



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: June 1, 2017
Re: **PB #328 – EF III PUD Preliminary Determination & Project Review**

Overview

The proposal by EFEKTA Group, Inc. to develop a new building at 10 North Point boulevard within the North Point Residence District (PUD-6) is the latest step in expansion of the Education First (EF) campus in East Cambridge. Since this parcel sits on Commonwealth-owned filled tidelands and is currently used by DCR, the proposed project is subject to the Commonwealth's "no net loss policy" (Article 97) as well as the Massachusetts Tidelands Act (Chapter 91). The project includes student housing, educational, office, and retail uses.

This memo, along with comments from The Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department and Department of Public Works, discusses various aspects of the development proposal. In addition, it summarizes the approval process and actions required by the Planning Board at this stage.

PUD Review Process

EFEKTA is seeking a Planned Unit Development (PUD) special permit for a single building, referred to as "EF III". The PUD review and approval process is similar to the "EF II" project, approved in 2011. The proposal is also seeking a Project Review Special Permit.

The first step in the review process is the submission of a Development Proposal, which describes the overall development plan and demonstrates how it will meet the zoning requirements and other planning for the area. Following a public hearing, if the Planning Board finds that the Development Proposal is in general conformance with those requirements and meets the City's stated goals for the district, then the Board would make a positive Preliminary Determination authorizing the Applicant to proceed with the review and approval of a Final Development Plan at a second public hearing. As part of the preliminary determination, the Planning Board may request additional information, further refinements or changes to be incorporated into the Final Development Plan.

According to the zoning in Article 12.000, the Planning Board must issue a Preliminary Determination on the Development Proposal within 21 days. A positive preliminary determination does not guarantee ultimate approval of the project, but a negative preliminary determination amounts to a denial of the special permit application.

In this case, the Applicant has submitted a detailed proposal meeting the standards for both a PUD Development Proposal and a Project Review Special Permit application. This approach is typical in cases where the proposed PUD is a single building rather than a multi-phase development with more than one building component.

The most useful approach for the Planning Board with this type of application is to review the project in its entirety at the first public hearing, and if it is found to be generally consistent with the planning and zoning for the area, to make the findings required in Section 12.35.3 (see below) and list any comments or issues for further study when issuing a Preliminary Determination. The Applicant may then submit revised materials in response to the Board’s comments when proceeding to the Final Development Plan stage of review at a second public hearing.

The Preliminary Determination findings for the first hearing are summarized below:

Requested Action	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Preliminary Approval of a PUD Development Proposal (Section 12.35.3)	The PUD Development Proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conforms with general PUD development controls and district development controls• Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for that portion of the city• Provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects, considering:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ quality of site design○ traffic flow and safety○ adequacy of utilities and other public works○ impact on existing public facilities○ potential fiscal impact

The complete set of findings for issuance of a special permit (to be made at the second public hearing) are summarized below:

Requested Action	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Approval of a PUD Final Development Plan (Section 12.36.4)	The PUD Final Development Plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues to conform to the criteria for approval of a Development Proposal. • Contains revisions to the Development Proposal in response to the Preliminary Determination.
Permission for up to 100% of approved gross floor area to consist of non-residential uses (Section 13.73.0)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only one building is proposed to be located within the parcel.
Approval of retail establishment to exceed 10,000 square feet (Section 13.73.1-i)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater size better supports and serve the residents within the PUD district and better advances the policy objectives set forth in the Eastern Cambridge Plan and the guidelines provided in the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.
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 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).

Overview of Area Zoning and Planning

Planning and urban development in this part of Cambridge has evolved over many decades. The “North Point” area (referring generally to the part of Cambridge north of Monsignor O’Brien Highway) has been identified as a planned redevelopment area as far back as 1988, but the most recent planning was done through the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS) from 2001. ECaPS amended the base zoning (“NP”) and PUD overlay zoning (“PUD-6”) for this area, with the key objective being to encourage a transformation from its previously dominant industrial character to a mixed-use neighborhood with housing as a dominant use, while also including new office developments, limited amounts of retail, and new public open spaces. ECaPS also encouraged creating opportunities to connect this area to East Cambridge, particularly in conjunction with the proposed relocation of the Lechmere T Station, and recommended a set of *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines* that are referenced in the zoning for the area. These guidelines are meant to inform urban design review for new projects, and are discussed in the Urban Design section further below.

Neighboring developments permitted in the PUD-6 area thus far have included the 5 million square-foot mixed use Northpoint complex, the adjacent three-phase residential PUD south of Langdon Street, and the residential building at 22 Water Street.

