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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

Date: March 4, 2020

Re: Special Permit **PB #354, 87-101 CambridgePark Drive - Continued Hearing**

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning

## 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.

## Planning Board Action

The current Application (as revised) is proposing to construct a new building for general office and technical office for research and development uses along with retail and consumer service establishment uses in the first floor, below grade parking for 241 cars and surface parking for 7 cars, 48 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 22 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and 2 loading bays. The new five-story building will have 141,834 square feet of GFA. The proposal would also create a multi-use pedestrian/bicycle path along the eastern side of the parcel to connect to the existing Fitchburg Path to the north.

The site is located in the Office-2A (O-2A) zoning district as well as Alewife Overlay District 6 (AOD-6). The proposed project is seeking a Project Review Special Permit per Section 19.20 and Special Permits within AOD-6 for increased FAR per Section 20.95.1, increased building height per Section 20.95.2.6, waiver of yard requirements per Section 20.95.34, and locating retail uses in the first floor per Section 20.94.1.

Since the project is located within the Flood Plain Overlay District, it also requires Special Permits per Section 20.73, which in turn requires review by the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission rendered a decision on 1/27/2020. A pre-application conference was conducted on 2/24/2020 to present the proposal for the multi-use path on adjacent MBTA property to the Conservation Commission.

The proposal is subject to the Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance, and a PTDM Plan for this project was submitted and approved on 1/14/2020. As discussed further in this memo, the provisions of the approved PTDM Plan will require the Planning Board to authorize a reduction in parking over time.

The applicable special permit findings are summarized on the following page.

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>Construction in Flood Plain Overlay District (Section 20.73)</p>	<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>
<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> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
<p>General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)</p>	<p>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.</p>

**Concord-Alewife Plan Goals for Triangle (intended to provide general guidance)**

- Encourage more transit-oriented development. Allow higher density and height to take advantage of proximity to Alewife Station.
- Continue to allow commercial development to be focused in this area, while also encouraging housing close to the T station.
- Create a pleasant, walkable connection between Alewife Reservation and Fresh Pond Reservation consistent with the Alewife Reservation Master Plan and the Fresh Pond Master Plan.
- Create public access to the Alewife Reservation from Cambridgepark Drive.
- Reduce auto mode share within the Triangle.
- Improve bicycle and pedestrian connections among the Minuteman Trail, Belmont Path, Linear Park, and a future pathway along the Watertown rail line.
- Improve signage and enhance access to the multiuse trail from Alewife Station.
- Encourage development of additional housing close to Alewife Station while continuing to support commercial development.

**Concord-Alewife Design Guidelines – Areawide & Triangle (intended to provide general guidance)**

- Break up large blocks into smaller blocks, of sizes similar to those in surrounding Cambridge neighborhoods.
- Vary the design of individual buildings to create an architecturally diverse district.
- Street level facades should include active uses such as frequent residential entrances with setbacks for stoops and porches; neighborhood-serving retail including shops, restaurants, cafes; services for public or commercial offices; and community spaces.
- Encourage awnings/ canopies to provide shelter and enliven ground-floor façades.
- Design residential buildings with individual units and front doors facing streets, including row-house units on the lower levels of multifamily residences.
- Design residential development to include a range of units of various sizes and with various numbers of bedrooms, including three or more bedrooms, with the overall goal of providing dwelling units for families with school age children.
- Utilize low impact development principles in building and site design.
- Use site design that preserves future rights-of-way identified in the Circulation Concept Plan.
- Improve existing streets to meet City standards, including streetscape improvements.
- Strengthen bicycle and pedestrian links to adjacent areas. Provide links that strengthen physical and visual connections to open space resources.
- Screen service areas from major streets.
- Parking below-grade is preferred. If above-grade parking is provided, it should be designed so that it is not visible from nearby residential neighborhoods, public streets and pathways; line structured parking with active uses (shops, cafes, lobbies) along important public ways.
- Design and locate lighting and signage in support of the district's pedestrian-friendly quality.
- Use site design to minimize shadows on other buildings or on public streets, open spaces, parks, and plazas.
- Create a pedestrian-friendly environment along Cambridgepark Drive.
- Provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces.
- Provide pedestrian links that strengthen physical connections to Alewife Reservation
- Create building height / façade setbacks between 85' and 105'.
- Site new development to preserve right-of-way for future crossing of the railroad tracks to connect the Triangle and Quadrangle.

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

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the hearing on 12/17/2019 in addition to comments from staff memos:

- Reduce the number of parking spaces to minimum required by current zoning and consider further reduction to proposed minimum requirement recommended in Alewife District Plan.
- Consider expanding the proposed retail area to serve the local neighborhood needs.
- Improve the proposed tree canopy for the site.
- Consider design improvements to make the building more energy efficient.
- Revise the renderings to accurately portray the design details of the façade.
- Coordinate façade openings and solid panels with column locations.
- Review the alternate location of the multi-use path on MBTA property with the Conservation Commission.

