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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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From: Swathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner  
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Date: April 11, 2018

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

### Overview

Following a 2007-2009 rezoning process, the Planning Board in 2010 approved a Planned Unit Development (PUD), now called “Alexandria Center,” for about 1.5 million square feet of commercial space and 220,000 square feet of required housing across several sites along Binney Street. 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 a major amendment in 2018 to permit a bank use and to relocate approved active uses within the PUD.

Last December, after a petition by Alexandria Real Estate Equities (the project owner), the City Council adopted a zoning amendment to exempt up to 10,000 square feet of innovation space, or commercial space set aside for smaller companies on more flexible leases, from floor area limitations if included within the existing commercial building at 161 First Street. Alexandria’s stated intent was to retain that building for commercial use, including innovation space, and to build a new stand-alone residential building to accommodate the second phase of required housing. In the original PUD Final Development Plan from 2010, the 161 First Street building would be converted to residential use and a new addition would be built. The Planning Board made a positive recommendation to the City Council on the zoning amendment.

This proposed PUD amendment, following from the zoning amendment, would authorize the creation of two new lots at the 161 First Street site, one containing 132,231 square feet of residential space in a new building (called 50 Rogers Street), which would satisfy the remaining housing requirement, and the other containing the existing 30,319 square-foot commercial building, after demolishing a rear annex.

Along with this PUD amendment, 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.

Individual buildings in the Alexandria PUD also require design review approval by the Planning Board. The design of the 50 Rogers Street building has been submitted for review and approval along with the special permit requests.

**Amendment Procedure**

Approval of a Major Amendment requires two public hearings, like a PUD Final Development Plan. At the first hearing, the Planning Board reviews the proposal in concept and makes a preliminary determination whether the proposal is generally consistent with the district objectives. If so, the proposal can proceed to a second public hearing, and the Board may request additional study or revisions to the plan; if not, the Board can deny the application. At the second hearing, the Planning Board reviews the additional material and makes a final decision to grant or deny the special permit approving the Final Development Plan or Major Amendment. The criteria for making a positive preliminary determination are summarized in the first row of the table below.

<b>Requested Actions</b>	<b>Summarized Approval Criteria</b> (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Preliminary Determination (First Hearing) – Major Amendment to PUD Special Permit (Section 12.37)	The proposed amendment to the PUD: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conforms with general PUD development controls and district development controls.</li> <li>• Conforms with adopted policy plans or development guidelines for that portion of the city.</li> <li>• Provides benefits to the city which outweigh its adverse effects, considering:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ quality of site design</li> <li>○ traffic flow and safety</li> <li>○ adequacy of utilities and other public works</li> <li>○ impact on existing public facilities</li> <li>○ potential fiscal impact</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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).

### Area Planning and Design Goals

The PUD-4C district has the following purpose as set forth in the Zoning Ordinance (with paragraph breaks and bulleted list added for ease of reading):

*The PUD-4C District is intended to provide for the creation of quality development that enhances the pedestrian experience along Binney Street, creates a transition between commercial development along the Binney Street corridor and residential neighborhoods to the north, and creates large areas of contiguous Public Open Space in the PUD-4C District or in adjacent PUD Districts.*

*As required by Section 13.59, any Final Development Plan in a PUD-4C District containing increased density and heights as described in Sections 13.53.1(4) and 13.54.4 shall*

- minimize noise from rooftop mechanical equipment;*
- contain environmentally sustainable buildings;*
- promote pedestrian usage of the sidewalks and pedestrian connections to public transit, and a sense of neighborhood continuity by providing an interesting, lively and active presence at street level, by requiring a mix of residential, retail and other uses as part of the Final Development Plan and by providing attractive exterior through-block connector space;*
- provide parking which is primarily located underground and is maintained at lower ratios than customarily required by the Zoning Ordinance, so as to eliminate surface parking lots and promote the use of public transportation and other parking and traffic demand measures which will reduce automobile trips;*
- be consistent with the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines dated October 15, 2001; and preserve certain existing structures which add to the character of the neighborhood.*

