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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board  
From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner  
Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Planner  
Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner  
Date: May 31, 2016  
Re: **Special Permit PB #309, 95 Fawcett Street – Continued Hearing**

### **Update**

Since the last Planning Board meeting, the Applicant has continued to work closely with staff to respond to comments and questions raised in the initial review of the application. The Applicant's recent submission provides additional information about the project in narrative and graphic form, proposes some changes to the building's exterior design, and proposes some changes in the development program, most notably the garage parking layout. This memo comments on the additional information and proposed changes. Previously submitted staff materials are attached.

### **Planning Board Action**

As a reminder, the proposal is seeking various special permits from the Board. The new residential building at 95 Fawcett Street requires Special Permits for increasing the FAR per Section 20.95.1, the height per Section 20.95.2, and the dwelling unit density per Section 20.95.4. The project is also located within the Flood Plain Overlay District and hence requires a Special Permit for development per Section 20.70. In addition, the project is seeking a Special Permit for construction of a multi-family dwelling in the Office-1 zoning district. Further, the project is seeking a Special Permit per Section 20.97.3 to waive FAR limitations for above-ground structured parking. The required special permits and applicable criteria are summarized on the following page.

If the Board acts to grant a special permit, the approval would be conditioned on continuing design review by CDD staff and on fulfillment of transportation demand management measures recommended by TPTD, along with any other conditions the Board deems to be appropriate.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Increase FAR and Height, and Reduce Lot Area per Dwelling Unit in Alewife Overlay Districts (Sections 20.95.1, 20.95.2, & 20.95.4)	The project promotes the general interests of the larger commercial and residential neighborhood noted in Section 20.92 and is consistent with the goals, objectives and guidelines established in the Concord-Alewife Plan (see following page and plan excerpts in appendix).
Construction in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 20.70)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No encroachment of the floodway or displacement of water retention capacity is allowed unless fully offset.</li> <li>• Flood water systems shall not cause nuisance, hazard or detriment to site or abutters.</li> <li>• Development is consistent with zoning, area plans and guidelines, and applicable laws including Wetlands Protection Act.</li> <li>• Review by the City Engineer and Conservation Commission are required.</li> </ul> (See full criteria in appendix).
Construction of Multifamily Dwelling in Office-1 District (Section 4.26.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key features of natural landscape are preserved.</li> <li>• New buildings relate sensitively to existing built environment.</li> <li>• Open space provides visual benefits to abutters and passersby and functional benefits to occupants.</li> <li>• Parking, access and egress are safe and convenient.</li> <li>• Intrusion of onsite parking is minimized.</li> <li>• Services such as trash collection and utility boxes are convenient yet unobtrusive.</li> </ul> (See full 10.47.4 criteria in appendix).
Special Permit to Waive GFA for Parking Facility (20.97.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facility advances the objective of the Concord-Alewife Plan</li> <li>• A shared facility is established that aids in implementation of effective Transportation Demand Management measures to reduce dependence on the single occupancy automobile.</li> <li>• The facility is well designed, does not diminish the pedestrian –friendly quality the area around it, and is otherwise consistent with the urban design objective of the Concord-Alewife Plan.</li> <li>• The additional bulk of building above grade is well designed and does not have an unreasonably negative impact on its abutters or the public realm.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The extent to which the construction of an above grade parking structure facilitates the creation of at grade soil permeability.</li> </ul>
<p>General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43)</p>	<p>Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43 (see appendix).</p>

### Issues Raised in Original Proposal

During the March 15, 2016 hearing, the Planning Board recommended that the following elements be further explored. The Applicant has provided some responses in the submitted materials.