Evolution of the “EF Campus”

The section of North Point located east of the Gilmore Bridge has long been industrial in character, including several parcels under the control of state agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR, formerly the Metropolitan District Commission or MDC) and others, and used for utility, maintenance, or transportation facilities. State projects that began to transform the overall character of the area included the construction of the Leonard P. Zakim Bridge in 2002 and the creation of the DCR North Point Park on the waterfront in 2007.

In 1989, the Planning Board approved the first PUD in this area (PB-85) consisting of a residential component (now known as the Regatta Riverview Residences) and a hotel component. The PUD was later amended to replace the permitted hotel use with an office building, which was occupied by EF.

In 2010, EF announced a plan to expand its facilities with a second building in the North Point area, partially on land conveyed by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT). The emerging “campus” would include expanded offices for EF and classroom facilities for the associated Hult International Business School. Along with special legislation from the state, this plan required the City Council to adopt zoning amendments to allow the Planning Board to approve a PUD consisting of a single non-residential building, as well as to allow greater building height and to account for the conveyance of land from public agencies when calculating the development parcel size. Following adoption of the zoning amendment (Ordinance #1337), the Planning Board granted a PUD special permit authorizing construction of the “EF II” building in 2011 (PB-262) and granted an amendment to PB-85 authorizing classroom uses along with office use in the “EF I” building in 2013.

While the creation of this type of international office/educational campus was not originally envisioned in the planning for the area, past decisions made at the state and city levels have established that it is

viewed as a desirable land use and it is encouraged under current zoning provisions. From an institutional planning perspective, EF/Hult is now included in the Planning Board's "Town-Gown" process along with other educational institutions. It is also apparent that EF's presence has played an important role in bringing new life to this area, which is one of the key objectives of the ECaPS study.

Major Development Controls

The development controls for a PUD overlay district are applied in place of the base zoning subject to the Planning Board's approval of a Final Development Plan. Therefore, the following controls are allowed if the Board determines that the development plan, as a whole, meets the intent and objectives of the zoning and planning for the area.

- **Density.** The total Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is limited to 2.4 across the district, although additional FAR may be allowed for proximity to transit and for increased residential use (neither applicable in this case).
- **Retail.** Retail and consumer service establishments are limited to 25,000 square feet in total for the portion of this district located east of Charlestown Avenue, unless the Planning Board makes a finding that additional retail use will better serve the objectives of the district and that of the Eastern Cambridge Plan. An individual retail or consumer service establishment may not exceed 10,000 square feet unless the Board makes a finding that greater size will better support and serve the residents within the PUD district and better advance the policy objectives set forth in the Eastern Cambridge Plan and the guidelines provided in the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.
- **Housing.** Normally, non-residential uses may not exceed 35% of the total GFA, exclusive of the parking facilities. However, the Board may permit up to 100% of the total GFA within a parcel to be non-residential if only one building is proposed within the parcel.
- **Open Space.** At least 20% of the development parcel must be publicly beneficial open space.
- **Height.** Maximum allowed height in this portion of the district is 150 feet.
- **Setbacks.** No requirement for minimum front, side or rear yards in the district except as may be established by the Planning Board in its review/approval of a PUD.

Parking Requirements

- Parking facilities may be located on the same lot or in pooled private or public parking facilities located within the district.
- For development, parking shall be as follows:
 - Residential: 1 space per unit minimum and 1.5 spaces per unit maximum
 - General Office: 1 space per 1,250 gross square feet minimum and 1 space per 625 gross square feet maximum
 - Technical Office for Research and Development Uses : 1 space per 1,675 gross square feet minimum and 1 space per 840 gross square feet maximum

- Retail and Consumer Services: No accessory parking shall be required if the retail and consumer service uses are located on the ground floor and front on and have a public entry directly onto a publicly accessible street
- The total number of parking spaces for non-residential uses in the district shall not exceed 2,500 spaces, allocated to each Development Parcel at the rate of 1.2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of land in the Development Parcel.
- Loading requirements as specified in Article 6.000 and in the Schedule of Parking and Loading Requirements applicable to the Residence C-3, Office 3, Business B and Industry B districts.
- Bicycle parking must be provided per citywide requirements (Section 6.100).

Proposed Development Concept

The proposed project will be the third phase of the “EF campus” in Cambridge. This state owned parcel has been legislatively approved for acquisition and development by EF. EF will also provide funding for environmental cleanup and the relocation and construction of a permanent maintenance and operation facility for DCR.