*Any such Final Development Plan encompassing land area in excess of 10 acres is expected to be constructed over a lengthy period of time of up to 20 years. By meeting these requirements and providing large areas of contiguous Public Open Space, an approved Final Development Plan in the PUD 4C district will promote the goals of the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study dated October 2001 and the public health, safety and welfare.*

The aim of the above-mentioned Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines, which are relevant to the proposed plan changes and the proposed residential building design, is to create consistently high-quality public environments and to ensure that development contributes to the character and vitality of the surrounding community. The urban design goals for the area are:

- Encourage new residential development and conversions of existing buildings to residential use, but allow existing commercial uses to remain.*
- Use finely graduated heights to create transitions in scale from Kendall Square to residential neighborhoods.*
- Create better pedestrian and bicycle connections between residential neighborhoods, Kendall Square, Central Square, and the Charles River.*

A detailed summary of relevant guidelines can be found in the attached appendix.

### **Planning and Zoning – Background**

The City Council adopted the zoning for the PUD-3A and PUD-4C districts in 2009, following a petition by Alexandria and about two years of public discussion on the proposal. The Planning Board granted a special Permit (PB-243) authorizing a Planned Unit Development (PUD) master plan for Alexandria's sites in 2010.

The Final Development Plan, approved in 2010, includes approximately 1.75 million square feet of development across five blocks, with about 1.53 million square feet of commercial space (including at least 20,000 square feet of ground floor retail or "active uses") and 220,000 square feet of required housing. Required contributions from this plan include the conveyance to the City of approximately 2.5 acres of land on two sites, with funding for the design and construction of park improvements on those sites, additional funding to use toward open space in East Cambridge, the conveyance to the City of the Foundry building site, and improvements to Binney Street. Thus far, most permitted development, required land conveyances, and other contributions have been completed. The remaining components of the plan include the adaptive re-use of the existing buildings at 41 Linskey Way and 161 First Street and the second phase of required housing, which would complement the approximately 88,000 square-foot building completed at 270 Third Street. The zoning contains requirements for new housing to include affordable units for low-to-moderate income and middle-income households.

Because the total amount of non-residential development is limited by zoning, the effect of the 2017 zoning amendment was to exempt up to 10,000 square feet of "innovation space" from the total limit on commercial gross floor area. This in turn enabled the existing building at 161 First Street to be retained for commercial use. Any amount of innovation space could be created within the existing building, but only up to 10,000 square feet would be exempt from being counted as part of the commercial GFA allocation for the project.

The "innovation office space" concept has been included in the zoning for several districts near Kendall Square, and was developed as part of the Kendall Square ("K2") Planning Study completed in 2012. As defined in the PUD-4C district (and others), innovation space is leased in increments averaging 200 square feet or less, with no single tenant occupying more than 2,000 square feet, month-to-month lease durations, and shared resources such as co-working spaces, conference rooms, office equipment, and kitchens. These standards are meant to mitigate some typical barriers for smaller and newer businesses that are seeking space. The PUD-4C zoning also contains the following requirement:

*At least twenty-five percent (25%) of the Innovation Office Space shall be set aside as below market rate space. Guidelines for eligible tenants and for determining below market rent shall be prepared by the building owner and approved in concept by the Planning Board prior to the Issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy for (or including) the Innovation Office Space, subject to continuing review of Innovation Office Space marketing and leasing programs by the Community Development Department.*

The zoning amendment did not change the total amount of required housing, so the second phase of required housing will need to include the same amount of residential floor area as in the original plan, which combined new construction with rehabilitation of the existing building.

