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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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BRIAN MURPHY  
Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

IRAM FAROOQ  
Deputy Director for  
Community Development

To: Planning Board  
From: CDD Staff  
Date: September 30, 2014  
Re: **Case #293 – Harvard Kennedy School of Government**

The following information has been assembled by staff to provide background and comment on the application by Harvard University to modify and expand the existing John F. Kennedy School of Government campus. This memo covers the planning and zoning background of the area, the criteria applicable to the special permits being sought, and comments on the proposal. An attached memo from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) addresses transportation issues.

### **Planning and Zoning Background**

The base zoning for the site is Residence C-3, as it has been since the current version of the zoning map was first established in 1943. Residence C-3, which is a typical designation for institutional campuses in Cambridge, allows a range of residential and institutional uses including college and university facilities. The dimensional regulations support higher-density development, allowing a floor area ratio (FAR) of 3.0 and a maximum building height of 120 feet.

The site is also within the Harvard-Radcliffe-Lesley Institutional Use Overlay District. The Institutional Use Overlay Districts were established in 1981 as a way to designate areas where the expansion of institutional uses is encouraged, and to differentiate them from residential areas where institutional expansion is more restricted. In general, educational uses cannot be restricted in residential zoning districts; however, special legislation has authorized Cambridge to enact Institutional Use Regulations that restrict expansion of educational uses in lower-density residential areas that are outside of designated Institutional Use Overlay Districts.

The balance between institutional growth and protection of residential areas is articulated in Policy #5 of the Cambridge Growth Policy, *Toward a Sustainable Future*:

*The major institutions, principally Lesley College, Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the hospitals, should be limited to those areas that historically have been occupied by such uses and to abutting areas that are reasonably suited to institutional expansion, as indicated by any institutional overlay district formally adopted by the City.*

## **Proposed Project and Zoning Requirements**

Development of the Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) on its current site began in 1978 when the site was converted from its previous use as an MBTA rail yard. At the same time, the portion of the rail yard closest to the river was redeveloped into John F. Kennedy Memorial Park, now under the control of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). DCR also controls a public pathway connecting the park to Eliot Street along the northwestern boundary of the HKS campus.

The campus has been developed in phases and now totals 241,065 square feet of Gross Floor Area (FAR of 1.90). The current proposal is to alter and connect existing buildings with new construction to result in a proposed total of 317,927 square feet (FAR of 2.51), remaining below the FAR limit of 3.00 in the district. However, the addition of 76,862 square feet of new Gross Floor Area triggers the requirement for a Project Review Special Permit per Section 19.23.2 of the Zoning Ordinance.

The height of buildings will remain well below the maximum of 120 feet, with existing buildings reaching a tallest height of 78 feet and new construction remaining below 70 feet. The yard setback requirements in the district are calculated using a complex mathematical formula that depends on the individual heights and lengths of different building frontages. According to the application documents, the result of the proposed new construction is that the front yard requirement will be met but the side yard requirement (adjacent to the DCR pathway) will not be met, and therefore the applicant has indicated that variance relief will be sought from the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA).

As is typically the case with institutional development, parking requirements will be met within the pooled parking facilities that exist to serve the entire Harvard campus. Thirteen existing surface parking spaces will be removed from the site, and these spaces will be replaced with parking available within Harvard's pooled parking inventory. The proposed parking allocations are discussed in more detail in the attached TPT memo.

The proposal also triggers the bicycle parking requirements in Section 6.100. Those requirements state that if additional development on a lot increases the bicycle parking requirements by at least 15%, then the requirement must be met for the entire lot. Therefore, the project must provide the required bicycle parking for the entire 318,000 square-foot campus, which is a minimum of 64 long-term spaces and 128 short-term spaces (the Applicant is proposing to shift a small number required long-term spaces to short-term, which is allowed for non-residential uses). Meeting this requirement is a significant effort that will greatly support alternative transportation choices for students, faculty, staff and visitors of HKS.

## **Special Permit Criteria**

Although the project does trigger the requirement for a Project Review Special Permit, a Traffic Study is not required. For a college or university facility, the requirement for a Traffic Study is triggered only by the creation of 150 new parking spaces or the relocation of 250 existing parking spaces (per Section 19.23). Therefore, the Planning Board is not required to consider the specific Traffic Impact Criteria in Section 19.25.1. Nonetheless, the Applicant has provided a transportation study as a supplemental piece of the application, which may aid the Planning Board's consideration of site planning considerations

such as access, egress and safety for automobiles, pedestrians and bicyclists. The transportation study is discussed in the attached TPT memo.

