



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE
Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: December 14, 2017
Re: **PB #302, MIT "NoMa" Building 1 Design Review**

The Special Permit for the "NoMa" Planned Unit Development (PUD) was granted by the Planning Board at the same time as the SoMa PUD on May 17, 2016. The design for "Building 1" (housing and retail) and additions to the existing One Broadway Building was approved by the Planning Board on March 21, 2017, subject to further Board review of the location, visibility and layout of the Bicycle Repair Station, and the design of the podium. The Applicant has submitted revised materials in response to the comments made by the Planning Board at the March design review meeting.

Staff Comments

Bicycle Repair Station

The special permit for the "NoMa" PUD contains the following condition (#7-b-i):

At a minimum, the Permittee shall include within the first floor of the Building to be constructed on Building Site 1, a bicycle repair station that contains, among other things, bicycle storage and repair, lockers and related amenities, which may be combined with or included in retail spaces associated with bicycle uses and services. The location and layout of the Bicycle Repair Station shall be subject to Design Review by the Planning Board.

Several questions were raised about the bicycle repair station as it was presented during the design review process for this building in March. In particular, there was uncertainty around the types of services it would provide and the role it would play within the Kendall Square transportation system as a whole. In the past, the notion of a "bicycle station" had been envisioned as a centralized transportation facility where bicyclists could store their bicycles and belongings, undertake tune-ups and repairs, and in some cases shower and change clothes before proceeding to their destination or transferring to other transportation modes.

The new ground-floor layout places the bicycle repair station in a more visible location, along Broad Canal Way, and increases its size so that it can include more functions, both of which will help ensure its viability. Staff supports the improved location and size, while acknowledging that its future success will ultimately depend on how it can most effectively tailor its services to meet the otherwise unmet needs of the bicycling community. To achieve this, it is important to maximize both physical and operational flexibility. For instance, the current concept is for a "self-service" facility that can be accessed by way of a key fob, which has the benefit of allowing 24/7 access.

However, if it is found in the future that a staffed facility would be more attractive, even if it is for more limited hours, there should be the ability to adjust over time. Similarly, the equipment that is used to outfit the facility should be usable and adaptable as needed to meet demand. As suggested in the special permit decision, coordination with nearby retailers may reveal opportunities that can be pursued in the future.

Therefore, staff recommends ongoing coordination between the City (CDD and TP&T) and MIT, along with the future operators of the space. Initially, the City should review the selection of equipment and a general operational plan prior to fit-out and occupancy of the space, as well as wayfinding signage to help visitors locate the facility. In the future, MIT or a future operator should coordinate with the City to develop a monitoring program to be conducted at regular intervals, with the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of its services and informing adjustments to the operational plan.

Podium Design

At the March 21, 2017 meeting, the Planning Board was principally concerned about the façade expression of the podium. Specifically, Board members commented on the podium’s height and presence in relation to nearby buildings, the consistency of punched windows, the color of the fritted glass, the need for additional trees to add texture in front of the podium, and possible ways to provide more retail frontage. The Board also raised several other design-related issues for continuing staff review, which included the color of the terra cotta, the thickness of the sunscreens, the design of the mechanical penthouse, and the potential for balconies on the north façade.

In response, using the same elements as the previous scheme, the Applicant has subtly revised the approach to the façade. With the assistance of Over, Under, the city’s urban design consultants, staff has reviewed the design changes and provides the following comments:

- The staggered window pattern creates a more dynamic façade. Window proportions are now 6 inches shorter (due to constraints of the structure).
- The cornice-like handrail on the south façade and a portion of the east façade has been increased in dimension to approximately 18 inches in depth, increasing the façade’s apparent scale in relation to its neighbors. This change also helps to ameliorate concerns regarding the podium feeling squat.
- Variation in the window groupings (with zones that do not have windows) helps to express a middle scale and differentiate what was an uninterrupted line of windows across three façades.
- A new alignment of the cornice/handrail has been developed in relationship to the façade below for the east elevation. While relatively minor, staff suggests possible relocation of the end point of the cornice/handrail further to the south, where its transition would be masked by the neighboring Red Cross building. Relocating the end of the cornice/handrail would allow a consistent sense of scale across the eastern façade where it faces the public park when viewed from Broad Canal.
- The extent of blank wall along the pedestrian walkway has been reduced and more retail frontage is proposed to address the future open space (Triangle Green). The wood treatment now proposed, instead of the graphic mural, is intended to provide a backdrop to Triangle Green and extend into the landscape. Staff is generally supportive of the proposed approach.

