



# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE TRAFFIC, PARKING, + TRANSPORTATION

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Cambridge Planning Board

**From:** Joseph E. Barr, Director

**Date:** August 24, 2020

**Subject:** 75-109 Smith Place, The Davis Companies (PB#359)

The Cambridge Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP+T) submitted a memo to the Planning Board, dated February 19, 2020, with our initial comments and recommendations on the proposed 75-109 Smith Place Project by The Davis Companies.

Based on comments at the first Planning Board hearing held on February 25, 2020, the Applicant has worked with City staff and the Project has advanced on many details, although the basic parameters of the Project remain similar to the original Application as shown below:

	Initial Application	Current Application
Total Gross Floor Area (sf) Technical Office Building	142,153 sf	144,175 sf
Off-Street Parking Spaces Total (Surface/Garage)	154 (39/115)	154 (30/124)*
Bicycle Parking Spaces (Long-Term/Short-Term)	50/10	50/10
Loading Bays	2	2

\* See comments below on Automobile Parking conditions.

As a reminder, TP+T certified the Project's TIS as complete and reliable on October 21, 2019. The TIS indicated that the project will generate a total of:

- 1,194 daily vehicle trips (34 AM Peak/34 PM peak hour net new vehicle trips)
- 176 daily transit trips, (7 AM Peak/6 PM Peak hour transit trips)
- 138 daily pedestrian trips, (5 AM/5 PM Peak hour transit trips)
- 156 daily bicycle trips, (5AM/6 PM Peak hour bicycle trips)

The TIS indicated that the Planning Board Special Permit transportation criteria were exceeded in 19 instances.

- Pedestrian delay criteria were triggered at 3 intersections (Concord Avenue/Smith Place, Concord Avenue/Fawcett Street, and Concord Avenue/Blanchard Road/Griswold Street) (14 exceedances).
- The pedestrian facility criteria was triggered for Smith Place adjacent to the Project site because there is no sidewalk present (1 exceedance).
- The bicycle facility criteria were triggered on segments of Smith Place and Fawcett Street (4 exceedances).

## 1.0 General Comments

From a mobility perspective, two positive elements for the proposed Project that TP+T stated in our February 19, 2020 Planning Board memo remain in place with the Project. First, the Project will be consolidating existing curb cuts on Smith Place, and second, it will be providing new sidewalks and landscaping on Smith Place, especially where no sidewalks exist today.

A new third positive element for the Project is that it has obtained an approved Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Plan from the City's PTDM Planning Officer. The PTDM plan was necessary before the Planning Board could issue a Special Permit. It requires measures to reduce automobile trips generated by the project and includes single occupancy vehicle (SOV) mode split goals and monitoring requirements. Another new positive element for the Project is that it has established a solid plan to create a separated bicycle lane along the Project's site frontage on Smith Place. Additional comments on the roadway and circulation plan are discussed below.

At the first Planning Board hearing, Planning Board members recommended the Project reduce the number of parking spaces. The Special Permit Application proposed no change to the total number of spaces (154 spaces), although the Project reduced the number of surface parking spaces by increasing the number of below-grade garage spaces. This is somewhat positive because it provides more open space which benefits the pedestrian environment. In very recent discussions with TP+T the Applicant has also agreed to a future reduction in total parking spaces as discussed in more detail below.

## 2.0 Automobile Parking

As stated above, the Project Special Permit Application and the most recent materials submitted by the Applicant proposes 154 total parking spaces (1.1 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet), including 124 spaces in a below-grade garage and 30 surface spaces. However, TP+T has been having recent ongoing discussions with The Davis Companies about the number of parking spaces and we have reached an agreement to support 154 total parking spaces with a condition to reduce the number to 144 spaces upon the opening of a bridge over the commuter rail tracks. The Agreement is shown below.

1. Prior to issuance of a Building Permit, the Project will provide a one-time \$5 per square foot contribution to the City toward the Alewife Pedestrian Bicycle Bridge or other Transportation Improvements in the Alewife Area as recommended in the Alewife District Plan (i.e., 144,175 sf x \$5/SF = \$720,875).

2. The Project may have up to 154 total parking spaces on the site with a condition to reduce the parking supply to 144 total spaces upon opening of a bridge over the commuter rail tracks.
3. The Applicant commits to a \$10 per square foot contribution to the City when work commences on the bridge through a binding Letter of Commitment (or other City-approved mechanism) linked to the Special Permit. The Letter of Commitment (or other mechanism) shall be completed prior to issuance of a building permit and will obligate the Proponent to provide the \$10 per square foot contribution (i.e., 144,175 sf x \$10/SF = \$1,441,750) whenever bridge construction commences, regardless of how the construction funds for the bridge are obtained. If the City is able to utilize another source of funding for bridge construction, the funding may be used for a different Alewife area improvement as approved by the City.
4. At the point when the pedestrian bridge is opening, the developer/owner will consider whether a reduction beyond the 10 spaces is possible, based on actual utilization of the parking spaces and sustainable transportation at that point in time.

