



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: Jeff Roberts, Senior Manager for Zoning and Development
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Re: Special Permit **PB #334, 24 Brattle Street (1-7 & 9-11 JFK Street, 18-20 Brattle Street)**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 24 Brattle Street (1-7 & 9-11 JFK Street, 18-20 Brattle Street), the special permits being requested, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

The applicant is proposing to renovate the existing building at 1-7 JFK Street and the office building at 18-20 Brattle Street, replace the existing two-story retail building at 9-11 JFK Street with a new four-story building, construct an upper story addition to 18-20 Brattle Street, and add a roof terrace on the new building at 9-11 JFK Street and a portion of 18-20 Brattle Street. The resulting development, combining existing structures and new additions, would contain approximately 63,400 square feet of Gross Floor Area. The proposal also includes the addition of 14 long-term bicycle parking spaces. No parking is proposed. The proposed project is in the Harvard Square Historic District, and was reviewed by the Cambridge Historical Commission, which issued a Certificate of Appropriateness on June 8, 2017 (find attached). Comments from the Department of Public Works (DPW) are provided in a separate memo.

Requested Special Permit

The project is located in the Business B District (BB) and the Harvard Square Overlay District (HSOD) and seeks Special Permits for additional building height, pursuant to Section 20.54.2.2, for exemption from parking and loading requirements, pursuant to Section 20.54.4 and for exemption of basement area from the definition of Gross Floor Area pursuant to Article 2.000. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Building height exceeding 60 feet	Portions in excess of 60 feet set back at least 10 feet from the street line and also set back from one or more 45-degree sky exposure planes
Exemption from parking and loading requirements in the Harvard Square Overlay District (Section 20.54.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lot contributes to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures. • Exemption from parking and loading requirements results in a building design that is more appropriate to its location and fabric of the neighborhood. • Design is in conformance with objectives and criteria contained in <i>Harvard Square Development Guidelines</i>. (See below) • No National Register or contributing building is demolished or altered as to terminate or preclude its designation (either now or within the past 5 years). • Conforms to general criteria for issuance of a special permit. (See appendix)
Exemption of basement area in the calculation of Gross Floor Area (GFA)	The uses occupying such exempted GFA support the character of the neighborhood or district in which the applicable lot is located.
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).
Summary of the objectives of the <i>Harvard Square Development Guidelines</i>:	
Primary Goal	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide change and encourage diversity in order to protect the distinctive characteristics of the District's buildings and public spaces, and to enhance livability and vitality • Preserve and enhance the unique functional environment and visual form of the District; preserve its architecturally and historically significant structures and their settings, and encourage compatible design; mitigate any adverse impact of new development on adjacent properties and areas; and discourage homogeneity by maintaining the diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. 	
Relevant Secondary Goals (intended to provide general guidance)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support creative, contemporary design for new construction that complements and contributes to its immediate neighbors and the character of the District. • Build on and sustain the diversity of existing building form, scale and material. • Expand the high quality public environment with attractive and compatible materials, lighting, and street furniture. • Expand the network of pedestrian walkways and paths wherever they can conveniently provide alternate routes through the District. • Encourage new residential projects in the District, especially in mixed-use buildings. • Encourage creative solutions to the District's parking and transportation issues, including the problem of on-street deliveries. 	

Area Planning and Zoning

Planning and zoning for the Harvard Square district, which is one of the most transit-connected areas in Cambridge, supports development of a range of uses at a relatively high density. The requirements and guidelines for the site, which are established in the Business B (BB) base zoning as modified by the Harvard Square Overlay District (HSOD), encourage an urban form that relates to the historic development patterns that defined the area, with heights up to 60 feet (about 4-5 stories) by right or 80 feet (about 6-7 stories) by special permit, and no yard setback requirements for non-residential buildings in order to enable closely spaced, “zero lot line” buildings.

The Harvard Square Overlay District (HSOD) was created in 1986, following a planning study that established development goals and guidelines for the area. The HSOD is identified as an “Area of Special Planning Concern,” where development is subject to additional scrutiny. In the case of Harvard Square, a standing community advisory committee conducts non-binding review of projects subject to development consultation procedures, and makes comments to the Planning Board or Board of Zoning Appeal on cases requiring special permits or variances.

In 2000, another study of Harvard Square resulted in some zoning changes, a set of development guidelines, and the establishment of a historic Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD), requiring new buildings or alterations to existing buildings to undergo review by the Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC). A study of the Harvard Square Development Guidelines, led by the CHC, is underway.

