



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Community Development Department

To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: November 4, 2020
RE: Canal District Kendall (PUD-CDK) Revisions Response Memo

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Overview

On September 15, 2020, the Planning Board held a public hearing on the Canal District Kendall (PUD-CDK) Zoning Petition. The Petition would establish a new overlay district to the east of Third Street between the Broad Canal and Linskey Way. The overlay district would, among other things, enable additional commercial gross floor area (GFA) and the redevelopment of a vacant parcel known as the Constellation Site (Parcel C), as well as an adjacent parcel containing an Eversource Gas Transfer Station (GTS). New development within the PUD-CDK would be incentivized to relocate the GTS site in exchange for greater allowable GFA. All new development within the PUD-CDK would require the inclusion of an arts and culture space as a component.

At the public hearing, after hearing testimony from the Petitioner (BMR Realty), City staff, and members of the public, several Planning Board members expressed general support for the proposal but Planning Board members also raised some concerns about the specifics of the Zoning Petition. Since that time, the Petitioner has met with CDD staff to review these concerns and offer revisions to the Petition text. CDD staff have reviewed these revisions and this memorandum provides some comments to assist the Board in its consideration. Overall, the proposed revisions are responsive to many of the Planning Board's concerns. There may be an opportunity for additional improvements as the Petition is further refined.

Planning Board Concerns

Concerns raised by the Planning Board at the September 15th public hearing included:

- There was no explanation of the development plan that would be enabled by the Petition if the GTS site is not included;
- City planning documents, such as the Kendall Square (“K2”) Study, are not referenced to guide the Planning Board’s review of a development proposal;
- The proposed open space requirement (15%) is lower than the open space that exists currently within the district and that is required in nearby areas;
- A “Transportation Assessment” is proposed in lieu of the typically required Transportation Impact Study (TIS) per Section 19.20 of the Zoning Ordinance;
- There is no maximum off-street parking requirement as recommended in K2 and incorporated in other recent rezoning in this area of the City;
- The proposed building height exemption for interstitial mechanical floors could result in unpredictable heights;
- It was unclear why the size of the arts and culture component of new development should be contingent upon the overall gross floor area permitted by a PUD-CDK special permit;
- In general, language inconsistencies should be “cleaned up” in the proposed language.

Proposed Revisions

Since that time, Zoning & Development Staff met with the Petitioner to discuss these concerns and review proposed revisions to the Petition language. The Petitioner has submitted proposed revisions to the original Petition text, dated October 20, 2020, which are included in the Planning Board’s packet. In addition to some language clarification and consolidation, these revisions provide the following substantive changes:

1. “Transportation Assessment” Concept (13.202.3(g) and 13.205.2.5) – The reference to a “Transportation Assessment” being submitted in lieu of a TIS is deleted. The required transportation submissions would be consistent with other redevelopment areas in Kendall Square.
2. Submittal Requirements (13.202.3 and 13.202.7) – Some submittal requirements are removed or amended. Because a Development Proposal is expected to include a single building site, submissions that are more appropriate to a multi-site, phased master plan development could unnecessarily complicate the Planning Board’s review. Some items that were removed, such as a management plan for parking and loading, would still be expected as an element of project review. The requirement for a pre-application conference with the Planning Board is also deleted, which would make it optional for the developer. For a single building site that has

undergone a rezoning process, it may be unnecessary to require a pre-application conference in addition to required community engagement meetings and two Planning Board public hearings prior to approval.

3. Reference to City Planning Documents (13.202.4) – A new paragraph (g) is included in the *PUD-CDK Special Permit Criteria*, which requires that any proposed development is consistent with the objectives set forth in K2, K2 Design Guidelines, and the Connect Kendall Square Open Space Plan (collectively, the “PUD-CDK Guidelines and Principles”). This section also includes reference to the recommendations of the Mayor’s Arts Task Force (2019) in evaluating the Arts and Culture Center.
4. Arts and Culture Center (13.204.1(b)) – The language has been simplified to require an “Arts and Culture Center” as part of any new development, rather than separately requiring a “Community Arts Use” in the case of a smaller project. The concept would still scale the size of the proposed Arts and Culture Center based on the overall gross floor area permitted by a PUD-CDK special permit as illustrated in the chart after #5 below. The new language also states that the Planning Board would need to determine that the size is “in approximate proportion” to the new commercial GFA. The implication is that a project with a commercial GFA of 420,000 square feet would include an Arts and Culture Center of approximately 30,000 square feet, and a project with a commercial GFA of 525,000 square feet would include an Arts and Culture Center of approximately 40,000 square feet.
5. Development Permitted under “GTS” and “non-GTS” scenarios (13.204.1(c)) – The revised petition still effectively allows two alternative development scenarios. The revised language clarifies that the maximum commercial GFA for new development (which is reduced from 550,000 square feet to 525,000 square feet) is permitted only if the site includes a substantial part or all of the GTS site, not for an “appropriate pedestrian corridor” to Third Street. The limit on allowable new development in the PUD-CDK without the GTS site is reduced from 450,000 square feet to 420,000 square feet of gross floor area.

	New GFA Permitted (sf)	Arts & Culture Center Size (sf)
Original Petition – Without GTS site	450,000	15,000
Original Petition – With GTS site	550,000	30,000
Revised Petition – Without GTS site	Up to 420,000	15,000-30,000
Revised Petition – With GTS site	Over 420,000 and up to 525,000	30,000-40,000

6. Building Height (13.204.3) – The height exemption for interstitial mechanical floors is removed from the text, making the standards for calculating building height consistent with citywide standards. The height limit is simplified to be 250 feet in all cases, subject to Planning Board approval, rather than varying based on the development scenario. Also, a provision limiting heights to 85 feet within 10 feet of the edge of Third Street is included, which was originally in the Letter of Commitment but is more appropriate to include in zoning.
7. Open Space Requirement (13.204.5) – The required minimum open space is increased from 15% to 20%. This figure is closer to the existing open space in the district and comparable with the minimum requirement in other redevelopment areas, such as North Point.
8. Parking Maximums (13.205.2.2) – Maximum off-street parking ratios are included for office and laboratory uses and retail uses, which are consistent with the rates recommended in K2.

There may be an opportunity to further clean up this language, and the Planning Board should consider recommending that CDD staff conduct a careful review of the text prior to adoption. The following are some minor issues that may benefit from further review:

1. Sections 13.202.6 and 13.206.1 contain language related to the applicability of PUD requirements across multiple sites, or among multiple PUD special permits that affect a given site. This type of language has raised concerns with Board members in the past because it presumes outcomes that are ordinarily reviewed and approved by the Planning Board on a case-by-case basis. Under normal PUD procedures, the Board has latitude to approve PUD special permit amendments that would resolve ambiguities or inconsistencies.
2. In Section 13.203, the language for allowed retail uses should be reviewed against the retail use zoning petition that is currently under consideration, which is intended to address some of the current zoning impediments affecting retail uses.