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## CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: December 8, 2020

Re: Special Permit **PB #361, 711-727 Mass Ave - Continued Hearing**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 711-727 Massachusetts Avenue, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

### Update

Since the last Planning Board meeting on July 21, 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 also subject to the Green Building Requirements in Section 22.20. Staff has reviewed the required submissions to certify compliance with the Green Building Requirement. Compliance with the Incentive Zoning Requirements will be reviewed at the time of issuance of a building permit.

### Planning Board Action

The current Application (as revised) is proposing to renovate and rehabilitate the historic building with an addition behind and partially above the existing building. The proposed uses include ground-floor retail, office space, and a 37-room hotel. The renovated building plus addition will result in a total of 41,895 square feet of Gross Floor Area (GFA) – which excludes areas exempt from GFA calculations either as-of-right or by special permit – and a total of six stories above grade.

The Applicant is seeking Special Permits allowed in the Central Square Overlay District for building height (Section 20.304.2) and FAR (20.304.3), to exempt rooftop spaces from the calculation of GFA (20.304.3.), to establish a Formula Business (20.304.5) and to modify limitations on bank frontage (20.304.5.3.b), and to waive parking and loading requirements (20.304.6). The Applicant also seeks an exemption of basement area from the calculation of GFA (Article 2.000).

Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

**IRAM FAROOQ**  
*Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development*

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
*Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration*

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
*Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning*

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text in appendix)</i>
<p>Central Square Overlay District: Standards for Issuance of Special Permits (Section 20.305)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed development is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Central Square Action Plan:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ encourage responsible and orderly development;</li> <li>○ strengthen the retail base to more completely serve the needs of the neighborhoods;</li> <li>○ preserve the Square’s cultural diversity;</li> <li>○ create active people oriented spaces;</li> <li>○ improve the physical, and visual environment;</li> <li>○ provide retail establishments that serve people of diverse economic and social groups who live in the surrounding neighborhoods.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Building and site designs are consistent with “Urban Design Plan for Central Square” as outlined in the “Central Square Action Plan” and the “Central Square Development Guidelines” (see summary on following pages).</li> <li>• Building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity.</li> <li>• No National Register or contributing building is demolished or so altered as to terminate or preclude its designation (either now or within the past 5 years).</li> </ul>
<p>Central Square Overlay District: Building height up to 80 feet and combined residential and non-residential FAR up to 4.00 (Sections 20.304.2 &amp; 20.304.3)</p>	<p><i>Central Square Overlay District findings set forth above</i></p>
<p>Central Square Overlay District: Exemption of rooftop spaces from calculation of Gross Floor Area (GFA) in Central Square Overlay District (Section 20.304.3.6)</p>	<p>The rooftop spaces are located and designed to minimize impacts on neighboring uses, including but not limited to light trespass, noise or other nuisance, and may place further requirements or conditions on the design or operational aspects of rooftop space, including but not limited to hours of operation, range of activities permitted, signage and lighting fixtures, visual screening devices, sound mitigation, and other measures to ensure ongoing compliance with the findings.</p>

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text in appendix)</i>
Central Square Overlay District: Reduction of parking and loading requirement (Sections 20.304.6 & 6.35.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total development authorized on the site is reduced to 90% of the maximum permitted on the lot or a cash contribution is made to the Central Square Improvement Fund in an amount equal to fifty (50) percent of the cost of construction of the parking spaces not provided.</li> <li>• Subject lot is sufficiently small in size as to contribute to a development pattern of diverse, small scale, new structures and the retention of existing structures.</li> <li>• Exemption from parking and loading requirements will result in a building design that is more appropriate to its location and the fabric of its neighborhood.</li> <li>• <i>Other Central Square Overlay District findings set forth above</i></li> </ul>
Central Square Overlay District: Special Permit for Formula Business (Sections 20.304.5.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The design reflects, amplifies and strengthens the established historical character of existing buildings and storefronts in Central Square.</li> <li>• The particulars of the building or storefront design is varied from the formula or standard design of the chain in order to reflect the unique character and conditions of Central Square generally or the specific location in particular.</li> <li>• Standard elements of the enterprise defining it as a Formula Business are modified to respect and provide unique expressions of Central Square history and traditions as well as innovation in physical design and marketing that will distinguish the Central Square location from other locations of the Formula Business.</li> </ul>
Central Square Overlay District: Bank frontage occupying more than 25 feet of building frontage facing Massachusetts Avenue or more than 30% of a lot's aggregate building frontage (Section 20.304.5.3.b)	<i>Central Square Overlay District findings set forth above</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.
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 hearing on 7/21/2020 in addition to comments from staff memos:

- Provide additional information for rooftop spaces.
- Provide additional information for ground floor retail uses and facades.
- Clarify proposed provisions for bicycle parking.
- Explore design improvements to make the building façade of proposed addition to be less overwhelming.
- Conduct more public outreach for input from immediate abutters.
- Provide additional information on rooftop mechanical screening.

