

July 9, 2012 (updated)

Kendall/Central Square planning study

Review comments on the Forest City proposal to rezone and redevelop portions of the 300 block of Massachusetts Avenue

- Building form/height
 - Shadow impacts
 - The proposed building puts Massachusetts Avenue in shadow, though not more than do adjacent existing buildings. New shadow impacts on Jill Brown-Rhone Park appear negligible, occurring mainly during relatively short morning periods during winter months.
 - Scale compatibility with context; Architectural expression
 - The proposed streetwall height of no more than 65 feet for at least 60% of Massachusetts Avenue frontage (with additional stories set back at least 25 feet from the façade) is appropriate, establishing a relationship to traditional Central Square building heights to the west. The remaining 40% of the approx. 250' frontage translates into about 100' width for the taller massing component proposed on Massachusetts Avenue. This width is in scale with the facade of Forest City's existing building at Sidney and Mass Ave, and just two-thirds the width of the old Necco building, so will overall have a vertical reading in scale with context, which will help maintain a sense of variety along Massachusetts Avenue.
 - The height of the building is appropriate in the context of other taller buildings flanking Massachusetts Avenue east of Lafayette

Square, but should not be interpreted as a precedent for building heights west of Lafayette Square.

- Architectural composition of the building, particularly its portions rising above the 65' streetwall setback, should emphasize variation in form and avoid a monolithic appearance. The gradual curve of the penthouse form evident in the concept illustrations helps achieve this goal. Additional or alternative strategies to consider toward this goal include other variations of the facade profile and/or roofline, as well as introducing at least one significant variation in material, plane, color etc. for every 100' horizontal length.
- Mitigating amenity loss from existing sites
 - Accommodate the All Asia bar/music venue, any other valued businesses/tenants on the 300 Mass Ave block in alternative locations in Central Square or other location amenable to the business owner.
- Contribution to walkable street network
 - Massachusetts Avenue
 - The building's proposed ground floor retail is very much welcomed as a means to create a more continuous retail environment between Lafayette Square and existing retail at the Novartis development, benefiting community members as well as retail business prospects. Widening the existing sidewalk area to accommodate outdoor dining, retail or similar use associated with active ground floor uses is strongly encouraged. The addition of this space and programming should not diminish the width of existing clear sidewalk passage open to pedestrians. Street trees and sidewalk paving should be added and/or improved where needed.
 - Blanche Street
 - Consolidation of loading into 3 bays, with street trees along most of the street, is a real improvement over the proposed 2011 redevelopment scheme. However, the proposal should include a strategy to activate the apparent blank ground floor wall areas,

preferably through provision of transparent windows onto active interior uses. Street trees and sidewalk paving should be added and/or improved wherever possible.

- Green Street
 - The proposed pocket park along Green Street is welcomed as a means of introducing public space, trees and plantings along a street that typically lacks these amenities. The proposed office space with windows facing the park is well-intentioned, and would help keep the park active and safe, but offers an unconventional floor configuration for office space. Provide an example of a potential tenant for this space.
- Use mix
 - We applaud the intent of the previous Forest City development proposal to include housing development in connection with commercial development. We strongly encourage Forest City to propose housing development in the Central Square area, in association with this commercial development proposal, on an appropriate site and with appropriate form and program. Creating this housing would help address the need for additional housing choices – as evident from stated community goals as well as housing inventory data – in the Central Square area and in Cambridge as a whole. The added housing would also help support the additional community-expressed goals of neighborhood-oriented retail and active public parks and sidewalks.
- Transportation impacts
 - The proposed project location takes advantage of MBTA transit services in Central Square and along Massachusetts Avenue, and EZ-Ride services linking University Park and Kendall Square.
 - The ability of the project to take advantage of existing structured parking spaces shared with other uses, with no new parking developed, is very positive, helping preserve opportunity for additional pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development in the area.