



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: July 26, 2017
Re: **PB-231A, First Street PUD Minor Amendment & Parcel D Design Review**

Background

The Special Permit for this Planned Unit Development (PUD) was first approved by the Planning Board in 2010, and has been modified several times through the PUD amendment process. Most recently, a major amendment was granted by the Planning Board on December 15, 2015 to expand the PUD to include four additional parcels (A-D), in addition to two parcels that were already completed. At the time, the Planning Board also approved the design of all four buildings, subject to continuing review by staff.

The "Parcel A" office building is currently under construction. The Applicant is now seeking Minor Amendment approval for an increase in permitted gross floor area and reduction in the permitted number of surface parking spaces on Parcel D, as well as approval of design changes to the standalone retail building based on the increase in size.

This memo summarizes the key areas of focus associated with the requested minor amendment and the design review. Comments from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) are provided in a separate memo.

Requested Minor Amendment

The design review submission for Parcel D proposes an increase in the permitted gross floor area (GFA) from 7,750 square feet to 9,800 square feet, and a reduction in permitted number of surface parking spaces from 24 to 11. As noted in the submission, these changes were contemplated as possibilities during the Board's review of the most recent amendment to the PUD special permit, and provisions were made in the special permit decision to allow flexibility for these changes.

[PB-231A, Amendment 3, Condition 1.(c)] The enlargement of the building on Parcel D by up to two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet of Gross Floor Area beyond the amount in the approved Final Development Plan may be approved by the Planning Board as a Minor Amendment in accordance with Condition 9 of this Special Permit Decision, provided that all other applicable requirements of the Zoning Ordinance and conditions of this Special Permit are met.

[PB-231A, Amendment 3, Condition 4.(g)] Surface parking spaces shall be authorized as illustrated in the Final Development Plan on Parcel A, Parcel B and Parcel D for use only of ground-floor retail establishments. The number of surface parking spaces may not be increased, but any future reduction in surface parking shall be allowed for the purpose of creating additional landscaped open space, outdoor space associated with adjacent retail uses, or similar functions, to the extent allowed by the minimum applicable requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. Planning Board approval shall not be required to authorize such a reduction in surface parking, but CDD and TPT shall review any associated design modifications in accordance with the Design Review conditions above and Paragraph (h) below. Any reduction in surface parking spaces on Parcel D as a result of a Minor Amendment contemplated in Paragraph 1 (c) herein shall similarly not require Planning Board approval.

While the reduction in parking does not require approval from the Board, the proposed increase in volume of the Parcel D building requires approval as a Minor Amendment, which would be granted by making a written determination that the proposal is consistent with the conditions of the PUD special permit as previously approved.

Parcel D Design

The Planning Board's review of the Parcel D design is guided by the conditions of the special permit, and the guidelines established in the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines, 2003* (see Appendix). Although the project is of a relatively modest scale, the importance of creating an active street edge and a high-quality pedestrian environment are key urban design issues.

At the site planning level, the reduction in parking results in positive urban design outcomes with a stronger street wall condition on Hurley Street, and less visual impacts on the public realm. The building design remains generally consistent with the PUD approval and the design guidelines. Like the original design, the intersection of First and Hurley Streets is defined by a double-height glazed space, and the storefront windows wrap around the corners of the building. Multiple building entries continue to be proposed for First Street, which helps to break down the monotony of the storefront façade. The mechanical louvers remain integrated into the architecture of the building and rooftop equipment appears well-screened.

The increase in GFA has resulted in increased building depth, which is beneficial for future retail tenants. High levels of transparency are provided on the street facades and a lesser amount provided to the rear. While the extent of blank wall on the Hurley Street facade has increased and now exceeds the 50 percent maximum stipulated in the design guidelines, Staff is satisfied with the proposed green wall concept design, although continuing review is needed to ensure it is successfully realized. Modifications to the rear elevation have reduced transparency, which provides a better balance between the needs of future tenants to provide back-of-house functions and maintaining some visibility of active uses.

The building is set back from First Street so that a widened sidewalk and street tree plantings can be established, which is important as First Street is intended to have a high volume of pedestrian traffic. The Hurley Street sidewalk is proposed to be 6-feet wide, which is tight for a commercial area. The previous approved design indicated a sidewalk width of 8' 5", so this new dimension should be clarified.

At the time of the PUD approval in 2015, the proposed Parcel D façade materials were rather schematic. More information is provided in the recent submission; however, it would be helpful if further details regarding the storefront glazing (tints or coatings), the spandrel above the signage band, window reveals and the 6" window base were provided. Review of material samples and a future mock-up will also enable a better understanding of the proposed colors and textures.

