



---

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE**  
Community Development Department

---

**IRAM FAROOQ**

*Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development*

**Sandra Clarke**

*Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration*

To: Planning Board  
From: Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Project Planner  
Date: April 18, 2018  
Re: **PB #332, Vassar Street – Design Update**

At its December 5, 2017 meeting, the Planning Board granted Special Permit #332 for MIT's Vassar Street dormitory. During its review, the Board expressed general support for the design, and recommended that continuing design review include:

1. Further consideration of opportunities to make the brick wall overhanging the main building entrance feel more welcoming and open.
2. Further review of the rear facade and design of the long-term bicycle parking area in relation to visibility from the public realm and the Grand Junction Path, safety and security, and opportunities to enrich the design.

The Applicant has submitted a set of design materials as an update for the Planning Board. These materials respond to the design review comments, and also include a noteworthy change to the window surrounds proposed for the south façade. Given the changes proposed, staff thought it prudent to return to the Board for review and comments.

The plans and graphic materials have been reviewed by staff, and are considered generally consistent with the Planning Board's approval. In response to the Board's comments, the rear façade appears much improved. Additional color, fenestration and minor massing changes that add interest and variety have been introduced. The design of the long-term bicycle parking has also been resolved with greater attention given to the relationship between bicyclists, the rear building entrance, and transparency.

The overhanging brick entry wall has an additional notch at the eastern end, less bulk, and two round white columns. While the changes are an improvement, the wall remains relatively low to the ground, and could perhaps be less of a visual barrier to make the entry courtyard feel more approachable. There may also be other opportunities to make this entryway more visually interesting, such as doing something more exciting with the white columns.

While staff supported the originally proposed window awnings, it is understood that these did not provide much in terms of energy gains, restricted views out from the building, and were a maintenance concern. The new window surrounds are a reasonable alternative, and will provide texture and shadow across the façade.