



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: June 23, 2017
Re: **PB #179, North Point PUD Parcel A, Parcel W and Open Space Design Review, and Baldwin Park update**

The Special Permit for the North Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) was originally granted by the Planning Board in 2003, and since that time has been modified several times through the PUD amendment process. The most recent major amendment (number 6) was granted by the Planning Board on July 26, 2016.

Three residential buildings have been completed on site, and the first commercial building, "Building JK" is currently under construction. The first retail buildings on "Parcel W" have been submitted for design review, along with proposed modifications to the adjacent "North Point Common". In addition, the design of a sewerage pump station on Parcel A, which is required to service the neighborhood, also requires review. The Applicant has also submitted Baldwin Park design updates in response to earlier design review comments made by the Planning Board. The special permit requires that each building and its associated park, street segment cross-section, streetscape details, or other associated physical improvements be subject to design review by the Planning Board.

The Planning Board's review of the building and landscape design is guided by the conditions of the special permit, which includes the goals and objectives of the *Eastern Cambridge Planning Study*, the guidelines established in the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines*, and utilization of the *North Point Design Guidelines* as a design reference.

This memo summarizes the key areas of focus associated with each element of the review.

Parcel W

The two retail pavilions, and covered plaza, are sited prominently within the green spine and public realm that overlooks North Point Common. The site forms part of the new retail corridor, which will extend from Lechmere Station, to the end of First Street. The stand-alone pavilions and plaza, along with North Point Common, the future retail on Parcel W and the Water Street open space to the west are intended to help unify the public realm in the North Point neighborhood.

Relevant Design Objectives and Guidelines

Design guidelines specific to the site were developed as part of the original PUD process in 2003 and have been subsequently amended as part of Major Amendment 6, which was approved by the Planning Board last year. As set out in the *North Point design Guidelines*, the retail pavilions are unique, site-specific buildings that are:

- *Created to activate the public realm and also create a sense of human scale that will balance the scale of adjacent buildings*
- *Shaped and oriented to enhance views and connections to North Point Common and open spaces in Parcel I*
- *Important in establishing human scale in North Point – but also enhance east west connectivity between North Point Common and Parcel I.*

See attached Appendix for a detailed summary of relevant *North Point Design Guidelines*.

Staff Comments

Staff is supportive of the proposal and looks forward to seeing the first retail buildings developed at North Point. The design of the pavilions is consistent with the guidelines. The buildings are lightweight, airy and open with an interesting roofscape that relates to the history of the site. The use of stained cedar siding adds warmth to the design and helps the structures relate to the distinctive setting provided at the edge of North Point Common. The upstairs decks will create opportunities for activation of the public realm, and the covered plaza extends the use of that public space into the shoulder seasons, which is a positive outcome for the neighborhood.

It is anticipated that design details will be refined as the project advances, and Staff suggest that the following aspects of the proposal be further studied:

- While transparency has been maximized on First Street, the common and internal to the plaza, there are portions of blank wall exceeding 20 feet on the north and south facades of the pavilions. It is understood that back-of-house functions necessitate this, however staff suggest that the blank walls be landscaped, decorated or detailed in a manner that makes them more visually interesting.
- The concept of a green connection between Parcel W, the common and Parcel I is a key urban design goal for North Point. Opportunities for additional plantings or greening to help enhance that relationship, and soften the hardscape.
- Opportunities to integrate public art into the design.
- Opportunities for additional public seating in the plaza.

North Point Common

The scope of this aspect of the review focuses on North Point Common, to the east of the retail pavilions. The Common is the centerpiece of the North Point neighborhood, and is located and designed to be easily accessible from the relocated Lechmere T station, First Street, and O'Brien Highway. As required by zoning, the primary urban design goal for the Common is to provide naturalistic, multi-use open space for both recreational and cultural activities.

