



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BRIAN MURPHY
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

IRAM FAROOQ
Deputy Director for
Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner
Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Planner
Date: November 19, 2014
Re: **PB #286 – 75 New Street Continued Review**

Update

The Applicant has submitted revised materials for the design of the proposed project, along with responses to questions raised by Board members at past meetings. Staff comments are provided in this memo and a memo from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TPT) Department under separate cover.

Special Permits

Below is a summary of the required special permits and the applicable findings. The Planning Board must also find that the General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43) are met. Full zoning text is provided as an appendix.

Required Special Permit	Required Findings (Summarized)
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	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.
Modification of Side and Rear Yard Setbacks (Section 5.34 Footnote b)	Minimum setback of ten (10) feet; yard is suitably landscaped to effectively buffer building walls from abutting lots.
Modification of Setbacks for Open On-Grade Parking Facilities (Section 6.44.1)	Site specific factors favor modification.

In addition, the application seeks approval for a multifamily residential use (Section 4.26) and waiver of parking screening requirements (Section 6.47.8). In our view these special permits are not required for the project as proposed, but the applicable zoning text is included in the appendix.

Planning Board Comments from Prior Meetings

The following summarizes some of the key comments that Planning Board members had about the project on September 16, 2014.

Building Scale, Massing and Design

- Need to design with excellence to make the project look like separate buildings.
- Need to determine what improvements might come from breaking up the building – pros and cons.
- Question to CDD staff: Should breaking up the building be in the zoning or does the Planning Board need to establish preferences or guidelines. Or should the design be modified to look like it is broken up.
- The skyline of such a long building is most important and there is a need to be smart about how to break down the module at key points. Need to make bigger moves to achieve this.
- Maximizing FAR and units is not guaranteed if urban design standards are not met.
- It is not clear how the building meets the sky.
- Variation in roofline is missing – the end pavilions provided some joy and interest to the building. Need diversity and interest in parapet height.
- View of mechanicals from Danehy Park needs to be addressed.
- Concerned about massing and FAR - Not enough has been done to articulate and modulate the building.
- Middle section of New Street elevation is well articulated, but the rest is flat.
- Concerned about length and relentlessness of building – biggest issue in one member’s opinion.
- Concerned about design and pedestrian feel as this was not clear from the elevations or renderings.
- Six inches is not enough of a setback for a recessed wall.

Building Materials

- Use of wood is OK.
- Require information on maintenance and longevity of selected materials.

Street design and access

- Assured that design of New Street is being addressed.
- Need to look at street design – lighting, undergrounding power poles and utilities, planting space for street trees and existing trees, width of sidewalk.
- Provision of 5’ path connection is good.

Traffic and circulation

- Think this is transit-oriented; more concerned about pedestrian/bicycle access than auto traffic.
- Discuss implication of Level of Service “F” as discussed in TIS.
- Link New Street to newly formed Alewife TMA.

Environmental issues

- Oversight over soil remediation to be included in conditions.
- Address fumes and noise from auto body shop.
- Need recommendations from acoustical report and address these in building design.

Further information

- Need street-level hard-line perspectives as the Planning Board wants to see that the proposal is a series of buildings with lots of modulation.
- View from Danehy Park, including of rooftop mechanical.
- Physical model or 3D model with a walk-thru.
- More discussion of retail viability at this location.

Comments on Revised Materials

Following the last Planning Board hearing, staff has worked with the project team on refinements to improve the proposal. The revised set of application materials seeks to address the various concerns and issues raised by the Planning Board at the last hearing. The most significant issues relate to building and site design, discussed starting on the next page. Some other issues are briefly addressed below, and traffic questions are addressed in a separate TPT memo.

Presentation of application materials

The Applicant has prepared a more cohesive package of documents with detailed plans, elevations, materials specifications and 3D perspectives showing the proposed building from various viewpoints.

New Street design

The initial public design process for New Street has begun under the direction of the Department of Public Works (DPW). The revised plans depict one option for the street design; however, the Applicant has committed to incorporate the final design resulting from the City's process.

Connection to future bicycle/pedestrian pathway

The Applicant has worked with staff to refine the proposal for a 5-foot public connection to a future pathway behind the building. The space will be kept clear of trees or other objects that might impede a connection in the future. It can be made a condition of the special permit that the owner would guarantee public access at such time that the connection is made to a public pathway, which may occur whether or not the adjacent property has also been developed. The revised design also allows for a direct private connection from the building lobby to a future pathway.

