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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: May 16, 2018

Re: **PB #243 Alexandria PUD Amendment #3 (Major) – Second Hearing  
50 Rogers Street – Design Review (continued)**

**Overview**

On May 22, 2018, the Board will hold the second of two required public hearings on a proposed Major Amendment to the Alexandria Center Planned Unit Development (PUD) Special Permit, PB #243. The PUD Special Permit authorized about 1.5 million square feet of commercial space and 220,000 square feet of required housing. The PUD special permit was granted in 2010 and has been amended two times, most recently in 2018.

The proposal received its preliminary determination from the Planning Board on April 17, 2018 in accordance with PUD approval procedures. The amendment as proposed would not change the aggregate development characteristics of the project, such as the total amount of development, mix of uses or amount of open space. It would authorize the creation of two new lots at the 161 First Street site, one containing a new residential building, which would satisfy the remaining housing requirement, and the other containing the existing commercial building, after demolition of its rear annex. In addition, the project is seeking a Special Permit to locate a driveway within five feet of the property line per Section 6.44.1 of the Zoning Ordinance, because the proposed subdivision will occur along the edge of the service drive for the 161 First Street building. The design of the 50 Rogers Street building had been submitted for review and approval along with the special permit requests, and the Board discussed it in detail during the first hearing. At that hearing, the applicant indicated that the design review for 161 First Street will be submitted separately.

Since the April 17<sup>th</sup> Planning Board Hearing, the applicant's team met with CDD's urban design staff. The intent of that meeting was to further discuss the set of issues raised by the Board and staff at the first hearing.

The purpose of this memo is to comment on the Final Development Plan and the responses provided by the Alexandria Real Estate Equities team, and to provide the Board with comments on the revised design for the new 50 Rogers Street building.

**Major Amendment Review**

Approval of a Major Amendment requires two public hearings and the issuance of a new special permit following the procedures applicable to a new PUD special permit application. However, instead of reviewing the project as a whole, the Planning Board applies the special permit criteria (summarized below) only to the elements of the Final Development Plan that are proposed to be changed.

While the Development Proposal stage is meant to consider the consistency of the proposal as a whole with the plans and guidelines for the area, the Final Development Plan review stage is meant to consider the particular elements of the proposal against those plans and guidelines, to determine if the Final Development Plan is responsive to the comments incorporated by the Planning Board into the Preliminary Determination, and to consider whether additional conditions should be applied to the project if the Major Amendment special permit is granted.

<b>Requested Actions</b>	<b>Summarized Approval Criteria</b> (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
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.
Reduce setback for on grade open parking facilities (Section 6.44.1)	The minimum setback requirement of five (5) feet between the driveway and side property line may be modified if site specific factors favor such modification.
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	The project continues to be consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30 (see appendix).
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43 (see appendix).

**Special Permit Conditions for a PUD Final Development Plan**

Since this proposal is a Major Amendment to the existing Special Permit PB #179 (which has already recorded several Amendments), there is already a detailed set of conditions that control the development process, including requirements for ongoing design review, traffic mitigation and public infrastructure improvements. If the current application is approved, then the current set of conditions would continue to apply, but in granting a Major Amendment the Board could modify, supplement or supersede the previous conditions.

**Comments on Proposed Amendment**

As established in the Board’s Preliminary Determination, the amended plan conforms to the zoning requirements in the PUD-4C district and remains generally consistent with the objectives set forth in the

Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines and the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS). Staff comments on the Final Development Plan therefore focus on the particulars of the proposed changes and how they respond to the Preliminary Determination.

The Final Development Plan includes more detail about the driveway proposed between 161 First Street and 50 Rogers Street to assess the special permit request to waive the driveway setback. It also confirms the conversion of 161 First Street building from a building containing laboratory and life science uses to an office building for innovation and startup companies with 25% of the space made available at below-market rents for qualified tenants. Details regarding flood resiliency are also included in the Development Plan. The Applicant has provided written responses to the additional concerns raised by Board members at the first hearing.