- Reconfiguration of garage layout to allow vehicles to turn around upon exiting the vehicular elevator and emergency access in addition to reduction in the number of parking spaces.
- Explore alternate options for building footprint to provide 15 feet front setback.
- Explore street-front façade treatments for the garage and residential units above that will improve the pedestrian experience and promote neighborhood ambience (clear glass windows with operable blinds for garage, wall panel material selection to provide a distinctive character to the building, avoiding office-like window features in the residential units, etc.).
- Parking ratio not to differentiate rental or ownership uses.
- Detailed building design review in terms of material selection, ADA accessibility compliance, etc.
- Better accuracy in depiction of rooftop mechanicals.
- Correspondence with electric company confirming location and size of equipment for the project.
- Explore transportation options available to Alewife station.
- Explore options to improve access to bicycle parking and to consider more number of short-term bicycle parking.
- Provide a massing model to show how the building fits in the site within the context of the immediate neighborhood.
- Provide more refined renderings with improved clarity in depiction of building materials.

### Comments on Proposed Changes

#### Consistency with Planning and Zoning

In addition to the various special permits in the original application, the Applicant is now also seeking a Special Permit for the waiver of gross floor area provisions for parking facilities as per Section 20.97.3. The rationale for granting such special permit is included with the revised submission. The proposed

development program of condominium units with deeded parking space makes it challenging to propose a shared parking facility. However, various TDM implementation measures have been proposed to reduce dependence on the single occupancy automobile. The garage and building are also designed to provide a permeable courtyard area on the lot facing Fawcett Street.

Perspective renderings have been provided to compare the proposed 10-foot setback and the 15-foot setback mandated by zoning. The rationale for not allowing the Planning Board to approve a reduction of the front setback to less than 15 feet is not fully explained in the Concord-Alewife Plan; however, one of the key conceptual goals of the plan is to provide for a well-defined, urban streetscape in areas that currently lack such definition. Therefore, aside from the identified hardship due to the shape of the lot (which will be the focus of review by the Board of Zoning Appeal), the Planning Board may consider how the proposed reduction in setback affects the desired streetscape outcome. The scale of the renderings makes it a bit challenging to evaluate the impact of the building location on the public sidewalk realm.

### **Transportation**

The project program has been revised to reduce the parking to 44 spaces in the garage, or one space per residential unit. The revised layout of the garage facilitates better maneuverability around the vehicular elevator and easier access into the parking spaces. The final details of the bicycle parking facilities and vehicular access/egress will be subject to final approval by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.

### **Flood Plain Requirements**

The Cambridge Conservation Commission reviewed and approved the proposed project on April 25, 2016. The project will be subject to an Order of Conditions in accordance with the Wetlands Protection Act.

### **Urban Design**

Since the first hearing, changes have been made to improve the ground floor elevation and the streetscape experience. This has included the addition of windows to the garage openings and a green wall, a wood-lined canopy soffit and selection of a more attractive garage door.

Efforts have also been made to further refine the elevations and bring greater clarity to the materials palette. These changes have primarily focused on the rear façade, as well as the selection and application of materials. Notably, instead of stucco, the applicant now proposes Equitone panels, which staff generally feels is an improvement as such panels are a more robust material. The colors shown on the elevations are still a little indistinct, though staff anticipate further review of materials at Tuesday's hearing when a materials sample board is presented.

The applicant has also addressed the Planning Board's comments about the commercial feel of some aspects of the project through revisions to the window and glazing patterns at the southern end of the building. Despite these modifications, staff remains uncertain about the applications of various materials, the proposed combination of traditional and contemporary details, and the various window treatments.

### **Sustainable Design**

Since the green building submission for the project did not include the enhanced commissioning credit, the staff had recommended that all efforts be made to earn this credit in the building's final design. The Applicant has agreed to consider expanding the scope of their independent commissioning to earn the credit.