Staff Comments

The proposed scope of work is generally limited to the area east of the retail pavilions and the north side of the common. The design enhancements both capture the essence of the naturalistic environment and also provide improved opportunities for activation and enjoyment of the open space. The picnic grove and granite outcrop are distinctive site features, which are expected to be attractive for families and children. In addition, the proposed design treatments for the common, as well as the retail plaza, provide a sense of identity and cohesiveness.

Some of the design details are a little unclear as the submitted plans are conceptual, so more detail will be needed as the project advances. In addition, staff suggest that the following aspects of the design be further studied.

- Whether there is a need for the public bathrooms proposed on Parcel I to be moved to Parcel W, so that patrons do not have to walk across North First Street.
- Opportunities to integrate public art into the design.

Parcel A

Most recently, the need for a sewerage pump station to service the area has arisen as part of the Department of Public Works (DPW) infrastructure review. Parcel A at the northwestern corner of the PUD area has been selected as the site for the facility. According to the DPW, the facility will be city-owned and operated, and due to the size, the station requires daily inspections and therefore needs to be located above-ground, with some infrastructure located below ground.

Staff Comments

Parcel A is a residential site with an open space designated for the western end of the parcel. In response to the desired future context, the Applicant proposed to enclose the pump station facility in a wood structure, which is designed to sit within the backdrop of the future open space. That open space is currently planned to be a community garden, thus the structure provides some public amenities, such as a water fountain and bench. The garden shed precedent is also most fitting for the future context. Staff suggest that the potential to set back the facility behind the future residential building's build-to-line be explored so that the structure does not dominate the streetscape experience.

Baldwin Park (Informational Update)

At the previous North Point Planning Board design review meeting on December 6, 2016, the Board made suggestions for the design of Baldwin Park. Specifically, the Board asked about more user-friendly seating, including benches with backs and moveable tables and chairs. The Board also requested that features that attract families with small children be introduced. In response, the Applicant has made several design modifications, which are being presented to the Planning Board for informational purposes. Staff feel that the changes have successfully addressed the Board's comments without altering the overall character of the park.

Continuing review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the meeting to a future date, or as items for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to approve the design review:

- Review of all proposed public realm, open space and streetscape design details, including accessibility requirements.
- Review of the internal layout of the retail space to ensure that the level of activation and transparency continues to be maximized.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details.
- Review of the Parcel W second floor deck areas to ensure that these spaces are designed and curated to be considerate of nearby residents after hours (e.g. lighting, noise).
- Provision of electrical outlets and other items that are needed for outdoor entertainment uses in the plaza space
- Modifications to the Parcel A Pump Station driveway apron to conform with city standards.

Relevant North Point Design Guidelines

The *North Point Design Guidelines* integrate and incorporate all North Point-related text of the City's adopted *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines* document with the Applicant's suggested elaborations.

Siting, Scale and Massing

Stand Alone Retail Building Massing and Articulation

- One and two story stand-alone retail buildings are created to activate the public realm and also create a sense of human scale that will balance the scale of adjacent buildings
- They should be shaped and oriented to enhance views and connections to North Point Common and open spaces in Parcel I
- The architectural language of these buildings should be distinctive from the overall architecture of North Point and should belong to and enhance the character of public realm
- These structures should have interesting roofscape as they will be highly visible from majority of the buildings at North Point
- Ground floor and second floor terraces are encouraged to engage and activate the public realm
- Design the building to accommodate changes in retailers and retail store size over time. This may entail making the ground floor retail facade bay structure flexible, so that in the future retail spaces can be demised to include multiple bays or portions of a single bay
- The location of any doors on buildings in the retail plaza abutting the multi-use path should be carefully considered. Doors may not open directly onto the path; facades must be set away from the path so that people are able to easily and safely get off the path and away from through-movement and have plenty of space to navigate.

