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## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: August 18, 2020

Re: Special Permit **PB #359, 75 -109 Smith Place – Continued Hearing**

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### Update

Since the last Planning Board meeting on February 25, 2020, 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 a revised set of plans and dimensions with additional information about the project in narrative and graphic form. This memo comments on the additional information and proposed changes and is supplementary to CDD's initial memo on this proposal.

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 4/20/2020. Some provisions of the approved PTDM Plan are discussed further in this memo and an accompanying memo from the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP+T).

The proposal is also subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20 and the Incentive Zoning Requirements in Section 11.202 (which require contributions to the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust). Staff has reviewed the required submissions to certify compliance with the Green Building Requirements, and the Incentive Zoning Requirements are calculated at the time of issuance of a building permit.

### Planning Board Action

The current Application (as revised) is proposing to construct a new 3-story building for technical office (*i.e.*, commercial laboratory) use, one level of underground structured parking for 124 cars, a surface parking lot for 30 vehicles, 50 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 10 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and 2 loading bays. The new building will have 144,175 square feet of Gross Floor Area (GFA).

The site consists of three parcels on Smith Place, with the southmost parcel located in the Office 1 (O-1) zoning district as well as Alewife Overlay District 3 (AOD-3) and the other two parcels located in the Industry B-2 (IB-2) zoning district as well as Alewife Overlay District 1 (AOD-1). The proposed project is seeking a Project Review Special Permit per Section 19.20 and Special Permits within the AOD for increased FAR per Section 20.95.1, increased building height per Section 20.95.2, and waiver of yard requirements per Section 20.95.34.

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

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text in appendix)</i>
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<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>
Increase FAR, increase building height, and waiver of yard requirements in Alewife Overlay Districts (Sections 20.95.1, 20.95.2, 20.95.34)	<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>
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	Special permits will normally be granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found to not be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43.

<p><b>Concord-Alewife Plan Goals for Quadrangle (intended to provide general guidance)</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create appropriate transitions between the Highlands and nonresidential uses in the Quadrangle by introducing a green buffer and allowing lower densities and heights near the Highlands.</li> <li>Create a public space that serves a stormwater function as well as being an open space resource.</li> <li>Increase the amount of permeable surface in the Quadrangle as the area redevelops.</li> <li>Encourage future development to respond to stormwater goals for the area.</li> <li>Create a hierarchy of boulevards, avenues, streets, and pathways.</li> <li>Design new public spaces and places that support a range of community-focused activities.</li> <li>Improve traffic circulation within the Quadrangle by enhancing existing roads and adding new ones—without creating a direct vehicular connection to the Highlands.</li> <li>Improve the streetscape within the Quadrangle to enhance the pedestrian and bicycle environment. Strengthen pedestrian/bicycle access to Alewife Station to improve connections to transit and to the Minuteman Path and Linear Park.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Concord-Alewife Design Guidelines – Areawide &amp; Quadrangle (intended to provide general guidance)</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Break up large blocks into smaller blocks, of sizes similar to those in surrounding Cambridge neighborhoods.</li> <li>Vary the design of individual buildings to create an architecturally diverse district.</li> </ul>

- Street level facades should include active uses such as frequent residential entrances with setbacks for stoops and porches; neighborhood-serving retail including shops, restaurants, cafés; services for public or commercial offices; and community spaces.
- Encourage awnings/canopies to provide shelter and enliven ground-floor façades.
- 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, cafés, 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.
- Use streetscape and other improvements to define Wilson Road as part of a major east-west connection through the Quadrangle.
- Create an open-space system characterized by parks and green spaces of varying scales and uses.
- Use pooled resources to create a new central public open space in the Quadrangle that incorporates stormwater management.
- Locate active uses around the future open space to create a safe and active environment throughout the day and evening.
- Provide pedestrian links to strengthen physical connections to the shopping center.
- Create building height/façade setbacks between 85’ and 105’.
- Provide pedestrian links to strengthen connections to Fresh Pond Reservation, consistent with the Fresh Pond Master Plan.
- Strengthen the streetscape and other improvements to define Concord Avenue.
- Locate new development to allow for a future above-grade crossing between the Triangle and the 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 2/25/2020 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 more open space and reduced surface parking area, with additional tree plantings.
- Improve the articulation of the facades on north and south sides.
- Explore design improvements to make the building more energy efficient, particularly in terms of envelope performance. Provide information in accordance with the Net Zero Narrative requirements in recently adopted zoning.
- Provide more information about resilience measures and concerns related to sewer infrastructure.
- Consider a larger courtyard entrance for the building.