### **Comments on Proposed Amendment**

The main elements of the approved Final Development Plan remain mostly unchanged by the proposed major amendment. Most building sites, and about 90% of the total project gross floor area, are built or under construction. The public benefits that were negotiated as part of the original rezoning, with the exception of the second phase of housing, have been delivered. The changes to the plan will not substantially affect the transportation impact studies that were previously completed for the project (additional comment on transportation issues is provided in a separate memo from the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department). Therefore, the effects of the proposed amendment are limited to the built form and character of the 161 First Street / 50 Rogers Street portion of the development. Given its size, one of the more surprising aspects of this project is that it has developed relatively quickly with few changes from what was originally permitted.

As in the original plan, the proposed building at 50 Rogers Street will be a positive contribution to East Cambridge. It expands Cambridge's housing inventory, reinforces Rogers and Binney Streets, and responds sympathetically to adjoining and nearby existing buildings.

The proposed amendment changes the treatment of the space between the existing and new buildings on the site. In the approved Final Development Plan, the new building was proposed to be attached to the west side of the existing building at 161 First Street with both buildings accommodating residential units. A shared courtyard was proposed, framed by the connected buildings, forming the center of the complex and linked to both Binney and Rogers Streets by wide landscaped covered passages. The PUD depicted the courtyard and the passages as parts of the "Public Realm" and designated the courtyard as a "destination node," but elsewhere described it as a private space.

In the amendment, the two buildings will be separated by a driveway proposed along the property line of 161 First Street to its west and abutting the interior courtyard of the building at 50 Rogers Street. The driveway for 161 First Street is proposed to have a new curb cut on Rogers Street, in addition to another new curb cut to access the garage below the building at 50 Rogers Street. The plans show the removal of the existing curb cut on Binney Street, which implies that the loading access and egress to 161 First Street will be from the north.

These changes do not seem to create inherent difficulties, assuming that 161 First Street has only minimal loading needs. However, the elimination of the upper level connections between 50 and 161 will make the courtyard feel much more open to the public. The alley appears to be publicly accessible as a shortcut through the block, and the courtyard opens directly onto it. Yet the residential units and building lobby open directly onto the courtyard, suggesting that it is intended as a private space for the residents of the building. The design of this interstitial space should be studied to resolve which areas are intended to be publicly beneficial and which are intended to be for the private enjoyment of residents. (This issue is also discussed in the design review comments further below.)

### *Additional Information*

In order to assess the proposal more fully, it would be helpful to see more detail about the driveway proposed between 161 First Street and 50 Rogers Street. This is also important in assessing the special

permit request to waive the driveway setback. If the plans are accurate in showing the closure of the curb cut on Binney Street, it is unclear whether the proposed driveway needs to extend the entire depth of the block. The arrangements for loading at 161 First Street should also be clarified as the major amendment does not address this change, and loading activities could impact the adjacent residential use. It would also be helpful to clarify whether pedestrian access to the interior courtyard of 50 Rogers Street from Binney Street will be available via this driveway (or some other route).

While it seems that the design and programming of the 161 First Street building (which will be subject to future design review) is not yet resolved, some additional details would be helpful for discussion at the second hearing. The proposal does not explain what proportion of 161 First Street is intended to be innovation space, and does not discuss guidelines for the 25% below-market space. It is also recommended to provide a conceptual rendering of the west façade of the renovated building (after the annex is demolished) to understand the quality of the proposed interior courtyard and the patterns of access and egress. It is unclear whether the existing pedestrian access (both steps and ramp) to 161 First Street on the west side will be retained and how it will be integrated with the proposed driveway.

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

#### **Site Layout:**

The proposed building at 50 Rogers Street fills most of its site; the site layout is primarily concerned with the pedestrian streetscape, the courtyard, vehicular entry, and the relatively narrow landscaped zones at the eastern and western portions of its parcel.