The parking space agreement is unique to this Project in order to move it forward in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and its unique circumstances such as current unknowns about parking demands and transit use. The parking agreement also recognizes what the Applicant believes is necessary to successfully launch the building as well as the City's Envision Alewife District Plan streetscape design recommendations.

At the current minimum zoning of 0.95 spaces/1,000 sf, the Project would provide 137 parking spaces. The agreement with TP+T is that with a bridge, the Project will provide up to 144 parking spaces which is 7 additional spaces above the current minimum zoning parking ratio. TP+T believes that 7 spaces on their own will not have a substantial adverse impact on traffic in the area but we note that it will be necessary for other commercial development projects to have lower parking ratios to avoid significant cumulative traffic impacts as the Quadrangle is redeveloped. In that respect, **TP+T also recommends that the Special Permit allow for parking at the site to be reduced in the future without needing to return to the Planning Board for approval.**

### **.3.0 Roadways and Circulation**

Since the first Planning Board hearing, The Davis Companies and their design team worked with the City staff on various details of the Project and the roadways and circulation plan. The updated plan dated May 22, 2020 shows how the Project is in line with the City of Cambridge Envision Alewife District plan's preferred street cross-sections including a raised cycle track with buffer zones, a tree planting area, and a new concrete sidewalk. Similar to existing conditions, no on-street parking spaces are proposed along the site's frontage. The Project's surface parking lot includes one (1) car share parking space and 9 high occupancy vehicle (HOV) parking spaces. The below-grade garage includes 2 electric vehicle charging spaces and 7 HOV spaces.

The Project's site plans include a "Day One Plan" which would be the expected conditions at the initial occupancy of the building that supports the preferred Alewife District Plans street cross-sections. For the "Day One Plan", the existing curb line along Smith Place will remain in place, but the Project will construct a raised cycle track with

an extra two feet in width to plan for future westward movement of the curb line to accomplish the City's preferred street section as part of a *later phase*.

TP+T supports the plan and appreciates all the work that went into it by The Davis Companies and their design team. However, there should be some greater clarity around what would trigger the *later phase* and if The Davis Companies is agreeing to funding the construction that will be needed to move the curb line westward at that time. The Davis Companies stated that it is contingent on the ability of Eversource to bring electrical services from the overhead wires to underground, which may occur after the Project is built, but it is unclear how this may play out and whether The Davis Companies would commit to the work if Eversource agrees to undergrounding or relocating the wires. The westward movement of the curb line will be important to enable changes to the curb line on the opposite side of Smith Place in order to achieve the planned cross-section, including cycle tracks on both sides of the street and on-street parking on one side of the street. **Overall, TP+T supports the "Day One Plan" for this Project but seeks more clarity regarding the developer's commitments to fund the potential future movement of the curb line and possibly the undergrounding of the overhead wires in the future.**

The Project's set back and site plan adjacent to Adley Road, which is a private way, is also aligned to support the future preferred roadway cross-section. The pedestrian/bicycle pathway connection from Smith Place to the rear of the building parallel to Adley Road could become a raised cycle track in the future. Similar detailed design attention has been made for the Project's driveway off Smith Place and a future Fawcett Street extension. The Davis Companies has committed to cooperate with the adjoining property owners to the north to construct the initial portion of Fawcett Street's westward expansion. **TP+T supports the plans and recommends that The Davis Companies be obligated to work with abutting property owners and the City to make any necessary changes in the future, presuming mutual agreement among abutting property owners, to realize the "Future Alewife Site" plan, as approved by the City.**

The site's "Future Alewife Plan" drawings shows the full vision of the westward expansion of Wilson Road, westward expansion of Fawcett Street, and a feasible raised cycle tracks on all three streets (Smith Place, Wilson Road expansion, and Fawcett Street expansion), although the separate bicycle lane/cycle tracks are only shown on the side of the street abutting the Project. Cycle tracks on the opposite sides of the streets will require support from the property owners of those parcels, although TP+T notes that The Davis Companies is the property owner of some of those parcels and we would expect to work with them cooperatively when they seek to redevelop those parcels.