- Explore options to reduce the volume of the mechanical penthouse and improved screening.
- Review the pedestrian experience of the public realm in terms of lighting and landscape treatment.
- Explore ways to design Smith Place in accordance with the Alewife District Plan.

## **Staff Comments on New Materials**

### *Planning and Zoning*

The revised proposal 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. The use and scale of the project remain largely the same. The major focus of staff and the Applicant's team has been to improve the proposal's overall conformance with the Alewife District Plan.

The surface parking area has been reduced by 9 parking spaces, reclaiming a substantial amount of open space, improving the project overall. The revised dimensional form does not show an increase in open space or permeable area from the original proposal, so a correction should be made in the final approved dimensional form.

However, there is no change to the total number of proposed parking spaces because 9 spaces have been added to the garage. The minimum required parking for the new building is 137 total spaces and a total of 154 spaces are proposed. As indicated in the approved PTDM plan and TP+T memo, staff continues to recommend reducing total parking to the extent possible in order to meet the required single occupant vehicle (SOV) mode-split targets in the Alewife District Plan. Existing commercial development in the Alewife area is characterized by more ample parking and higher SOV rates, but it is important for those rates to decrease as future redevelopment occurs. As recommended in the TP+T memo, if the Board grants a special permit, staff suggests explicitly approving any future reduction in parking to the extent allowed by zoning, in addition to any other required measures to reduce future traffic impacts.

The building's frontage has been redesigned with a "Day One" streetscape that includes a separated cycle track and sidewalk, part of which is located on the private lot and will require an easement for public use. Staff strongly supports this proposal as it more closely aligns with the Alewife District Plan, as discussed further in the urban design comments. However, it raises a minor zoning issue because currently, front yards are required to be Green Area Open Space, which limits the extent of paved area. The Applicant has referred to Section 20.99 of the Zoning Ordinance, which states, "No development approved by special permit in this Section 20.90 [Alewife Overlay Districts] shall be subsequently rendered non-conforming with regard to the dimensional requirements applicable to it as a result of a subdivision of land to create an approved public or private street, park or pedestrian, bicycle or other pathway," which explicitly includes conveyance of an easement. It would be helpful for the Board to explicitly state in its findings that this future easement was considered and approved as part of the development proposal.

The revised proposal also anticipates a "Future Alewife Plan" condition that would modify the Smith Place frontage to meet the specifications of the Alewife District Plan, including shared roadways to the

north (aligned with the extension of Fawcett Street) and south (aligned with Adley Road, currently a private street). The future conditions are not fully within the Applicant's control, and will require participation from abutting property owners as well as utility relocation. Staff also supports this future condition. If a special permit is granted, staff would suggest explicit approval of such future changes and a "mutual compact" condition that would require the Permittee to implement such changes if and when abutting property owners and other necessary parties agree to implement the necessary corresponding changes that are under their control.

The new materials also include a revised Green Building Requirements submission in conformance with the new requirements that took effect earlier this year. The Project is currently meeting the minimum requirement with 62 credit points, targeting LEED Gold, under LEED v4 BD+C: Core & Shell. An additional 5 points have been designated as "possible" points. The project is proposing high efficiency condensing boilers, high efficiency direct expansion cooling, high efficiency pumps with variable speed drives, and heat pump domestic water heating to reduce energy use. The submission includes a "Net Zero Narrative" describing baseline, proposed, and future energy performance and greenhouse gas emissions. The site energy use is targeted to be 17% below the Stretch Code baseline design. Additional information about flood resilience has also been provided, using the City's projected 2070 flood elevations.