Noise and environmental issues

The Applicant has indicated that high transmission-loss acoustical windows and sound baffles on fresh-air intakes will be used at the rear of the building. The Applicant has also set up a web site to address remediation issues and has contacted the Cambridge Public Health Department to discuss monitoring programs for the adjacent auto body use to ensure that it complies with state regulations. Ongoing attention to these issues could be made conditions of the special permit.

Retail use

While there is neighborhood interest in providing a small retail space, after consulting with staff in the Economic Development Division we feel that 75 New Street is not the most viable or attractive location to sustain a retail use. There is not enough pedestrian activity within the vicinity of the site and the housing would not sustain retail on its own. Moreover, a stronger retail focus is provided at the Fresh Pond Shopping Center, where the *Concord-Alewife Plan* encourages a concentration of neighborhood retail in future development.

Urban Design Review

Site planning and landscaping

At the site planning level, little has changed since the September hearing. The project remains broken into two staggered volumes with the lobby and associated landscaped setback located at the knuckle. Parking is provided below the building with some parking down the side of the site. Some refinements have been made in response to staff comments regarding the bicycle path. This has primarily assisted with enhancing the future amenity of and visual connection to the bicycle path.

The Applicant has also committed to providing additional landscaping along the front of the existing Phase 1 Building, which is partly shown on the Landscape Plan. This landscaping should be expanded to incorporate the entire Phase 1 frontage, which would help to improve the appearance of the Phase 1 building and also create more consistency between the two buildings.

Building scale, massing and design

Like many recent projects in the Alewife area, this site, being long and narrow and abutting a railroad easement, constrains development options and potential building typologies. In response to these constraints and the concerns raised at the last Planning Board hearing, the architect has endeavored to provide a more rigorous approach to building massing and articulation. The additional perspectives submitted with the revised materials successfully demonstrate this approach and provide a sense of the street-level experience.

Greater changes in plane and use of vertical bay windows help to modulate the façade, create a townhouse scale and avoid long expanses of co-planar surfaces. This is particularly evident where the 30' return in the middle of the building has been retained and through the introduction of additional 2-foot recesses. The rhythm of alternating bays, vertically aligned balconies, materials, and colors, with corresponding variation in the roofline adds interest and successfully reinforces the notion that the building is broken down into a series of volumes. This reduces the monotony of such a long building and creates a pedestrian-oriented environment, which when combined with additional transparency of the lobby, reinforces a sense of connection between New Street and the building.

The fourth floor terraces, being notched into the corners of the building, and at the knuckle, are significant gestures towards reducing building bulk. The reduction in fourth floor floorplate and cladding the notches in red cedar assists with establishing the townhouse scale and provides a more playful façade treatment. While the originally proposed rooftop terrace is not permitted within the 45 foot height limit, this residential amenity is to be accommodated in a centrally located amenity space and terrace overlooking Danehy Park. Despite the loss of the rooftop terrace, the roofline has retained some variation, due to extended parapets that screen the mechanicals, and cedar trellises associated with the terraces. The presence of the roofline has also been strengthened with use of a 10-inch coping element.

While there has been some discussion on whether or not the site should be developed as two buildings instead of one, it is considered that in this instance, such an approach would provide minimal additional benefits. A breakthrough would only enable a view of and connection through to the Whole Foods loading dock. It must also be recognized that the Phase 1 and 2 buildings are separated by an accessway, which provides for shared site circulation and permeability. The setback from the southern

property line for the bicycle path also provides for additional permeability and a substantial separation from the existing auto shop and any potential redevelopment of that site.

Building materials and colors

The color scheme for the fiber cement clapboards has been refined and is now consistent throughout the application materials. The range of materials, which now includes an alternating pattern of metal shingles, stone, cedar, and fiber cement of varying colors (darker green, light green, pale gray and white) and exposures, incorporates enough contrast, warmth and texture to reduce the monotony of the building and provide interest at the pedestrian level. Application of the materials also emphasizes the vertical, which minimizes the horizontal nature of the New Street elevation.

The Planning Board also queried the longevity and durability of the fiber cement siding. Staff has researched this matter and notes that fiber cement is a mix of sand, cement, cellulose wood fibers, and water. The material is a durable alternative to vinyl or hardboard siding products. Staff will continue to review the material detailing and location as part of the ongoing review process.