



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner
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Date: March 30, 2017

Re: Special Permit **PB #326, 195 & 211 Concord Turnpike – 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. 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 is proposing to demolish two existing buildings to construct a multi-family residential development in two buildings with a total of 320 dwelling units with 243 off-street parking spaces accommodated at the basement and ground levels, 336 long-term bicycle spaces, 38 short term bicycle spaces, and landscaped areas accessible to the building residents and general public.

The site is located in the Special District-4A (SD-4A) zoning district and the Flood Plain Overlay District and partially in the Parkway Overlay District. The project seeks a Project Review Special Permit per Section 19.20; special permits to diverge from the standards of the Parkway Overlay District per Section 20.63.7 to alter the Green Area Open Space in the front yard, to increase the allowed height of a fence, to site on grade open parking area in the front yard, and to locate mechanical equipment in the front yard; special permit for building construction in the flood plain per Section 20.73; special permit to waive gross floor area (GFA) for parking facilities in the flood plain per Section 5.25.42; special permit for reduction of required parking per Section 6.35.1; special permit to exceed allowed curb cut width; and special permit to increase building height in Special District 4A per Section 17.42.3. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area, upon review of the traffic impact indicators analyzed in the Transportation Impact Study and mitigation efforts proposed. • The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30 (see following page).
Alter the required Green Area Open Space in the front yard, increase the height of the fence, site on grade open parking area in front of the building, and locate mechanical equipment in the front yard in Parkway Overlay District (Sections 20.64.1.2, 20.65, 20.66.2, 20.67)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In reviewing applications for any special permit in the Parkway Overlay District, the Planning Board shall consider compliance with the requirements specified in this Section 20.60, the recommendations made in the Cambridge Community Development Department's 1979 report entitled Alewife Revitalization, and the criteria specified in Section 10.43. • The Board may grant such a permit upon its determination that the development proposed will better serve the objectives of this Section 20.60 than if the standards were followed and that the criteria specified in Section 10.43 will be satisfied. (See full criteria in appendix)
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. (See full criteria in appendix)
Waive GFA for parking facilities in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 5.25.42)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only the minimum number of parking spaces required for the uses on the site are provided. • Where in a flood hazard area, the construction of a parking facility underground is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) not technically feasible due to the requirements of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (b) would require construction that would violate requirements or limitations of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (c) would, in the view of the Cambridge Conservation Commission, seriously compromise the wetlands

	<p>protection objectives of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act</p> <p>(d) would result in costs of construction that are significantly greater than would otherwise be typical for the location were it not in a flood hazard area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The above ground facility is designed so as to reduce its actual or perceived bulk through, among other possible techniques, limiting the number of parking spaces it contains, placement of portions of the facility below grade where feasible, or its location relative to actively occupied portions of the construction. Construction above grade is discouraged that would increase the amount of impervious area on the lot.
Reduction in required parking (Section 6.35.1)	Lesser amount of parking will not cause excessive congestion, endanger public safety, substantially reduce parking availability for other uses or otherwise adversely impact the neighborhood; or will provide positive environmental or other benefits to the users of the lot and the neighborhood, including assisting in provision of affordable housing units.
Exceedance of allowed curb cut width (Section 6.43.5)	Increased curb cut width will facilitate traffic and safety. (see appendix)
Exceedance of building height in Special District 4A (Section 17.42.3)	The additional height will better serve the objectives of this Section 17.40 to increase the amount of open space in the district and to limit the extent to which building and other hard surfaces cover the ground. (See full criteria in appendix)
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	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).

Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Urban Design Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods Consistency with established streetscape Compatibility with adjacent uses Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inhabited ground floor spaces Discouraged ground-floor parking Windows on ground floor Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access

Urban Design Objective	Indicators
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
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"> • Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities

Planning Board Comments from First Hearing

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the February 21, 2017 hearing. The Applicant has provided some responses in the submitted materials.

- Review options for safe access into the site from Route 2 traffic.
- Consider measures to raise future residents’ awareness of potential flood risk.
- Refine vehicular movement within the site and explain how school bus pick-up and drop-off will be handled.
- Provide less parking, more car sharing and increase mitigation.
- Provide detailed information about flood gates and their functionality during flood events.

- Explore pedestrian and bicycle connections to Discovery Way and provide a definitive agreement with the landowner.
- Provide additional information about 2030 and 2070 flood projections, flood resiliency measures and emergency response planning.
- Explore options to provide shuttle service to local shopping areas.
- Explore massing and exterior façade treatments to create a more interesting built environment along the highway, to reduce the wall-like appearance of the buildings, and to respond to the gateway location.
- Review building entries and how the project is oriented to enhance neighborhood connections. The design of the site should recognize that the life of the buildings will occur to the south.
- Review treatment and visibility of parking under Building 2 at the Route 2 frontage.
- Provide further information about rooftop mechanicals and any necessary screening.
- Refine site circulation to reduce conflicts between vehicular and pedestrian movements through the site, and to enhance pedestrian character.
- Provide additional information regarding the mix of units and future tenants.
- Provide more landscaping and usable open space further into the site where it will be of more value to the neighborhood and community.
- Aim for the project to be LEED Certified and go beyond Silver.
- Provide a description of materials and their durability.