### **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 Central Square Action Plan and Development Guidelines. Staff have also been in contact with representatives of the Cambridge Housing Authority to provide information to residents of the abutting residential building.

The revised materials provide sufficient information regarding the zoning compliance aspect of rooftop spaces. It also documents that no changes are proposed for the amount of glazing on the building façade along the ground floor of Massachusetts Avenue.

#### *Urban Design*

The applicant met with staff several times over the last few months to review the design as it was developed in response to Planning Board and staff comments. Staff feels that the project will be a valuable contribution to Central Square, both for its protection of the existing Cambridge Gas and Light Building, and for its well-designed addition.

Highlights of changes to the design include:

- On the fifth and sixth floors of the Massachusetts Avenue and Temple Street facades, the amount that the angled faces of the double height window surrounds project from the plane of the windows has been considerably reduced, giving the building's new upper floors a simpler form more in keeping with the existing building.
- The angled panels that frame the fifth/sixth floor windows, previously shown as gold/bronze, now have a more neutral color, closer to the color of the existing building's limestone. The applicant will continue to carefully study their color and appearance as materials are selected.

- The sightlines from the sidewalk on the opposite side of Massachusetts Avenue to the railing at the fourth floor terrace have been checked. The railing appears to be below the visual cutoff line created by the Gas and Light Building's cornice and parapet.
- On the Temple Street façade, the narrow panel-clad element at the rear of the building above the hotel entrance has been separated from the double height fifth/sixth-floor window surrounds above the existing building by a reveal. This clarifies that the rear element is conceptually a separate structure, one that functions as a backdrop for the more visually assertive element above the existing building.
- Details have been provided for the visual and acoustical screening around the rooftop mechanical equipment.
- To minimize light trespass from the building interior to the neighbors in the Temple Place Apartments, a combination of approaches is proposed, including shielded downlights, window shades, and a "specialty glazing/filming" system on the glass.
- The hotel entrance from Temple Street has been reduced in height, bringing it into alignment with the arched windows of the existing building.
- The owner will work with the City to plant a new street tree on Temple Street.

Comments on the new materials:

- A new fence is proposed on the north side of the property. There is an existing fence in approximately the same location, perhaps on the Temple Place Apartment site. Coordination with Temple Place Apartments could be considered, so as not to have two fences in close proximity with each other.
- Recessed downlights are shown in the exterior soffit above the 4<sup>th</sup> floor level units facing Massachusetts Avenue. They should be designed to avoid glare at street level.
- Acoustical as well as visual screening is shown on the east, south, and west sides of the rooftop mechanical space. Consider adding acoustical screening to the screening made of ipe wood on the north side of the mechanical enclosure.
- The 1,067 square foot area along the north edge of the high roof is noted as "Mechanical Space". It appears to not be visually or acoustically screened. Consider mechanical equipment in this area to be located elsewhere, away from the Temple Street Apartment Building, and this space be instead considered for a green roof.
- On the metal panel-clad north façade, the windows begin two panel's widths away from the building's northeast corner. Consideration could be given to extending the window openings one panel's width closer to Temple Street, so as to give the rear addition less of a boxy look when seen looking south on Temple Place.
- Consider providing wider than typical doors on the route to the bicycle storage rooms.

### **Continuing Review**

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Review of all exterior materials, colors, alterations, and details with the Cambridge Historical Commission, and review of a materials mock-up by city staff prior to any exterior materials being ordered. Coordination of the mockup's location with city staff.
- Review of changes to the adjoining sidewalks and their features, including any new trees and the removal of the existing curb cut.
- Review of exterior lighting.
- Review of Interior lighting and window treatment on the façade facing the Temple Place Apartments.
- Review of visual/acoustical screening of rooftop mechanical equipment.
- Coordination with Cambridge Arts Council on the removal of its upper portion of the mural on the west wall of the existing building when the existing rooftop penthouse is demolished, and on protection of the remaining portion during construction.