The HSOD contains some other modifications to the base zoning requirements as follows:

- Parking and loading requirements are waived for uses in existing buildings. Otherwise, they may be waived by special permit from the Planning Board if the Board finds such a waiver to be consistent with the objectives of the district. Unlike other parts of the city, where parking reductions are justified by the availability of alternative parking or transportation options, the parking and loading waiver in Harvard Square is intended to result in development patterns that fit with the historic fabric. In exchange, projects that utilize at least 80% of the site’s allowed FAR are required to make a payment in lieu of parking to a Harvard Square Improvement Fund.
- Some variations from the signage requirements of Article 7.000 are allowed (provided that signs remain no higher than 20 feet in elevation), with the understanding that signage would be subject to NCD procedures.

Current Zoning Petition

Because the Kroon, et al. Zoning Petition has been advertised, the project would need to conform to applicable provisions of that petition if they are ultimately adopted by the City Council. The following provisions could apply to this project:

- Additional Review Criteria: The Board’s review would be guided by the additional goal of “preserving and enhancing the retail ecosystem, including the pedestrian retail window-shopping experience, the extent and density of contiguous storefront openings, and the pedestrian streetscape vitality generally.”
- Height Limitations: Any uses above 60 feet in height would be limited to residential dwelling units, or an equivalent amount of residential gross floor area would need to be provided elsewhere.

- **Formula Business Regulation:** A retail establishment that meets the zoning definition of a “formula business” would require a special permit from the Planning Board, after considering whether its design approach supports the character of Harvard Square. Since the exact retail establishments are unknown at this stage of review, it is not clear whether this provision would apply. If so, it would be considered through a separate special permit process for a given business.
- **Small Store Regulations:** A project of this type would be required to devote at least 50% of its ground-floor frontage, not counting entrances, to retail spaces of no more than 1,250 square feet.
- **Bank Frontage Limitations:** Banks or other types of office uses would not be allowed to occupy more than 25 feet of linear ground-floor frontage, or would require a special permit from the Planning Board. Again, it is not known at this time how the ground-floor space is intended to be tenanted.
- **FAR Exemption for Below-Grade Spaces:** The current project is seeking a waiver by special permit. If the proposed zoning is adopted, that special permit would not be needed, provided that the below-grade space is being used to support ground-floor retail uses or to provide other publicly-accessible functions.

Proposed Project

As it exists, the lot is currently conforming with regard to dimensional requirements, as it is within the 60-foot as-of-right height limit and is not required to have any yard setbacks. The proposed non-residential development will conform to the allowed uses in the district, and will expand the development on the site to the maximum allowed FAR of 4.0, provided that the Gross Floor Area in the basement is exempted. The project proposes adding a new top story reaching a height of about 65 feet, exceeding the as-of-right limit of 60 feet. The additional story is set back from the edges of the building and behind a 45-degree bulk control plane, as prescribed by zoning, so that it will have little visibility from the public realm. The new additions to the building total approximately 38,529 square feet, and therefore the proposed development is subject to Green Building requirements (Section 22.20) and Incentive Zoning requirements (Section 11.202).

The existing buildings are over 100 years old, and subject to review by the CHC per the demolition delay ordinance and the NCD requirements. The project has been reviewed by the CHC, which issued a certificate of appropriateness with the condition that the design details would be reviewed further by the CHC following Planning Board review.

The project is not proposing any parking, and is seeking a waiver of the parking and loading requirements for the new portions of the building, since the uses within the existing buildings are not required to provide parking as-of-right. Given that the project is maximizing the allowed development on the site, it will be required to make a cash contribution to the Harvard Square Improvement Fund, which will be calculated per the requirements of Section 20.54.4(2)(a).

The required long-term bicycle parking located in the basement of the new building meets the zoning requirements for number and location of spaces, which are detailed in Section 6.100 of the Zoning Ordinance. The plans submitted do not demonstrate that they are meeting the requirements for layout and spacing, and the access route to the bicycle parking area is not shown (a more detailed set of plans

will need to be reviewed for compliance). The project does not propose short-term bicycle parking on-site. According to the zoning, if short-term bicycle parking spaces are not feasible on site, the requirement may be met by providing a contribution to the Public Bicycle Parking Fund.

The building is proposed to have service areas and retail uses occupying the entire basement. The Planning Board may grant a special permit to exempt these areas from the gross floor area (GFA) calculation if they support the character of the neighborhood or zoning district, which in this case seems to align with the goal of supporting ground-floor retail in the district. As noted earlier, if provisions of the Kroon, et al., Zoning Petition are adopted, this space could be exempt as-of-right. One of the concerns raised during consideration of the zoning that allowed the basement exemption was that it would encourage basement-level space that may be susceptible to flooding risk. If the space is used primarily for storage or functions that would be more resilient to flooding, the risk may not be a great concern. The applicant is in the process of reviewing the plan with the Department of Public Works (DPW) regarding potential flood risk.

