



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

NOTICE OF DECISION

Case Number:	PB-402
Address:	815 Somerville Avenue (818 Somerville Avenue)
Zoning:	Business C (BC)
Applicant:	SA815 Equity Partners, LLC 296 Concord Road, Suite 100, Billerica, MA 01821
Owner:	KS Partners, LLC 296 Concord Road, Suite 100 Billerica, MA 01821
Application Date:	January 25, 2024
Date of Planning Board Public Hearing:	February 27, 2024
Date of Planning Board Decision:	February 27, 2024
Date of Filing Planning Board Decision:	April 25, 2024
Application:	Special permit to modify Building and Site Plan Requirements (Section 19.51.2) to alter an existing building in excess of 25,000 square feet to accommodate a new use.
Decision:	GRANTED with conditions.

Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17 of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after filing of the above referenced decision with the City Clerk. Copies of the complete decision and final plans, if applicable, are on file with the Community Development Department and the City Clerk.

Authorized Representative of the Planning Board: Swaathi Joseph

For further information concerning this decision, please contact Swaathi Joseph at 617-349-4668, or sjoseph@cambridgema.gov.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED

Application Documents and Supporting Material

1. Special Permit Application dated 1/12/2024, containing Special Permit Cover Sheet, Dimensional Form, Ownership Certificate, Narrative, Community Outreach Summary, and plan set titled 815 Somerville Ave Proposed Conversion, prepared by EMBARC, dated 12/22/2023.
2. Presentation slides shown to the Planning Board on 2/27/2024.

City of Cambridge Documents

3. Memorandum to the Planning Board from James Wilcox, City Engineer, Department of Public Works (DPW), dated 2/20/2024.
4. Memorandum to the Planning Board from Community Development Department (CDD) staff, dated 2/21/2024.

Other Documents

5. Email communication to the Planning Board from Ethan Frank, dated 2/24/2024.

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The existing, three-story, approximately 27,000 square-foot office building previously occupied by Lesley University will be renovated for office/lab uses with no changes to the existing building footprint or height. Off-street parking will be reduced from eighteen (18) spaces to five (5) spaces. The rooftop will be retrofitted for new mechanical equipment.

FINDINGS

After review of the Application Documents and other documents submitted to the Planning Board, testimony given at the public hearing, and review and consideration of the applicable requirements and criteria set forth in the Zoning Ordinance with regard to the relief being sought, the Planning Board makes the following Findings:

1. Special Permit for Building and Site Plan Requirements (Section 19.50)

19.51.2.3 A project that does not comply with the requirements of this Section 19.50 shall not receive a building permit until a Special Permit is granted by the Planning Board. The Planning Board shall grant such special permit only upon finding that the project is consistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

The Board finds that the Project on the whole is consistent with the City's Urban Design Objectives, as further detailed below.

19.31 New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.

The reuse of an existing building helps to maintain the prevailing pattern of development in the neighborhood.

19.32 Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.

The Project will reduce its off-street parking spaces from eighteen (18) to five (5), and will incorporate transportation demand management (TDM) measures which help to encourage commuting by walking, biking and transit. The ground story of the Project, which is currently vacant, will consist of office space that is visible from the street and helps to bolster street-level activity. An additional 3,888 square feet of commercial space will be added to the ground story by reducing existing off-street parking.

19.33 The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.

The Project includes a visual and acoustical screen wall around the proposed mechanical equipment, which will mitigate any potential adverse impacts on neighboring properties. The proposed transformer will be incorporated within the footprint of the building, and all refuse and recyclables will be stored within the building to minimize potential visual impacts. To minimize any potential light trespass on neighboring properties, the Project will not add new windows to the facades of the building facing residential properties to the east and north.

19.34 Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.

The Project does not propose altering or adding any new municipal infrastructure connections and will continue to be served by an existing 3” water line and 4” sanitary sewer line. No new impervious area will be created as part of the Project and there will be no new increase in stormwater runoff rates. The Project is designed to meet all of the City’s flood resilience standards.

19.35 New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.

No new construction is proposed.

19.36 Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.

The Project involves the conversion of an existing general office use to a laboratory use, and no residential dwelling units are being removed or added by the proposal.