EF is proposing a twelve story mixed-use building with a first floor predominantly dedicated to public uses, office uses on some upper floors, and the remainder of occupied space devoted to student housing. The project also includes a public open space that will be maintained and programmed by EF offering multiple recreational amenities. Above-grade structured parking will be incorporated into the building on the side adjacent to elevated roadways, and long-term bicycle parking will be provided in a series of stand-alone sheds on the north side of the site.

In general, the development proposal conforms to the PUD-6 zoning as it was amended in 2010. At that time, the integration of commercial, residential, academic, retail, and open space uses were discussed and ultimately approved by the City Council, with the support of the Planning Board.

The development proposal also relates to the city’s planning objectives in the following ways:

- Student Housing: The 2001 zoning for the area prescribed a mix of residential and non-residential uses in new development; while the 2010 zoning amendment relieved this requirement for single-building developments, and dormitory uses are technically not classified as residential, the inclusion of student housing is nonetheless consistent with the original planning in the area that envisioned a mixed living/working environment. The additional student housing will result in a significant net increase in EF’s capacity to house students on campus, which was raised as a key issue in past Town-Gown discussions on EF/Hult and other institutions. Also, the proposed location of the housing in close proximity to the other EF buildings will continue to activate this part of North Point.
- Open Space: Another positive outcome is the creation of a large open space far in excess of the zoning requirement (20%) to provide as publicly beneficial open space, which will serve as a link between the DCR North Point Park and the central “Commons” within the Northpoint PUD. The development plan also includes a commitment to programming the open space to meet the recreational needs of the community.

- **Retail:** The proposed fitness facility and associated retail space will activate the first floor in addition to supporting recreational needs in the area. Through the design and programming of the project, it will be important to ensure that these retail uses are visible and perceived as public amenities rather than facilities that are exclusive to the EF campus.
- **Sustainability:** The project is required to meet the current Green Building Requirements to design to a LEED Silver level, as well as meeting the Stretch Energy Code, the City's Building Energy Use Disclosure Ordinance (BEUDO), and the requirements of the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA). Staff has reviewed the submitted green building materials with the Applicant's consultant and has found that the project is on track to meet LEED standards at the Gold level. The Applicant has worked with staff to explore strategies to meet all requirements and to respond to the City's broader sustainability efforts such as the Net Zero Action Plan and climate change resiliency planning. The project as proposed is pursuing strategies including an Energy Management System (EMS), well-insulated building envelope and cool (high-albedo) roof, onsite renewable & alternative energy sources, rooftop Combined Heat and Power (CHP) system, 'solar ready' roof construction, and operable windows in the residential portion of the building.

Staff recommends that the applicant provide the EOEAA Secretary's Certificate regarding the MEPA process. Staff suggests that while on-site solar power maybe not be feasible for building operating systems, the project should explore using solar power for user oriented systems, which could benefit from renewable sources (i.e. cell phone charging, emergency lighting, etc.). The applicant has agreed to continue to investigate cost effective opportunities to improve the building envelope as the design progresses based on staff comments that in addition to energy efficiency and greenhouse gas mitigation, improving the building envelope also contributes to providing a greater measure of passive thermal resilience in the event active energy systems fail, which is critical for residential uses. The comments provided by the staff on the project's Environmental Impact Report (EIR) are attached to this memo.

Urban Design

As mentioned above, guidance for urban design review is found in the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines (2001)*. The aim of these guidelines is to create consistently high-quality public environments, and to ensure that development contributes to the character and vitality of the surrounding community. Relevant open space and urban design goals for the North Point area include:

- Create a lively new mixed-use district with strong visual and pedestrian connections to East Cambridge. The district should be a place to live, work, and enjoy a variety of parks and public spaces.
- Design streetscapes and public spaces to encourage walking and cycling, and to create a welcoming pedestrian environment through the provision of street trees, seating, and lighting, and other amenities.
- Locate new buildings to provide a consistent edge along public streets, and avoid blank walls or parking facilities facing public streets.

- Enhance and expand the area’s open space resources to serve current and future residents.
- Create new neighborhood parks, playgrounds and recreational facilities that serve a wide range of users.
- Design new open spaces to be convenient and welcoming to residents.
- Create a network of pedestrian and bicycle-friendly connections to the Charles River

A detailed summary of relevant guidelines can be found in the attached appendix.

