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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

Date: December 8, 2021

Re: **PB #243, Alexandria PUD – 41 Linskey Way Design Review**

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning

The Special Permit for the Alexandria Center Planned Unit Development (PUD) was originally granted by the Planning Board in 2010. Currently, development on all but one of the approved sites is completed or in construction. The Board approved a minor amendment for this PUD in 2015 for parking reduction, and two major amendments in 2018 to permit a bank use and relocate approved active uses within the PUD, and to create two new lots at the 161 First Street site.

The special permit requires that the specific design of each building, including outdoor spaces adjacent to those buildings, shall be subject to Design Review by the Planning Board. The design for the 41 Linskey Way site, involving renovation and additions to the former Maple Sugar Factory building, has been presented to the Board on several occasions over the last few years, and design approval was granted on May 28, 2019. The Applicant recently submitted revised materials that have altered the design significantly. These revised design materials are presented for the Board's review and approval.

A summary of comments from staff is provided on the following pages. Staff will continue to review refinements to the design prior to issuance of a building permit, and throughout the development phase.

### **Design Review process**

The Planning Board's review shall consider the following standards and guidelines:

1. Architectural design of building facades, with special attention to the ground level.
2. Selection and placement of rooftop mechanical equipment, along with the design of penthouses and other features meant to screen such equipment, and any other exterior features within or surrounding the building site.
3. Configuration and design of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular access and egress.
4. Design of open spaces, landscape elements, and modifications to abutting streets and sidewalks, with attention to pedestrian and bicycle circulation and comfort.
5. Any potential impacts on the public realm or on properties outside of the PUD, including but not limited to visual impacts, noise impacts, shadows, and effects on the safety and comfort of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists in the area.
6. Design standards specified in the Final Development Plan and the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.

A summary of relevant design guideline and standards is included in the Appendix.

## **Staff Comments**

The PUD special permit (PB-243, Condition #4a.) requires a “Mixed-Mode Transportation Hub” at the corner of Binney Street and Second Street. A Mixed-Mode Transportation Hub, as described in the zoning for the PUD-3A and PUD-4C districts (Section 13.59.31), is “a facility which shall include a bicycle storage and bicycle service facility, convenient access to a ‘car-sharing’ program, and a shuttle bus stop and a protected waiting area for shuttle buses to public transit facilities.”

The approved Final Development Plan also provides for a building addition to the former Maple Sugar Factory, or a separate structure at the southwestern corner of Binney Street and Second Street. The potential for a pavilion-type building addition is identified in the Final Development Plan as providing the opportunity for the building design to be marked by a unique identity, creating variety and interest to the street.

## **Urban Design**

### Site design and massing

The proposal involves the restoration and adaptive reuse of the former Maple Sugar Factory building, and an addition sited on the northern side of the building, facing Binney Street. The revised design is much more modest in scale compared to earlier iterations and now more closely aligns with the renderings shown to the Planning Board as part of the Final Development Plan approval in 2010.

The “jewel box” addition is more subdued than previous designs and is a playful addition to the existing building. While small in scale, the swooping form and concave footprint, have a strong visual presence and add visual drama to the streetscape. The addition has been carefully sited to ensure that the existing brick façades of the Maple Sugar Factory building are highly visible and prominent. A recessed notch at the junction of the addition and the existing building is particularly successful at maintaining the presence of the historic structure’s masonry details. The contemporary nature of the proposal offsets the more robust, historic brick structure; creating a meaningful juxtaposition between old and new in an evolving urban district. In addition, Staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission support the new design as a welcome development and a great improvement on all previous iterations.

Some possible siting and massing improvements to consider include:

- Further study of the footprint/siting of the addition to understand why it needs to be sited so close to Second Street. Setting the addition back from the curb, to align with the proposed planter in front of the existing building, would provide more sidewalk space on Second Street.

### Façade design

The high degree of transparency, lightness of the structure, and the bridge inspired rooftop, shown in the renderings are quite successful. These are key features of the proposal, so it will be important to ensure that they are maintained as the project advances to the Building Permit phase. While specific construction details are currently unclear, to further enrich the façade design and celebrate the contemporary nature of the addition, the following improvements should be considered:

- Use of structural glass with stainless steel fittings and glass fins. This would increase transparency and lightness, and make the façade unique and seamless as opposed to a traditional curtainwall storefront.
- Provision of glazing details, including visible light transmittance (VLT) and reflectivity. Low iron glass with a very high VLT and low reflectivity should be selected.
- The detailed design of the recessed junction between the addition and the existing building is ambiguous in the renderings; resolution of that detail should be subject to continuing review.

