



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development
Date: December 12, 2017
Re: Special Permit PB #330, 55 Wheeler Street

This memo provides supplemental information responding to questions that have come up at Planning Board regarding the consistency of the proposed residential development at 55 Wheeler Street with Envision Cambridge and the Cambridge Climate Change Preparedness and Resilience plan. Additional detailed information and analysis is provided in staff memos from the Community Development Department (CDD), dated October 19, from Traffic Parking and Transportation (TP&T), dated October 20, and from the Department of Public Works (DPW), dated August 29, 2017.

Responsiveness to Envision Cambridge and Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency planning

Since the start of the Alewife component of Envision Cambridge, members of the 55 Wheeler St project team have attended meetings of the Envision Alewife working group and related public meetings to stay abreast of the plan. The resulting development proposal is quite consistent with Envision Cambridge planning for Alewife.

Land Use: The Envision Alewife land use plan locates residential use on the 55 Wheeler St. parcel to create a housing cluster, building upon existing residential development on Wheeler and Fawcett Streets. The scale of the 55 Wheeler St. project is consistent with the scale of residential development discussed in the Envision plan. From an urban design perspective, there has been emphasis on breaking down the scale of buildings by changes in materials and façade treatment and through physically breaking up the building into smaller components.

Open space: The project locates a publicly accessible open space in the northern section of the site, which is complementary to the future diagonal open space proposed in the Envision Alewife plan along unused railroad spurs. The park at Wheeler St. could serve as a terminus to the diagonal park, which would facilitate access for people from different parts of the site.

Connections: Additionally, the project would create connections on the site as proposed in Envision Alewife. These include a pedestrian-bicycle connection through the site that would both break up the block and enable a mid-block non-auto connection between Fawcett and Wheeler Streets. The design proposal would also complete the vehicular connection between Wheeler and Fawcett Streets proposed in both Envision Alewife and the 2005 Concord-Alewife Plan and supported by the Planning Board in the special permit for 70 Fawcett St. Envision Alewife speaks to the value of improving transportation connections between the project site and Alewife Station and proposes the idea of a connection between Wheeler St. and Terminal Road to further this goal. TP&T's recommendations for transportation mitigation include a \$250,000 funding commitment for this purpose, which could include further development of the Terminal Road connection to Wheeler Street.

Housing: Increasing the city's housing supply and the development of affordable housing have emerged as key goals of the Envision Cambridge process, and the Housing Working Group is currently developing recommendations to incentivize and facilitate the creation of housing throughout the city. Increasing access to affordable housing for all income groups is also the number one goal of the City Council. Earlier this year, the City Council, with the support of the Planning Board, almost doubled the Inclusionary Zoning set-aside to 20% of a project's floor area. 55 Wheeler St. is the first project to come before the Planning Board under the new 20% Inclusionary Zoning requirement. The project would, therefore, yield over 100 units of affordable housing, depending on unit sizes. For reference, in November, the City celebrated the creation of the 1,000th Inclusionary housing unit since the inception of the ordinance in 1998. This project, if approved, would provide a 10% increase in this yield from the almost 20 years that the Inclusionary zoning ordinance has been in place.

Cambridge Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency (CCPR) planning: The CCPR is being developed as a guide for the City to identify strategies in response to climate change vulnerabilities -- heat, flooding from precipitation, flooding from sea level rise and storm surge -- building upon the Cambridge Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (CCVA) that assessed risks for the City. At present, the 55 Wheeler St. site is largely hardscaped. Redevelopment of the site would allow for the introduction of green space and plantings that would help reduce heat island effect on the site. Soils in the Alewife area are not conducive to infiltration, hence redevelopment on the site has to incorporate structured solutions to manage stormwater. DPW has asked the proponent to address flood level impacts and building resiliency associated with increased flood elevations associated with the 2030 100-year storm events and projected 2070 1% sea level rise/storm surge. The project design elevates the first floor of the buildings above the 2070 sea level rise/storm surge 1% event elevation so that entrances to occupied spaces and mechanical equipment are located to minimize potential impacts.

Staff from CDD, DPW, and TP&T will continue to work with the proponent to ensure that the principles of good urban design, flood preparedness and resiliency, and mobility improvements included in the Planning Board's review are maintained and enhanced as the project proceeds through the design development phase. If the evolution of the project negatively impacts these aspects, we will bring the project back for the Planning Board's input.



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

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Assessing Department

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Louis A. DePasquale, City Manager

FROM: Robert P. Reardon 

SUBJECT: 55 Wheeler Street / PB Terminal Rd

DATE: December 13, 2017

I am writing in response to questions that have been raised concerning a potential new connection between the existing Terminal Road and Wheeler Street to alleviate traffic from new developments. For background, Westbrook Properties, the owners of 55 Wheeler Street (the former Abt Associates site) have submitted a residential development proposal which will be located at the end of Wheeler Street. In addressing neighbors' concerns about increased traffic that might result from its proposed development, Westbrook Properties studied and presented two potential alignments or alternative connections between Wheeler Street and Terminal Road. These proposed connections would allow automobiles, emergency vehicles, bikes and pedestrians access to the retail area along Alewife Brook Parkway, and to bypass Route 16 and the Concord Avenue/Alewife Brook Parkway Rotary to gain access to the retail area along Alewife Brook Parkway. Any such proposed connection would require an agreement with at least two or more private property owners as well as a plan to improve safety and the flow of all modes of transportation both on Terminal Road and on the Fresh Pond Mall property, which is the terminus of one end of the existing Terminal Road. After reviewing the proposal along with site visits it is believed that this proposed new connection could improve travel time to the MBTA Alewife Station (Red Line and bus connections) for bikes and pedestrians and provide improved access to other Cambridge destinations for residents who would be able to bypass the Concord Avenue/Alewife Brook Parkway rotary. Here is a summary of actions taken to date by the City:

- 1) Meetings with City Departments to walk the site and discuss the land area needed to construct a connection between Wheeler Street and Terminal Road;
- 2) Meetings with Eversource on potential land acquisition to accommodate the construction of a connection between Wheeler Street and Terminal Road; and
- 3) Interdepartmental meetings to review costs and other impacts the construction of a connection between Wheeler Street and Terminal Road would have on the surrounding area.

In summary I believe that the proposal has merit and would make sense for a variety of users. The Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department has requested and Westbrook Partners have agreed to contribute \$250,000.00 to improve access between the Alewife Quadrangle and the Alewife MBTA Station as part of the development at 55 Wheeler Street. We would ask the Planning Board to support this project by agreeing to the \$250,000.00 contribution the developer has agreed to make by making it a condition of the Special Permit. We think the likely timeline for this project is 3-5 years.