



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
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Date: November 16, 2016

Re: **Special Permit PB #314, 35 Cambridgepark Drive – Continued Hearing**

Update

Since the last Planning Board meeting, the Applicant has worked 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 changes to the site layout, and proposes some changes to the building's exterior design. This memo comments on the additional information and proposed changes. Previously submitted staff materials are also attached.

Planning Board Action

As a reminder, the project proposes partial demolition of the existing three-story building and construction of two additional levels for technical office use for research and development (R&D), increasing the Gross Floor Area from about 137,635 square feet to about 184,815 square feet, with the addition of a small retail area of about 7,500 square feet in the first floor. The proposal also includes relocation of the outdoor mechanical and electrical equipment, landscape improvements, and minor modifications to the attached garage building, including a reduction in parking spaces from a total of 351 to 331.

The proposed project is seeking Special Permits for increasing the FAR per Section 20.95.1, waiver of yard requirements per Section 20.95.34, and a determination that the proposal meets the standards for reduction in required permeable area per Section 20.96.1. The project is also located within the Flood Plain Overlay District and hence requires a Special Permit for development per Section 20.73. In addition, the project is seeking a Special Permit for alteration and enlargement of a pre-existing nonconforming structure per Section 8.22.2a. The required special permits and applicable criteria are summarized below.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Increase FAR, waive yard requirements, and reduce required open space in Alewife Overlay Districts (Section 20.95.1, 20.95.34)	<p>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.</p> <p>For waiver of yard requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objectives of the Concord-Alewife Plan continue to be met. • The stormwater management objectives for the area continue to be met both on the site and as the site may be a part of a larger system for managing stormwater runoff. • The reduction or waiver of yard requirements provides for more efficient development of land; encourages or facilitates a more logical pattern of buildings, streets, parks and open space; or enhances the urban, pedestrian character of the area as envisioned in the Concord- Alewife Plan.
Alteration or enlargement of a pre-existing nonconforming structure (Section 8.22.2a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed change, extension, or alteration will not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconforming use.
Construction in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 20.73)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No encroachment of the floodway or displacement of water retention capacity is allowed unless fully offset. • Flood water systems shall not cause nuisance, hazard or detriment to site or abutters. • Development is consistent with zoning, area plans and guidelines, and applicable laws including Wetlands Protection Act. • Review by the City Engineer and Conservation Commission are required. <p>(See full criteria in appendix).</p>
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	<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>

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 the Traffic Parking & Transportation Department, along with any other conditions the Board deems to be appropriate.

Planning Board comments from First Hearing

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the August 2, 2016 hearing. The Applicant has provided some responses in the submitted materials.

- Address stormwater and floodplain issues.
- Explore closing the curb cut on Cambridgepark Drive so that the vehicular access to the site will be on Steel Place.
- Review the extent of hardscape, consider alternative locations for the accessible parking spaces, and provide additional open space.
- Clarify loading arrangements and dimensions.
- Review the location and extent of rooftop mechanicals, as well as the proposed architectural treatment and screening materials. Setbacks from the front façade and Steel Place should be considered.
- The two different architectural treatments are problematic. Refine the façade treatment of the building with less variation between the two approaches and more emphasis for the entry areas.
- Consider varying the façade treatment to respond to solar orientation and provide more depth.
- Materials need to be richer; color accents, modulation and a playful rhythm of panels are beneficial.
- Provide revised landscape plan to match the site plan.
- Provide additional information regarding the criteria requirements for reduction in open space.
- Review sidewalk and streetscape improvements along Steel Place and Cambridgepark Drive.
- Explore opportunities to improve the appearance of the façade of the existing garage along Cambridgepark Drive.
- Provide additional perspective renderings from a distance, and include the garage.
- Provide a conceptual signage plan for the building.
- Explore retail uses and tenancy sizes that will benefit the local neighborhood.

Staff Comments on New Materials

Planning and Zoning

The Cambridge Conservation Commission reviewed and approved the proposed project on September 26, 2016. The project will be subject to an Order of Conditions in accordance with the Wetlands Protection Act. This, along with the report provided by DPW, are necessary to demonstrate compliance with the Flood Plain Special Permit criteria.

The supplementary materials provided clarify that the Applicant is not seeking a Special Permit for reduced Open Space (Section 20.96.3) but rather is seeking a determination that the stormwater management guidelines of the Concord-Alewife Plan are met in order to allow a reduction in required permeable area (Section 20.96.1). The letter from DPW also addresses this issue.