### **Parking and Transportation**

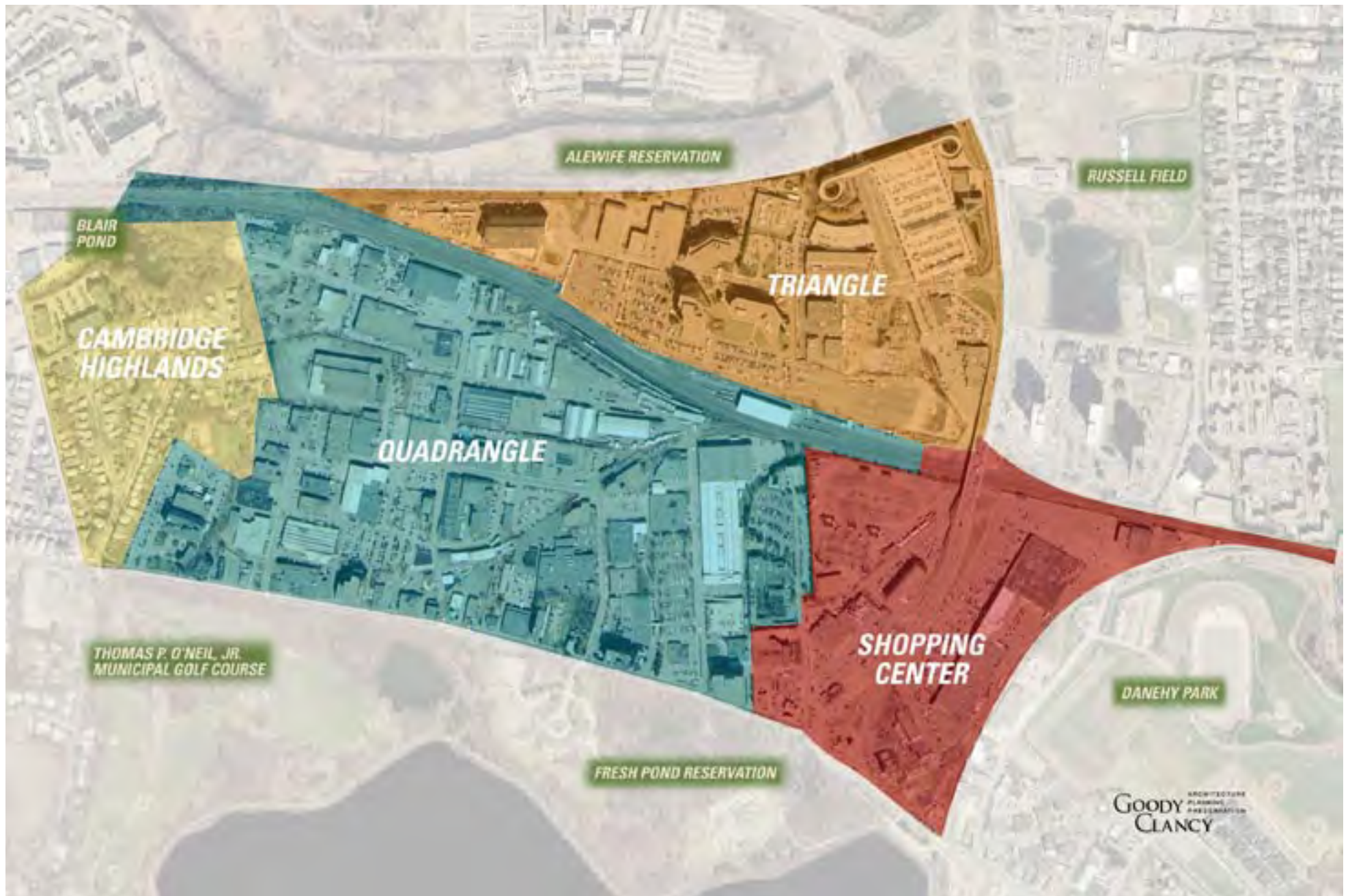
Comments are provided in an accompanying memo from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.

