



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 20, 2014
Re: **PB#293 - Harvard Kennedy School of Government**

Update

The Applicant has submitted revised materials for the design of the proposed project, along with responses to questions raised by Planning Board members and staff.

Planning Board Comments from Prior Meetings

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board on October 28, 2014, including subsequent clarification and advice provided by the Planning Board Chair and staff.

Site planning and circulation

- The sunken Belfer Center entry appears out of scale with the small entry door and may be a safety concern.
- Provide further detail on proposed loading operations, including how deliveries will be scheduled.
- Provide further detail on possible solutions to managing vehicle drop-offs, including ways to prevent vehicles standing in the Eliot Street bicycle lane.

Building massing and design

- The architectural treatment of the connecting buildings requires further consideration in terms of vertical scale, architectural quality and contribution to surrounding streets and public spaces.
- Show design alternatives or evidence of further study to demonstrate why the selected option was chosen.
- There is some concern that the JFK walkway connector is a mismatch architecturally, has a poor relationship with the allée, lacks interest and appears cluttered.
- Provide a response to public concerns raised about shadow and sky view impacts on the JFK walkway.

Landscape design and bicycle parking

- The proposed security bollards and screen to be used for the Eliot Street entry seem inconvenient and unattractive.
- Clarify proposed landscaping and paving at front of Taubman Building entry.
- Bicycle parking has potential to be better designed and integrated.
- Provide more detailed landscaping plans.

Comments on Revised Materials

Site planning and landscape design

At the site planning and landscape design level, several positive refinements have been made in response to the items noted above.

- Revisions to the Belfer Center entry, including additional landscaping, handrails and reducing the expanse of the stairs, have provided a more intimate scale and definition to the entry. These changes also assist to ameliorate safety concerns. Plant selection will be very important at this highly trafficked location and should form part of any ongoing review process should the Special Permit be granted.
- The extent of granite paving has been reduced so that the red brick sidewalks adjoining the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) retain continuity and dominance in the public realm. Combined with the proposed widening of sidewalks, this enhances the pedestrian network on both Eliot and JFK Streets. Final sidewalk details should be subject to approval by the Department of Public Works to ensure that it meets City standards.
- Changes at the Taubman Building entry increase the landscape setting and also retract the granite paving from the public realm. This creates more breathing space for the JFK walkway and enables the allée to be clearly demarcated.
- Several options for the Eliot Street security bollards and screens have been submitted. Given the limited use, security screening of a temporary nature is desirable to maintain the open and inviting of character of the courtyard year-round.

Building scale, massing and design

In order to respond to concerns raised about the architectural treatment of the connecting buildings, the Applicant has provided documentation of design iterations and conceptual thinking. The information presented helps to understand the basis of the selected design approach and clarifies various elements of the proposal. The architect's approach, which seeks to unify the two adjoining buildings rather than provide a transparent connector bridge, is reasonable given the context of multiple buildings of varying architectural character and site frontages.

A number of modifications have made to the design of both connecting buildings in response to Board member comments. While relatively minor in nature, the changes do make a positive contribution to the public edges of the building as described below.

- Greater transparency through increasing the spacing between fins is more welcoming to the neighborhood and provides an improved visual connection between building occupants and pedestrians.
- Removal of the fins from the upper story of the Gateway Building creates a more transparent presence and additional animation on Eliot Street.
- The West Building on JFK walkway has undergone more significant change with an additional 2' setback from the walkway and a reduction in height of 3'. These changes, combined with the earlier move of the mechanical penthouse further from the façade, have the effect of enabling more sky views and further minimizing shadow impacts.
- The setback, height reduction and increased fin spacing, also help create a more passive form along the allée, which provides for an improved relationship with the public realm and a less jarring intrusion into the pedestrian experience of the allée.
- Positioning of the mechanical room on the ground floor does create a blank spot on the facade of the West Building. However, the proposed long-term bicycle parking has potential to mitigate some of these concerns.

Circulation and loading

- Bicycle parking is still to be determined; however, Harvard has included reference to bicycle parking installed at Harvard Law School in the application materials as an example of the type of parking structure to be developed. Final design should be subject to approval by CDD staff.
- More detailed information on the management of loading and vehicle drops offs has been provided. The intent is to assist in educating visitors and monitoring the traffic activity around HKS to discourage stopping in travel lanes, bicycle lanes or bus stops.