



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
CITY HALL ANNEX, 57 INMAN STREET, CAMBRIDGE 02139

**NOTICE OF DECISION**

Case No: PB#166

Address: 100 Vassar Street

Zoning: Residence C-3 District

Owners/Applicants: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 77  
Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Application Date: July 28, 2000

Public Hearing: August 15, 2000

Planning Board Decision: August 15, 2000

Date of Filing Decision: September 28, 2000

Application: Planning Overlay Special Permit (Section 11.500) for  
108,124 square feet of gross floor area for a Sports and Fitness Center.

Decision: GRANTED with conditions

Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17 of Massachusetts  
General Laws, Chapter 40A, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days  
after the filing of the above referenced decision with the City Clerk.

Copies of the complete decision and final plans, if applicable, are on file  
with the Office of the Community Development Department and the City  
Clerk.

Authorized Representative to the Planning Board:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Elizabeth M. Paden".

For further information concerning this decision, please call Liza Paden  
at 349-4647, TTY: 349-4621, email lpaden@ci.cambridge.ma.us.

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**Documents Submitted**

Special Permit Application submitted July 28, 2000, certified complete on July 28, 2000, containing the project description, supporting statement, dimensional form, supporting statement IPOP special permit, certification of traffic study by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, site photos.

MIT Sports and Fitness Center, Transportation Impact Study, June 2000, prepared by Rizzo Associates, Inc.

**Other Documents Submitted**

Copy of presentation made at the public hearing at 8/15/00

**Findings**

After review of the application documents and other documents submitted to the Board, testimony taken at the public hearing, review and consideration of the Planning Overlay Special Permit and the general special permit criteria, the Board makes the following findings.

**1. Conformance to the requirements of the Planning Overlay Special Permit, Section 11.500 of the Zoning Ordinance.**

***a. Submittal of required documents***

All requirements of Section 11.511 have been met with the submittal of a complete application, including a certified traffic study.

***b. Finding of no substantial adverse impact on city traffic***

The Planning Board identified five criteria that would assist in determining whether a project should be found to cause substantial adverse traffic impact: (1) project vehicle trip generation, (2) traffic generated on residential streets, (3) effect on level of service at identified intersections, (4) length of traffic queues at identified intersections, and (5) nearby locations with a high incidence of accidents.

The evaluation of the proposal shows that the project either falls under all IPOP criteria for adverse impact or, where the criteria are not met, the project meets the conditions prescribed by the City.

There will not be an increase in student enrollment or faculty at MIT as a result of this project. A nominal increase in campus employment may occur to operate the new facility. The facility will not be open to the general public. The majority of project generated trips will consist of students and faculty walking or biking from other parts of the campus.

With the implementation of improvements along Massachusetts Avenue as planned by the City, with the improvements to the Galileo Way/Main Street/Vassar Street intersection including the demolition of the existing parking garage to make way for the previously approved Stata Center (PB#158), and with possible improvements by the MDC along Memorial Drive, all with the cooperation of the permittee, the identified failures will be satisfactorily addressed.

The Board concludes that the project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic with the implementation of mitigation measures imposed by the Board as conditions of this Decision and with the redevelopment of the project site as indicated on the approved plans.

***c. Conformance with Enumerated Growth Policies***

The Planning Board finds that the project is consistent with the growth policies enumerated in Section 11.500.

**(1) Policy 13: Pace of development, maintenance of the tax base, adjustment to changing conditions, consistent with urban design plans, disruption of neighborhoods, overburden infrastructure.**

The Board finds that the project is consistent with the urban design and other goals of the city as set forth in the Growth Policy document. The large institutions in particular are encouraged in a number of institutional policies set out in ***Toward a Sustainable Future: Cambridge Growth Policy Document*** to concentrate future development within existing core campus areas, to reduce the impact of new institutional development on the city's tax levy by utilizing already tax exempt properties more efficiently, and to provide housing for students, faculty and staff on campus. This proposal meets all of those objectives. No further property will be taken off the tax rolls, and students will be able to use an improved athletic facility.

As part of the City's effort to upgrade the drainage system leading to the Charles River, MIT, Forest City and the City of Cambridge Department of Public Works have combined efforts to alleviate drainage problems in the Cherry Street and Forest City area. The proposed Athletic Center will require the relocation of the Danforth Street drainage culvert; MIT has made financial contributions to the design consultants.

**(2) Policy 27: Affordable housing and neighborhood character.**

While this proposal is not a residential use, it does not displace any existing residential uses. MIT is currently in the process of constructing undergraduate student dormitory housing as well as applying for a special permit to build a graduate student dormitory.

**(3) Policy 39: minimize impacts on abutting neighborhoods.**

The Sports & Fitness Center will not have a negative impact on abutting residential neighborhoods. The site is part of the high-density residential district, which is on the MIT

campus. The MIT residential district benefits from various student activities being concentrated on the campus.

**(4) Policy 66: Open space facilities**

The proposed landscape plan incorporates a series of landscaped open spaces of various sizes and configurations. The Sports and Fitness Center will form the north side of an open space area with the Student Center and Kresge. The south elevation is designed to promote a sense of community by allowing the various recreational or athletic events to be seen from the outside and vice versa. Landscaping will be used to soften the edges of the building and enhance the Infinite Corridor.

**2. Conformance to the general criteria for the issuance of special permits contained in Section 10.40 of the Zoning Ordinance**

*A special permit will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except where the particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because of the following.*

***a. The requirements of the Ordinance cannot be met.***

With the issuance of this special permit the requirements of the Ordinance are met. While a final determination will be made by the Superintendent of Buildings at the time a building permit is sought, the Board finds no indication that the proposal contains any use other than the sports and fitness activities.

