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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: August 22, 2018

Re: Special Permit **PB #338, 36-54 CambridgePark Drive – Continued Hearing**

### **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 (TP&T) and Department of Public Works (DPW).

### **Planning Board Action**

As a reminder, the applicant is proposing to demolish the three existing buildings on a site consisting of four parcels on CambridgePark Drive, to construct a new 8-story building with commercial space in the first floor, 294 residential units on six floors, two levels of structured parking for 179 cars, 328 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 38 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and 1 loading bay. The proposal also includes improvements to the existing private roadway, creating an additional 9 parking spaces, and construction of a play area over the shared boundary with 88 CambridgePark Drive. The project proposes to transfer 128,000 square feet of allowed Gross Floor Area (GFA) from 88 CambridgePark Drive (PB #292) and will require an amendment to the site plan approved for 88 CambridgePark Drive.

The project is located in the Office-2A (O-2A) zoning district as well as in Alewife Overlay District 6 (AOD-6) and seeks a Project Review Special Permit per Section 19.20 and Special Permits within AOD-6 for FAR per Section 20.95.1, building height per Section 20.95.2.6, waiver of yard requirements per Section 20.95.34, and allowance of retail uses per Section 20.94.1. The application also seeks a reduction of required parking per Section 6.35.1, exceeding allowed curb cut width per Section 6.43.5, and common driveway per Section 6.43.6. Since the project is located within the Flood Plain Overlay District it requires Special Permits per Section 20.73 and seeks a waiver of GFA for above-grade parking facilities per Section 20.97.3. In addition, the project is seeking Special Permits for Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to increase GFA and dwelling unit density per Sections 21.40 and 20.95.4. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text in appendix)</i>
<p>Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30.</li> </ul>
<p>Increase FAR, increase building height, and waiver of yard requirements in Alewife Overlay Districts (Sections 20.95.1, 20.95.2.6, 20.95.34)</p>	<p>The project promotes the general interests of the larger commercial and residential neighborhood noted in Section 20.92 and is consistent with the goals, objectives and guidelines established in the Concord-Alewife Plan.</p> <p>For waiver of yard requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The objectives of the Concord-Alewife Plan continue to be met.</li> <li>• The stormwater management objectives for the area continue to be met both on the site and as the site may be a part of a larger system for managing stormwater runoff.</li> <li>• The reduction or waiver of yard requirements provides for more efficient development of land; encourages or facilitates a more logical pattern of buildings, streets, parks and open space; or enhances the urban, pedestrian character of the area as envisioned in the Concord- Alewife Plan.</li> </ul>
<p>Waiver of GFA for parking facilities in a flood plain, modifications to permitted uses in base Office district in Alewife Overlay Districts (Section 20.97.3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The facility advances the objective of the Concord-Alewife Plan.</li> <li>• A shared facility aids in implementation of effective Transportation Demand Management measures to reduce dependence on the single occupancy automobile.</li> <li>• The facility does not diminish the pedestrian–friendly quality the area around it, and consistent with the urban design objective of the Concord-Alewife Plan.</li> <li>• The additional bulk of building above grade does not have an unreasonably negative impact on its abutters or the public realm.</li> <li>• The extent to which the construction of an above grade parking structure facilitates the creation of at grade soil permeability.</li> </ul>
<p>Modifications to permitted uses in base Office district in Alewife Overlay Districts (Section 20.94.1)</p>	<p>For all uses listed in Section 4.35 (Retail and Consumer Service):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No individual establishment exceeds 10,000 sq. ft. in area.</li> <li>• Retail use is located on the first floor or basement of the building.</li> <li>• Total Gross Floor Area of retail uses does not exceed 10% of the total Gross Floor Area of the building.</li> </ul> <p>The Planning Board may waive above limitations if the project promotes the general interests of the larger commercial and residential neighborhood noted in Section 20.92.</p>