The Mobility Hub is highly visible and contributes to creating an animated streetscape on Binney Street and the through-block connector. The visible green roof, and wood lined soffit, also add visual interest and distinct character to the proposal. A key urban design consideration is to ensure that this space feels as publicly welcoming as possible. The highly transparent glazing will go some way towards addressing these concerns; however, signage and interior design that does not feel like it is part of the surrounding corporate buildings, would help to further activate the Mobility Hub. As the design advances, further study of the following is suggested:

- Developing a public identity and branding strategy that differentiates the Mobility Hub from the corporate context. The Alexandria signage currently shown in the renderings makes the hub feel like an extension of the campus rather than a publicly accessible destination.
- Recessing the lobby entry on the west façade to help further differentiate the Mobility Hub from the entry to the tenant office space.

#### Rooftop mechanical equipment

Mechanical equipment will be located on the rooftop of the existing building. The equipment is proposed to be set back from the façades, in the middle of the roof and appears to be of a scale that is compatible with the building. Rather than adding bulk to the rooftop with a penthouse screen, the proposed approach seems more in line with some of the typical appurtenance on historical building rooftops.

#### Open space, public realm, and pedestrian and bicycle connections

The project continues the existing streetscape design treatment created as part of the Final Development Plan. The addition is set back from Binney Street to accommodate the existing separated bicycle lane, a generous sidewalk space, street trees and landscaping. It is anticipated the moveable tables and chairs will spill out from the Mobility Hub to some of the larger areas of paving, helping to provide color and activate the sidewalk. Situated between 100 Binney Street and the proposal is a through-block pedestrian connection, which carries forward the landscape design intentions of the Final Development Plan.

As the open space and public realm design details are further advanced, areas of potential improvement include:

- Opportunities for the addition to open out to the through block connection with operable walls or windows.
- Where possible, additional street trees on Second Street, filling in the gap at the south-west corner of Binney and Second Streets.

- Further study of the planter on the east side of the existing building to consider incorporating taller plantings and a low seat wall.
- Further study and review of the proposed Second Street transformer indicated on the landscape plans, including whether it should be incorporated into an extended planter bed.

#### Environmental comfort

Shadow and noise studies have been submitted with the design review application materials. Given the scale of the addition, negligible amenity impacts are envisaged.

#### **Economic Development**

Information on the expected hours of operation for the Mobility Hub is requested by staff. Staff highly encourage weekend activity since that area of Binney Street is inactive on the weekends.

#### **Sustainability**

The project is subject to the Alexandria PUD green building requirements, which requires projects to be designed to LEED Silver under the version of LEED currently in effect, LEED v4. The design is currently exceeding this requirement by targeting 79 credit points under the LEED Core and Shell program.

#### **Continuing Review**

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends as items for ongoing design review if the Board decides to approve the design:

- Further information on the visible light transparency and reflectance of all glazing, and detailed drawings of the curtainwall system.
- Review of the internal ground floor layout of the mobility hub and office tenant space to ensure that the level of activation and transparency on all streets is maximized.
- Review of the tenant office entry design and resolution of the junction between the addition and the Maple Sugar Factory building.
- Review of signage details, including development of a branding and public identity signage approach that will set the Mobility Hub apart from the corporate campus.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials wall mock-up on the site prior to any exterior materials being ordered.
- Review of the Maple Sugar Factory building renovation details (including all construction details and materials) and on-site review of masonry restoration by the Cambridge Historical Commission staff.
- Review of all proposed public realm, open space, and streetscape design details, including planter beds and proposed treatment of the electrical transformer.

## Appendix

### Relevant principles from the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines – Transition Areas

#### *Street-level Uses and Design*

1. New buildings should contribute to the character of the existing street.
2. Street-level facades should include active uses such as:
  - Residential entrances
  - Shops, restaurants, and cafes
  - Services for the public or for commercial offices such as fitness centers, cafeterias, daycare centers, etc.
  - Community spaces, such as exhibition or meeting space
  - Art exhibition space/display windows
  - Commercial lobbies and front doors
3. 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
4. Transparent materials and interior lighting should be used to maximize visibility of street level uses. Ground floor facades should be at least 30 to 50 percent transparent.
5. Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.

#### *Building Height and Orientation*

##### Binney Street

1. Set back any portion of the building above 65' by at least 10' from the principal facade.
2. For retail and office uses, build to the lot line or provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces. Setbacks used exclusively for ornamental landscaping are not permitted but may be allowed to accommodate street furniture, street trees, or generous sidewalks. Awnings and canopies are encouraged to provide shelter and enliven the ground floor facade
3. Awnings/ canopies are encouraged to provide shelter and enliven ground floor facades.
4. Driveway turnaround and vehicle drop-off facilities are strongly discouraged on public streets.
5. Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.
6. In use, design, and entry, orient buildings towards corners.