19.37 Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.

The Project is currently a zero lot line condition, and the existing building footprint will not change as a result of this proposal. There is currently no open space on the site and no open space is proposed to be removed or added.

19.38 Development should be resilient to the effects of climate change as anticipated in the Resilient Cambridge plan published by the City.

The Project is designed to meet all of the City’s climate resilience standards, including the City’s flood resilience standards and Green Factor standard. The Project is subject to the City’s Green Building requirements in Section 22.20 and is targeting a LEED v4 Gold certification with 61 credit points.

2. General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit (Section 10.43)

The Planning Board finds that the project meets the General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit, as set forth below.

10.43 Criteria. Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:

(a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or ...

With the requested relief, the project will meet all requirements of the Zoning Ordinance.

- (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or ...*

The project will not generate congestion, hazard, or result in a substantial change in established neighborhood character. The project proposes a voluntary transportation demand management program to encourage employees to commute to and from the site by transit, biking or walking.

- (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or ...*

The project is bounded by similarly sized commercial and residential buildings. As described above, the project will mitigate potential noise and visual impacts of proposed rooftop equipment through the use of a visual and acoustic mechanical screenwall.

- (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or ...*

No nuisance or hazard will be created by the project.

- (e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and ...*

The adaptive reuse of an existing, vacant office building for permitted laboratory use will not impair the integrity of the zoning district or detract from the existing, mixed-use character of the area.

- (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.*

As described above, the Board finds that the project is consistent with the City's Urban Design Objectives as set forth in Section 19.30.

DECISION

Based on a review of the Application Documents, testimony given at the public hearing, and the above Findings, the Planning Board hereby GRANTS the requested Special Permit subject to the following conditions and limitations. Hereinafter, for purposes of this Decision, the Permittee shall mean the Applicant for the requested Special Permits and any successor or successors in interest.

1. All use, building construction, and site plan development shall be in substantial conformance with the Application Documents and other supporting materials submitted to the Planning Board, except as modified by the additional Conditions of this Special Permit Decision. The project plans hereby approved by the Planning Board are the plan set titled 815 Somerville Ave Proposed Conversion prepared by EMBARC, dated 12/22/2023. Appendix I summarizes the dimensional features of the project as approved.
2. The Planning Board approves the use as described and depicted in the Application Documents, specifically Technical office for research and development, laboratory & research facility (Section 4.34.f). Any other use shall require approval from the Planning Board.
3. The project shall be subject to continuing design review by the Community Development Department (“CDD”). Before issuance of each Building Permit for the project, CDD shall certify to the Superintendent of Buildings that the final plans submitted to secure the Building Permit are consistent with and meet all conditions of this Decision. As part of CDD’s administrative review of the project, and prior to any certification to the Superintendent of Buildings, CDD may present any design changes made subsequent to this Decision to the Planning Board for its review and comment.
4. The Permittee shall address the following comments through the continuing design review process set forth above. Each of the below items shall be subject to CDD review and approval of the final design details prior to issuance of a Building Permit:
 - a. Brick and mortar selection for changes to the Somerville Avenue façade.
 - b. Design of the revised masonry and first floor fenestration.
 - c. Design of the recessed area for the gas meters.
 - d. Design of louvers in the first-floor façade.
 - e. Design of overhead grills or doors.
 - f. Tenant improvements that would be visible to the public, including window treatments and additional mechanical equipment.
 - g. Height, layout, color, material, and acoustical properties of mechanical screening.
 - h. Potential bicycle parking.
 - i. Proposed signage.
 - j. Exterior lighting details.
 - k. Control of light trespass from interior spaces.
 - l. Repairs and improvements to the sidewalk and potential curbside street trees.