Another provision of the Kroon, et al., Petition that would affect the project, if adopted, is the requirement for residential dwelling units for areas above 60 feet in height. Since either office or retail uses are proposed in the new top story of the building, the project would not conform to this provision. That space would either need to be converted to residential use, or an equivalent amount of space elsewhere in the building (about 9,074 square feet, according to the plans) would need to be converted to residential use.

The “small stores” provision of the Kroon, et al., Petition might also affect the project as currently proposed. The ground-floor plan shows a potential apportioning into seven tenant spaces ranging from about 902 square feet to about 2,872 square feet in area, most of which are 1,500 square feet or larger. The demising walls could potentially be reconfigured, making some spaces smaller and others larger, so that half of the frontage is for stores of 1,250 square feet or less. It is not clear if this would result in a vastly different outcome, but it would put more constraints on the tenancing options for the ground floor.

Urban Design

Overall Massing

The staff appreciates that the proposal protects and restores the existing Abbot and Brattle Buildings as its primary urban design objective. The massing of the proposed new building connecting the two is well considered and creates a coherent composite block, which supports the development goals for Harvard Square. The additional retail space the building accommodates will contribute to the vitality of the area.

Façade Design

The restraint shown in the design of the facades is commendable, as the designers have made an effort to allow the existing Abbot Building to remain the dominant element of the block while still giving the infill building subtle visual interest. A few comments and questions follow.

- The staff appreciates the varied ground floor retail facades in the infill building – the sense that different shops can be expressed individually within the overall façade scheme. We appreciate

the retention of the Tess Storefront at 18-24 Brattle, and hope that the restored storefronts on the Abbot Building will be relatively permanent.

- The glazed recessed reveals at the left and right sides of the infill façades should be studied further in order to minimize their disruption to the coherence of the block as a whole. Possibilities include:
 - Introducing additional vertical mullions close to the left and right sides of the reveals.
 - Widening the brick façades and reducing the reveals to about half to two-thirds of their current widths (except where the width is governed by the loading dock), such that the recesses are only wide enough to respect the cornice returns of the Abbot Building.
- The design of the ground floor granite façade should be further developed with regard to color, joint pattern, and joint details. On the elevations on pages 13 and 14 of the application, the simpler joint pattern of the “Historical Commission Proposal” seems preferable to the pattern of the “Current Proposal”.
- In the brick façades, the large windows at floors 2 and 3 seem under-detailed. Adding vertical mullions close to the outer edges of each window might be an improvement.
- Alternatives to spandrel glass should be considered at the 3rd floor level in the double height windows, such as metal panels or shadow boxes, to relate better to the historic context.
- The metalwork at the 3rd floor level is a welcome enrichment of the façade in principle, but the current design seems unrelated to the basic rectilinearity of the façade. Improvements could be made by adding more members, and/or changing it to a rectilinear rather than zigzag pattern.
- The cornice at the main roof level might project farther out, while still deferring to the cornice of the Abbot Building.
- It seems unnecessary to recess the central bay on the JFK Street façade, yet to have the decorative metalwork at the 3rd floor level continue straight across. Alternative options might include bringing the façade of the central bay out to the plane of the façade on either side, but distinguishing it by a vertical reveal on both sides, or inserting a bay window into the recess with its outer face in the same plane as the typical façade.
- The shadows on the elevation indicate that the ground floor façade of the central bay is at the sidewalk line, but the perspective shows it recessed. We believe that it provides greater continuity of the pedestrian frontage to locate the façade at the sidewalk line.
- The corner entrance of the Abbot Building should be reviewed further, to consider whether the restoration shown on the “Historical Commission Proposal” on pages 13 and 14 of the application is preferable to the approach that is currently proposed.

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:

- Provide additional detail on the glazing to be used in the new building as well as in the replacement windows in the existing Abbot and Brattle Buildings. The glazing should be reasonably clear and transparent, rather than reflective or colored.
- Provide more detail on the exterior lighting to be used on the façades and roof levels, including shielding, illumination levels, and color temperature.
- Provide details of the material used for the wide central mullions of the double height windows and their lintels.
- Provide more detail on the materials used in the proposed roof addition, including the railing of the roof terrace, the walls of the pavilion, and the mechanical equipment well (with a particular focus on noise attenuation measures).
- Check that all drawings include accurate north arrows and graphic scales.
- Review all proposed mechanical equipment on the rooftop, façade or exterior of the building.
- Review details of bicycle parking location, layout, and access with TP&T.
- Review all exterior materials, colors, façade alterations and details with staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission.
- Continue to review of stormwater management measures with DPW.