



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: February 24, 2017
Re: **PB #303, MIT "SoMa" PUD Building 3 and Open Space Design Review**

The Special Permit for the "SoMa" Planned Unit Development (PUD) was granted by the Planning Board on May 17, 2016. The second building in that PUD, "Building 3" (the mixed-use office) has been submitted for design review and approval. In addition, a revised set of SoMa open space design review materials has also been submitted in response to the Planning Board's comments made at the November 29, 2016 meeting when the landscape design was first presented. The open space design must be approved prior to the issuance of a building permit for the first new building in the SoMa plan.

Planning Board Action

The Planning Board's review of the building and landscape design is guided by the conditions of the special permit, which references the design standards specified in the *Kendall Square PUD-5 Design Guidelines, 2016* (Appendix C of Final Development Plan), the *Sustainability Strategies* described in Appendix D of the Final Development Plan, and the *Kendall Square Design Guidelines, 2013*. A compilation of these guidance documents was previously sent to the Planning Board and is available on the CDD web site.

This memo summarizes the key areas of focus associated with each element of the review.

Review Process

Since May, staff has had several meetings with the MIT team and the project architect and landscape architects to review various details of the project. These meetings have also included the Cambridge Historical Commission, as required by the special permit, since the design of this site involves the rehabilitation of the historically significant Kendall Building.

The design of the below-grade parking, bicycle parking and loading facility does not require Planning Board review and approval, and a building permit has already been granted for this work

Building 3

Urban Design Objectives

In addition to the *Kendall Square Design Guidelines*, which the Board is familiar with, design objectives and strategies specific to the site were developed as part of the PUD process. The built form objectives most relevant to the review of Building 3 are:

Ground level design and uses

- Establish a seamlessly integrated pattern of robust retail and active uses that contribute to an active and pleasant ground floor environment from Ames Street to the Sloan School on the south side of Main Street.
- Enhance the area around the MBTA station where Main Street and Carleton Street connect as a crossroads of Kendall Square – the nexus where business, academic, community and visitors connect.
- To the greatest extent possible, activate the edges of secondary streets and the interior open spaces to provide activity and interest for pedestrians.

Siting, Scale and Massing

- Employ creative siting and massing approaches that maximize physical and visual porosity on Main Street, both at grade and volumetrically.
- 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.
- Integrate and celebrate the existing ensemble of historical buildings on Main Street to preserve and honor this important industrial heritage while simultaneously preparing for the groundbreaking work of the future — the work that defines MIT’s mission and that of its many innovative partners in this district and beyond.
- 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.

Staff Comments

Overall, the massing and scale of the building remains consistent with the PUD approval. The project has a sleek, minimalist appeal, and over the past several months work has continued on refining the building’s curtain wall detailing.

Considerable attention has been given to the alteration and addition to the historic building, which is a prominent aspect of the project on Main Street. The separation of the new building from the Kendall Building is achieved by a highly transparent 6-story atrium space, which staff feels successfully creates a clear distinction between new and old. The atrium has been reduced in size since the PUD approval, and is now further set back from Wadsworth Street above the first floor with an additional roof terrace proposed. The use of very clear glass is also quite successful as it creates a unique break in the façade and an opportunity to see through to the other side of the building.

The treatment of the building’s skin overall is elegant and sensitively detailed; however, it is somewhat undifferentiated across the various surfaces and orientations of the building. Differentiation occurs at the penthouse level and at each floor with a white glass shadowbox. Further scale-enhancing differentiation could be explored. The massing of the lower volume, and in particular the south facade of the projecting volume, should be studied to explore possible massing readings at a smaller scale. This might be accomplished with subtle massing shifts or variations of the façade system.

The project team has continued to successfully activate all sides of the building and to minimize lobby spaces, which are important objectives of the Design Guidelines. The ground floor plan and program have been refined since the PUD approval and now include additional retail/active use space on Wadsworth Street, which wraps service/mechanical space thereby creating a more engaged street edge. This is a welcome change as it helps to mitigate the negative impacts associated with the combined parking, loading and mechanicals node created by both Building 3 and the future Building 2. While high levels of transparency and storefront design flexibility are proposed, in some renderings the ground floor façade design appears relatively undifferentiated, with little texture or visual interest at the human scale. Continuing the same storefront across the atrium at the ground floor to meet the Kendall Building on Hayward Street also enhances this uniformity and does not respond to the change in massing above. The potential to create some variation and a softer transition to the Kendall Building, and to punctuate the façade design at that location, should be explored. Perhaps there will also be future opportunities to express the building’s structural system, or individual storefront designs as the project advances.

As with Building 4, the soffit/underside of the projecting mass offers an opportunity for a special moment within the language of the building. At present, the underside is treated with white aluminum panel; however, it has been suggested that this will be a site for a future art installation.

The mechanicals penthouse is incorporated into the architecture of the building, clad in horizontal louvers and continuing the fins from the middle section of the tower to the roofline, creating a seamless approach and accentuating vertical proportions. Several exhaust fans are required to be exposed for ventilation purposes, however these are located in the middle of the building, and set back to avoid views.

Wind conditions appear to have improved, as demonstrated in the recently updated Wind Study. On the south side of Main Street, there appears to be one area of concern remaining on Hayward Street, with uncomfortable conditions expected on a regular basis. Overall, throughout the PUD area, wind mitigation relies on strategic plantings, rather than modifications to the built form, which should be a priority.

