



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: September 14, 2021

Re: **PB #179, Cambridge Crossing (North Point) PUD Amendment 9 (Minor)**

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Background

The North Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) is an approved 45-acre, 5+ million square foot development project planned to be built out through 2030. The Final Development Plan was first approved by the Planning Board in 2003, and since that time has been modified several times through the PUD amendment process. The most recent minor amendment (proposed by the current developer, DivcoWest) was granted by the Planning Board on October 15, 2019.

DivcoWest is currently seeking Design Review and Minor Amendment approval to construct two pedestrian bridges between the Parcel H building (450 Water Street) and Parcel G building (350 Water Street), which will increase the Gross floor Area (GFA) associated with Parcels G and H. Both buildings received design approval in 2019, with revisions approved in 2020, and are currently under construction. The proposed amendments to Appendix I of the PUD Special Permit (summarizing the approved Development Program) show that the increase in commercial GFA on Parcels G and H will be offset by a reduction in commercial GFA on Parcel U.

This memo summarizes the key areas of focus associated with the requested minor amendment.

Criteria for Granting Minor Amendments

Per the general PUD provisions in Section 12.37 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board determines whether changes to the Final Development Plan may be approved as minor amendments. The following guidance is provided in zoning:

(12.37.2) Minor amendments are changes which do not alter the concept of the PUD in terms of density, floor area ratio, land usage, height, provision of open space, or the physical relationship of elements of the development. Minor amendments shall include, but not be limited to, small changes in the location of buildings, open space, or parking; or realignment of minor streets.

If the Board determines that the changes are minor, then the Board may approve the minor amendment on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members.

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Comments on Proposed Amendment

Planning and Zoning

GFA Changes

The addition of the proposed pedestrian bridges would add 1,273 square feet of GFA to Parcel G and 853 square feet of GFA to Parcel H. To compensate for this increase without changing the overall GFA allotment of the PUD, the GFA of Parcel U is proposed to be reduced by 2,216 square feet.

Condition 12.c.i of the PB-179 Decision states that a modification of up to 10% of approved GFA for a building is permitted as part of Design Review, but a modification exceeding 10% requires an amendment by the Planning Board. This provision is to allow for flexibility in the design of individual buildings. While the current request only adds a small amount of additional square footage to what was approved for Parcel G during Design Review, the GFA approved during design review had already increased from what was approved in 2016 as part of the most recent PUD Major Amendment Special Permit. The additional GFA now moves the total square footage for Parcel G above the 10% threshold established in the Special Permit, and thus requires an amendment from the Planning Board. The change in GFA on Parcel H is still less than 10% of the initial approval.

Parcel History	Special Permit GFA (2016)	Design Review GFA (2019)	Current Proposal	% Change from Special Permit GFA
Parcel G	410,000 SF	450,895 SF	452,273 SF	+10.3%
Parcel H	345,000 SF	365,110 SF	365,963 SF	+6.1%

Overall, this results in very little change from the previously approved Development Program. Because the increase is being offset by reductions in the commercial GFA of other sites, the project will remain within the total permitted non-residential GFA, but there is little remaining commercial GFA for the remainder of Phase 1 of the development. In order for the Project to meet the condition that at least 50% of the overall development at the end of Phase 1 be residential, significant residential development will need to move forward before the end of Phase 1.

Urban Design

Pedestrian Bridges

From an urban design perspective, the concept of connecting two buildings by a bridge is generally discouraged as such structures often internalize activity that is needed to animate the public realm. Pedestrian bridges can also have negative impact on the environment, including creating shadows, blocking views, reducing daylight and privatizing open space. However, in this instance there are several mitigating factors, which are discussed below.

The North Point Design Guidelines foresee the possibility of bridge connections between buildings. Where bridge connections are proposed, the guidelines recommend that they be located over service drives, be highly transparent with a light visual appearance, be narrow, have visible structure, and be differentiated from the adjacent buildings. The proposed pedestrian bridges comply with these guidelines. The bridges span the service drive between Buildings G and H, and are well set back from the principal wall plane of each building. In terms of design, the bridges are highly transparent with low iron, vision glass proposed for the walls, and the spandrels have been minimized. The bridge width has been minimized and they will only provide for pedestrian passage. The truss system used to create the bridges will be expressed and will also be highly visible due to the transparency of the glass. In the renderings, the pedestrian connectors have their own character, and are expressed architecturally as a bridge element rather than additional building occupying space.

While not specifically called out in the design guidelines, the following are additional mitigating factors that are pertinent to the Planning Board's review:

- The site is located at the edge/rear of the neighborhood, adjacent to the MBTA railyards.
- This is the only North Point location where two adjacent commercial buildings are separated by a service drive. All the other commercial buildings are separated by either open space, or a public street, which are not considered acceptable locations for pedestrian bridges.
- The pedestrian bridges are proposed to connect two buildings that have a single tenant.
- Each bridge will be well set back from the public street; at least 98 feet from Water Street.
- The bridges are one-level structures and are proposed to be located on floors 3 and 9. They would be angled in such a way that would allow for light to penetrate to the ground plane. The angled bridge alignment also adds some visual interest.
- The lower pedestrian bridge helps to humanize the space between the buildings and visually buffers the loading docks.

Staff have had several design discussions with the Applicant and are very pleased with the design outcome. The option to treat the underside of the bridge with a spandrel system, similar to what is being proposed for the walls, was also discussed. Staff are supportive of that approach to help enhance the visual appeal of the undersurface/soffit.

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 amendment:

- All materials, specifications, and details.