



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

February 28, 2018

To: The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

From: The Planning Board

Re: 88 Ames Street Bank Proposal and Signage

At the Planning Board's meeting on February 20, 2018, the Board voted to grant a special permit approving the proposed bank and financial institution use in the 88 Ames Street project. Though signage review in the MXD District is under the purview of the CRA, the topic of signage was raised during the Board's deliberations on the proposed use, and Board members wished to convey some of the Board's discussion to inform the CRA's review.

Some positive aspects of the proposal, as noted by Board members, are that it limits the ground floor frontage of the bank use in accordance with the city's design guidelines, and that it makes productive use of a second-floor space that may pose challenges for other types of retail. The city's guidelines limiting bank frontage are partly in response to concerns about the tendency of banks to visually dominate the streetscape. The Board also noted that the proposed ground floor ATM lobby would be active due to the number of transactions that are expected to occur.

Board members agreed that signage is appropriate and necessary to identify the uses on the second floor, and to create visual interest that will distinguish the bank and investment office from general office uses that do not provide services to the public. However, Board members also voiced concerns about excessive branding that would characterize 88 Ames Street as a "Bank of America building," overpowering the retail and residential uses or detracting from the architecture of the building as a whole. Striking this balance is a difficult design challenge. Most Board members agreed that the scheme proposed in its materials could be improved to strike a better balance; however, members had differing concerns and suggestions for improvement.

Specific comments and alternative suggestions from Board members included the following:

- Board members had varying concerns about the projecting banners on the second floor. Some believed that the banners were too overpowering or interrupted the architecture of the building. One suggestion was to use projecting signage at the ground floor instead, and possibly use more subtle window signage at the second floor. Other Board members were amenable to the banners on the second floor, but only if all retail uses in the building, not only the bank and investment office, had similar banners.

- Board members also had varying opinions about the proposed insignias on the ceiling of the second-floor space that would be visible from the street. Some members appreciated the imagery as a subtle and creative way of identifying the second-floor use. Other members expressed concerns about whether the size of the insignias would be too dominant in relation to other elements of the building and the pedestrian experience from Ames Street. Board members were unclear about the exact size of the insignias based on the renderings.
 - To some Board members, the graphics proposed at the corners of the building on the second floor seemed excessive or unnecessary, particularly in combination with the several other types of signage proposed for the second-floor use.
 - Some Board members suggested that lighting spillover should be a consideration in reviewing the signage and lighting scheme.
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