The applicable criteria for the Planning Board's review are the Citywide Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30 and the General Special Permit Criteria in Section 10.43 of the Zoning Ordinance. These criteria are listed in an appendix to this memo, and are addressed in the Application Narrative. It is worth noting some of the objectives that are especially relevant to university development:

*(Section 19.35) New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically. Indicators include:*

*(1) New educational institutional construction that is focused within the existing campuses.*

*(2) Where institutional construction occurs in commercial areas, retail, consumer service enterprises, and other uses that are accessible to the general public are provided at the ground (or lower) floors of buildings. Where such uses are not suitable for programmatic reasons, institutional uses that encourage active pedestrian traffic to and from the site.*

## **Comments on Proposal**

### Land Use

From a land use planning perspective, the proposal to expand the HKS campus within its current site is consistent with long-standing City policies and objectives for institutional growth. Allowing the construction of additional floor area on the current site is a preferable alternative to the expansion of educational facilities into other residential or commercial areas. The proposal's emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle connections and enhancing open space are also supportive of the City's planning objectives. Because the site is located in an institutional use district where retail uses are not permitted, the exclusion of retail and consumer service uses is appropriate.

### Design Approach

In many respects, the urban context and setting is strongly established by the existing Kennedy School buildings, which exude a modern interpretation of the traditional characteristics of Harvard buildings. The proposed additions respond to this existing pattern of development with a formal and dignified approach. A series of three buildings is proposed, which seeks to unify the school by bridging over the entry points and connecting the existing structures. Building heights and setbacks align with existing buildings and an elegant solution to addressing the site constraints, including the existing built form, the pre-existing rail yard slab located beneath the campus and the significant grade change, is achieved.

### Site Planning and Circulation

The most positive aspect of the proposal is the pedestrianization of the courtyard space with its raised level, removal of automobiles and parking, and loading below. This creates a much more inviting and seamless flow from Eliot Street to JFK Memorial Park, as well as several other more activated entry

points. Quite clearly this positive engagement with the public realm is a physical response to the school's mission of delivering a more collaborative, transparent and engaging public policy education. It is also anticipated that the school's presence within the community will be strengthened by this enhanced courtyard experience. Some modifications to the courtyard have been made since the informational presentation to the Planning Board. These changes enable emergency vehicle access without altering the overall open space concept.

#### Open Space and Street-Level Design

There are perhaps some locations where the opportunity to create a more human scale, richness, color or interest has been overlooked. This is primarily at the courtyard and building entries, which as proposed all have a similar look and feel, but could be better differentiated to respond to their role and context.

Notably, the pedestrian walkway with its allee of mature honey locusts that connects to the JFK Memorial Park offers a different experience to the more formal building entrances on Elliot and JFK Streets. This entry could conceivably be expressed in a subtly different way to add some interest and animation along the walkway. The Taubman Plaza at the end of that walkway could also be thought of differently since it is one of the more publicly-facing open spaces on the site. Rather than an empty plaza with benches, this space could be designed and activated with more engaging features that encourage community use, as Harvard has recently done in spaces such as Harvard Yard (with movable seating) and the Science Center plaza (with seating and tables). More artistic features (as in Quincy Square) could also make the space more welcoming.

Likewise, long-term bicycle parking at the entries is not well integrated into the overall design. This also provides the opportunity to create some sense of play or interest, particularly on the pedestrian walkway, which is proposed to be expressed as a blank wall with a bicycle cage located in front.

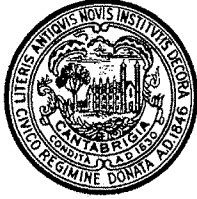
As previously suggested by the Planning Board, the integration of signage or other forms of display to advertise events occurring at the school could assist to enliven some of the restrained edges.

#### Environmental Impacts

It is noted that a Wind Study has been completed by the proponent. It appears that there may be some wind channeling effects and acceleration through the gateway openings. More information is needed to determine how this has been addressed in the landscaping plan.

Mechanical equipment for the entire campus complex is proposed to be centralized and screened within the rooftop space, which helps to mitigate visual and acoustic impacts. Continuing design review can focus on the details of equipment selection and screening.

Otherwise, the project is designed to have minimal impact on abutters. The new structures will not create noticeable new shadows, and lighting will not have impacts beyond the site. Trash, loading and service functions will be handled in the proposed below-grade enclosed loading area, which will significantly reduce impacts so long as the entry and exit of vehicles is well managed.



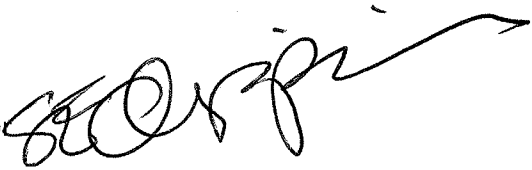
**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
**Traffic, Parking and Transportation**  
344 Broadway  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139

[www.cambridgema.gov/traffic](http://www.cambridgema.gov/traffic)

Susan E. Clippinger, Director  
Brad Gerratt, Deputy Director

Phone: (617) 349-4700  
Fax: (617) 349-4747

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Cambridge Planning Board  
**From:** Susan E. Clippinger, Director   
**Date:** September 30, 2014  
**Re:** Harvard Kennedy School of Government

The Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) has been working with Harvard University on the Harvard Kennedy School Project at 79 John F. Kennedy Street. The Project includes approximately 77,000 square feet of additional Gross Floor Area for new administrative offices and classroom space at the existing Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) campus (note that the figure of 91,200 square feet in the Transportation Impact Study (TIS) includes mechanical and other spaces that are exempt from Gross Floor Area).

