



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: July 27, 2017
Re: **PB #328 – EF III PUD Final Development Plan & Project Review**

Overview

On August 1, the Planning Board will have the second hearing on EFEKTA Group's Planned Unit Development (PUD) special permit application for development of a new building ("EF III") in the North Point area. The first hearing was on June 6, 2017.

Since that time, the applicant's team has held numerous meetings with staff, including CDD's urban design, environmental and transportation planning staff, along with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) and the Department of Public Works (DPW). The intent of these meetings was to further discuss the set of issues raised by staff and the Board at the June 6 hearing, and to discuss how the project would proceed if the Board grants the requested special permits. In July, the applicant provided a Final Development Plan and Supplement with revised plans and a summary of efforts they have made to address the points raised by the Planning Board.

The purpose of this memo is to comment on the responses provided by the applicant, and to provide the Board with recommended conditions if the Board approves the development plan, including details of the site and building designs to be subject to continuing staff review, and measures to mitigate project impacts and provide public benefits. A new memo from TP&T (dated 7/25/17) and previous memo from DPW (dated 5/31/17) are included, along with the Preliminary Determination issued by the Planning Board after the first public hearing.

The following topics are covered in this memo:

- Summary of the findings that are required of the Planning Board in granting the requested special permits.
- Summary of the issues raised at the prior meeting, and staff comments on the additional materials provided by the Applicant.
- Recommended items for continuing review if the Planning Board decides to grant the requested special permits.

Planning Board Action

The Applicant submitted a detailed development plan meeting the standards for both a PUD Final Development Plan and a Project Review Special Permit application, which 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 findings for issuance of both special permits 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 (see Preliminary Determination). • 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).

Comments from Prior Review

As indicated in the June 6 hearing and in the CDD materials prepared for that hearing, the proposal conforms to the provisions of the PUD-6 zoning and is broadly consistent with the city’s plans for the area, as established in the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS) amendment for the base zoning (“NP”) and PUD overlay zoning (“PUD-6”) for this area. Board members noted that the growth of EF and the Hult school as an institutional presence in the area, while not anticipated by the original zoning, has nonetheless been successful in helping to enliven the area and provide public amenities in service of the City’s planning goals. Board members also raised specific issues and referred to issues that were raised in written comments by staff. Below is a summary of just some of the higher-level issues that were raised. In addition to these, there were many comments related to specific elements of the proposed development plan.

Site Planning and Design

- In consultation with City staff, consider alternative design approaches in order to minimize the amount of paved area along North Point Boulevard.
- Provide details of the proposed fence treatment around the multi-use field.
- Consider the arrangement of benches and flexible seating options, including movable outdoor furniture.
- Update context rendering to show the proposed retail at North Point.

Building Concept Design

- Explore alternative sizes, shapes and architectural treatment of the exterior support column in the front façade.
- Investigate alternative materials for the façade other than precast concrete.
- Improve the design of the roof-top mechanical screen so as to completely screen all mechanicals, if possible.
- Improve the visual character of the blank wall at the north corner of the building.
- Explore using a similar façade treatment for both the internal elevations and the front elevations of the building, with an emphasis on doing more with publicly visible facades.
- Consider if there is adequate width of windows in the residential areas of the building, and provide an interior rendering of a dorm room.
- Provide details of the roof terrace parapet/balustrade.

Transportation

- Provide details for reducing conflict between vehicles and bicycles near the garage entrance and bike sheds.
- Consider potential conflicts between pedestrians accessing the building from the sidewalk and bicyclists on the multi-use path.

Sustainability

- Consider seeking full LEED certification of the building.

Open Space

- Consider alternatives to synthetic turf for the multi-use field.
- Provide details of all public realm and landscape treatments.

Comments on New Materials

Urban Design Issues

Site planning, landscape design and open space

At the time of the first hearing, the landscape concept design was rather diagrammatic. Since then, considerable work has been undertaken by the Applicant to provide further details and respond to comments made by the Board. Staff is generally supportive of the design changes shown in the revised materials. The perspective views of the streetscape (Volume 2, pp. 40 and 41) are much improved and

the additional landscaping has helped to break down some of the large expanses of paving, creating a more pleasant and green public realm. Up-close details have been resolved and the views towards the lobby (pp. 37-38) show an improved relationship between the ground floor, the proposed landscaping and the multi-use path.

Landscape treatments proposed at potential vehicular/pedestrian conflict points appear reasonably well-resolved. The fence around the field was of particular interest to the Planning Board, and the proposed black metal railing and 3.5' height is a sensible design response. Staff would suggest that the fence treatment continued to be refined with consideration given to opportunities to incorporate seating and additional landscaping that might help to break down its visual presence to passersby. Given the emphasis on providing a welcoming and active public ground floor, continuing design review should also focus on the public realm and landscape treatments, including ensuring that direct pedestrian paths are provided through the site.

