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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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IRAM FAROOQ  
Acting Assistant City  
Manager for Community  
Development

To: Planning Board  
From: Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner  
Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Planner  
Date: July 7, 2015  
Re: **PB #300, Proposed Addition to 16-18 Eliot Street**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed development at 16-18 Eliot Street, the special permits being requested, and comments related to planning, zoning and urban design.

Prior to submittal of the Special Permit Application, Staff met with the Applicant to discuss the proposal on several occasions. These discussions were also coordinated with staff of the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC). The project received a Certificate of Appropriateness from the CHC on April 28, 2015. The Harvard Square Advisory Committee has reviewed the proposed project and has provided written comment in the attached report.

### **Summary of Proposal**

The proposed project is a three-story, 11,935 square-foot addition to an existing wood-frame, retail building containing four restaurants. The addition would be for residential use comprising 15 housing units. The existing façade will be re-clad as part of the project, and new paving and landscaping is proposed in private and publicly-accessible areas around the site. No parking spaces are proposed, but the project will provide bicycle parking spaces in accordance with Article 6.000.

### **Requested Special Permits**

The Applicant is seeking an exemption from parking and loading requirements in the Harvard Square Overlay District pursuant to Section 20.54.4 of the Zoning Ordinance. This district contains a unique provision that the Planning Board can waive parking requirements if the project meets the urban design objectives for the area, and if the owner makes a cash contribution to a Harvard Square Improvement Fund equivalent to 50% of the cost of constructing parking spaces. This is a different standard than the special permit for reduction of required parking that is applicable elsewhere in the city.

The Community Development Department will make a final determination of the contribution amount and the City will make a final decision as to the use of the funds following review by the Harvard Square Advisory Committee, in accordance with the zoning.

The Applicant also seeks an exemption from the building setback requirements in the Harvard Square Overlay pursuant to Section 20.54.5 of the Zoning Ordinance. Like the parking and loading waiver, the Planning Board may exempt the building from the yard requirements specified in Section 5.30 provided the project conforms to the objectives and criteria contained in the *Harvard Square Development Guidelines (See attached)*.

The applicable special permit findings are summarized below, and applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Exemption from parking and loading requirements in the Harvard Square Overlay District (Section 20.54.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lot contributes to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures.</li> <li>• Exemption from parking and loading requirements results in a building design that is more appropriate to its location and fabric of the neighborhood.</li> <li>• Design is in conformance with objectives and criteria contained in <i>Harvard Square Development Guidelines</i>.</li> <li>• No National Register or contributing building is demolished or altered as to terminate or preclude its designation (either now or within the past 5 years).</li> <li>• Conforms to general criteria for issuance of a special permit. <i>(See attached)</i></li> </ul>
Exemption from building setback requirements in the Harvard Square Overlay District (Section 20.54.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design of the new structure is in conformance with the objectives and criteria contained in <i>Harvard Square Development Guidelines</i>.</li> <li>• No National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation (either now or within the past 5 years).</li> </ul>

The objectives of the *Harvard Square Development Guidelines* are summarized on the following page.

<b>Primary Goal</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Guide change and encourage diversity in order to protect the distinctive characteristics of the District’s buildings and public spaces, and to enhance livability and vitality</li><li>• Preserve and enhance the unique functional environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings, and encourage compatible design; mitigate any adverse impact of new development on adjacent properties and areas; and discourage homogeneity by maintaining the diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages.</li></ul>
<b>Relevant Secondary Goals (intended to provide general guidance)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements and contributes to its immediate neighbors and the character of the District.</li><li>• Build on and sustain the diversity of existing building form, scale and material.</li><li>• Expand the high quality public environment with attractive and compatible materials, lighting, and street furniture.</li><li>• Expand the network of pedestrian walkways and paths wherever they can conveniently provide alternate routes through the District.</li><li>• Encourage new residential projects in the District, especially in mixed-use buildings.</li><li>• Encourage creative solutions to the District’s parking and transportation issues, including the problem of on-street deliveries.</li></ul>

**Overall Planning and Zoning – Comments**

Planning and zoning for the Harvard Square district, which is one of the most transit-connected areas in Cambridge, supports development of a range of uses at a relatively high density. The requirements and guidelines for the area encourage an urban form that relates to the historic development patterns that define the area, with active pedestrian-oriented streetfronts and heights up to about five stories (by right) or seven stories (by special permit). The retention of the small-scale retail at the ground floor and associated façade improvements will maintain a lively ground floor. The introduction of residential use above the retail will also add to the vitality of the district, and is specifically encouraged in the development guidelines.

Because the existing building was built in the 1980s, it is not a National Register contributing building (although this project was subject to Historical Commission review because it is within the Harvard Square Historic District). The project abuts remnants of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century wall along the rear property line.