### **Continuing Review**

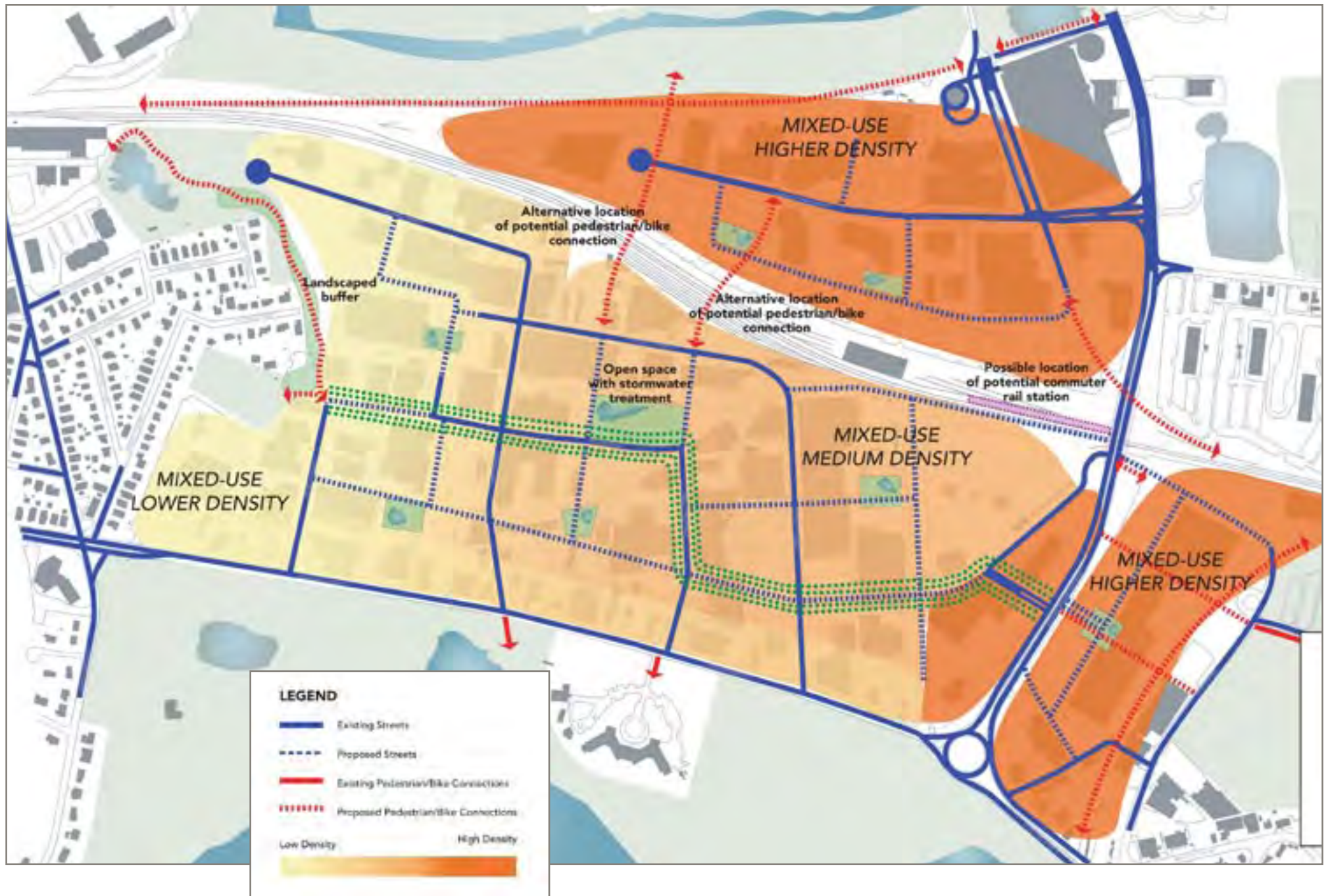
The following is a list of some key issues that staff recommends should be addressed further as the building and site designs advance. Additional comments from the Planning Board are welcome.

- Further study of the elevations to ensure changes in material are applied purposefully and in a manner that corresponds to variations in building massing.
- Review of parking, bicycle parking, access and egress by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (see accompanying memo).

# STUDY AREA -



# 10 CONCEPT PLAN -



# Goals: Areawide

## **Land Use and Density**

- Support mixed-use development throughout the Study Area to create a vibrant urban environment.
- Encourage development that responds to transit proximity by allowing higher densities and taller heights closer to Alewife Station.
- Create incentives for cooperation among property owners to meet study goals, especially stormwater management and infrastructure goals.
- Create urban design guidelines that encourage future development and create a sense of place for Concord-Alewife.
- Create guidelines that encourage future development to be responsive to stormwater, open space, and transportation goals for the Study Area.

