basics of providing sidewalk and bike facilities, it will mitigate heat and flooding, provide shade, and adhere to Cambridge’s requirements for noise, lighting, and wind.

Given the PUD’s programmatic mix of commercial (potentially laboratory) buildings and residential buildings, and its location between two large natural areas, lighting and bird safety are of particular concern.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Staff recommend all proposed building and site lighting adhere to the recommendations of *Shaping Our City: Citywide Design Guidelines* (2025) for both minimizing light pollution and protecting the health and safety of migrating bird populations.

Connectivity

To achieve its goal of creating a fully functioning urban district with a welcoming pedestrian environment, and to begin the transformation of the rest of the Quadrangle, the PUD must create connectivity:

- Between the PUD and the Quadrangle and surrounding districts and neighborhoods.
- Within the Quadrangle
- Within the PUD itself
- Between The PUD’s individual buildings and the sidewalk

The PUD will create crucial new routes between the Quadrangle and its surroundings: to the Alewife Triangle and MBTA station via the bridge across the Fitchburg Rail Line, to the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood, via a pedestrian and bicycle path to Loomis Street. It will begin the creation of a multiuse path along the south side of the Rail Line, and contribute to a study for the

connection of Terminal Road to Wheeler Street. Its improvements to the Mooney Street area will create a more welcoming route to Blair Pond.

The Planning Board recommended that the PUD pursue even greater integration into Cambridge's circulation system, and greater connectivity within the PUD, with particular attention to the Bend Park area, where building R2 in its proposed design blocks sight lines and pedestrian routes to the bridge, and the Mooney Street area, where Mooney Green should have a stronger and clearer relationship to Smith Place.

Within the Quadrangle, the PUD will provide new streets, appropriately lined by trees and with sidewalks and bicycle facilities, reforming the existing discontinuous circulation system with a finer grained block structure and allowing more flexible circulation options.

At the scale of individual streets and buildings, the challenge for designers is how to connect sidewalks, which will generally be at the level of existing grade, to first floors, which will be elevated as much as five feet above them in response to anticipated flood levels, while maintaining building's roles in framing the street and enhancing it with their pedestrian zone facades and activity in their first floor facades. The Board requested clarity on how elevated first floors will be accessed, and how connection and activity will be supported despite the difference in levels.

Staff suggests including the following considerations in any special permit approval:

- Reshape Bend Park and Building R2 to create harmony between their forms, and to create clear sightlines from New Main Street and the future Diagonal Park to the bridge, and paths that respond to pedestrian desire lines.
- At the north end of Smith Place, plan for the opportunity to accommodate the landing of a future second bridge across the Fitchburg Rail Line from the west end of Cambridgepark Drive.
- See the Urban Design Appendix [A] for more strategies on achieving positive relationships between buildings and sidewalks while creating gracious connections to elevated first floors.