5. If tree plantings are proposed in the public right-of-way as part of continuing design review with CDD staff, the tree plantings shall occur in accordance with the Tree Planting Standards and the Urban Forestry Master Plan, subject to approval by the Department of Public Works (DPW).
6. The Permittee shall implement the voluntary Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures as first proposed in the memorandum from Vanasse & Associates, Inc. on Page 16 of Volume III of the Application Documents, and as modified in the CDD staff memo to the Planning Board dated February 21, 2024 and agreed to by the Permittee. These measures shall be subject to monitoring by the City's Parking & Transportation Demand (PTDM) Officer:
 - a. Charge market rates for parking, separate from building area lease costs.
 - b. Require that tenants charge employees directly for parking at market rate.
 - c. Require that employees will be charged by the day rather than by the month to promote flexibility in mode choice.
 - d. To share sustainable transportation information with site users, provide a centrally located bulletin board with sustainable transportation information including transit routes and schedules, pedestrian routes, and bicycle parking locations and routes.
 - e. Require that tenants provide a 100 percent subsidy towards an MBTA pass up to the federal fringe benefit limit via a pre-tax deduction program. The pass will cover bus, subway, and commuter rail services.
 - f. Require tenants to provide a Gold-Level Bluebikes membership to employees to encourage commuting by bicycle. Employees can use any of the Bluebikes stations located nearby, such as the Porter Square Station, the Lesley University Station, or the Wilson Square Station.
 - g. Require tenants to provide flexible work schedules to encourage employees to access the site during off-peak times and work from home when possible.
 - h. Require tenants to provide up-to-date information explaining all commute options and sustainable transportation benefits to new employees as part of their orientation.
7. Throughout design development and construction, the project shall conform to the Green Building Requirements set forth in Section 22.20 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. CDD shall certify that the applicable requirements are met prior to issuance of a Building Permit, and again prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, for development authorized by this Special Permit.
8. All authorized development shall abide by all applicable City of Cambridge Ordinances, including the Noise Ordinance (Chapter 8.16 of the City Municipal Code).

Voting in the affirmative to grant the requested Special Permits were Planning Board Members H Theodore Cohen, Mary Lydecker, Tom Sieniewicz, Ashley Tan, and Associate Members Diego Macias and Adam Westbrook, appointed by the Vice-Chair to act on the case, constituting at least two thirds of the members of the Board.

For the Planning Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Sieniewicz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tom Sieniewicz, Vice-Chair

A copy of this decision PB-402 shall be filed with the Office of the City Clerk. Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17, Chapter 40A, Massachusetts General Laws, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after the date of such filing in the Office of the City Clerk.

ATTEST: A true and correct copy of the above decision has been filed on April 25, 2024 with the Office of the City Clerk, by Swaathi Joseph, duly authorized representative of the Planning Board. All plans referred to in the decision have been filed with the City Clerk on said date.

Twenty days have elapsed since the above decision was filed in the office of the City Clerk and:
_____ no appeal has been filed; or

_____ an appeal has been filed within such twenty days.

The person exercising rights under a duly appealed special permit does so at risk that a court will reverse the permit and that any construction performed under the permit may be ordered undone. This certification shall in no event terminate or shorten the tolling, during the pendency of any appeals, of the periods provided under the second paragraph of G.L. c. 40A, §6.

Date: _____, City Clerk

Appeal has been dismissed or denied.

Date: _____, City Clerk

Appendix I: Approved Dimensional Chart

	Existing	Allowed or Required	Proposed	Permitted
Lot Area (sq ft)	10,442	No min	10,442	No Change
Lot Width (ft)	112	20	112	No Change
Total GFA (sq ft)	27,824		27,824	
Residential Base				Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Non-Residential Base				
Inclusionary Bonus				
Total FAR	2.66	1.25	2.66	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Residential Base				
Non-Residential Base				
Inclusionary Bonus				
Total Dwelling Units	N/A		N/A	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Base Units				
Inclusionary Bonus Units				
Base Lot Area / Unit (sq ft)				
Total Lot Area / Unit (sq ft)				
Height (ft)	38'6"	55'	38'6"	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Front Setbacks (ft)	0	0	0	
Side Setback (ft)	0	0	0	
Side Setback (ft)	0	0	0	
Rear Setback (ft)	0	0	0	
Open Space (% of Lot Area)	0	No min	0	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Private Open Space				
Permeable Open Space				
Off-Street Parking Spaces	18	No min	5	Consistent with Application Documents and applicable zoning requirements
Long-Term Bicycle Parking	0	N/A	N/A	
Short-Term Bicycle Parking	0	N/A	N/A	
Loading Bays	1	1	1	