Ground Floor Retail

- At least 75% of the street frontage of the proposed retail in "EXHIBIT: 10 CONCEPTUAL RETAIL PLAN" should be occupied by retail uses, including cafes and restaurants.
- Retail entrances should be located on public streets, or primary pedestrian uses and on corners wherever possible
- Retail entrances should relate to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit
- Retail within North Point should be as transparent as possible to maximize visibility of street level uses
- Ground floor facades should permit a clear view from the sidewalk to the interior space of the building (75% transparent surface is encouraged, and reflective glass is discouraged)
- Blank walls should be avoided along all public streets, courts, and pedestrian walkways
- Create a horizontal change in plane as the building approaches the ground plane
- Plan for tenant awnings or canopies that create a sense of enclosure over sidewalks and provide identity for tenants

- Design the building to accommodate changes in retailers and retail store size over time. This may entail making the ground floor retail facade bay structure flexible, so that in the future retail spaces can be demised to include multiple bays or portions of a single bay.
- The design should seek the optimal balance between the architectural identity of the building and that of individual retailers. Where appropriate, provide a facade bay structure that relates to the architecture of the building while allowing for signage, and storefront architecture within each bay that provides an opportunity for the individual expression of each retail storefront.
- Signage and graphics create both retail identity and a lively streetscape. Base building design should consider tenant signage visually as well as structurally. Signage in multi-tenant buildings should be co-ordinated and incorporated into the building's architecture

Open Spaces

Open spaces including North Point Common will be designed to support, enhance, and balance the commercial and residential development at North Point.

- The provision of open spaces of diverse size and use is encouraged to enhance the public environment at North Point. All open spaces at North Point shall be designed to be public in nature, creating an open environment that the public can easily identify that is welcoming for everyone's use
- The provision of an interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections both to neighborhoods and within North Point so as to promote pedestrian movement.
- The major new park required by the zoning code should be located convenient to the Lechmere T station in order to link East Cambridge and future neighborhoods at North Point.
- In addition to the large park, the creation of a series of smaller open spaces such as pocket parks, public plazas, active recreation areas, courtyards, play areas and gardens is encouraged. A second large park on Parcel I is located along the central main street, conveniently close to the neighborhood access from Water Street.
- These spaces shall be articulated throughout North Point through wayfinding and signage measures including space types, themes and program
- Open spaces shall be visible and accessible from public streets

Parks

- Fencing is strongly discouraged; clear entry points, lines of sight into the park, and pathways for the public to use are encouraged.
- Individual spaces within the large parks are encouraged to have clear identities and themes, so that the public can understand the potential use, including areas for gathering, and community events.
- Loading and service shall not interfere with the core function of the park spaces.
- It is encouraged that the major entry point to North Point at Lechmere Station shall have a central mapping sign that will direct users to the parks and open spaces within North Point.

- The Pocket Parks at North Point shall be designed to be public in nature, creating an open environment that the public can easily identify as welcoming and for everyone's use. The entrance to the park from streets and sidewalks should be designed to be open and inviting to the public.
- Pocket Park Connectors are the three open spaces that connect between streets, including Child Street and Baldwin Parks connecting North Street with Dawes, and Earhart Park connecting Glassworks Avenue with Northpoint Boulevard. These parks are framed by clear straight circulation paths either for vehicles (Child Street and Earhart Parks) or for pedestrians (Baldwin Park.) The circulation paths for walking, cycling and non-motorized use are to encourage connections, and to ensure the parks will feel truly public and not part of the adjacent private buildings. Encourage active or transparent edges at ground floors
- Active Pocket Parks are the three open spaces to the north of West Boulevard and Dawes Street. They are encouraged to have active recreational program including sports and gardening and be designed to be used by the whole community.

Plazas

- The Retail Square will be the heart of North Point, and should be designed to become a vibrant public gathering place, where open space, retail activities, and public events come together. The Retail Square is the point at which the First Street corridor and the east-west open space spine and Community Path cross each other, and clear pedestrian connections and lines of sight should be encouraged to facilitate pedestrian movement between the two. The retail pavilions should be configured to promote activation of the public plaza and park spaces through restaurant and café terraces, and activity areas. Trees and built shade structures are encouraged to create a strong green connection, and a comfortable micro-climate during the summer months. Great care should be taken in the design of plazas and paths to minimize the potential for unsafe conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists.