The Project requires a Project Review Special Permit (CZO 19.20) from the Planning Board; however, it is below the threshold that requires a TIS for a College or University, which is creation of 150 new parking spaces or the relocation of 250 existing parking spaces or any combination thereof. Nonetheless, Harvard voluntarily completed a TIS to fully understand the Project's transportation impacts. The TIS was conducted by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. dated July 30, 2014. TPT certified the traffic study as complete and reliable on August 13, 2014.

The HKS 2013-2014 school year had approximately 2,200 students and employees. The Project is expected to primarily provide decompression of space, but based on past two years of population growth, the Project is expected to add about 412 persons over 5 years.

Harvard University has a robust PTDM plan and a very low single occupancy vehicle (SOV) mode share. Harvard's 2013 PTDM report indicated 12.8% SOV, 3.9% carpool, 0.07% vanpool, 35.4% transit, 14.5% bicycle, 29.2% walk, and 3.9% telework/flextime. The Harvard Kennedy School itself had an even lower drive-alone mode share (9.5%) in 2013, however the traffic study used the University wide 12.8% SOV rate to be more conservative. In addition, only 36% of employees and graduate students commute during peak hour.

The project will generate a total of:

- 138 daily vehicle trips, including 25 AM and 25 PM peak hour vehicle trips
- 293 daily transit trips, including 52 AM and 52 PM peak hour trips
- 240 daily pedestrian trips, including 43 AM and 43 PM peak hour trips
- 120 daily bicycle trips, including 22 AM and 21 PM peak hour trips

The project will result in no Planning Board special permit criteria exceedences.

### **Auto Parking**

Harvard University has 4,576 spaces in their 2013 Cambridge Parking Inventory, which includes 13 surface parking spaces located within the courtyard at the Harvard Kennedy School. The 13 spaces will be eliminated with the construction of the Project. The loading facility beneath the courtyard will provide secure parking for visiting dignitaries and other VIPs. The spaces being removed will be replaced in Harvard's Cambridge Parking Inventory.

Harvard Kennedy School affiliates who park on campus are assigned specific parking locations within the University's Parking Inventory based on space availability. In 2014 the Harvard Kennedy School was issued 121 total parking permits located at Harvard parking facilities located on the Cambridge and Allston Campus. Based on future population projections, approximately 19-25 new permits are expected to be generated. These additional permits will be managed by the Harvard Parking Office and assigned to available spaces in the parking inventory.

43 parking spaces are required by zoning for the 77,000 sf of additional gross floor area being added, and will be allocated from non-allocated spaces in the University Parking Inventory. TPT believes the Project's parking needs can be accommodated in Harvard's Parking inventory.

### **Bicycle Parking**

The existing HKS campus has 99 bicycle parking spaces. The scale of the proposed Project requires that the zoning ordinance's current requirements for bicycle parking apply to the entirety of the HKS campus and not just the added floor space. The Project will provide a total of 130 short-term and 62 long-term bicycle parking spaces which meets the zoning requirement for bicycle parking. We support the number and locations of bike parking and will continue to work with HKS on final detailed design as part of our Building Permit review process.

### **Vehicle Drop-off/Pick-up Activities**

One item we have been discussing with Harvard is how they will accommodate drop-off/pick-up activities associated with the Harvard Kennedy School. HKS can currently accommodate drop-off/pick-up in the campus' existing courtyard. The TIS indicated a count done on May 14, 2014 observed about 1-3 drop offs per hour in the courtyard. Also observed were drop-offs on the south side of Elliot Street (2-8 per hour) and on the north side of Elliot Street (1-8 per hour). TPT had asked HKS to provide space on their property to accommodate drop-offs, however, given the space constraints and the Project's urban design objectives, no space on the HKS campus was proposed. Our main concern is to prevent vehicles from parking or standing in travel lanes, bus stops, bicycle lanes or sidewalks while picking up or dropping off passengers. We have the following recommendations to minimize impacts to traffic on Eliot Street:

1. We support Harvard's plan to accommodate visiting dignitaries in the below grade loading dock area.
2. Harvard should direct any Harvard associated buses not to stop adjacent to HKS on Eliot Street or JFK Street.
3. No trucks should be stopped at the loading dock door and block the Eliot Street sidewalk. The loading dock door should be actively monitored by a security camera or other mechanism or protocol approved by TPT to ensure that no trucks block the sidewalk.
4. All HKS loading activities should occur in the loading dock.
5. HKS should proactively inform employees, students and others doing business with the school that stopped vehicles are not permitted to block traffic or bike lanes.
6. Campus security and loading dock managers should be instructed to request that drivers of vehicles illegally parked or standing in bicycle lanes move along.

**PTDM**

As stated above, Harvard has a robust PTDM Plan resulting in low single occupancy vehicle trips. We appreciate Harvard's efforts and commitments to reduce automobile trips generated by this Project and by all Harvard University employees, students and visitors. We look forward to continuing to work with Harvard to minimize their traffic impacts and support sustainable modes of transportation (i.e. walking, biking, and transit).