**Urban Design – Comments**

Preservation and enhancement of the historic features present in Harvard Square is the principal objective of city policy here. As the existing building has no historical or architectural significance and the Winthrop Square/JFK Street subdistrict is recognized as having an eclectic mix of architecture, there is an opportunity for contemporary design expression, which complements the area’s diverse visual

character. With regard to the *Harvard Square Development Guidelines*, new building design should be guided by contextual considerations, such as the appropriateness of the structure's height, scale, mass, proportions, orientation, and lot coverage; vertical and horizontal emphasis, rhythm of openings, transparency, texture, and materials of publicly-visible facades; and relationship to public open space; and landscaping.

The project responds to the context with a contemporary interpretation of a traditional structure built to the sidewalk, expressing a base, middle and top. Generally, the height and scale of the addition reflect the predominant character of the area by retaining the footprint of the existing building and raising it to a 5-story height. While heights up to five stories are recognized as a feature of Harvard Square's architectural character, in this instance the fifth floor appears somewhat dominant with only a marginal setback provided. The use of pale gray panels has helped to lighten its appearance; however, some further thought should be given to whether this setback should be increased. An increased setback would also provide an opportunity for more useable above-ground private open space. The depth of the cornice and overhang of the balcony were specifically called out by the CHC as requiring further consideration. The cornice depth, which appeared exaggerated particularly with the wood-lined soffit in a previous version of the proposal, now aligns with the front lot line in a curvilinear manner.

The proposed windows punch through the façade reflecting an asymmetrical rhythm that is successful at both engaging the street and responding to the historic context. The angled bay windows are a clever way of dealing with the limited side setbacks and the proximity of the parking structure. While the second floor shutters help address the fact that these are smaller windows than other openings, it would be preferable if these windows were similar to the scale and proportion of the windows above to create a better sense of unity across the facade. The first two floors of the rear and side elevation are proposed to remain unchanged from the existing metal cladding. Given residents will access the rear and some public access is proposed, consideration should be given to enlivening these facades.

Proposed façade materials include "stone-like paneling" which the Board has also reviewed in previous projects. Initially, staff expressed some concern with the extent of the proposed dark gray coloring. This has been addressed with the introduction of wood-laminate accents. The matte finish of the paneling creates a contemporary aesthetic, which interfaces well with the adjoining brick and wood-frame buildings. As a further point of consideration, the panels can be detailed to provide texture and scale through the expression of joints, fixing methods and a natural finish. There appears to be a mismatch of materials on the side elevations, which may be a concern depending on how publicly visible these facades will be.

There are positive site planning outcomes to not providing loading and parking on this small site. In terms of the proposal's contribution to the public realm and open space, the Applicant has offered to provide access to the historic wall for tour groups. The CHC did not require public access in their approval, and instead focused on having the wall repaired and stabilized. There appears to be an opportunity to improve the appearance of the brick-paved loading space, small paved areas along the

frontage, and perhaps even view lines to the historic wall. Consistent with the development guidelines, opportunities for softening and landscaping along the frontage should be explored.

Rooftop mechanicals appear sufficiently screened and recessed so as not to significantly intrude upon view lines from public areas. The location of one short-term bicycle parking space adjacent to the side entry should be reviewed to ensure it is convenient, visible and safe for cyclists.

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 hearing to a future date, or as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- The fifth floor setback.
- Proportions and dimensions of second floor windows and shutters.
- Details of all external materials, including review of the mix of materials used on side elevations.
- Articulation of ground level side and rear facades where they are publicly visible or accessible to future residents.
- Opportunities for landscaping and other improvements in paved areas along the street frontage.

Design of bicycle parking should also be reviewed further by staff to determine if it meets applicable standards. The design of the long-term bicycle parking enclosure (to be used by residents) proposed at the rear of the site will need to be reviewed to ensure it will be usable, secure and weather-protected. It is also not clear if the short-term bicycle parking spaces (to be used by visitors) will be publicly accessible and located within the required 50-foot distance of public building entrances. If short-term bicycle parking meeting those standards cannot be provided on the private lot, the requirement can be met with a funding contribution to the City to install and maintain bicycle parking on City property.

## Harvard Square Overlay District: Exemption from Parking and Loading Requirements

**20.54.4** Parking and Loading Requirements. Uses in the Harvard Square Overlay District which meet the following requirements shall be exempt from the parking and loading requirements as specified in Section 6.36 - Schedule of Parking and Loading Requirements.

1. The use is contained within a structure or portion of a structure in existence on or before June 1, 1940 or if constructed later is identified as a National Register or contributing building; or
2. The use is contained in a new structure or new addition to a structure identified in (1.) above, after the issuance of a special permit by the Planning Board provided:
  - a. The total development authorized on the site is reduced to eighty (80) percent of the maximum permitted on the lot; or a cash contribution is made to the Harvard Square Improvement Fund to be established by the City of Cambridge in an amount equal to fifty (50) percent of the cost of construction of the spaces not provided, said contribution to be used by the City of Cambridge for one or more of the following capital improvements in the Harvard Square Overlay District:
    - (1) Provision of public parking, preferably for short term users;
    - (2) Improvements to public parks, or restoration of historic structures, monuments and other features owned by the City of Cambridge or other public agency or a nonprofit organization;
    - (3) Extension throughout the Harvard Square Overlay District of the surface improvements installed by the MBTA as part of the Red Line subway extension (brick sidewalks, light post, street furniture, etc.)

