

Harvard Square Advisory Committee

c/o Cambridge Community Development Department

344 Broadway

Cambridge, MA 02139

617/349-4647

Case: 1350 Massachusetts Avenue, Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Campus Center

Applicant: President & Fellows of Harvard College, c/o Tanya Iatridis, HPPM

Proposal and Zoning Issues: Building additions and alterations requiring Large Project Review by the Harvard Square Advisory Committee and Board of Zoning Appeal relief for Floor Area Ratio, additional height, and alterations/enlargement of a non-conforming structure.

Harvard Square Advisory Committee: June 10, 2015

Summary: Tanya Iatridis, Harvard Planning and Project Management, introduced the presenters, the project rationale and requested Board of Zoning Appeal variances. The variances are for additional gross floor area (approximately 2,500 square feet) increasing the Floor Area Ratio to 4.48, the height to 116 feet and the alteration of a nonconforming structure. The planning rationale for the work is to create a space in a central location on the Harvard campus to serve as the student center and to revitalize the Holyoke Center into a public space that encourages activity and interaction on the campus. Henry Moss, of Bruner / Cott & Associates described how the renovations were developed in the context of Sert, the original architect of the building, and the building location in the center of Harvard Square as well as the Harvard campus.

Andrew Barnett, Hopkins Architects, described the new entrances and program areas, how the improvements would work, and operations of the building alterations.

Emily Mueller de Celis, Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates described how Forbes Plaza, the interior atrium spaces and Mount Auburn Street would be developed to be flexible and open to public activities removing barriers to accessibility.

HSAC comments:

- The Urban Planning goals have been incorporated in the restoration of an important modern building; it will be restored to become a “living room of Cambridge”, and an active campus center.
- The elimination of grade changes is an important improvement. More space from Forbes Plaza will be captured for year round use, the transparency will engage the public with improved accessibility.
- The Mount Auburn Street entry is an improved connection.
- The livability will be enhanced through the redesign, and the proposed uses welcome the public.
- The size of the publicly accessible space is an improvement, the Harvard Square guidelines appear to be met through the improvements in the functioning of the building, improvements to the retail

along Dunster and Holyoke Streets, and preservation of the Holyoke Center building. The second floor public access will be a huge benefit as seen in the existing space at Starbucks.

- These improvements will provide social spaces in a central location for both students and the public. Overall, elements of both groups of users will be better.

Design/program suggestions:

- The beacon at the tenth floor may be too subtle and could require some more drama.
- The internal spaces flow to the public streets, and should be maintained as publicly accessible through programs and vendor hours of operation staying open late into the evening to maintain the activity level.
- The livability will be enhanced through the redesign, and the proposed uses welcome the public.

Concerns:

- There is concern that this is a youth centric building, with little to offer those who do not want a cup of coffee or play chess. The design appears to be inaccessible at points. There was some clarification at the meeting regarding how the accessible spaces will operate, offering relaxation without requiring any purchases as well as a centralized location for Harvard University tickets to events.
- The commitments made during the public review process should be memorialized in the Board of Zoning Appeal decision. The public opportunities to access the building at all hours should be included.
- Cambridge history should be included in the public area.
- There was concern about the increase of the enclosed retail space of the Forbes Plaza.

Overall, the HSAC supports the granting of the requested relief and offers the following suggestions as conditions to any Board of Zoning Appeal decisions. The Advisory Committee would like to see the public access to the areas described as public in the plans be open as early and late as possible with appropriate activities, including the public restrooms. This includes making the space safe and inviting, and not dependent on the operation of retailers, though stores can be an important tool in the effort. The Advisory Committee would like the Harvard Planning Department commitment to public access be part of any decisions granted. The crosswalk at Dunster Street and Massachusetts Avenue should be reviewed for conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

Committee Members in Attendance: John DiGiovanni, Bridget Dinsmore, Lauren Curry, Allison Crosbie, Matt Simitis, Max Frank, Frank Kramer, Bill Barry and Pebble Gifford. Alexandra Offiong recused herself from the discussion.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

Liza Paden
Community Development Department staff