



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: Jeff Roberts, Senior Manager for Zoning and Development
Erik Thorkildsen, Urban Design Planner
Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner

Date: March 21, 2018

Re: Special Permit **PB #334, 24 Brattle Street (1-7 & 9-11 JFK Street, 180-20 Brattle Street)**

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. The applicant is in communication with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department and the Historical Commission. Previously submitted staff comments are attached.

Planning Board Action

As a reminder, 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.

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.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
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	
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)	
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.	

Planning Board Comments from the First Hearing

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the January 30, 2018 hearing. The applicant has provided responses in the submitted materials:

- Study the possibility of retaining at least portions of the Abbot Building's 3rd floor as a mezzanine to the adjoining double height space.
- Emphasize the penthouse and roof terrace more strongly. The penthouse could be a positive and attractive addition to the building, a lantern when seen from a distance. A visible rooftop restaurant would enliven Harvard Square. The portion of the penthouse above the Brattle Building – both the north and west sides – seem the location most appropriate for a stronger statement. Add windows on the west side of the penthouse.
- In refining the design of the penthouse, creatively respond to the opinions that have been expressed regarding its role in the urban form and life of Harvard Square.
- The glazed reveals on either side of the two infill facades are too wide and too strong visually, they excessively isolate the infill façades from the adjoining existing facades, revise them to give the block more coherence.
- Study the proportions of the ground floor storefront openings and their granite surrounds.
- Exceeding the base limitation of 60 feet as proposed to allow a height of 65'-6" seems appropriate.
- Consider giving the infill facades a more pronounced cornice.
- Preferably restore the curved glass entrance façade at the apex of the Abbot Building.
- Preserve the "Dewey, Cheetham, & Howe" window lettering.
- It would be good to maintain the possibility of having retail in the lower level.
- Consider the comments made by the CDD in their memo of January 24, 2018 (copied at the end of this memo).

Staff Comments on New Materials

The additional material dated February 27, 2018 addresses concerns raised by the Planning Board and makes other changes that the CDD feels are improvements.

- The glazed reveals on the sides of both infill facades have been reduced in width and given a mullion pattern more in keeping with the project's other windows, thereby giving the block's streetwall more continuity, and making the infill facades feel more substantial.
- The Brattle Street's infill façade now has four structural bays, rather than three, which gives the double height windows a more vertical proportion. This creates more proportional compatibility with the facades of the Abbot and Brattle Buildings, and creates a smaller scaled rhythm at the ground floor retail facades.
- The central bay of the JFK Street façade, previously recessed, is now flush with the other bays, giving the streetwall more continuity.

- The vertical mullions of the double height windows, previously centered in their left and right halves, have been moved off center, closer to the brick piers. In this location they serve as secondary framing elements that enhance the grand scale of the windows.
- The more substantial decorative metalwork at the middles of the double height windows is an improvement.
- The increased differentiation of the penthouse into two different types of facades both breaks up its mass and allows it to respond to the site's varied urban conditions. At the recessed portions, there is a knee wall below the glazing, the vertical mullions are wider, and generally more closely spaced. In the projecting portions the expression is more modern: the glazing extends down to floor level, the vertical mullions are narrow, and generally more widely spaced.
- The portion of the penthouse above the Brattle Building, with the more modern looking fenestration system, now projects forward toward Brattle Street. Its glazing continues around the corner to the penthouse's west façade, creating a sense of a lantern on the top of the existing Brattle Building.
- The rooftop terrace has been extended west along the Brattle Street façade over the Brattle Building, and around the corner to the west face of the Brattle Building, capitalizing on this location's relationship to Brattle Street as it extends to the northwest.
- The standing seam penthouse roof has been changed from grey to a copper color (non-weathering), adding warmer color to the composition.
- The retail space configuration has not changed substantially, with smaller ground-level spaces that are in line with what many feel are good sizes for small business owners, larger undesignated spaces at the basement (lower) level (potentially for storage or other support functions), and a single space occupying the second floor. The penthouse level remains designated as "office or restaurant."

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:

Architectural Design

- Continue to fine-tune the proportions of the fenestration.
- Consider giving the infill facades a more pronounced cornice.
- Consider adding some kind of screening or shading at the west facing penthouse elevation: a trellis, screening, or overhang, etc., both to protect the interior from western sun, and to differentiate the north and west facades of the penthouse as seen from Brattle Street.
- Review all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials mock-up of all wall assemblies with the Historical Commission and CDD.
- 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 tinted.

- Work with the Historical Commission regarding the restoration of the curved glass and the stone knee walls at the ground floor entrance to the Abbot Building.
- Provide more detail on the appearance of the mullions that will be used in the replacement windows at the ground floor of the Abbot Building. They should be appropriate for a restoration, rather than seem to be modern replacements.
- Provide more detail on the exterior lighting to be used on the façades and roof levels, including shielding, illumination levels, and color temperature.
- Review all proposed mechanical equipment and appurtenances on the rooftop, façade, or elsewhere on the exterior of the building.
- Review details of bicycle parking location, layout, and access with TP&T.
- Work with CDD regarding the flexibility of the retail space for different size tenants.

Other Items

- The Applicant should continue to address loading issues and the mitigation of disruption due to construction as advised by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department. In addition, staff recommends implementing a community outreach program as part of the construction process, including posting of signage with contact information, renderings, and a description of the project, and maintenance of a website and/or notification list to provide project updates. It will be especially important to engage with retailers who will be affected by construction.

Staff Comments from the Previous Memo, dated January 24, 2018

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 third 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.