Streetscape and Circulation

Green Connections

Major street Connections into the site wherever possible, without interfering with the underlying principles of the plan, shall create a "green and pedestrian friendly" experience that connect the neighborhood to interior green spaces at North Point. Plans shall include enhanced sidewalks, expanded plantings and where reasonably possible a view corridor to interior green spaces.

- Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to future regional pathways (Grand Junction railroad, North Point path).
- Provide continuous pedestrian and bicycle access, and strong visual connections to the Charles River and public parks through view corridors, signage, and/or art installations.
- Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to hubway stations, existing and new bus stops and to transit stations including Kendall Square, Lechmere, Community College and North Station MBTA stations. In particular, direct access from the residential neighborhood south of Msgr. O'Brien Highway and Cambridge Street to the new T station, if relocated, is desirable.

- Provide new pedestrian crossings along Msgr. O'Brien Highway with strong visual connections from existing streets in East Cambridge to new streets and open spaces at North Point. Ensure that new pedestrian crossings are coordinated with traffic operations on Msgr. O'Brien Highway.
- Provide landscaped pedestrian/cycle connections from North Point to the future regional bicycle path.
- Provide for improved pedestrian and bicycle connections to and from the Orange Line T station.
- Provide a clear, public, legible and green connection between North Point Common and Parcel I

Character

- Use streetscape elements such as trees, benches, signage, and lighting to support active pedestrian uses and to reinforce the character and identity of each district.
- Design streets to encourage pedestrian and cycle activity, and to control vehicle speed in residential areas.
- Where appropriate, establish, preserve and highlight views from public streets and spaces to important civic landmarks such as the Zakim Bridge and Northpoint Common.
- In the design of new streets, provide sufficient pavement width to accommodate on-street parking and short-term loading where appropriate in order to provide short-term parking and to serve local retail and building uses.
- In the design of new streets, pathways, and parks, provide pedestrian-scale lighting to enhance pedestrian safety.
- Numerous entrances along principal pedestrian routes are encouraged both for safety and to enhance the pedestrian environment.
- Major entrances should be located on public streets and at or near corners wherever possible. Entrances should relate well to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit stations.

First Street

The Street has been designed to harmoniously accommodate multiple functions including MBTA Green Line Station entrance, bus stop, retail corridor, bicycle accommodation, neighborhood to open space connector and a gateway to North Point. This is achieved through the design of the street as a complete street to accommodate mobility, a green identity through a double alley of trees where possible, and wide sidewalks and wayfinding.

- First Street should serve as a green connection into North Point linking the neighborhood to North Point Common and other interior open spaces.

The goal of First Street is to connect North Point to East Cambridge with a vibrant, friendly pedestrian retail experience.

- Connect and draw the public to retail and interior open spaces.
- Setbacks will allow space for continuous rows of trees connecting Monsignor O' Brien Highway to the open space at the heart of North Point.

- The developer will provide expanded sidewalks and bicycle accommodation from the transit hub to the center of the North Point.
- A major view corridor will be established on First Street, with different architectural elements terminating the views as the street bends, and also providing strong visual connections to North Point Common.

Parcel W Block Guidelines

- In designing these buildings, it is important to shape them to maintain visual connections to North Point Common from First Street and Retail Square.
- The small retail buildings should be designed to have a visual presence from First Street and the train station.
- The design for the retail plaza should explore shading devices such as pergolas or canopies that are create an important visual identity for Parcel W as an important component of North Point's public realm.
- Transparency is highly encouraged to enable views through the retail buildings.
- Ground floor of the building should engage the Water Street Park and the retail plaza and retail frontage should be maximized along all sides.
- Second floor terraces for restaurant seating is encouraged.
- These structures should have interesting roofscape as they will be highly visible from majority of the buildings at North Point.