***b. Traffic generated or patterns of access and egress will cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character.***

Section 11.500 of the Ordinance establishes a higher standard for traffic impact than is required by Section 10.40. As proposed, and with the mitigation measures set forth as conditions of this permit, no substantial impact on neighborhood character will result, nor will the project cause congestion or hazard

The Transportation Impact Study, the traffic impact of the Sports and Fitness Center on the surrounding neighborhood will be

minimal. The traffic impacts of the small number of peak hour vehicle trips is minimal and localized. It is anticipated that the majority of trips associated with the project will be students walking and cycling to and from the facility. With bus services and pedestrian and bicycle facilities in close proximity to the site, it is anticipated that the majority of students will continue to use alternative non-auto modes of transportation.

While a final determination will be made by the Superintendent of Building at the time a building permit is sought, the Planning Board finds no reason to doubt that the parking requirement as presented by the petitioner is accurate, but that in any case sufficient parking is available in the Institute's inventory of existing parking to meet the requirements of the zoning ordinance.

Therefore the Board finds that no nuisance or hazard will be created or substantial change in the character of the neighborhood caused by the traffic generated by this project. The Board further finds that the assumptions used by the petitioner in generating the analysis of traffic impacts of this project were reasonable and likely to be very conservative (and thus overestimate the traffic impacts of this project on city streets).

***c. The continued operation of or development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance will be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use.***

The zoning district within which this project will be built is intended to accommodate high density institutional uses to serve the public policy objective of concentrating such activity at existing campus locations and discouraging expansion of such uses into valuable commercial areas or residential neighborhoods. The development of the Sports & Fitness Center is consistent with adjacent uses, all of which are educational in nature. Adjacent institutional activities will be enhanced.

Therefore the Board finds that with this project, continued operation of adjacent uses or future development will not be negatively impacted.

***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.***

No nuisance or hazard will be created.

***e. For other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or the adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance.***

The proposed use is consistent with the uses allowed in the Residence C-3 district and the Institutional Overlay Districts, as well as the adjoining Business B and Special District 11 districts.

### **Decision**

Based on a review of the application documents, comments made at the public hearing and other comments received by the Board, and based on the above findings the Planning Board **GRANTS** the requested Planning Overlay Special Permit subject to the following conditions and limitations:

1. All use, building construction, and site plan development shall be in general conformance with the plans and application documents submitted to the Planning Board as referenced above and dated July 28, 2000. Appendix I summarizes the dimensional features of the project as approved.
2. The project shall continue to undergo design review with the staff of the Community Development Department. The Planning Board shall review and approve the final plans, submitted to the Superintendent of Buildings for a building permit, at a regular meeting of the Board, before issuance of a building permit.
3. MIT shall fund the redesign and construction of Vassar Street to include bicycle lanes and pedestrian improvements. The design will be completed and best efforts made to get the construction of the new facilities substantially underway before the building receives its certificate of occupancy. The concept plan shall be the one presented to the city staff on July 24, 2000, with revisions. The plan shall include careful positioning and design of the mid-block pedestrian crossing with a provision for bicycles to cross at these locations. The Traffic, Parking and Transportation and Community Development Departments must approve final design.
4. At least 200 new bicycle parking places shall be provided in the complex and at least 50% of these shall support commuter bicycling through the provision of secure spaces protected from

bad weather. Bicycle commuter parking shall be located so as to be convenient to showers and lockers that are available for the use of the bicycle commuters. MIT currently has reduced rates for lockers. These reduced rates should include the use of showers as well as lockers to support bicycle commuting.

5. MBTA pass subsidies shall be brought to at least 50% of the cost of such subsidies or the maximum amount allowed under the Federal Tax Code for fringe benefits.
6. New bicycle and pedestrian counts shall be done in September 2000 at all the count locations identified in the traffic study during one of the last three weeks of the month. The counts are to be done during the following times: 8 – 10 a.m., 12 – 2 p.m., 4 – 7 p.m.
7. MIT shall report to the city annually on the following:
  - (a) The number of on and off campus, MIT affiliates in MIT-owned buildings who are residents of Cambridge; the number of autos registered to MIT affiliates in Cambridge On campus, the number of parking spaces maintained by the Institute for affiliates, and parking fees charged.
  - (b) Report on MIT shuttles and Saferide routes and frequency of service and ridership.
  - (c) Parking rates for MIT parking facilities

MIT will also provide the PTDM Officer with a copy of the annual rideshare report.

8. Public pedestrian access shall be maintained through the building. The access as shown on the application plans, shall be from Vassar Street at the crosswalk to the garage through the building to the “infinite corridor” pedestrian axis on the other side of the building.

Voting in the affirmative to **GRANT** the Planning Overlay Special Permit were K. Benjamin and P. Winters, associate members appointed by the Chair to act in the place of an absent member, L. Brown, T. Anninger, F. Darwin, and B. Shaw, constituting more than the two thirds of the members of the Board necessary to grant a special permit.



For the Planning Board,

*Larissa Brown (UMP)*

Larissa Brown, Chair

A copy of this decision #166 shall be filed with the Office of the City clerk. Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17, Chapter 40A, Massachusetts General Laws, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after the date of such filing in the Office of the City Clerk.

ATTEST: A true and correct copy of the above decision filed with the Office of the City Clerk on September 28, 2000, by Elizabeth M. Paden, authorized representative of the Cambridge Planning Board. All plans referred to in the decision have likewise been filed with the City Clerk on such date.

Twenty (20) days have elapsed since the filing of the decision.

No appeal has been filed.

DATE:

City Clerk

City of Cambridge