



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: July 6, 2017
Re: **PB #179, North Point PUD Minor Amendment 7 and Parcel Q1 Design Review**

Background

The North Point Planned Unit Development (PUD) is an approved 45-acre, 5+ million square foot development project planned to be built out through 2030. The Final Development Plan was first approved 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 (proposed by the current developer, DivcoWest) was granted by the Planning Board on July 26, 2016.

DivcoWest is currently seeking Minor Amendment approval for modest changes to the Final Development Plan pertaining to the boundaries of Parcels Q1, Q2 and R, a minor increase in allowable GFA for Parcel Q1, and the phasing of traffic mitigation requirements. DivcoWest also seeks design review approval for a retail and office building on Parcel Q1. 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.

This memo summarizes the key areas of focus associated with the requested minor amendments and the design review. Comments from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) are forthcoming.

Requested Minor Amendments

Per the general PUD provisions in Section 12.37 of the Zoning Ordinance, the Planning Board must determine whether changes to the Final Development Plan may be approved as minor amendments. The following guidance is provided:

(12.37.2) Minor amendments are changes which do not alter the concept of the PUD in terms of density, floor area ratio, land usage, height, provision of open space, or the physical relationship of elements of the development. Minor amendments shall include, but not be limited to, small changes in the location of buildings, open space, or parking; or realignment of minor streets.

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Various conditions of the special permit decision (PB-179, as most recently amended) provide some guidance to determine what changes would constitute minor amendments, some of which relate to these requests.

- Condition 10-b. provides that the “metes and bounds” of each parcel will be established at the time of design review. Minor variations in parcel boundaries, provided that they are generally consistent with the approved development plan as a whole, are typically approved as part of the design review process, though it is helpful for the Board to accept a revised master plan to ensure consistency in future phases of development.
- Condition 12-c.-(i) provides that variations of less than 10% in the GFA of a “Block” may be approved through design review. While the proposed change is approximately 26% of the approved GFA on parcel Q1, it is still a relatively small amount of GFA given that Q1 is much smaller than most development sites, and only about 2% of the total approved GFA on the “block” containing sites Q1 and Q2. Therefore it would be within reason for the Board to consider the change to be minor. The main consideration related to Q1, set forth in Condition 12-c.-(iv), is that the allowed 75,000 square feet of retail GFA on sites I, N, Q1, R and W may not be eliminated or relocated from those sites without a major amendment.
- Condition 12-e. provides that changes to the phasing of the development plan may be approved as minor amendments. Since this request is to amend the phasing of required mitigation relative to the phasing of the development, it is important to consider the potential impact on earlier phases of development if those transportation improvements are not completed. Further comment may be provided by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.

If the Board determines that the changes are minor, then the Board may approve the minor amendment on the affirmative vote of five Planning Board members.

Parcel Q1 Design Review

The third retail building to be considered by the Board is sited prominently at the corner of the extension of First Street and North Point Boulevard. The site forms part of the new retail corridor, which will extend from Lechmere Station, to the end of First Street. Unlike the other retail pavilions on Parcels I and W, which are a part of the public realm, Parcel Q1 is proposed to have a traditional urban street wall condition. In addition, the second floor of the Q1 building will be dedicated to office use.

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. 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 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 the open spaces on Parcel I*

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

Staff Comments

The design of this modest retail and office building is consistent with the design guidelines. The building follows the same design approach used for the two nearby Parcel W pavilions, which were recently granted design review approval by the Board. Like the Parcel W buildings, this is a four-sided structure with public view possible from each side. The use of stained cedar siding adds warmth to the design and helps the structure relate to the distinctive setting. The awnings also add color and provide a human scaled element across the facades. High levels of transparency are provided with the majority on the street facades and a lesser amount provide to the side and rear, which will also be pedestrian walkways. Staff is satisfied with the conceptual options proposed for the public engagement wall on the south façade, although this should be subject to continuing review as further design details become available.

The streetscape design is consistent with the approach used throughout North Point. The building is set back from North Point Boulevard and First Street to enable a wide sidewalk, as well as provide for a strong green connection to North Point Common. While a temporary condition is proposed until the station plaza is designed, staff is confident that the future design of Parcel Q2 and the plaza will be well coordinated with Q1.

Continuing review

It is anticipated that design details will be refined as the project advances. 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 and streetscape design details
- Review of the interior layout of the retail space and storefront curtain wall design to ensure that optimum levels of transparency between interior activities and pedestrian activity on sidewalks, are provided. The clarity of the glass, including minimizing coatings, tints and reflectivity of the ground floor facades, is an important component of this review.
- Opportunities to create more three-dimensional relief across the facades, such as further expressing structural bays, and careful attention to the detailing of openings and changes in materials.
- Opportunities to include potential building entrances that open directly onto First Street.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details.
- Review and further study of the public engagement wall proposed for the south façade.

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 coordinated and incorporated into the building's architecture

Open Spaces

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.

North Point Boulevard

North Point Boulevard is an important east-west connector linking North Point to North Point Park. The distinguishing character of North Point Boulevard is that it is lined continuously with the multi-use path on one side and also borders North Point Common, the retail plaza, and Parcel I Park. Street trees will be planted on both sides of the street where possible, and the design of the Somerville Community Path should be handled as a part of the street and sidewalk section of North Point Boulevard.

Wayfinding

- Provide appropriate and approved wayfinding signage for bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles.
- Provide information kiosks that show walking and biking distances to major destinations such as Lechmere Station, Community College Station, North Point Park, etc.
- Accommodate the installation of real-time transit and Hubway monitors/screens where feasible

MBTA Facilities

- The open spaces on parcels Q and R should be vibrant, active, safe public spaces for people, designed with an eye to accommodating multimodal transportation needs such as benches and shade for pedestrians, shelters for bus riders, covered and uncovered bicycle parking for cyclists, on-street parking for motorists, safe site lighting and wayfinding signage for all
- The plazas should be made universally accessible

Parcel Q1 Block Guidelines

- The design of the building should recognize its significant presence on the corner of North First Street and North Point Boulevard and the role of green connectivity down First Street to North Point Common
- In designing these buildings, it is important to shape them to maintain visual connections to North Point Common from First Street and the Retail Square
- Special consideration should be made to the relationship to the MBTA Green line viaduct to the south
- The configuration shall positively use the orientation and exposure to sun by means of balconies, terraces and bay windows and minimize shadows on parks and surrounding buildings
- Special corner treatment should be considered on North Point Boulevard and North First Street
- The building design shall give special consideration to the streetscape, scale and character of First Street and the retail plaza; retail frontage should be maximized along all sides with a high level of transparency

- Second floor terraces for restaurant seating are encouraged
- These structures should have interesting roofscape as they will be highly visible from the majority of the buildings at North Point
- Building design shall accommodate new T Station to positively define the public realm. It should contribute to the activities, character and the scale of proposed Lechmere Square
- Building design shall accommodate the activities of First Street that is designed as a major transit transfer and retail hub. It shall give special attention to interface with the T line to reduce noise and vibration by thoughtful building design and acoustical treatments.
- The building mass on First Street will be set back from the street to allow for gracious sidewalks