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

The revised proposal (dated 2/11/2020) retains the numerous aspects of the original proposal that the Planning Board found positive, and includes changes in response to many of the comments from Planning Board members and staff.

#### *Parking*

The proposed parking in the garage has been reduced from 247 to 241 spaces, which when added to the seven proposed surface parking spaces brings the total number of parking spaces to 248. The 111 spaces for the existing building will be replaced, and 137 spaces would be provided for the new building, which is the minimum required by current zoning for that building.

The approved PTDM Plan has established a framework to reduce the total number of parking spaces at the site over time in a way that will not conflict with the existing parking lease agreements for the current building while reducing parking ratios for future tenants. This accommodation to allow further parking reduction in the future aligns with the recommendations in Alewife District Plan.

To enable the implementation of the PTDM Plan, if the Planning Board grants the requested special permit, the conditions should specify that any future reduction in parking is permitted (without requiring an amendment to the special permit decision) to the extent allowed by the underlying zoning provided that the PTDM requirements continue to be met. The accompanying memo from the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP&T) has also recommended allowing a reduction of parking spaces in compliance with any future zoning changes if monitoring shows that spaces are not being fully used.

Comments on the Applicant's response to other transportation issues, including service and delivery operations, bicycle access, parking, and traffic impacts, has been provided in the TP&T memo.

### *Retail*

The proposed retail area has increased slightly in size from 2,703 square feet to 2,745 square feet. Its entrance has been moved to the building's south façade, to directly address the pedestrian frontage. The retail space is elevated above grade to improve flood resilience, and a lift is shown to provide access. Staff recommends that instead of a lift, a ramp with direct access from the exterior be provided as a preferred means of accessible entry. One possibility would be to add a ramp within the retail space, ascending from a new retail entrance at the southwest corner of the retail space, and running east along the façade. Staff believes that the space will still be attractive to retailers even if the amount of usable retail space is slightly reduced.

In addition to the designated retail area, the western portion of the first floor is "retail ready", with direct entry and doors in the front façade. Although is not proposed to have a retail use initially, the revised materials state that it could be converted to retail use in the future. Staff recommends that in both of these first floor spaces, provisions be made for future ventilation/exhaust to the roof, to allow a variety of potential retail uses.

The proposed floor-to-floor height of the first floor is 17 feet. To increase the viability of first floor retail space and its flexibility to accommodate different types of uses, consider increasing its floor-to-floor height to 18 feet.

### *Energy Efficiency and Resilience*

The revised proposal includes an updated LEED Narrative with an Integrative Process WorkPlan document. Following the review of the preliminary energy modeling results, improvements were made to the building envelope and HVAC design including a significant reduction in the vision glass area, an improvement to the exterior wall insulation, and an increase in the chiller part load efficiencies, resulting in additional energy and GHG emissions savings of approximately 4-6%. According to the new submission, the Applicant has met with and received a letter of approval from Eversource, and enviENERGY Studio is performing a Design Development energy analysis for the project to evaluate the environmental and financial impact of the proposed ECMs and potential additional measures. As the project is subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20, it will be subject to continued review prior to receiving its Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy.

A previously approved development on CambridgePark Drive is leading a "Triangle Preparedness and Resiliency Initiative" in conjunction with neighboring property owners and the City. The purpose of this group is to coordinate on neighborhood-level resilience efforts to help manage extreme events, such as flooding. This initiative includes a yearly meeting between stakeholders and City Staff for 3 years (2019, 2020 and 2021) to ensure that the initiative becomes established and can be an effective tool in protecting the neighborhood into the future. Staff recommends that this project also participate in the initiative.

### *Site Plan*

The Board indicated the preference to locate the multi-use path on the adjacent MBTA property. The shared use pathway location shown in the revised materials is on MBTA Property within a resource area and will be under the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Conservation Commission. Proposed work in

the resource area will trigger the filing of a Notice of Intent (NOI). The Applicant provided an informational presentation on the proposal on 2/24/2020 and has to file the formal NOI to the Commission.

In the revised design, trees have been added along Cambridgepark Drive, at the west of the site, in the courtyard between the existing and proposed buildings, and between 87 Cambridgepark Drive and the Fitchburg Cutoff Path. All are welcome additions to the site plan, but the viability of some plantings might be constrained by underground utilities. The planting spots of the proposed trees at the west property line are constrained by the new utility lines just to their east; coordination with the owner of the property to the west on their locations may be needed to ensure that these trees can be planted. Additional trees could be considered in the front setback at the southwest corner of the building, and if possible, at the southernmost end of the planted median between the multiuse path and the driveway. At the building's southeast corner, tree locations and planting standards should be coordinated with existing and proposed utility locations. Planting standards for trees located close to public utility lines should follow the DPW's recommendations.

DPW has completed a preliminary review of the submitted revised Tree Study and has provided some comments. A final review of the Tree Study will take place as the plans progress and a final multi use path alignment is selected.