##### Second Street and Linskey Way

1. If the prevailing height of surrounding buildings is 65 feet or less, establish a cornice line that matches the prevailing height of surrounding buildings. For additional height above the cornice line, provide a setback of at least 10 feet from the principal façade.

2. For retail and office uses, build to the lot line or provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces. Setbacks used exclusively for ornamental landscaping are not permitted.
3. Locate loading docks on side streets or service alleys, and away from residential areas.

#### *Scale and Massing*

1. For new development sites, the block size should be similar to the existing East Cambridge blocks. An attempt should be made to reduce the distance that pedestrians have to walk to a crosswalk in order to safely cross the street.
2. Avoid continuous massing longer than 200 feet facing mixed-use and retail streets. If massing extends beyond this length, it should be made permeable and visibly articulated as several smaller masses using different materials or colors, vertical breaks, bays, etc.
3. Buildings should reflect a rhythm and variation appropriate to the urban context. E.g., expressing bay widths of 16 - 25' along residential streets and 25' - 50' along mixed-use streets.
4. Buildings should have a clearly expressed base, middle, and top.
5. Use variations in height and architectural elements such as parapets, cornices and other details to create interesting and varied rooflines and to clearly express the tops of buildings.
6. Emphasize corners using taller elements such as towers, turrets, and bays

#### *Architectural Character*

1. Create varied architecture and avoid flat facades by using recessed or projected entryways, bays, canopies, awnings, and other architectural elements.
2. Vary the architecture of individual buildings to create architecturally diverse districts.
3. Where buildings are set back at upper stories, lower roofs may be used as balconies, balustrades, and gardens.

#### *Environmental Guidelines*

1. Rooftop mechanical equipment should be sited and shielded to protect neighboring uses from noise impacts.

#### *Open Space*

1. The provision of open space of diverse sizes and use is encouraged.
2. The provision of interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections to neighborhoods and to encourage pedestrian movement.
3. Locate new open spaces to create linkages and connect to existing parks and open spaces, where possible.

*Streets and sidewalks*

1. 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.
2. Design streets to encourage pedestrian and cycle activity, and to control vehicle speed in residential areas.
3. Where appropriate, establish, preserve and highlight views from public streets and spaces to important civic landmarks such as the Charles River cable-stayed bridge and the clock tower in Kendall Square
4. Provide pedestrian- scale lighting to enhance pedestrian safety.
5. Refer to the Cambridge Pedestrian Plan and the Cambridge Bicycle Plan for additional guidance on creating a safe and pleasant environment for pedestrians and bicyclists.
6. Provide safe pedestrian crossings at Binney Street.

*Connections and Transportation*

1. Preserve rights of way for future Urban Ring project.
2. Integrate retail and other public activities with any new transit stations.
3. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to future regional pathways.
4. Provide strong pedestrian, bicycle and visual connections to the Charles River and public parks through view corridors, signage, and/or art installations.
5. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing and new bus stops. and to transit stations including Kendall Square, Lechmere, Community College and North Station T stations.
6. Provide safe pedestrian crossings at Binney Street.
7. Provide pedestrian crossings/phases at all major intersections.
8. Provide bicycle lanes on major streets.

**19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]**

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods</li> <li>• Consistency with established streetscape</li> <li>• Compatibility with adjacent uses</li> <li>• Consideration of nearby historic buildings</li> </ul>
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inhabited ground floor spaces</li> <li>• Discouraged ground-floor parking</li> <li>• Windows on ground floor</li> <li>• Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways</li> <li>• Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access</li> </ul>
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location/impact of mechanical equipment</li> <li>• Location/impact of loading and trash handling</li> <li>• Stormwater management</li> <li>• Shadow impacts</li> <li>• Retaining walls, if provided</li> <li>• Building scale and wall treatment</li> <li>• Outdoor lighting</li> <li>• Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)</li> </ul>
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management</li> <li>• Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service</li> <li>• Efficient design (LEED standards)</li> </ul>
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional use focused on existing campuses</li> <li>• Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed</li> <li>• Preservation of historic structures and environment</li> <li>• Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing</li> </ul>
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing as a component of large, multi-building development</li> <li>• Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families</li> </ul>
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development</li> <li>• Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks</li> <li>• Provide wider range of activities</li> </ul>