- As noted above, understanding how the west façade of 161 First Street will be designed is important to understand how it will relate to the other three façades of the courtyard.
- As also discussed above, further details are required to resolve whether the courtyard is proposed to be open to the general public or intended primarily for residents' use and enjoyment. Consideration should be given to introducing landscape elements, and possibly also adjustments to the building's architecture, to give the courtyard more privacy and to give the courtyard and alley more distinctly different characters.
- Further study of the Binney and Rogers Street streetscapes should include the consideration of additional street trees on both Binney and Rogers Streets, to achieve a regularity and spacing more consistent with the approved Final Development Plan. The width of the Rogers Street sidewalk should also be clarified to ensure that it complies with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA) in areas where street trees are proposed.

#### **Built Form:**

The simple massing of the proposed 50 Rogers Street building reinforces the streetwall on Binney and Rogers Streets, complements the existing building at 161 First Street, and contrasts positively with the more complex massing of the Church of the Latter Day Saints Meeting House. The building's street façades are quite successful, combining a simple repetitive pattern of openings with varied configurations of fenestration, opaque panels, and balconies within those openings. The façades relate

well to those of the Archstone Kendall Square building and 161 First Street, and to other historical manufacturing buildings in the area. In addition, the variation in the fenestration and the thin projecting edges of the openings are consistent with the *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines*, and provide visual enrichment compatible with the masonry and fenestration details of the older buildings in the area.

- To further emphasize the relative privacy of the courtyard, opportunities to further highlight the difference in character between the building's street façades and the courtyard façades should be explored. In addition to more balconies, the use of bay windows, other projections, or changes of plane to give the latter a more varied and three-dimensional expression and residential character would be beneficial.
- To strengthen the building's contribution to the continuity of the street walls, further consideration should be given to creating a more pronounced difference between the building's street façades and its side façades, perhaps by reducing the widths of the side façades' solid wall panels at building corners.
- At the ground floor, consideration should be given to creating more difference between the building's street façades and the side façades. For instance, a more three-dimensional treatment of the side façades would both emphasize the frontality of the street façades and would help screen residential windows and mechanical room doors from oblique views.
- Additional ways to enliven the Rogers Street lobby façade and the façade of the ground floor Activity Room on Binney Street should be explored. To the greatest extent possible, these street frontages should be given a warmer, and more welcoming residential character.
- To further enhance the pedestrian experience on Rogers Street, consideration should be given to relocating the overhead parking door to the building's north façade to hide the ramp from public view. Furthermore, the extent of blank wall along Rogers Street should be reviewed. The potential to relocate some of the ground floor mechanical space to the basement should be studied.
- While the design guidelines encourage residential stoops and entrances at the ground floor, further study of the transitions between the ground floor units on the east side of the building and Binney Street and the alley is recommended. Opportunities for additional landscaping, screening, etc., should be considered.
- Though this site is not identified as an "active use" site in the original PUD plan, consideration should be given to designing portions of the Binney Street ground floor to accommodate retail in the future if there is increased demand.
- As recommended in the design guidelines, consideration should be given to adding a cornice at roof level, both to cap the wall, and to relate to the cornices of 161 First Street and the Meeting House.
- Further review of all exterior materials and colors will be important as the project advances. The addition of the blue accents and warmer, wood elements creates a pleasing contrast with the charcoal brick. Details of material colors, finishes and joints are often difficult to accurately render, and best reviewed by looking at samples or actual materials. With the Board setting a general direction, staff can monitor the material colors and finishes as part of continuing design review.

**Continuing Review:**

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends be further studied by the Applicant.

- The relationship between 50 Rogers Street and 161 First Street.
  - The alley's character and landscape design.
  - The alley's arrangements for loading, service, and building entry, and their impact on the residents of 50 Rogers Street and on the general public.
  - The landscape treatment of the relationship between the courtyard and the alley.
  - The design of the façades of 50 Rogers Street and 161 First Street that face the courtyard and the alley.
- The design of 50 Rogers Street's ground floor façades on Binney and Rogers Streets.
- The number and location of street trees, and the width of the Rogers Street sidewalk.
- Provide notes for planting, fences, paving, clearances, seating, paving, etc.