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text in appendix)</i>
Transfer of GFA under Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and increase dwelling unit density for additional GFA under TDR in Alewife Overlay Districts (Section 21.40, 20.95.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce the density of development adjacent to the existing residential neighborhood of the Cambridge Highlands.</li> <li>• Encourage greater development density closer to public transit and to facilitate infrastructure improvements that will make those transit services more widely available in the Alewife Overlay Districts.</li> <li>• Facilitate a more orderly development pattern within the Alewife Overlay Districts, including increasing the opportunities for installation of new circulation pathways for pedestrian, bicycles and vehicles; creation of new public or private open space facilities; and development of new pedestrian connections from the Quadrangle to the Triangle.</li> <li>• Make additional land surface available for better stormwater management and increased permeability.</li> <li>• Encourage a more attractive pattern of new buildings consistent with the urban design objectives set forth in the Concord-Alewife Plan.</li> </ul>
Construction in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 20.73)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No encroachment of the floodway or displacement of water retention capacity is allowed unless fully offset.</li> <li>• Flood water systems shall not cause nuisance, hazard or detriment to site or abutters.</li> <li>• Development is consistent with zoning, area plans and guidelines, and applicable laws including Wetlands Protection Act.</li> <li>• Review by the City Engineer and Conservation Commission are required.</li> </ul>
Common Driveway (Section 6.43.6)	Conditioned on mutual easements recorded at the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds.
Reduction in required parking (Section 6.35.1)	Lesser amount of parking will not cause excessive congestion, endanger public safety, substantially reduce parking availability for other uses or otherwise adversely impact the neighborhood; or will provide positive environmental or other benefits to the users of the lot and the neighborhood, including assisting in provision of affordable housing units.
Exceedance of allowed curb cut width (Section 6.43.5)	Increased curb cut width will facilitate traffic and safety.
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.

### **Planning Board Comments from the First Hearing**

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the July 10, 2018 hearing.

- Respond to concerns about development density and scale on the site.
- Increase the number of 3-bedroom units and consider including 4-bedroom units.
- Provide a significantly improved landscape plan, expanding planted areas and trees where possible and providing details for the playground and the new shared roadway. To assess the quality of on-site open space, provide a “Green Factor” calculation similar to what was proposed in the Brown, et al., Zoning Petition.
- Clarify how the site will protect and recover from future storm surge flooding, including ground floor retail areas.
- Consider reducing paved area along the private roadway and pedestrian/bicycle path in order to increase planted areas.
- Clarify the public benefits provided to meet the criteria for transfer of development rights.
- Explore opening up elevated courtyards to improve visual connections to the neighborhood.
- Revise design to comply with front yard requirements.
- Focus on improving the sense of community in the district as a whole. Consider where neighbors would meet each other outside of the building, and account for residents’ routes to places within the neighborhood other than Alewife Station in the site design.
- Explore options to add detail to the facades, including brick details and bond patterns, and the possibility of using metal balconies rather than glass. On the west façade, consider aligning the fenestration of the first and second floors with that of the residential floors to create more vertical continuity. The east façade is weak, it should be given more design attention.
- Discuss thinking about expected retail types and marketing strategies.

### **Staff Comments on New Materials**

The revised proposal (dated August 6, 2018) retains many positive aspects of the original. It augments Cambridge’s housing inventory, contributes to the transformation of the Alewife Triangle into a mixed-use area, creates pedestrian friendly streets with landscaping and street furniture, provides a playground as a neighborhood-wide amenity, and screens its parking, loading, and service from view. The building’s bulk is mitigated by the division of its west side into three wings, and by the differentiation of its ground and second floor facades into varied zones for retail and other uses.

The revised design, along with supplemental narrative materials dated August 1, 2018, address many of the comments raised by the Planning Board and staff, including the following improvements:

#### *Project Scale and Dimensional Standards*

- The number of units is reduced from 299 to 294 and three-bedroom units are increased from 8 to 18 in the housing mix.

- The revised layout meets the front yard requirements of the zoning district with over 15 feet between the property line and the building along CambridgePark Drive.

#### *Site Layout and Landscape Design*

- The area dedicated to green landscaping along the west side of the building has been increased.
- Trees have been added along the east edge of site.
- The path to the residential entry on the east side of the building has been widened, and the glazed entry façade has been divided to give it a smaller scale.