- This project is unique as the shared use path alignment will require removal of trees on the adjacent, State Owned, Parcel. The Applicant has indicated that while some replanting on this parcel can be accommodated there will be a DBH deficit resulting from this work. DPW will need to consider how this deficit best be address in the spirit of the Tree Ordinance.
- DPW supports the addition of Street Trees along Cambridgepark Drive, but they cannot be used to mitigate removals from the site.
- DPW supports the additional trees within the development, but has some concerns about proximity of some of the plantings to existing and proposed utilities. DPW will continue to evaluate all proposed tree locations as the utility plans for the site are developed for Building Permit Submission. Specific to the new trees proposed along the west property line near Cambridgepark Drive the Applicant may need to consider the following:
  - Control During Construction: In order to make space for the trees, the applicant has proposed 6 utility lines in very close proximity to each other. While in concept the spacing may be acceptable, the constructability of the utilities, as they may be done by separate entities at different times, will be difficult to manage. If this is the plan, the Applicant should work very tight controls into their contract to make sure each utility is located as shown on the plan.
  - Proposed Tree Size: The Applicant is proposing 3.0" white Oaks at this location, reduced from 4.5" initially proposed. A tree of this size may have a large root ball making it difficult to locate on their property as shown. A smaller tree with a more manageable root ball may be better suited to start at this location.

Low foundation plantings could be considered along the west side of the building. In the previous design, curbs/low site walls/benches bordered the planting beds in the front setback, both protecting the plants and serving as seating. Staff suggests that their reinstatement be considered.

The multiuse trail connecting Cambridgepark Drive to the Fitchburg Cutoff Trail will improve the Alewife Triangle's bicycle and pedestrian connectivity. Its route has been further studied and two options have been provided. The option titled "Base Multi-Use Path Connection", with the path on the north side of 87 Cambridgepark Drive's outbuildings, is preferable, as it separates pedestrian and bicycle traffic from the building's service yard.

The landscape design of the building's front setback has been made more consistent and the western portion of the loggia has been made accessible. In the perspectives, the pedestrian paving in this area is a single color, while on the plans it has a striped pattern. The single color seems preferable.

Staff supports the revised plan's enlarged Bluebikes station.

### *Architectural Design*

As in the previous scheme, the curved south façade facing Cambridgepark Drive will help frame Cambridgepark Drive, and its modulations will help reduce the building's scale. The revised design's improvements include a reduction in the amount of glazing, the coordination of solid panels and fenestration with column locations, the substitution of shadow boxes for spandrel glass at the large glazed areas at the façade's east and west ends, and the reduced size of the cornice/string course at the 4<sup>th</sup> floor level and its extension around the building's corners.

Staff appreciates the depth of the window openings in the brick facades, and the extension of the mullion pattern vertically through the spandrel panel areas (as shown on some of the perspectives), which reinforces the double height expression of the fenestration by visually linking its upper and lower windows.

As the facades are developed, the addition of sun shading devices on glazed areas facing south, east, and west could be considered to enhance the building's energy performance, and the addition of a canopy at the second floor level on the Cambridgepark Drive façade could be considered to enhance the pedestrian scale of the building and strengthen the connection between the retail space and the street.

The south façade of the penthouse has been broken into three sections, reducing its visual bulk and increasing its harmony with the modulated form of the façade below. Consideration could be given to reducing the amount of difference between the penthouse's light and dark façade panels.

### **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:

- If the special permit is granted, the conditions should specify that the number of parking spaces may be reduced in the future to the extent allowed by zoning, in accordance with the project's approved PTDM Plan and the recommendations in the TP&T memo.
- Similar to other large-scale projects in this area, a Construction Management Program should be prepared in accordance with Section 18.20 of the Zoning Ordinance, to be reviewed and certified by TP&T and DPW prior to issuance of a Building Permit, and involving a community outreach program including, at a minimum, the following elements:

- a. An identified point of e-mail and telephone contact to respond to community questions and feedback throughout the construction process;
  - b. A system for communicating ongoing project updates, which may include a web page, e-mail list, social media presence, direct outreach, and/or other measures; and
  - c. One or more signs posted on-site, legible from the public way, providing the information above along with a brief description of the project, the number of dwelling units and amount of commercial space, an expected completion date, and a rendering of the street-facing elevations.
- As a condition of the special permit, the owner should participate in the Triangle Preparedness and Resiliency Initiative in conjunction with neighboring property owners and the City.
  - Provide a copy of the approval letter from Eversource referenced in the sustainable design submission.
  - The following building and site design details should be subject to continuing staff review:
    - Access/egress and ventilation systems for the retail space(s).
    - Site lighting, in consideration of the city's Draft Outdoor Lighting Ordinance.
    - The multiuse path connection, bicycle track and changes to the curb and sidewalk, in coordination with the DPW, CDD, and TP&T.
    - Tree species, locations, and planting standards, in coordination with the DPW.
    - All exterior materials, colors, and details, including an on-site materials mock-up of all exterior wall assemblies.