A site plan called "Future Alewife Plan" on page 42 in the Special Permit Application shows a potential future new driveway connection between the Project's parking lot to Adley Road. TP+T does not believe a new driveway will be needed for the site and it would negatively eliminate some green space. **TP+T recommends that The Davis**

**Companies not pursue the idea of adding another future site driveway off of Adley Road.**

**TP+T recommends that the Project be responsible for maintaining the separated bicycle lane(s) along its frontage, including clearing of snow, ice, debris and making any necessary repairs as need.**

**Lastly, the Project's site plans show new street trees that TP+T believes are too close to the corners of the future Adley Road extension and Fawcett Street extensions and should be installed in a modified location in accordance with City standards for clearance for all modes of travel. TP+T will work with DPW, CDD and The Davis Companies on these details as part of the Building Permit Review process.**

#### **4.0 Curb Cuts and Loading**

The Project will reduce the number of curb cuts from about five today to one curb cut off Smith Place. TP+T supports the consolidation of curb cuts into a single curb cut for the site because it will reduce conflict points on Smith Place (i.e. between vehicles crossing a sidewalk and pedestrians on the sidewalk). As stated above, TP+T does not support a future new curb cut on Adley Road.

The Project also proposes two on-site loading bays, which TP+T supports because service and loading activity will all be accommodated on-site instead of on Smith Place.

#### **5.0 Bicycle Parking**

TP+T supports the Projects' bicycle plan which will meet the zoning required bicycle parking spaces by providing 50 long-term and 10 short-term bicycle parking spaces. All short-term bicycle parking spaces will be located on the Project's property.

The Project proposes a 5-foot wide bicycle and pedestrian pathway connection from Smith Place to the rear of the site, which will include access to the bicycle parking. **TP+T supports this path, although we note that the proposed rumble strip and truncated domes in the bicycle path are not a design that we support.** The Project will also add signage. for both bicyclists and trucks where conflicts may occur in the rear of the building by the loading docks and bicycle parking areas. TP+T will work with the Project team on these details as part of the Building Permit review process.

#### **6.0 Transportation Mitigation:**

TP+T provides the following recommendations for transportation mitigation to offset the project's transportation impacts.

Item#	Transportation Mitigation	Due Date
1	As recommended in the Alewife District Plan, the Applicant shall provide a one-time \$5 per square foot contribution to the City toward the Alewife Pedestrian Bicycle Bridge or other Transportation Improvements in Alewife Area. (example: 144,175 sf x \$5/SF = \$720,875). This mitigation item was recommended in the Envision Cambridge Alewife District Plan for new development projects in the Alewife Area to contribute toward this long-term but needed project to connect the Quadrangle and Triangle to improve access within the district.	Prior to the issuance of the Building Permit.
2	The Applicant shall provide a one-time \$10 per square foot contribution to the City toward the Alewife Pedestrian Bicycle Bridge or other Transportation Improvements in Alewife Area. (example: 144,175 sf x \$10/SF = \$1,441,750). The initial parking supply of 154 total parking spaces on the site shall be reduced to 144 total parking spaces upon opening of a bridge over the commuter rail tracks. The Applicant shall have the right to further reduce the parking supply to the zoning minimum in effect at that time, without requiring additional Planning Board approval.	Prior to the commencement of construction of the bridge over the commuter rail tracks.
3	Contribute \$140,000 to the City toward planning, design and or installation of transportation improvements in the Alewife District, such as a potential new traffic signal at Concord Ave/Smith Place, upgrading the Pedestrian crossing beacon at Concord Ave/Spinelli into a Red Rapid Flashing Beacon, and/or other transportation projects in the area. This item will help mitigate the new vehicle trips, delay and queuing generated by the Project and decrease in pedestrian and bicycle comfort from new vehicle traffic.	Prior to the issuance of the Building Permit.
4	Reconstruct Smith Place, Adley Road, and Fawcett Street along the site's frontage to align with the City's future cross-section plan for Smith Place as indicated in the Alewife District Plan and/or as approved by the City. This item will help mitigate the pedestrian and bicycle facility criteria that was triggered for this Project on Smith Place.	Final design to be approved by the City prior to the issuance of a Building Permit. The "Day One" Infrastructure plan shall be complete prior to issuance of the first Occupancy Permit unless approved by TP+T due to unforeseen or reasonable delays.
5	Fund and install a 23-dock Bluebikes bikesharing station as shown on the plans and required in the PTDM plan. The station shall be located as per the project plans, unless an alternative is approved by the City.	Funding to be provided prior to the issuance of a Building Permit, as required in the final PTDM Plan.