- At the northwest corner of the building, where the podium wraps around from the loading entry, a metal panel system is now proposed. This wall might be better expressed using a material resolution similar to that of the wood system lining the podium’s east façade.
- The color of the frit and terra cotta has been modified in response to Board member comments. It is anticipated the material samples will be presented to the Planning Board as the renderings do not capture the exact colors or textures well. On page 16, three different frit options are presented, and while the hint of color reflects the surrounding red brick, Staff prefers the white fritting. The visual mock-up will provide further opportunities for staff and the Planning Board to review the materials and colors in a range of weather conditions.
- Some revisions to the pedestrian walkway are proposed, and changes to the design of Triangle Green are also shown on page 6. Though the Board did not ask to review changes to the landscape design, staff note that the current design includes fewer trees in front of the building and fewer opportunities for seating. Compared to the earlier design, staff is concerned that access through the open space may not be as welcoming or connected, and the wood elements in the plan may tend to isolate the building.

Continuing review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be subject to continuing review by staff if the Board approves of the podium design and the location and configuration of the bicycle repair station as currently presented:

- Selection of equipment and a general operational plan prior to fit-out and occupancy of the bicycle repair station, as well as wayfinding signage to help visitors locate the facility.
- Coordination with city staff to develop a monitoring program for the bicycle repair station to be conducted at regular intervals, with the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of its services and informing adjustments to the operational plan.
- Updates to plans and elevations to include a scale and all key dimensions.

As proposed by staff in March.

- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials mock-up(s) of all wall assemblies on the site.
- Continuing study and review of wind mitigation measures, particularly the design of the wind screen.
- Review of all public realm and landscape details, including Triangle Green, sidewalk design, street furniture, and placement of bicycle parking.
- Review of rooftop HVAC, exhausts, and mechanical equipment screening and penthouse treatments.

Appendix - NoMa Urban Design Objectives

In addition to the *Kendall Square Design Guidelines 2013*, design objectives and strategies specific to the site were developed as part of the PUD process. Those most relevant to Building 1 include:

Site Planning and Open Space

- The Broad Canal area benefits from existing activities at the water’s edge and active retail on the north side of Broad Canal Way. The MIT open space system will create a new connection to the Broad Canal via a new pedestrian crossing of Main Street and a new generous and activated pedestrian pathway between Building 1 and the Luke Building, owned and occupied by the American Red Cross. The Broad Canal area will be enhanced with active ground floor retail uses along the passageway and the south side of Broad Canal Way through the addition of Building 1 and a new retail liner on the north edge of the existing One Broadway building.
- Design connecting pathways and streets to be welcoming and comfortable for all users, including pedestrians and people traveling by bicycle.
- Enhance and improve wayfinding for all users, including bicyclists, to make it easier to find the campus, the river, neighborhoods and the center of Kendall Square.

Ground level design and uses

- Complement the successful uses along the north side of Broad Canal Way and create a two-sided retail corridor with retail and active uses on the south side of Broad Canal Way.
- Where possible, activate the Third Street and Broadway sides of the NoMa development with enhanced retail and active uses.
- To the greatest extent possible, activate the edges of secondary streets and the interior open spaces to provide activity and interest for pedestrians.

Built Form – Siting, Scale and Massing

- Site and shape buildings to minimize their impact on the historical buildings, as well as the public realm, particularly associated with Main Street and Broad Canal Way.
- Create a strong pedestrian scaled street wall throughout the PUD area and particularly on Main Street to align with the existing historic fabric, and achieve the level of public realm activity desired in the heart of Kendall Square.
- Enhance the pedestrian experience along the secondary streets.

Architectural Character

- Create a family of buildings that work harmoniously together while allowing for individual character and definition to be developed and celebrated
- Create an architectural approach that will distinctly represent Kendall Square, employing innovative, contemporary architecture and the latest cost-effective green building design technologies.

- Enable each building to maintain a distinct character due to its unique context, use and relationship to the public realm. This could include integration with the historic buildings or the specific uses programmed for the building, such as the MIT Museum or academic housing or a significant ground floor retail or active use.

Parking and Loading

- Where possible, parking and loading entries should be located on secondary streets and consolidated. The location of driveways should not preclude or negatively impact possible future visual and physical connections to the Charles River.
- Above-grade parking should be carefully screened to minimize the visual impact.
- Loading should be internal to buildings.
- Loading should be consolidated where possible and located below grade.
- At-grade loading facilities should not be more than 30 feet wide and should have the ability to be closed off when not in use.
- Loading dock areas should have adequate visibility and sightlines for pedestrians on the sidewalk, vehicles and cyclists on the street and trucks entering/exiting.

The specific Building 1 Design Guidelines include:

Building 1 should be designed to reduce its perceived mass to the extent possible. Techniques to achieve this may include gradual tapering so that the upper portions of the building have a slightly reduced volume. Potential strategies may include sculpted massing and the use of balconies. Building 1 massing should activate the street edge of Broad Canal Way to create a double-sided street with ground floor uses and an improved path to the Broad Canal from Third Street.