The Harvard Square Advisory Committee shall receive and make comments on any proposal for the expenditure of such cash contributions. To the extent practicable the provision of public parking facilities shall be the first priority of any expenditure. The funds shall not be used for ordinary maintenance activities normally undertaken by the City of Cambridge.

The value of the cash contribution shall be determined by the Community Development Department assuming equivalent structured parking spaces and using generally accepted cost estimation methods customarily used by architects and engineers or using actual construction costs for comparable contemporary parking construction in Cambridge.

- b. The subject lot is sufficiently small in size as to contribute to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures (for lots exceeding 10,000 square feet a specific finding shall be made that this objective has been met).
- c. The Planning Board shall specifically find that an exemption from parking and loading requirements will result in a building design that is more appropriate to its location and the fabric of its neighborhood and that it is in conformance with the objectives and criteria contained in *Harvard Square Development Guidelines*. **[SEE ATTACHED]**
- d. No National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation as a National Register or contributing building; and
- e. No National Register or contributing building has been demolished or altered so as to terminate or preclude its designation within the five (5) years preceding the application.

## General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

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

- (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or
- (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or
- (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or
- (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, or
- (e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and
- (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30. **[SEE FOLLOWING PAGE]**

**19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]**

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods</li> <li>• Consistency with established streetscape</li> <li>• Compatibility with adjacent uses</li> <li>• Consideration of nearby historic buildings</li> </ul>
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhabited ground floor spaces</li> <li>• Discouraged ground-floor parking</li> <li>• Windows on ground floor</li> <li>• Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways</li> <li>• Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access</li> </ul>
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location/impact of mechanical equipment</li> <li>• Location/impact of loading and trash handling</li> <li>• Stormwater management</li> <li>• Shadow impacts</li> <li>• Retaining walls, if provided</li> <li>• Building scale and wall treatment</li> <li>• Outdoor lighting</li> <li>• Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)</li> </ul>
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management</li> <li>• Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service</li> <li>• Efficient design (LEED standards)</li> </ul>
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional use focused on existing campuses</li> <li>• Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed</li> <li>• Preservation of historic structures and environment</li> <li>• Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities</li> </ul>
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing as a component of large, multi-building development</li> <li>• Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families</li> </ul>
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development</li> <li>• Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks</li> <li>• Provide wider range of activities</li> </ul>





City of Cambridge  
Department of Public Works

*Owen O'Riordan, Commissioner*

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July 8, 2015

TO: Planning Board

FROM: Katherine F. Watkins, PE  
City Engineer

**RE: 18 Eliot Street: Residential Addition to Existing Commercial Building**

We are in receipt of the Special Permit Application materials for the Residential Addition to the existing commercial building at 18 Eliot Street, dated May 2015. We have reviewed the materials and have presented below some comments related to the interests of the Department of Public Works.

Generally, the DPW, based on the provided documentation, does not anticipate the project having any issue meeting all of the requirements of the DPW as the project will be subject to thorough and complete engineering review at the time of the Building Permit Application.

As the project is further developed, DPW will work with the applicant to ensure the following requirements are met:

**Public Infrastructure:**

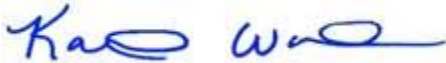
1. Requirements for temporary and permanent alterations to the Public Right of Way will be considered as part of the Building Permit review process, when a full understanding of the scope of the utility and surface work is presented.
2. With the development being an addition/renovation of an existing structure, we will look to the Applicant to present, in advance of the Building Permit Application, an evaluation of the condition of the existing utility services, the impacts from the increased demand on the public utilities and a plan presenting any required work in the public right of way to provide required utility services.
3. All business use of the public right of way, including outdoor dining areas as depicted in the Application package, need to be reviewed and approved by the Department of Public Works. The specifics of the location will be evaluated when a permit for the sidewalk use is applied for. Current standards for these areas establishes the dining seating at the curbside of the sidewalk to maintain an uninterrupted pedestrian access way.

## Stormwater Management:

1. Under the City Land Disturbance Regulations due to the project requiring a Special Permit from the Planning Board, the Applicant will need to obtain a Stormwater Control Permit from the Department of Public Works. The permit requirements cover the design standards and long term operation and maintenance of a management system for the project site, as well as the construction phase erosion and sedimentation control plans. The permit requirements also include the standard to mitigate the stormwater runoff from the site from the proposed 25-year storm to a rate below the pre-redevelopment 2-year storm event. Our Department will work with the Applicant to evaluate the permit requirements as they relate to the constraints associated with the projects location, while maintaining a development that meets the intent and goals of the Requirements.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns related to the comments provided above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Katherine F. Watkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Katherine" and last name "Watkins" clearly distinguishable.

Katherine F. Watkins, P.E.  
City Engineer