



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

TRAFFIC, PARKING, + TRANSPORTATION

MEMORANDUM

To: Cambridge Planning Board

From: Joseph E. Barr, Director

Date: December 7, 2020

Subject: 600 Massachusetts Avenue Project (PB#369)

The Cambridge Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department (TP+T) has reviewed the Special Permit Application for a mixed-use development Project located at 600 Massachusetts Avenue in Central Square. The Project proposes to construct 46 dwelling units, ground floor and basement level retail space, 60 long-term bicycle parking spaces in the basement of the building accessible by an elevator and contribute to the City's Public Bicycle Parking Fund for two (2) short-term bicycle spaces. The Project is seeking a waiver of parking and loading requirements. TP+T offers the Planning Board members the following comments:

- This Project is primarily intended to create 46 new housing units on the site currently containing Supreme Liquor Store, Chipotle restaurant, Tae Kwon Do martial arts facility, and retail space previously occupied by Sleepy's Mattress store that is proposed for demolition. TP+T believes that creating new housing in the heart of Central Square is a positive mixed-use transit-oriented development project because creating new housing is a high priority for the City and creating housing where residents will have many options for sustainable travel, and therefore do not need to own a car, is good land-use/sustainability/transportation planning.
- The Applicant completed a Transportation Impact Study (TIS) which was certified as complete and accurate by TP+T on December 9, 2019. The study was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is a year-old, but TP+T believes it continues to be a fair assessment of the proposed Project's transportation impacts, particularly given that COVID-19 makes it impossible to update the study at this point.
- Overall, TP+T supports a waiver for parking and loading requirements for this specific site for various reasons, including the significant challenges of constructing parking under the existing building. This approach is also in line with our overall transportation policies, which strongly support the promotion of sustainable transportation and discourage car ownership. However, we believe that a waiver of parking should not necessarily exempt a Project from providing appropriate mitigation for its traffic and parking impacts. TP+T believes that the Planning Board should consider requiring mitigation that is commensurate with the level of relief associated with completely waiving the parking requirements for this project, which represents a very significant savings in cost and construction complexity for the

developer. One potential mitigation strategy would be to make a contribution towards needed capital repairs to the Green Street Garage, since this Project would be expected to increase demand on that facility (as it is the nearest commercial parking facility). TP+T recommend that the Project contribute \$250,000 towards necessary capital repairs, particularly structural repairs. Payment should be made prior to issuance of the first Occupancy Permit for the Project. We further recommend that this contribution should be provided prior to issuance of a Building Permit for the Project

- Similar to a parking space waiver, overall TP+T supports the waiver for loading bays for this project, however we note that loading for this Project will need to occur on Green Street, which will then limit the ability for Green Street to be used for other transportation uses, such as a bus lane or bicycle lane.
- The Project proposes 60 long-term bicycle parking spaces, which meets (and actually exceeds) the zoning minimum for long-term bicycle parking. Furthermore, the Project proposes to contribute to the City's Bicycle Parking Fund for two bicycle spaces (approximately \$800) in lieu of providing short-term bicycle parking spaces on its site. TP+T generally supports this because the building has no property line setbacks, which makes it difficult to provide short-term bicycle parking on its property. However, we recommend that the Project more fully demonstrate that it is not possible to provide short-term bicycle parking on its property, such as off Green Street. TP+T recommends that the final design and plan for short-term and long-term bicycle parking be reviewed by City staff as part of the Project's continuing design review.
- At TP+T's first meeting with the Applicant, we mentioned the idea of relocating the MBTA Red Line stairway which is located on sidewalk in front of the Project, into the building to create a wider, safer stairway and free up sidewalk space on the highly used Massachusetts Avenue sidewalk. The idea would be similar to what was done in Kenmore Square in Boston as part of the Hotel Commonwealth Project. Page 8-9 in the Project's Special Permit Application narrative states that the petitioner is willing to discuss such a vision of a possible future relocation of the stairway with all relevant stakeholders. However, the narrative then states that it is not possible because a large concrete stormwater storage tank in the project's basement will be in the way of this access, and that there is no other suitable location for that tank. It also says that that such a relocation of the MBTA entrance could adversely affect a portion of its retail space. While we acknowledge that the location of a stairway within the project's envelope will impact the retail space, the statement regarding the location of the stormwater storage tank is difficult to verify without an independent analysis.

While recognizing these challenges, we still believe that it is worth further investigating this possibility, since it represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to move this stairway and open up additional space at one of the busiest locations in Central Square. It is also important to note that we are not necessarily expecting this Project to fully fund the relocation of the stairway but expect to have more discussions and ideally a commitment to make the space in the building available in the future if such a project could be undertaken. The MBTA is actively working on

adding new stairs and elevators in Central Square, so the improvements could be undertaken as part of that overall effort, with this project providing the space.

- Lastly, the Planning Board Special Permit Application did not offer transportation and parking mitigation, including Transportation Demand Management Measures (TDM). As a minimum, TP+T recommends that the Project be required to implement the following minimum TDM measures, which are generally consistent with what has been required in Special Permits for other residential projects:
 1. Offer each adult member of each household (up to two) upon move-in a Charlie Card valued at the cost of 50% of a bus/subway pass (currently \$90.00 but subject to fare increases) for three consecutive months. This benefit will end after three months for the household and begins anew upon unit turnover.
 2. Offer each adult member of each household (up to two) upon move-in a one-year Gold-Level Bluebikes bikeshare membership. This benefit will end after one year for the household and begins anew upon unit turnover.
 3. Provide air pumps and other bike tools in/near the bicycle storage areas.
 4. Either install a real-time multimodal transportation display screen to help people decide which mode to choose for each trip (transit, carshare vehicle, Bluebikes, etc.), or establish a transportation information center located in an area that is central, visible, convenient, and equally accessible to all residents and visitors. The center will feature information on:
 - a. Available pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the vicinity of the Project site
 - b. MBTA maps, schedules, and fares
 - c. Area shuttle map and schedule, if one exists
 - d. "Getting Around in Cambridge" map and other CitySmart materials (available at the Cambridge Community Development office)
 - e. Location of bicycle parking
 - f. Bluebikes bikeshare system
 - g. Carsharing
 - h. Ride-matching
 - i. Other pertinent transportation information
 5. Designate a transportation coordinator (TC) for the site to manage the TDM program. The TC will also oversee the marketing and promotion of transportation options to all residents at the site in a variety of ways:
 - a. Posting information in a prominent location in the building and on the Project's website, social media, and property newsletters.
 - b. Responding to individual requests for information in person and via phone and email.
 - c. Performing annual transportation surveys if requested by TP+T or CDD.
 6. Require the TC to compile and distribute up-to-date information explaining all transportation options to all new residents as part of their New Resident Packet. Transportation information packets may be purchased from the Community Development Department. The packets will contain information on both the range of options available and any building manager programs to support the use of these options, and will include:
 - a. Available pedestrian and bicycle facilities in the vicinity of the Project site
 - b. MBTA maps, schedules, and fares
 - c. Area shuttle map and schedule, if one exists

- d. "Getting Around in Cambridge" map and other CitySmart materials (available at the Cambridge Community Development Department office)
 - e. Location of bicycle parking
 - f. Bluebikes bikeshare system
 - g. Carsharing
 - h. Ride-matching
 - i. Other pertinent transportation information
7. Require that the TC be on-site during a minimum of 2 hours per week and be available during other times to residents via email and telephone. Email and phone information for the TC will be posted in the transportation information center.
 8. Require that the TC will participate in any TC trainings offered by the City of Cambridge or local TMA.