

Harvard Square Advisory Committee

c/o Cambridge Community Development Department

344 Broadway

Cambridge, MA 02139

617/349-4647

January 24, 2018

CASE: The Abbot Buildings, 1-7 & 9-11 JFK and 18-20 Brattle Streets

Applicant: Regency Centers

Proposal and Zoning Issues: A Planning Board special permit for a proposal to renovate the existing Abbot Buildings, to remove the two story building and construct a new building with a roof terrace. The special permits are for a waiver of the parking requirement and loading requirements, basement gross floor area and additional height.

Committee discussion

The Committee discussed the Historical Commission Certificate of Appropriateness and the changes to the design during that process, including how much of the building will be demolished and how the new construction will meet the remaining structure.

The design of the height on the new building and how the top floor will step back from the building façade was reviewed.

The vehicle parking requirement and bicycle parking, both long and short term spaces were covered as was the expected daily office, restaurant and retail occupancy numbers.

The proponent explained the floor plans and showed basement retail space and the possible uses of the space, as either storage for ground floor retail or active retail space could be used.

Public comment:

There was strong interest in having construction mitigation include construction worker parking, control of the material delivery and removal of demolition material and preservation of as many on street parking spaces as possible for the general public.

The construction should include restoration of the sidewalk, to keep the crosswalk clear of obstructions such as the planters currently on the sidewalk on Brattle Street.

The penthouse should be designed to minimize being seen from the public street.

Lighting inside of the building should be controlled to minimize spilling from the building during all hours.

Business owners expressed concern about the increased property assessments and tax rates, which mean that small retailers have to reduce the number of part time employees. Contributions to the Harvard Square Improvement Fund should include more on street parking not less. Also, there should be mitigation of the construction dust and mess.

One comment was that this building will be mall like and should have smaller retail spaces.

Harvard Square Advisory Committee comments:

There is support for the increased density at this location, as part of requiring the basement be used as retail and require that the individual retail spaces be small keeping in character of Harvard Square geared to local tenants.

The entrance to the ground floor retail at the corner is a strong element and while is not a guarantee to be a small retail space, it does encourage active retail.

The committee supports the accommodation of the existing topography and the increased accessibility to all the floors in the existing building and new construction. This corner is the heart of Harvard Square and preservation of the building is a loud gesture to maintaining a strong retail location.

Parking on this parcel would not be a positive use, JFK and Brattle Streets are busy and creating egress and access would not be positive.

The Construction Management Plan is key to minimizing the negative impacts of demolition and construction and should be carefully reviewed to include control of contractor parking, and deliveries as well as dust and noise.

The basement gross floor area will support the retailers and provide "back of shop" areas that will allow the windows to remain open to activity.

There is interest in creating a commitment to small individual retail spaces, that the expectation of having between 3 and 7 ground floor tenants.

Some members did not support the additional top floor and gross floor area. Other members support the addition and specifically the penthouse as a source of activity and interest.

Overall, there is support for the City to figure out how to manage the parking supply in the business area, to support the retailers.

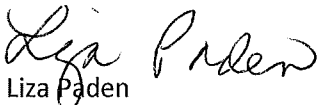
The Committee supports the three requests being made in this application, the parking waiver for the new construction, the additional height and the basement gross floor area. The architecture is found to be responsive to many of the concerns. The committee supports multiple ground floor tenants, of various sizes and shapes. There is interest in creating a commitment to small individual retail spaces, between 3 and 7 ground floor tenants. Improvements are needed to the sidewalk to make it accessible and safe.

The Committee asks the Planning Board to encourage the ground retail spaces be small and individual.

All but one member of the committee present voted in favor of the motion, one member abstained from voting.

Committee members in Attendance: F. Kramer, A. Crosbie, M. Simitis, J. DiGiovanni, A. Offiong, K. Kuelzer, L. Curry and W. Barry.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,



Liza Paden

Community Development Department