Pre-Application Conference

As is often customary with PUD applications, the applicant presented the project to the Planning Board at a Pre-Application Conference on April 25, 2017. The Board made various comments about the project, including the following that are pertinent to the urban design review of the project:

- General support for the use of the land for student housing and the proposed open space strategy.
- Opportunity to do something more whimsical, dramatic or adventurous with the rooftop.
- Questioned if two floors of parking were needed to support the project.
- Further study of the design and location of the exposed column near the main entrance.
- Concern about the proposed long, flat facades and the need for color, or contrast. Board members suggested exploring elements of the program to deform the skin, facades, and pattern of windows.
- Need something to differentiate the building and create a strong visual element.
- Support for the colored accents and associated precedent images.
- Further study of North Point Boulevard to determine if it should be less urban, and more park-like with more trees and slower cars.
- Need to carefully balance visual and physical access to the soccer field with the ability to stop soccer balls.

Staff Comments

In guiding the future form of development in North Point, the ECaPS study and Design Guidelines emphasize that well-defined street walls, human-scale buildings, and windows at street level are essential to creating an attractive pedestrian environment. This is especially important in districts like North Point where historically the redevelopment of former industrial areas often resulted in large-scale buildings with privatized environments due to a lack of surrounding context to relate to. The proposal’s interface with North Point Boulevard, and the design and character of open space, are therefore key urban design considerations.

The project has evolved since the Pre-Application Conference and in response to the Board’s comments. More glazing at the northeast corner and a notch on the north elevation have been introduced to address the Board’s comments about the facades and the visual presence of the project from the freeway. A playful mechanical screening element, which folds across the roofline, has been introduced, which helps to celebrate the top of the building. The color palette has also improved with additional

accent color panels introduced, and a range of warmer colors and textures, including wood, proposed. These recent changes have enhanced the project, and the following features are noted as positive outcomes:

- The lobby is an active use and occupies the majority of the ground floor frontage with a high level of transparency.
- The main entrance and double-height lobby, with the associated wood-lined soffit, create a strong focal point and are clearly visible from the sidewalk, with the cantilever creating a grand, porch-like entrance.
- A tripartite scheme is achieved through a well-detailed two story base, which includes warmer materials and textures; a vertically-oriented middle section with a syncopated rhythm of windows; and a pronounced top.
- Maximizing public open space on the site is a key design driver, which has resulted in careful siting of the building so that shadow impacts are minimized and the site's poor interfaces are mitigated.
- A variety of open space activities are proposed, ranging from recreational uses to passive seating, which will enhance the pedestrian environment, and attract people to and through the site.
- Loading and access is proposed to the side of the building and will not be visible from the public realm. Similarly, utilities and mechanicals have been well-handled, with an interior vault provided for electrical infrastructure.
- Wind conditions around the site are generally expected to remain similar to, or better than, the existing conditions. During the summer, an existing uncomfortable wind condition remains unchanged, and one new location along Gilmore Bridge becomes uncomfortable. During the winter, wind conditions are generally expected to be comfortable for walking or better, with the number of uncomfortable conditions around the site reducing significantly.

There are several areas where the project varies from the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines* and citywide urban design objectives, and the Planning Board should carefully consider whether or not the proposal meets the intent of these guidelines, or if the individual circumstances of this site warrant an alternative approach:

- While creating many positive opportunities for the project, the building's oblique siting, setback from the street edge, and landscaped plaza space that connects the building lobby to the sidewalk do not provide a well-defined street wall.
- Underground parking is preferable, and any above ground parking should be designed so as not to be visible from public streets or pathways, and lined with active uses.
- Portions of the building above 65 feet should be set back by at least 10 feet from the principal façade.

In addition, the following aspects of the design may benefit from further attention:

- While none of the building's plan dimensions exceed those recommended in the *Design Guidelines*, further opportunities to breakdown the scale of and length facades could be explored, particularly for the south elevation.

- The design of the lobby and retail space could be further celebrated to capitalize on the proposed indoor/outdoor relationship and further activate the streetscape. Opportunities for large, operable doors and windows, and movable tables and chairs, should be explored. In addition, making the internal stair a visually engaging and active element of the lobby should be considered.
- The landscape design and lobby/retail space design should continue to be refined to ensure that these spaces are welcoming, interactive and feel comfortable for the public. It is important that the open space, and ground floor design, invites people in and provides desirable places for people to sit and enjoy the site.

Staff suggest continued study and review of the above issues as the project advances.

Additional Requests

Staff recommends that the following additional design materials be included in the Final Development Plan:

- A rendered pedestrian view of the project from under the Gilmore Bridge.
- A detailed materials palette with all materials and colors specified, and cross-referenced to the elevations.