Continuing review of the project will need to focus on exterior materials, colors and details, and a mockup of all wall assemblies (including the ground floor façade) should be provided on site. Given the project’s emphasis on a unitized curtainwall system, the character of the glass and its transparency is important. Samples of glass types and information on transparency/ reflectivity should be provided.

Green Building Review

Presently, this project is set to achieve LEED Gold with a projected 60 points, with an additional 17 points listed as “likely”. At this point, it is not yet clear if SoMa Building 3 will meet, at minimum, its projected certification level and point totals due to a number of inconsistencies between the credits claimed in the narrative (with a point total of 60) and the checklist (with a point total of 64).

Aside from inconsistencies that should be resolved, there is a question regarding Credit SS c3 (Open Space) in which the language in the Master Site Narrative suggests that there is a possibility that this credit cannot be achieved as part of a master site. If this will be the case the alternatives should be discussed, whether this credit will be pursued on a building-by-building basis, or not pursued at all.

Historical Review

Staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission is satisfied with the proposed approach to preserving and adapting the Kendall Building, subject to further review of the following:

- Approval of construction details and materials, particularly around the main entrance.

Additional Information Requested

- Fully dimensioned elevations.
- Perspectives views from Main Street showing the building from the sidewalks and street, and looking south down both side streets.
- Show sightlines for vehicles exiting the parking garage onto Wadsworth Street.
- More detailed site plan of the sidewalk/building frontage conditions on Wadsworth Street showing the design that was agreed to with city staff.
- Landscape details for the roof terraces.

Landscape Design

The overall landscape incorporates a series of open spaces, which were identified as the “Gateway”, “Activity Area (south of Building 4)” and “Promenade” in the *Kendall Square PUD-5 Design Guidelines, 2016*. The relevant site planning and open space design objectives are to:

- Transform existing parking lots and streets into new publicly accessible and porous open space that will extend the network of open spaces currently existing within and adjacent to the PUD-5 District.
- Design the landscape to be a cohesive and pedestrian-oriented open space, the connective tissue of the Kendall Square Development, connecting the MIT east and main campuses, and connecting the campus, the community and the Charles River.
- Create a series of places designed to become gateways and gathering spaces for the MIT and Cambridge communities, and anchors for various locations within the PUD area. Each space should have a unique sense of place designed to complement the surrounding architecture, but also to provide a unifying element between individual buildings across the PUD development parcels.

Planning Board Comments from November 29, 2016

While the Board was generally supportive of the overall structure of open space and the bicycle/pedestrian circulation network, and appreciated the programming and art, some key issues raised included:

- What is the memorable space? What will draw people to the open space?
- The plan responds to lots of small individual conditions and details, but what is the image of the place?
- Address how children and teenagers, who may live in the graduate student housing, will find enjoyment in the open space.
- All kinds of things that might be “MITish” might serve as play elements rather than a specific playground.
- Illuminated benches and the lights in the paving are not very innovative.
- What is the relationship of that architectural gesture of the cantilever to the landscape below? How does it connect to the landscape in a meaningful way?
- Give more attention to the area around the T Headhouse as it feels cold, and needs color and vibrancy. The multi-light poles need to be pedestrian scale.
- Review access between Main Street and T Headhouse – the headhouse in the middle of space might be an entry point, but could continue to be a barrier.
- Transparency of the T Headhouse is important.
- Clarify how bicyclists are going to get the message to that it is okay for them to ride across pedestrian areas and that they need to ride slowly.
- Support for surface water being captured, and encourage groundwater infiltration and getting more water into the Charles River.

- Provide images of the garage headhouse and parking ramp, and show pedestrian and cyclist circulation through the surface parking lot.
- The curb cut to the garage should be perpendicular to the street.

Staff Comments

The landscape design submission has evolved since November in response to the Board’s comments and now includes more comprehensive information about the proposed programming activities, feature lighting, multi-media projection wall, public art, seating, hardscape, and plantings. Staff comments on the new materials are:

- Overall, engaging site features and programming are the foundation of the proposed open space design. The various proposed activities, events and programs are robust and will engage with the community throughout the year, and during the day and night. The design continues to use MIT’s internal “Infinite Corridor” as an analogue, with nodes of activity connected along a central pedestrian spine. The intent is for those nodes to host a variety of formal and informal activities, reflecting the types of activities taking place throughout the MIT campus and inviting the broader community to participate.
- The “special activity/feature” deserves more emphasis as it is intended to be a focal point at the confluence of the Gateway and Infinite Corridor. While the proposed activities are dynamic and interesting, the opportunity to create something more permanent that evokes the groundbreaking activities of MIT and attracts the community should continue to be explored.
- The image of the “gateway” and T Headhouse responds to concerns about activation and permeability – the colorful awnings, moveable tables and chairs, and wayfinding signage add life to the space.
- It appears that the pinch point between the trees between the T Headhouse and entrance to Building 4 has been addressed, although continuing review of a detailed landscape plan will be required.
- A study of possible playful approaches to benches has been included in response to the Board’s comments about play and children, as well as other comments about the loss of the original curvilinear design features. Staff is very supportive of the more organic forms being explored and continues to encourage the integration of playful elements throughout the space.
- A warmer color pattern for hardscape materials is proposed, which will bring more color, warmth and variety to each of the open space areas.
 - The “dispersed urban gardens” are a positive passive feature of the revised design. These should be planted with a mix of plant species that will bloom during various seasons to create year-round interest.
 - Further information regarding mitigating the presence of the parking ramp along the Hayward Street sidewalk has been provided, and staff is supportive of the proposed landscape screening and improved wall treatment.