Staff Comments on New Materials

The supplemental material dated March 21, 2017 primarily addresses concerns that were raised by the Planning Board associated with managing and mitigating flood risks, the safe operation of entering/exiting traffic along Route 2, and the architecture, landscape and urban design of the project. The revised set of plans and supporting graphic materials dated March 21, 2017 shows changes to the site layout, building design and landscape without altering the original project program.

Site design

- Overall the site layout and general approach to building siting was supported by the Planning Board, however there were comments about the project being too car-oriented, and needing to ensure that this is a successful place for people to live.
- The Planning Board also expressed concerns about the amount and quality of open space on the site. Members felt that the project lacked connections to the neighborhood and that there was a need to enhance the landscape character of the site and provide space for people.

Comments on new materials:

- Through design improvements, the main pedestrian route along the edge of Building 2 has advanced and staff is supportive of the changes made. The walkway more clearly prioritizes pedestrians over vehicles and additional landscape treatments have been added. A small plaza created to the south of the Building 2 lobby, which further enhances the pedestrian environment and provides opportunities for passive enjoyment of open space.

- While a direct north-south connection to Discovery Park Way is not possible, the alternative at the southeastern corner of the site appears to have been carefully considered. The site design emphasizes that access point through re-orientation of the Building 2 entry lobby and enhanced landscape treatments, including opportunities for seating. The expanded play area also has potential to become a focal point and its design details will continue to be reviewed as the project progresses.
- Additional comments regarding site design and circulation are provided in accompanying memos from the Department of Public Works (DPW) and Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T).

Architectural design

- Generally, the Planning Board was comfortable with the project being broken into two buildings and the notion of a spine with volumes attached. The Board also recognized that the different site conditions were being responded to.
- Several comments were made about the need to mitigate the massing as experienced on Route 2 because it appeared to have a wall-like character. Members also expressed an interest in more modulation of height and differentiation of building planes to make the project look like three separate buildings rather than one long building.
- At a more detailed level, it was mentioned that Building 2 was more successful than Building 1 and that the projecting bays on Building 1 were not effective, and something more dramatic should be considered.

Comments on new materials:

- As a result of the Board's comments, the architect has endeavored to provide a more dynamic approach to building massing and articulation with particular attention given to the Route 2 interface. The additional perspectives submitted with the revised materials demonstrate this approach and provide a sense of both the vehicular and pedestrian experience of the site.
- Greater variation in materials, step backs and articulation has been introduced to help modulate the façades facing Route 2, and avoid long expanses of co-planar surfaces. This is particularly evident where the Building 1 sixth story has been substantially set back. The breaking down of the façades, and the corresponding variation in materials and colors adds interest and successfully reinforces the notion that the buildings are a series of volumes. While this approach does reduce the monotony of such long buildings, it is also important to ensure that the arrangement of colors, materials and projecting bays is thoughtful and systemized.
- The main corners of the two buildings have also been revised to create greater architectural variation and to help direct pedestrians and vehicles to building entries.
- The roofline has further variation, due to the additional step backs and articulation. The presence of the roofline has also been strengthened with use of a projecting cornice element, which has been moved to the fifth floor in some instances, and appears to reduce the scale of the building.

- The design of the southern end of Building 2 has improved significantly and is more pedestrian-friendly and welcoming with an enhanced residential character achieved through additional transparency and vertically aligned balconies. The building has been further set back from the southern property line creating additional open space, and has also been designed to relate to and facilitate access to the available Discovery Way pedestrian connection. The podium façade adjacent to the pedestrian connection has been made more interesting by extending the balcony elements from above to the ground floor, although this does not appear to be reflected in the floor plans.
- The treatment of podium level is not as well articulated where the site interfaces with pedestrian routes to the southwest and where building corners and edges are visually prominent. Each elevation should be evaluated in terms of its visibility, and further design details and architectural features should be incorporated accordingly.
- Building materials remain unchanged with a vocabulary of fiber cement siding, and wood fiber cement panel for each building. A materials palette should be submitted and opportunities for joint and reveal patterns to be introduced to the wood panel should be further explored.

Sustainable Design

- The Applicant materials state that the roof will be designed to be solar-ready. The supporting materials for LEED review indicate that Thorndike/Magnolia Park and Central Rock Gym are within a half mile of the project. However, the walking distance to these uses are over a half mile due to circumventing Route 2 in the case of the former and the railroad tracks in the case of the latter.

Flooding

- The supplementary materials provide a narrative response to the Planning Board's comments about flood risks and mitigation. Additional comments regarding flood projects and impacts are provided in accompanying memo from the Department of Public Works (DPW).

Continuing Review

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:

- Updates to all floor plans to ensure changes to elevations are accurately reflected.
- Review of all proposed public realm, open space and streetscape improvements, including a more specific landscaping plan identifying plant species (plant list denoted in sheet L-101 is missing).
- Final selection of landscape materials and outdoor furniture.
- Site design details, including play area, screening of the at-grade parking area, electrical equipment and utilities, final sidewalk and pathway locations and design treatments, especially the connection through the adjacent property to the Discovery Way sidewalk.

- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials mock-up of all wall assemblies, including rooftop screening elements, on the site.
- Review and refinement of first floor façade treatments, particularly where visible from publicly accessible areas.
- Review of parking, bicycle parking, access and egress by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.
- Review of stormwater management by the Department of Public Works.