#### *Urban Design*

The proposed project will be the first major construction in the Alewife Quadrangle since the publication of the Alewife District Plan, and will be an important precedent for how the City's vision for the area will be realized. Since the project's first hearing, the applicants met twice with city staff to review design changes in response to Planning Board and staff comments. These changes include extensive coordination of the "Day One" site plan in anticipation of the longer-term realization of the street configurations envisioned by the Alewife District Plan.

The revised design responds to most of the comments and suggestions raised by the Planning Board and staff. These changes are enumerated in the applicant's memo to the CDD dated May 22, 2020. The memo also provides explanations for the few suggestions that were not followed, and discusses issues whose resolution must be deferred to the future.

The most significant changes to the design include:

1. The building's location and sitework have been adjusted to allow for the realization of the street alignments and sections recommended in the Alewife District Plan for Smith Place, Adley Road/Wilson, and the westward extension of Fawcett Street. Separate drawings show the "Day One" and "Future" site design on the north, east, and south sides of the site.
  - a. On Smith Place, most of the desired street/front setback configuration is achieved on the "Day One" site plan, including the construction of the separated bicycle track and the planting of new street trees. Fully realizing the future plan will require adjusting the location of the curb, which will involve the undergrounding of utilities, and the construction of an elevated walkway, along the building frontage, which is restricted by current zoning. The number of street trees has been increased since the first hearing.

- b. In the south setback, trees planted on “Day One” are properly located to serve as street trees for the future Adley Road once it is widened to the north to align with Wilson Road. The retaining wall that will support the future elevated walkway is included in the proposed site plan.
  - c. On the north edge of the site, the “Day One” driveway and plantings do not preclude the future westward extension of Fawcett Street. The desired long-term locations of the street, sidewalk, and street trees are shown on the “Future” site plan.
2. As noted above, the amount of surface parking has been reduced and the amount of green open space has been increased.
3. A Public Bicycle Sharing (Bluebikes) Station has been added.
4. The bicycle path on the south side of the site has been widened to five feet, per zoning standards, to provide a better route from Smith Place to the rear yard and the long-term bicycle storage area.
5. The building’s Smith Place entrance has been recessed, creating an entry courtyard, and the steps up to it from sidewalk level have been narrowed.
6. The mechanical penthouse’s massing has been broken up and adjusted in plan to reduce its visual bulk and to ensure that potential future tenant rooftop equipment will be hidden. Its color has been changed to a lighter grey.
7. The north and south facades of the building have been given a visually interesting pattern in shallow three-dimensional relief.
8. Locations have been designated for doors to potential first floor retail spaces, and for future canopies over the elevated sidewalk.
9. An explanation has been provided for the full height windows relative to solar heat gain, and interior sunshades will be included.

Staff appreciates the applicant’s responsiveness to the comments that have been made. Suggestions for further refinements follow:

1. Staff encourages that the applicant continue working with the owners of the adjoining properties north and south of the site, with the utility companies, and with the City to construct the street sections and alignments recommended by the Alewife District Plan, including the construction of the elevated walkways.
2. Further reductions in the amount of surface parking and pavement should be considered.
3. The documents depict a possible future driveway that could be constructed to connect the rear parking lot to Adley Road. It isn’t clear that this is needed, and it would generally not be seen as beneficial to the public realm because it would reduce the amount of open space while increasing paved area and adding a curb cut.
4. Coordination with the CDD and the DPW on plant species and planting standards should continue.