The Application provides no further clarification of what type of retail use is proposed, though additional images of ground floor frontage and signage locations are shown, indicating that a restaurant or café use is favored and suggesting that the space may be divided into multiple establishments. If this is in fact the intent, it is recommended that the Applicant make provisions for ventilation requirements associated with food use to make it easier to find a tenant. It is also important to note that tenant

improvements should not result in substantial alterations to the façade treatment that is ultimately approved by the Planning Board, except for providing necessary signage as shown in the revised materials. Some potential tenants, if they are not traditional restaurants or retail stores, may not prefer the level of transparency shown in the proposed façade. Finally, with the increasing residential population in the neighborhood, staff recommends seeking a retail use that will be open at least one day of the weekend.

Sustainable Design

The project is still on track to meet the current Green Building Requirements, which require the project to be designed to a LEED Silver level. However, this project could exceed the Green Building Requirements by achieving LEED Gold as there are over 30 points listed as “possible”.

Since the initial submission, the project has indicated that it will seek the Enhanced Commissioning credit, which was recommended by staff and is included in the Net Zero Action Plan. However, the Stormwater Design credits are still not being fully pursued by this project, even though it employs a stormwater management plan. As indicated in the accompanying DPW memo, detailed review of stormwater management measures will occur at a later stage of design. Additionally, there is no indication of incorporating “solar ready” rooftop design as previously suggested.

In terms of energy performance, the project appears to be designed for the minimum requirement of 20% above ASHRAE 90.1-2007. It is unknown at this time if the new Massachusetts “Stretch” Energy Code, which uses a different baseline standard, will apply to this project.

Site layout

Since the first hearing, changes have been made to improve the site design and the streetscape experience. The Applicant has redesigned the parking area and driveway, which has resulted in significant site layout improvements, including a reduced extent of hardscape, additional open space with a streetscape presence, elimination of the curb cut on Cambridgepark Drive, direct entry to the garage from Steel Place, and covered accessible parking.

Additional landscape treatments have been added to the corner of Cambridgepark Drive and Steel Place to create a small urban plaza, which further enhances the pedestrian environment and provides opportunities for passive enjoyment of open space. To further enhance this new open space the potential for activities to spill out of the retail should be considered in the design of the ground floor façade. Additional seating opportunities could be introduced to maximize opportunities for social interaction and create a more inviting public space. The Cambridgepark Drive public realm design has also been refined to ensure that pedestrians have the ability to walk closer to the building edge and be shaded by trees in the summer months.

Comments regarding site design are also provided in accompanying memo from the Department of Public Works (DPW). The applicant is in communication with Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) to finalize the site design.

Architectural Design

In response to the Board's comments, the project's massing and architectural treatment has been simplified. The revised design is well-balanced and elegant with a curtain wall expression across both sides of the south façade, which then wraps around to the east and west elevations. Overall, the building now feels more streamlined and subdued. The east and west elevations are vertically articulated as two side-by-side volumes; one clad in pre-cast concrete and the other an extension of the curtain wall, which helps break down the scale of the facades. The south elevation is punctuated by a central notch, which has been enhanced and now provides a significant visual break in the facade. Some of the playful accents of color, which were well received at the first hearing, are also used across the curtain wall as vertical fins.

A series of perforated metal panels will be applied to the existing east and south facades of the garage. Combined with narrow openings, the panels successfully mimic the play of color and materials on the building, while obscuring the unsightly aspects of the parking structure and providing necessary ventilation.

The design of the rooftop mechanical penthouse is much improved. The setbacks from Steel Place and Cambridgepark Drive, and the central notch, reduce visual bulk, add variation to the roofline and help the penthouse to read as more of a recessive element. The material treatment of the penthouse has also advanced, with the metal panel carefully articulated to create subtle interest both horizontally and vertically. All equipment seems sufficiently organized, recessed and/or screened by the penthouse, and the exposed ventilation stacks have been carefully sited in the center of the roof.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be subject to continuing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Review of all exterior materials, colors and details, including the garage screening treatment, and a materials mockup on site.
- Review of landscape details, particularly associated with plantings, and hardscape design and materials.
- Review of sidewalk design, parking, bicycle parking, access and egress by the Traffic, Parking & Transportation Department.
- Review of stormwater management by the Department of Public Works.