#### *Scale and Massing*

- A broad double height opening has been created in the west façade to the south residential courtyard, breaking up the façade's length and visually connecting the courtyard to the building's surroundings.
- The amenity area below the north courtyard has been pushed back. It is now slightly recessed behind the plane of the wings on either side, thereby giving stronger emphasis to the north courtyard as a break in the mass of the west façade.

#### *Architectural Character*

- Brick detail has been added, including at window heads and sills.
- The balconies have been changed from glass to metal.
- The east façade has been given increased articulation and three-dimensionality.
- The southern portion of the west façade has been revised to create a stronger relationship between the structure of the upper residential floors and the piers of the first and second floors.

The new materials also include discussion of transportation, flood resilience, and sustainable design strategies, including a "Green Factor" calculation for the site based on standards used in Seattle and those proposed in the Brown, et al., Zoning Petition. The Applicant has had continued discussions with TP&T regarding transportation impact mitigation and with DPW regarding infrastructure, stormwater management, and flood protection measures.

Staff have suggested the following additional improvements that might be considered as the design is refined further:

#### *Open Spaces*

- Consider a simpler and more open treatment of the plaza at the northwest corner, a more continuous pedestrian setback zone on the building's north side, and a more continuous planting zone along the west façade. The landscape design shown on the perspectives is simpler and less cluttered than that shown on the plans.
- Make the play area feel more public and inviting, perhaps by adding a gate directly off the driveway to the south, and by adding planting along the south façade of the building.
- Join the southwest crosswalk more directly with the west sidewalk to create smoother pedestrian flow.

- Adjust the location of short term bicycle parking areas both to make them more convenient to building entrances and to reduce disruption to the continuity of planting zones.
- Study whether additional trees could be added along Cambridgepark Drive by spacing them more closely, and whether the existing tree at the northwest corner of the site could be preserved. (The symbology on the site plan on page 34 of volume 2 makes it unclear which trees are existing and which are proposed).

#### *Building Design*

- To further reduce the west façade's sense of bulk, consider making the facades of the middle and south residential wings more visually independent from each other, for example by making their framed gray areas less symmetrical.
- Add design nuances, such as subtle changes in plane, brick bond patterns, and joint patterns in other materials.
- Adjust the proportions of the proposed soldier course headers relative to the height of the spandrel panels.
- Further refine the façades of the first and second floor podium, including more detailed consideration of mullion patterns and profiles, canopy design and materials, entrances, the materials and design of the knee wall below retail windows, and possibly incorporating large operable windows for the retail façade at the northeast corner, etc.
- On the south facade and the southern part of west façade, use color or a change of materials to distinguish the second-floor level spandrels from the piers to create a stronger double-height effect.
- On the façade of the Amenity Area below the north courtyard, use a lighter, more glazed façade expression, treating this area as though it is infill between the two residential wings.
- On the lower two floors of the building's east façade, consider climbing vines, louvers, changes in plane, or other ways of visually enlivening the dark, blank wall surface.

#### *Mechanicals and Utilities*

- Verify that the fences screening the transformers and switchgear are tall enough. (Staff note that the equipment should be shown on the perspectives on pages 56 and 57 of Volume 2.)
- Consider moving the transformers and switchgear slightly west, so that the switchgear is in line with the corner of the building instead of projecting farther east.

#### **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:

- Refinement of the site plan, including the width of the sidewalk on the west side, the location, amount, and type of planting, the location of bicycle parking areas, the design of the play area, etc.
- Review of landscape details, including plantings, pavers, planters, benches, fences, exterior lighting, etc.
- Review of the proposed siting and screening of the transformer and switch gear.

- Review of the proposed play area.
- Review of façade design details, especially the ground floor details, material transitions and reveals, and glass specifications: ground floor glazing, upper floor glazing, balcony railings.
- Review of all exterior materials and colors, including a materials mock-up of all wall assemblies on the site prior to any exterior materials being ordered.