Continuing review

It is anticipated that design details will be refined as the project advances. The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the meeting to a future date, or as items for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to approve the proposed design:

- Review of the building setback and sidewalk width on Hurley Street.
- Review of all proposed landscaping design and sidewalk details, including transformer and trash screening, and the green wall on the south façade.
- Review of the interior layout of the retail space and storefront curtain wall design to ensure that optimum levels of transparency between interior activities and pedestrian activity on sidewalks and walkways, are provided. The clarity of the glass, including minimizing coatings, tints and reflectivity of the ground floor facade, is an important component of this review.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a visual mock-up on site per the Special Permit conditions.

Appendix: Relevant Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines, 2001

1. Goals: Transition Areas

- a. Use finely graduated heights to create transitions in scale from Kendall Square to residential neighborhoods.
- b. Create better pedestrian and bicycle connections between residential neighborhoods, Kendall Square, Central Square, and the Charles River.

New development on retail blocks should be consistent with the following principles:

2. Street-level Uses and Design

- a. At least 75 percent of the street frontage should be occupied by retail uses, including cafes and restaurants.
- a. Major entrances should be located on public streets, and on corners wherever possible. Entrances should relate to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit stations.
- b. Transparent materials and interior lighting should be used to maximize visibility of street level uses. Ground floor facades should be at least 50 to 75 percent transparent surface to permit a clear view from the sidewalk to the interior space of the building.
- c. Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.

3. Building Height and Orientation

First Street

- a. For retail and office uses, build to the lot line or provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces. Setbacks used exclusively for ornamental landscaping are not permitted but may be allowed to accommodate street furniture, street trees, or generous sidewalks. Awnings and canopies are encouraged to provide shelter and enliven the ground floor facade.
- b. Driveway turnaround and vehicle drop-off facilities are strongly discouraged along public streets.
- c. Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.
- d. In use, design, and entry, orient buildings towards corners.

Neighborhood Streets:

- a. Set back any portion of the building above 45 feet by at least 10 feet from the principal facade. Where appropriate, design these setbacks to include balconies and rooftop terraces.
- b. Locate courtyards and open spaces to maximize sun exposure.

4. Scale and Massing

- a. Buildings should avoid continuous massing longer than 100 feet facing residential streets and 200 feet facing mixed-use and retail streets. If massing extends beyond this length, it should be made permeable and visibly articulated as several smaller masses using different materials or colors, vertical breaks, bays, or other architectural elements.

- b. In addition to the above limits, buildings should reflect a rhythm and variation appropriate to the urban context. For example, this can be achieved by expressing bay widths of 16 to 25 feet along residential streets and 25 to 50 feet along mixed-use and retail streets.
- c. Buildings should have a clearly expressed base, middle, and top. This may be achieved through changes in material, fenestration, architectural detailing, or other elements.
- d. Use variations in height and architectural elements such as parapets, cornices and other details to create interesting and varied rooflines and to clearly express the tops of buildings.
- e. Emphasize corners using taller elements such as towers, turrets, and bays

5. Architectural Character

- a. Create varied architecture and avoid flat facades by using recessed or projected entryways, bays, canopies, awnings, and other architectural elements.
- b. Vary the architecture of individual buildings to create architecturally diverse districts.
- c. Where buildings are set back at upper stories, lower roofs may be used as balconies, balustrades, and gardens.

6. Streets and Sidewalks

Character

- a. Use streetscape elements such as trees, benches, signage, and lighting to support active pedestrian uses and to reinforce the character and identity of each district.
- b. Where appropriate, establish, preserve and highlight views from public streets and spaces to important civic landmarks such as the Charles River cable-stayed bridge.
- c. Refer to the Cambridge Pedestrian Plan and the Cambridge Bicycle Plan for additional guidance on creating a safe and pleasant environment for pedestrians and bicyclists and for guidance on sidewalk width and street trees.

Connections:

- a. Provide strong pedestrian, bicycle and visual connections to public parks through view corridors, signage, and/or art installations.
- b. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing and new bus stops and to transit stations.
- c. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing and new bus stops and to transit stations including Lechmere MBTA stations.

7. Parking

- a. While underground parking is preferable everywhere, if above ground parking is to be built it should be designed so as not to be visible from public streets or pathways.
- b. Locate vehicular parking entrances on side streets and alleys and provide safe pedestrian access from public streets.
- c. Design and locate lighting fixtures in surface parking lots and garages to enhance safety while minimizing light spillover onto adjacent properties.