### **Comments on 50 Rogers Street Design Submission**

#### *Planning Board Comments from First Hearing*

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the April 17, 2018 hearing.

- Mixed opinions regarding the appearance of the building:
  - Some liked the façades very much, and felt that the building’s relatively quiet design, combining a regular pattern of openings with varied fenestration infill fenestration and wood panel, is appropriate on this site.
  - Others felt that the design was too restrained, that it should be more interesting, more varied, more modern.
- It was noted that the success of the design will depend on the colors and qualities of the materials. A different grey iron spot brick was suggested.
- The Board felt that the ground floors should be more interesting to walk past, that they felt dull and uninviting.

CDD Staff subsequently met with the Applicant to review proposed design changes. The revised application materials include many refinements, clarify issues raised in the first hearing, and respond to the Planning Board’s comments:

#### *Courtyard and Alley*

- The new drawings include fences and plantings that make it clear that the courtyard is meant to be private, and that the alley is strictly a service alley and private green space, not a pedestrian passage. These changes help to create a clear transition from the public sidewalk to the more private, interior spaces of the project as recommended in the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines.
- The precise arrangements for service and loading at 161 First Street are not yet determined. Staff understands from discussions with the Applicant that the proposed uses in 161 First Street building will need considerably less service than previous uses did. As such, it is recommended that the arrangements for service and loading be designed and located to minimize their impact on the courtyard and on Rogers Street.

*Site Plan and landscape design*

- Street trees have been added to Binney Street, improving the pedestrian environment.
- The courtyard is more lushly landscaped and is separated from the alley by the new fence and planting.

*Façade Refinements*

- The new proposed brick – Sioux City “Ebonite Satin” – is an improvement over the brick that was initially proposed. It is livelier, with more variation and more gleam.
- The brick façades of the upper floors have been enriched with relief and patterns, giving increased detail, shadow, and interest as one approaches the building, while retaining the clarity of the original design. The design improvements include:
  - The double stacked soldier courses just below the cornice are now slightly staggered in plan.
  - The effect of a slightly projecting grid, superimposed over the building’s street façades, has been created by recessing vertical bands of stacked bricks at the sides of each window opening.
  - A “washboard” pattern of alternating courses of inset and flush bricks at the corners of the building.
- The number of the upper floor window openings with wooden infill panels has been increased, and the panels are now more random in size and location.
- The balcony railings now have a random pattern of slightly tilted vertical members, and their color has been changed from black to the silvery window mullion color.
- The roof level cornice has been extended.
- The ground floor is much improved. More wood panels, lattices, and plantings have been added, enhancing the residential feel and pedestrian scale of the building.

Additional refinements could further increase the building’s contribution to a warm and inviting pedestrian experience, increase its affinity with nearby finely detailed existing buildings, strengthen the role of its streetwall in framing the public realm of the street, and further emphasize the building’s residential character. These might include:

- Utilization of more wood at and around building entrances at Rogers and Binney Streets, possibly including the entrance doors.
- Review of details and materials at the parking entrance, including changing the pavement color to grey, considering using wood on the walls rather than striated concrete panels, and lighting.
- Reducing the breadth of the brick panels at the building’s side walls where they meet the street façades at the southeast and northeast corners, to reduce the building’s blocky appearance.
- Additional detail on the façades to add to the character of the building and the liveliness of its façades. This could perhaps include increased variation of the window infill panels, including breaking up the vertically aligned wood panels that extend through the five upper floors, and additional balconies on the street and courtyard façades.

**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 review 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 landscape details, including possible addition of a street tree on Rogers Street, near the northeast corner of the site, and more plantings along the north wall of the courtyard.
- Review of wall materials at the building's pedestrian and vehicular entrances.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details, including a materials mock-up on the site prior to any exterior materials being ordered.