5. Consideration should be given to planting additional trees on the “Day One” site plan, to the extent feasible, in the following areas:
  - a. For the full east/west length of the south setback, to function as street trees for the future westward extension of Wilson Road;
  - b. On the western edge of the property, to shade the parking lot;
  - c. To further screen the surface parking and the site located electrical equipment;
  - d. At the center of the Smith Place frontage; and
  - e. In the forecourt on Smith Place, to create a more lush and welcoming experience.
6. Note that the street trees at the southeast and northeast corners of the site appear to be too close to the intersections. Their exact locations should be coordinated with City staff.
7. On the Smith Place frontage, the provision of a low retaining wall along the full length of the inner edge of the sidewalk, rather than just at the southern portion of the frontage, would give the sidewalk a consistent edge, and would anticipate the construction of the elevated walkway.
8. Provisions should be made at the southeast corner of the site for future construction of a ramp and steps up to the elevated walkway.
9. Consideration should be given to relocating the “Day One” bicycle path on the south side of the site. If it were moved to the north side of the line of trees (in other words, adjacent to the low retaining wall), it could serve as the pedestrian sidewalk in the “Future” condition.
10. Adjustments to the course of the bicycle track at the northeast corner of the property should be considered to create a smoother transition from the separated cycle track to the on-street bike lane north of the site.
11. Consideration could be given to providing doors to the potential first floor retail space and to providing the canopy over the future elevated walkways as part of the “Day One” construction, rather than as possible future improvements.
12. In accord with the Alewife District Plan, the canopy over the future elevated walkway should be continuous, rather than intermittent.
13. To minimize light trespass from the building’s interior, consideration could be given to automating the proposed full height interior window blinds.
14. Subject to continuing review by CDD and DPW, permeable and high-SRI pavement options should be employed where practical as a way to mitigate water runoff and urban heat island effects.

*Public Works*

Since the last hearing, the Department of Public Works (DPW) has been engaged with discussions between other City Departments and the Applicant. DPW has provided the following comments to CDD based on the revised site plan:

- As presented in the revised materials, the DPW is in general agreement with the proposal for the “Day One” plan. Specific details need to be worked out, in conjunction with other departments, as the site becomes fully engineered.
- The site plan will be subject to a complete and thorough review in advance of a building permit being issued. At time of this review, the DPW will look to ensure the “Day One” plan aligns with the recent discussions with the Applicant.
- The items noted in DPW’s February 11, 2020 memo to the Board, including the review and approval of a Site Action Plan, should remain subject to continuing review.

### **Special Permit Considerations**

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends for consideration if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

#### *Special Findings and Conditions*

- Specify that the number of parking spaces may be reduced in the future to the extent allowed by zoning, in accordance with the recommendations in the TP&T memo.
- Acknowledge the Board’s review and approval of a portion of the lot to be dedicated for public use as an extension of Smith Place, in accordance with the Application Documents and the provisions of Section 20.99 of the Zoning Ordinance, subject to review and acceptance of an easement by the City.
- Specify that the Board approves future improvements in accordance with the “Future Alewife Plan – Site Plan” in the Application Documents, subject to continuing review by staff, without requiring a future amendment to a special permit. In addition, as a condition of a special permit, the Permittee should agree to implement such improvements on its property provided that they are permitted by zoning and provided that there is mutual agreement by abutting property owners or other controlling entities to implement the necessary corresponding improvements.
- Specify that all tree plantings should be in full compliance with the City Standards current at the time of plantings and in full accordance of recommendations of the Urban Forestry Master Plan.
- The approval of a Site Action Plan, as set forth in the DPW memo dated February 12, 2020, should be made a special permit condition.
- 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.

*Continuing Design Review*

The following is a summary of issues that should be subject to continuing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Detailed coordination with CDD and DPW regarding improvements to Smith Place and the extensions of Wilson Road and Fawcett Street once engineering drawings are available, including street sections and alignments, utilities, bicycle lanes, curb cut, sidewalks, street trees, and other plantings.
- Detailed coordination with CDD and DPW on future construction of elements in the “Future Site Plan” condition, including the elevated walkways.
- Review of tree species, locations, and planting standards, in coordination with DPW and the recommendations of the Urban Forest Master Plan.
- Coordination with CDD regarding the detailed dimensions, design, and installation of the Public Bicycle Sharing (Bluebikes) Station.
- Review of all exterior building materials and colors, including joints in the panel systems, details at corners, glazing, spandrel glass, window mullions, penthouse screening, roofing system, etc.
- Review of site lighting, using the standards recommended in the city’s Draft Outdoor Lighting Ordinance as guidelines.
- Construction of an exterior wall mockup for staff and Planning Board review, showing all exterior colors and materials, prior to ordering materials.