



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: February 5, 2020

Re: Special Permit **PB #358, 34-40 Hampshire Street**

IRAM FAROOQ
*Assistant City Manager for
Community Development*

SANDRA CLARKE
*Deputy Director
Chief of Administration*

KHALIL MOGASSABI
*Deputy Director
Chief of Planning*

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 34-40 Hampshire Street, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

The applicant is proposing to demolish the two existing buildings on a site consisting of three parcels on Hampshire Street, to construct a new 6-story hotel building with 68 rooms, parking for 16 cars in the basement with valet service, 2 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 12 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and 1 loading bay.

Requested Special Permit

The project is located in the Industry B (IB) District and seeks a Special Permit from the Planning Board to modify bicycle parking standards to locate the short-term bicycle parking more than 50 feet from a pedestrian entrance to the building, pursuant to Section 6.108 of the Zoning Ordinance. In addition, the project needs a few Special Permits normally granted by the Board of Zoning Appeal (BZA). The project requires special permits for hotel use in IB district per Section 4.32.i(2), for reduction of required parking per Section 6.35.1, to modify access for off-street parking per Section 6.43.5, and for exemption of basement area in the calculation of Gross Floor Area (GFA). The BZA would typically grant these special permits, but since the proposal requires Planning Board review, the Planning Board may grant all necessary special permits per Section 10.45. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text on following pages)</i>
<p>General Special Permit Criteria (Section 10.43) – applicable to special permit for hotel use in Industry B district (Section 4.31.i(2))</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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or (e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.
<p>Special Permit to reduce required parking (Section 6.35.1)</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Special Permit to modify access for off-street parking (Section 6.43.5)</p>	<p>Provisions for layout of parking spaces can be modified with a valet parking arrangement for the parking facility.</p>
<p>Special Permit to modify bicycle parking standards (Section 6.108)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal is consistent with the purpose of Section 6.100 and that the Bicycle Parking Plan proposes a quantity, design and arrangement of bicycle parking that will serve bicycle users in a way that is sufficiently comparable, given the circumstances of the specific project, to the bicycle parking that would be required under the regulations of Section 6.100. • The Bicycle Parking Plan will satisfactorily serve the needs of all expected users, based on quantitative and/or qualitative evidence provided by the Applicant.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text on following pages)</i>
Special Permit for 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.

Area Planning and Zoning

The IB district is the least restrictive zoning district in the city, allowing a broad range of uses at the highest allowed scale for commercial and residential uses. The project site is in the Port neighborhood and the district also borders the neighborhoods of East Cambridge, Area 2/MIT, and Wellington-Harrington. Predominantly residential and lower-scale commercial districts are located to the west, and the higher-density institutional and mixed-use areas of Kendall Square are located to the east. Most of the parcels in this district are large in scale and developed intensively for office/R&D uses, such as the campuses of Technology Square and portions of One Kendall Square and MIT, while the project site is relatively small in scale. The Grand Junction rail corridor, planned to include a rail-with-trail path (part of which is built), borders the district to the east.

Last year, the City Council amended the zoning ordinance to change the FAR for hotel use from 2.75 to 4.0, with no changes to the other dimensional requirements, in order to incentivize hotel development on the few undeveloped smaller parcels in the district.

The site is located on Hampshire Street, which is an important corridor for bicycle travel in metro-Boston, serving almost a million cyclists in a year. The 2015 Cambridge Bicycle Plan designates Hampshire Street for a separated bike facility, and the Cambridge Cycling Safety Ordinance adopted earlier this year by the City Council requires that future street improvements comply with the Cambridge Bicycle Plan. Such a change may preclude on-street motor vehicle parking in the future.

Comments on Proposal

The project site includes three parcels. The proposed total Gross Floor Area (GFA) is 23,030 square feet, but this figure excludes the basement, for which the project is seeking a special permit to exclude the basement area from the calculation of GFA. The application does not record the area of the exercise room and the storage room in the basement that is seeking this special permit. As the proposed new construction is less than 25,000 square feet in area, the project is not subject to Green Building requirements. However, if the special permit to exempt the basement space from GFA is not granted, it is possible that the GFA of the project would exceed 25,000 square feet, making the project subject to Green Building Requirements.

Under the current zoning, a new hotel of this size would be required to have 34 off-street parking spaces, 2 long-term as well as 4 short-term bicycle parking spaces. The project is proposing to have 8 parking spaces in the basement with auto stackers to accommodate a total of 16 vehicles with valet parking service. The application does not indicate whether any registered off-street parking spaces are

associated with these parcels. A Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Plan is required for creating more than 4 off-street parking spaces within the site. Under the City's PTDM Ordinance, the project cannot be granted a permit from the Planning Board until the PTDM plan is approved.

The bike parking plan records 2 long-term and 12 short-term bicycle parking spaces. However, the dimensional form and the narrative inaccurately denote that the project is proposing 6 long-term and 10 short-term bicycle parking spaces. The narrative and plan set do not indicate that the project is seeking a special permit for the location of long-term bicycle parking, but the cover sheet has listed it under the list of special permits sought.