Multi-use Path

As discussed earlier, the project will create a multi-use pedestrian and bicycle path segment, which is a critical link in connecting the network of public open spaces that has evolved throughout the area over time. Most directly, this would connect the state-owned parks along the riverfront to the open spaces and residences in the North Point development complex. More broadly, this would become a piece of a larger interconnected "Greenway" system extending into many communities throughout the region.

The Planning Board commented that the North Point Boulevard renderings appeared to show a wide expanse of pavement. The updated plans and renderings show additional landscaping to soften the effect of paved surfaces and create a continuous visual experience along that frontage. Since the previous renderings focused on the building, they may have inadvertently overemphasized the visual impact of paved surface and underemphasized landscaping. The updated renderings and plans better illustrate the combined visual effect of the proposed street, landscaping, and multi-use path as a whole.

In Volume 4 of the submission, responding to the Board's comments, an "Option B" is shown that suggests removing the sidewalk along North Point Boulevard. However, the City would not support such a deviation from the current typical street layout, since it would be disruptive to remove the sidewalk in just this location, would result in unnecessary conflicts for pedestrians who wish to continue along the sidewalk instead of merging in with other users, and would create an awkward transition point at the MWRA parcel line. The street layout itself is also not significantly different from many other parts of Cambridge, though it may appear wider because of the surrounding pattern of building setbacks and open spaces. Vertical landscape elements, as well as the potential raised crossing that is proposed, should help to visually narrow the appearance of the street.

Moreover, if the City were to allow removing the sidewalk and consolidating all pedestrian traffic and recreational users onto a single multi-use path, the City's design standards would require a minimum path that is 14' wide with 2' buffers on either side in order to adequately support multiple types of users at the same time. Once these dimensions are taken into account, there is no gain in terms of additional landscaping/greening. Therefore, staff continue to prefer the "Option A" plan with improved landscape treatments along the street and multi-use path edges.

The detailed design of the multi-use path will need to be coordinated with City staff as the project advances. Any non-standard surfacing materials, such as raised paving, used in the public right of way will need to be reviewed in detail by the DPW, and if an alternate material is approved, the Applicant will be responsible for ongoing maintenance.

Architectural design

At the first hearing, Board members were very supportive of the project, including the active uses proposed for the site, the proposed open space, the building's relationship to its surrounding context and its massing. Board members had various questions and comments about detailed aspects of the architectural design, which are broadly summarized above. In response to the Board's comments, several design modifications have been made and further information provided. While modest, these changes and detailed refinements have enhanced the overall architectural character of the building.

The column at the front entry now seems to have a better proportional relationship with the building. While the column treatment is proposed to match the precast base, it could perhaps be further celebrated in some other way. The darker, horizontal reveal lines introduced at every floor level, and now also shown above the wood soffit at the main entry (see p. 37 view), have also helped to create more crisp edges and visual interest.

The blank wall at the northwest corner of the building does remain, although an additional vertical strip of the accent material has been added to the inner corner, which draws the eye and accentuates the massing change. The proposal to paint all rooftop mechanical equipment the same accent color as the penthouse screening also appears to be an improvement.

As is often the case with renderings, it is difficult to capture the exact qualities of façade materials. The precast remains the selected façade material and the Applicant has provided an explanation for this choice in Volume 4. While staff is confident that variation and a vibrant color palette can be achieved, especially with the use of the accent color, the project should be subject to continuing design review, with particular attention to the choice and detailing of materials, and more detailed treatment of the ground floor design. The clarity of the glass, including a lack of coating and tints, at the ground floor is also important as it relates to how accessible the interior of the building will be perceived by the public.

Transportation Issues

Transportation issues are addressed in the accompanying memos from TP&T, which include recommended mitigation programs, and in the recommended special permit conditions.

Sustainability Issues

Sustainable development is an important topic of interest for this development. The applicant has committed to a high level of sustainability by targeting a LEED Gold standard for the building using the newest version of LEED, Version 4, which is more aggressive than previous versions. This moderately equates to the standard that was recommended for short-term citywide adoption in the Net Zero Action Plan. The applicant will also be required to implement site and infrastructure improvements to meet the city's stormwater management standards.

The Applicant has continued to work with staff 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 continue to suggest 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.

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:

- Review of all proposed public realm, open space and streetscape improvements, including the detailed design of the multi-use, fence treatments and pathway design.
- Final selection of all landscape materials and outdoor furniture.
- 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 of potential cost-effective opportunities to improve the efficiency of the building through envelope design.
- Review of rooftop HVAC and mechanical equipment screening and penthouse treatments.
- 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.