



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: December 12, 2018

Re: **PB-66 PUD Amendment #21 (Major), CambridgeSide – First Hearing**

Overview

The Planning Board in 1987 approved a Planned Unit Development (PUD) for 944,000 square feet of mixed uses between First Street and Land Boulevard (PB-66). The development included the creation of the CambridgeSide retail mall (formerly known as Galleria at Riverside Place and CambridgeSide Galleria), an office building to the south (which is now attached to the One Charles Park building, which was separately permitted as PB-65), and a residential building to the east (later amended to a hotel use and now the Hotel Marlowe). The development followed the principles of East Cambridge Riverfront Plan (1978).

The development contains a mix of uses, but is dominated by retail activities in three floors of the mall building, with the hotel and offices being secondary uses. The original decision has had twenty amendments, including 5 major amendments, for adjustments in the use mix and overall development plan. The mall building recently had exterior and interior renovations to improve the marketability of the existing retail spaces.

The proposed amendment is to allow up to 140,000 square feet of third floor retail space in the mall building to accommodate office use, the justification being that the demand for retail space has diminished and that vacant space in areas with less foot traffic could be made available to office tenants as an alternative. Since this is a substantial deviation from the approved mix of uses in the original decision, the applicant is seeking a major amendment. The applicant has submitted a detailed Traffic Impact Study (TIS), which has been certified by Traffic, Parking and Transportation (TP&T) Department.

The required findings for approval of a Major Amendment are summarized on the following page.

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Requested Actions	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Preliminary Determination (First Hearing) – Major Amendment to PUD Special Permit (Section 12.37)	The proposed amendment to the PUD: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conforms with general PUD development controls and district development controls.• Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for that portion of the city.• Provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects, considering:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ quality of site design○ traffic flow and safety○ adequacy of utilities and other public works○ impact on existing public facilities○ potential fiscal impact
Final Decision (Second Hearing) – Major Amendment to PUD Special Permit (Section 12.37)	The amended Final Development Plan contains revisions to the initial proposal in response to the Preliminary Determination.

Development Plan Amendment Procedure

The zoning allows for PUD Final Development Plans to be modified over time by approval of Major or Minor Amendments. This is crucial because it is typical for long-term PUD developments to be amended many times over the course of development.

Approval of a Major Amendment follows the same two-hearing procedure as approval of a PUD Final Development Plan. At the first hearing, the Planning Board reviews the proposal in concept and makes a preliminary determination whether the proposal is generally consistent with the district objectives. If so, the proposal can proceed to be considered in further detail; if not, the Board can deny the application. If the proposal is allowed to proceed, the Board may request additional study or revisions to the plan. At the second hearing, the Planning Board reviews the proposal in detail and makes a final decision to grant or deny the special permit approving the Final Development Plan or Major Amendment.

Because this proposal is limited to just change of use, the two hearings have been scheduled at consecutive Planning Board meetings to streamline the review process. However, as with any special permit application, the Planning Board can choose to continue the hearing to a future date in order to request additional study or revision.

Area Planning and Zoning

Planning and urban development in East Cambridge has evolved over many decades. In the 1970s, the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan was developed to coordinate redevelopment of former industrial sites within the “Lechmere Triangle” area that would promote contemporary commercial and residential redevelopment along with new open space amenities and a more urbanistic pattern of streets and pedestrian connections. The zoning of the area was subsequently changed to establish residential and commercial base zones with Planned Unit Development (PUD) overlays to allow greater development

potential balanced with more rigorous design review and mitigation for increased impacts. An “East Cambridge Development Review Process and Guidelines” document was also published in 1985 to establish principles and a conceptual plan for the area’s redevelopment.

The base zoning for the site is Business-A (BA), which allows various non-residential and residential uses by right. The development controls of the PUD-4 district are applied in place of the base zoning subject to the Planning Board’s approval of a Final Development Plan. Development in the PUD-4 district must be found consistent with the policy objectives set forth in the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan. This plan supports functionally diverse and active urban development that enhances the public open space system that extends from Lechmere Canal into East Cambridge. Specific design principles guide use, scale, density, set-back, bulk, height, and landscaping of developments proposed in the area with critical emphasis on individual project to complement the established developments in the vicinity while improving connections within East Cambridge community.

An important objective of the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan was to enable a mix of new private development with public open space and connections. Lechmere Canal Park and Charles Park were created by the City as part of the area’s redevelopment, and are maintained through private funding agreements with adjacent landowners.

The PUD-4 district later was amended to reference the 2001 Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS), which created the adjacent PUD-4A and PUD-4B districts, and includes reference to the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines created through that study. Both plans encourage an active urban setting around the Lechmere Canal and along public and private streets both during and after customary business hours, with ground floor building spaces oriented toward the Lechmere Canal and public streets containing retail or consumer service office uses to the extent possible. Extensive ground level building frontage along the Lechmere Canal is not encouraged for institutional or office uses.