Given the aforementioned plan for future separated bike facilities on Hampshire Street, it is recommended that the applicant demonstrate how this location could function for the proposed use if valet parking is not viable on Hampshire Street. In addition, evaluating the off-street parking provided for the hotel use should account for future bicycle facility plans that may affect the future availability of on-street parking.

Urban Design

The site is in the commercial/industrial area that separates Kendall Square from the residential neighborhoods. It is designated a "Transition Area" in the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines*. New residential development, high-quality pedestrian and bicyclist connections, and transitions in scale are key urban design issues. Relevant principles from the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines are summarized in the attached appendix.

Site Plan & Massing

At the site planning level, the proposal transforms a currently unappealing street corner into a more pleasant and lively pedestrian environment with round-the-clock activity. The proposed building anchors the corner, positively addresses both street frontages and maintains the continuity of the streetwall. While reasonable attempts have been made to celebrate and articulate the prominent street corner, there is a discordant relationship between the slightly set back, curved upper volume and the sharp building corner of the two-story podium.

The proposal has a clearly expressed base, middle, and top, with strong cornices used to define horizontal datum lines. However, the two-story podium, which is built to the property lines, appears heavy and overwhelms the upper volume proportionally. Additionally, the design guidelines suggest that on main streets, portions of buildings above 65' should be setback at least 10' from the principal wall plane.

Further study of the corner treatment is recommended, including the possibility of refining the massing of the podium to follow the curve of the volume and lowering the cornice to the second-floor level. Further study of whether a sixth-floor setback is desirable is recommended.

Pedestrian improvements

Several positive pedestrian improvements are proposed as part of the application. The two sidewalks will be reconstructed, and four new street trees are proposed. While these improvements will help to create a more amenable pedestrian environment, the width of the sidewalk remains narrow, particularly at the street corner and in relation to accommodating future street trees. The feasibility of tree plantings needs to be investigated in more detail due to potential conflicts with underground utilities. It is also recommended that consideration be given to setting the podium back to align below the upper floor façades, or at a minimum, providing more breathing room at the corner pinch point. Additionally, reducing the width of the existing curb cut should be explored as it appears to dominate the Portland Street sidewalk experience.

Architectural Design

The project conveys a strong urban presence on both streets with a palette of robust materials, which is softened by finely detailed projecting bays and curved curtainwall corner. The vertical emphasis that the bays give the façades will contribute to the scale of the street and relate to vertical elements in nearby buildings. As proposed, however, they appear too narrow and insubstantial. Their widths should be reviewed to ensure that the proportion of solid to window is well-balanced. The side elevations incorporate the same porcelain rainscreen cladding as the street façades, which is important as these façades will be partially visible.

Hampshire Street, being the main street, houses the hotel entrance, while the lobby is oriented towards the street corner. Signage and a canopy will help with pedestrian wayfinding. Again, in plan, it appears that a curved first floor façade may be sensible given the interior layout of the lobby and the potential to create a more welcoming and spatially interesting feature at the street corner.

It would be helpful if further details regarding materials, joints, façade depth and color palettes were provided as the renderings are unclear. Use of large porcelain rainscreen panels should be reviewed given the character and texture of surrounding brick buildings. There also appear to be inconsistencies between the elevation descriptions and the colored façade renderings. Full size floor plans for the fifth and sixth floors should also be submitted to assist with understanding the treatment of the top of the building.

Mechanicals, services and other details

Rooftop mechanicals seem well-screened, although it will be important to review the screening materials and details and the height of equipment. The first-floor transformer vault is proposed to be screened by what appears to be a spandrel glass storefront. While the storefront treatment is appreciated, spandrel glass can have a deadening effect on the public realm, so opportunities to provide some transparency and sense of depth should be studied.

Loading and access to the basement parking will be screened by an overhead door that is set back from the sidewalk, at the rear of the bicycle forecourt. Given that this results in an open, recessed area adjacent to the sidewalk, it will be important to ensure that the bicycle forecourt is designed to be an attractive feature of the streetscape with good finishes, lighting, interesting paving, and opportunities for color and art.

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 the total area of basement to be exempted from GFA calculation.
- Revise the dimensional form and the narrative to denote the correct number of long-term and short-term bicycle parking spaces.
- Revise the cover sheet to remove the special permit for location of long-term bicycle parking if the project is not seeking that special permit.
- Review of streetscape improvements on Hampshire and Portland Streets, including the design of the sidewalks, and street tree plantings.
- Provision and review of 5th and 6th Floor Plans.
- Further development of the building's facades and podium massing
- Review of penthouse massing.
- Review of all exterior building materials, colors, and details, including a materials mock-up on the site prior to any exterior materials being ordered.
- Review of glass specifications: ground floor and upper floor glazing visible light transmittance and reflectance.
- Review of bike parking/forecourt area.