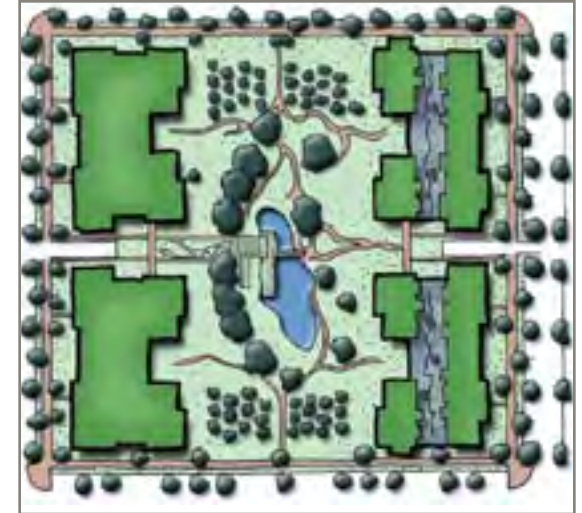
## **Infrastructure, Stormwater Management, and Open Space**

- Encourage creation of some combination of large open spaces, smaller retention ponds, and neighborhood squares; use parks, street plantings, parking lots, and other open space to enhance stormwater retention and treatment.

- Ensure that new development and redevelopment increases permeability and utilizes principles of low-impact development to improve runoff quality and reduce runoff quantity.
- Apply best management practices and low impact development strategies to mitigate stormwater runoff.
- Improve connections between open space resources in and adjacent to the Study Area.

## **Traffic and Transportation**

- Reduce anticipated auto-trip growth as compared to what is allowed under current zoning.
- Reduce auto mode share by employing measures such as:
  - improving access to transit,
  - designing a walkable and bike-friendly community,
  - improving the pedestrian environment, and
  - balancing provision of parking with transportation-demand management (TDM) goals.



**Encourage site planning that incorporates low-impact development strategies to improve stormwater management in future development.**



**GOALS: AREAWIDE [continued] -**

- Address safety issues on the periphery of the Study Area as well as within its interior.
- Provide for the possibility of consolidating existing surface parking into a structure as part of overall site improvements.

**Housing**

- Create a variety of housing opportunities that serve a diverse population of varying incomes, ages, and household sizes.
- Provide a mix of ownership and rental housing at all income levels.



*These renderings and photos illustrate the desired future character of the mixed-use area.*

# Goals: The Quadrangle

- Encourage creation of housing along Concord Avenue.
- Introduce neighborhood-focused retail to form a mixed-use core near the Alewife Brook Parkway edge of the Quadrangle.
- Continue to allow light industrial uses closer to the railroad tracks.
- Create appropriate transitions between the Highlands and nonresidential uses in the Quadrangle by introducing a green buffer and allowing lower densities and heights near the Highlands.
- Create a public space that serves a stormwater function as well as being an open space resource.
- Increase the amount of permeable surface in the Quadrangle as the area redevelops.
- Encourage future development to respond to stormwater goals for the area.
- Create a hierarchy of boulevards, avenues, streets, and pathways.
- Enhance the character of Concord Avenue by improving its streetscape.
- Design new public spaces and places that support a range of community-focused activities.



- Improve traffic circulation within the Quadrangle by enhancing existing roads and adding new ones—without creating a direct vehicular connection to the Highlands.
- Improve the streetscape within the Quadrangle to enhance the pedestrian and bicycle environment.
- Strengthen pedestrian/bicycle access to Alewife Station to improve connections to transit and to the Minuteman Path and Linear Park.
- Improve the pedestrian environment along Concord Avenue and provide safe crossings.
- Continue to encourage residential use along Concord Avenue.
- Encourage housing development within the Quadrangle, particularly close to the Highlands.



*Two development concepts for the Quadrangle: Above, residential development along Concord Avenue with views to Fresh Pond; at left, a passive park that incorporates stormwater-management features.*



# 11 PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE -



# 12 ADDITIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE -



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# Concord-Alewife Design Guidelines

These urban design guidelines are recommended to guide the character of future development in the Concord-Alewife Study Area.