Comments on Proposed Amendment

The main physical elements of the approved Final Development Plan remain mostly unchanged by the proposed amendment from the existing conditions. The plan still conforms to the zoning requirements in the PUD-4 district and, in concept, responds positively to the planning goals for the area (established in the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan) by retaining a mix of uses with retail activity and public connections. Modest changes are proposed to the building exterior to accommodate a new building entrance for the new office space. Comments on the proposed physical changes are included in the Urban Design section below.

Much has changed in the commercial landscape of Cambridge in the 30 years since this project was first permitted. The eastern part of Cambridge now has some of the greatest demand for office space in the Boston region. Meanwhile, especially in recent years, there has been a decrease in demand for retail space both locally and nationwide, particularly in mall-style shopping centers. The proposed use change from retail to office in the third floor of the mall building seems to be a reflection of these larger trends.

The original Final Development Plan permitted a total of 944,000 square feet, of which approximately 9% would be office use. This proposed change would result in a proportion of up to 24% office. This is a more sizable percentage, but the project still remains predominantly retail in nature. The Application suggests that the proposed 140,000 square feet might not be wholly converted to office, but would be available for office or retail use to accommodate demand. This might also offer opportunities for hybrid

retail/office activities that might be infeasible in single-use office buildings or districts. Limiting new office tenants to the upper floor of the building as proposed is a helpful way to ensure that retail activity and connectivity would be maintained in areas that are most accessible to the public. Providing an office/retail mix within the building also has the potential to improve the retail businesses in the area with additional office tenants becoming retail consumers as well.

Transportation impacts are a key consideration. A TIS was provided and TP&T and will provide specific comments on the findings. From a land use perspective, a shift from retail to office use would suggest a shift away from evening and weekend trips and toward more peak-hour weekday trips. Parking is also a potential concern, as the project was permitted with approximately 3 off-street parking spaces per 1,000 square feet, which is significantly higher than the typical parking ratios for office uses in the area (roughly 1 space per 1,000 square feet, in some cases less is permitted) and higher than the maximum permitted for general retail in most higher-density zoning districts (1 space per 600 square feet, or roughly 1.67 spaces per 1,000 square feet). The proposal includes a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Plan to discourage single occupant automobile trips and promote a more walkable, bike-friendly, and transit-oriented neighborhood as well as modifications to pedestrian and roadway facilities to improve safety.

Urban Design

The “East Cambridge Development Review Process and Guidelines” (1985) stresses the importance of Cambridge’s public open space system and the role of Cambridge’s buildings in enriching it, shaping it, and activating it. It recommends that buildings bordering public open space and public thoroughfares have inviting elevations, with special attention paid to the design and activation of their ground floors; that existing streetwalls within the district must be maintained; and that large buildings and mixed-use buildings have multiple lobbies, directly located on public streets.

The proposed changes to the Cambridgeside Galleria generally align with these guidelines. While the internal change of the building’s third-floor from retail to office space will not have a direct physical impact on the public space around the building, the creation of a new entrance lobby on the Cambridgeside Place façade will add activity and variety to the pedestrian area along the street and is in accord with the intent of the guidelines.

The new entrance appears to be compatible with the pedestrian sidewalk, outdoor dining, and vehicular drop off area along Cambridgeside Place. There are currently translucent glazed doors (presumably for emergency egress or service) in this location. The proposed entrance will give a more public character to this pedestrian flow. The façade expression of the new lobby as a glazed double-height space should enhance the building by its contrast with the brick masonry walls on either side and help to mediate the difference in their heights.

To ensure that a meaningful streetwall is maintained on Cambridgeside Place, consideration should be given to:

- Creating a more coherent relationship between the bay system of the third floor and that of the second and first floors.
- Creating a stronger sense that the masonry streetwall façade has a substantial thickness, i.e.: that it is not merely a thin surface plane at the left and right of the double-height lobby.

In addition, consideration could be given to:

- Eliminating what appears to be spandrel glass at the left and right sides and top of the new curtainwall façade zone.
- Studying different treatments of the glazed area, potentially including sun shading.
- Improving the paved pedestrian area and the vehicular drop off area in response to the new lobby, including planting new canopy trees to replace the potted plants currently at the edge of the sidewalk and in the raised median between the pull-of lane and the street.

Note that the perspective view of existing conditions on page 32 should be corrected in its depiction of the curved cornice at the second-floor level and the stone fascia below it.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, at the Final Development Plan stage or as part of continuing staff review:

- Update the development data with the proposed use change to clarify the total area for each type of use.
- Review of specifications for window glass, details of the glazing systems and colors of exterior materials.
- Review of changes to the site plan, including potential planting, and changes to paving and vehicular markings.
- Review of changes to the Lobby façade.