## AREAWIDE GUIDELINES

- Break large blocks into smaller blocks, of sizes similar to those in surrounding Cambridge neighborhoods, to improve circulation and to be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.
- Vary the design of individual buildings to create an architecturally diverse district.
- Street-level facades should include active uses such as frequent residential entrances, with setbacks for stoops and porches; neighborhood-serving retail including shops, restaurants, cafés; services for the public or for commercial offices such as fitness centers, cafeterias, day care centers; community spaces such as exhibition or meeting spaces; and commercial lobbies and front entrances.
- Encourage awnings/canopies to provide shelter and enliven ground-floor façades.
- Design residential buildings with individual units and front doors facing street, including row-house units on the lower levels of multifamily residences.
- Encourage sustainable and green building design and site planning.
- Use low-impact-development principles in building and site design as a way to meet city, state, and federal stormwater requirements. Examples of low-impact development strategies include green roofs, bioswales, filter strips, and retention/detention ponds. For additional detail refer to “Low Impact Development in Cambridge: Concepts and Criteria” (currently under development by the DPW). As an additional benefit, reducing impermeable surfaces in the area would lessen the urban heat-island effect.
- Use site design that preserves future rights-of-way identified in the Circulation Concept Plan.
- Improve existing streets to meet City standards, including streetscape improvements.
- Strengthen bicycle and pedestrian links to adjacent areas. Provide links that strengthen physical and visual connections to open space resources.
- Screen service areas from major streets.
- Parking below grade is preferred. If above-grade parking is to be provided, design it so it is not visible from nearby residential neighborhoods, from public streets, or from pathways. Line above-ground structured parking with active uses (shops, cafés, lobbies) along important public ways; use parking structures to provide visual and acoustical screening between the railroad tracks and the rest of the area.
- Design and locate lighting and signage to support the district’s pedestrian-friendly quality.

## LOCATION-SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

### SHOPPING CENTER (AOD-5)

- Provide pedestrian links to create strong physical and visual connections to Danehy Park.

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## CONCORD-ALEWIFE DESIGN GUIDELINES

- Improve the pedestrian connection to Alewife Station and to North Cambridge.
- Create a new street network, including a north-south main street.
- Ensure that a significant number of entrances for building(s) face Alewife Brook Parkway and/or new main street.
- Create a strong pedestrian link across the Alewife Brook Parkway to connect the east and west parts of the Study Area.
- Create building height/façade setbacks between 55' and 85'.

### **TRIANGLE (AOD-6)**

- Create a pedestrian-friendly environment along CambridgePark Drive.
- Provide small setbacks (5' to 15') from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces.
- Screen service areas from CambridgePark Drive.
- Provide pedestrian links that strengthen physical connections to Alewife Reservation, consistent with its master plan.
- Create building height/façade setbacks between 85' and 105'.

- Locate new development to preserve right-of-way for future crossing of the railroad tracks to connect the Triangle and Quadrangle.

### **QUADRANGLE (AOD-1, 2, 3, 4)**

- Scale and use in areas adjacent to Cambridge Highlands should be compatible with the residential neighborhood and serve as a transition between the Highlands and the rest of the Quadrangle.
- Use streetscape and other improvements to define Wilson Road as part of a major east-west connection through the Quadrangle.
- Develop a vegetated buffer between the Highlands and Quadrangle that also provides a north/south link to adjacent open spaces.
- Create an open-space system characterized by parks and green spaces of varying scales and uses.
- Use pooled resources to create a new central public open space in the Quadrangle that incorporates stormwater management.

- Locate active uses around the future open space to create a safe and active environment throughout the day and evening.
- Provide pedestrian links to strengthen physical connections to the shopping center.
- Create building height/façade setbacks between 85' and 105'.
- Create a consistent edge along Concord Avenue, with a combination of residential and retail uses.
- Use streetscape and other improvements to define Smith Place and Spinelli Place as major north-south entries into the Quadrangle, and to establish Concord Avenue as a major gateway.
- Provide pedestrian links to strengthen connections to Fresh Pond Reservation, consistent with the Fresh Pond Master Plan.
- Strengthen the streetscape and other improvements to define Concord Avenue.
- Locate new development to allow for a future above-grade crossing between the Triangle and the Quadrangle.