

Comments on proposed changes by Boston Properties in the IDCP made to the East Cambridge Planning Team July 11 2018

The proposed changes by Boston Properties in the IDCP involve the relocation of the commercial building proposed for 250 Binney Street to 355 Main Street. The proposal raises a number of questions and planning issues which need be addressed before any final agreement. The proposal also prompts some suggestions and considerations that are listed below.

Proposed building

BP proposes to demolish the existing three story plus basement building now on the [site at](#), 355 Main Street. The existing building has been occupied by the MIT Coop, on the ground floor and basement. A food court, formerly offering inexpensive food, but now closed, and two floors of office space. The total floor area of the existing building is estimated to be 100,000 square feet. The building is serviced by a large loading dock and service area below grade at the level of the subway platform.

Given the current over all limits on development in the IDCP, the new building will provide 400,000 square feet inclusive of the area that is being demolished.

The height of the building will be limited to 250 feet, the same height as the adjacent Marriott hotel and also the proposed height of the MIT building, now under construction located opposite the proposed site across Main Street.

It appears that one of the reasons for this proposed change in location is to allow Boston Properties to respond to the desire for one of its major clients, Google, to expand its facilities and to do so in a way that would allow its new space to be physically connected and contiguous with Google's existing facilities at 325 Main Street and 90 Broadway. It would be helpful to know if this project will be a net addition to Google's tenancy or will there be a reorganization of their tenancy, which could result in releasing some existing space for other uses?

Parking; The project does not anticipate the creation of any new parking space and would result in a reduction of 30 spaces. BP's strategy is to move to consolidated operation of its three parking facilities using more of a valet parking system which would result in a more efficient use of existing spaces. It would be useful to have current information on the volume of both employee and visitor parkers that use the existing [facilities in](#) order to gauge the effectiveness of this plan.

There were no proposed enhancements to the public transport system to serve this additional population concentration on Main Street. A 400,000 square foot building may add as many as two thousand employees to this location. Some of these may be due to consolidation and some may be new people, but it presents a significant addition to the working population. The additional population concentration which BP hopes will be public transport oriented will put the Kendall Station at close to its maximum capacity when both the existing buildings and MIT's developments south of Main Street, currently underway, are counted.

Building height and Publicly Accessible Open Space

The construction of a 250 foot building volume south of the existing roof garden will shadow portions of the existing roof garden further reducing its attractiveness as one of the most important small quiet public accessible open spaces in the area. An area that has already been reduced in size by an earlier Google project.

The preliminary shadow studies suggest that there would be little to moderate impact on the roof garden but that may not be convincing for some and an animated study should be commissioned to independently determine if the garage roof top garden's utility would be severely compromised if not eliminated

The Relationship to Approved Projects Underway

The building site proposed would be opposite(across Main Street) a 250 foot commercial building under construction by the MIT Investment Company. The combination of these two buildings in such close proximity will create a shadowed and windy canyon effect along Main Street during much of the day. Increasing the distance between these two buildings would help mitigate this effect.

Retail Services

The new building will offer replacement retail space on the ground floor. The new building provides a new retail face to the existing plaza. It is not clear how the access to the T entrance will be handled

There is no specific description of the retail services that will be offered save the statement that a much smaller Coop would return. Perhaps in the range of 5,000- 10,000 square versus the estimated 30,000 square feet now controlled by the Coop. There was not much information on what retail services will be promoted. If there is an interest in non corporate, locally operated retail it is not apparent from the existing proposal. This may be an opportunity to explore other methods of providing locally owned and operated affordable retail. Much of the loss of local retail has been as a result of rapidly rising rents and competition from banks and national chains who outbid local shop keepers. The city and the developer should explore mechanisms that would provide for the sale of affordable retail space to operator owners on a condominium basis with appropriate guarantees on resale to insure that there is an inventory of affordable retail that can continue to thrive and serve the growing community in Kendall square. A version of this model is already in use in the affordable purchase housing program in Cambridge.

Parking, Service and Transportation

It appears that there is no indication of how this building will be serviced by trucks and other service vehicles. The existing lower service level on the site that has provided trucking services to the Coop and other tenants is presumed to be adequate to serve the new building as well. Service access to the building raises serious questions about the impact on the street of trucks and other vehicles trying to service this building without creating additional congestion on Main and Broadway. The project plan should be clear about how these services will be accommodated without creating further congestion?

There is a long standing problem for pedestrian movements north and south through this site. The lobby of the Marriott Hotel is the only passage available at this time. There needs to be another public option for pedestrians to move across the site between Main to Broadway. The placement of the proposed building can either hinder or enhance the solution to this problem. Opening up a new public passage between main and Broadway would be welcome.

Construction implications

How will the building be built without serious disruption on Main Street?

If we assume that construction will last at least two years? How will the disruption be handled? The current experience with construction in the Kendall area on Broadway and Binney suggest that where streets are wider there is some room to accommodate construction. Accessing the site from only Main Street will present formidable problems including further narrowing the usable street area, relocating public and private bus and shuttle services, and interrupting pedestrian access to existing buildings all along Main Street. The maintenance of access to the west bound red line station during construction will be a challenge. Consideration of opening another portal to the station west of the present site should be required.

Further, in anticipation of this project the city and the developer should press for having the current MBTA bus service continue on to destinations further north in East Cambridge and the new Lechmere station. A proposal to have the CT2 line terminate at Lechmere rather than Sullivan square would be greatly advantageous as many people with destinations in Kendall now walk from Lechmere. An unpleasant situation in the winter time. Attention should be paid to the other bus lines that now wait on Main Street. Having them go on to other terminals would make it much easier to accommodate a construction project between Main and Broadway.

Other considerations: There is a concern on the part of the neighborhood that by abandoning the current site there is concern that Boston Properties will come back in the future and ask for additions to its development capacity at 250 Binney Street. This will leave the community with little or no options to seek additional community benefits or indeed to object to what is already a very densely developed site. Protection for this possible outcome should be enshrined in any current agreement.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the proposed project:

1. Be pushed back to the Garage site and a new scheme be prepared which would bring the roof garden to the south side of the new building facing on to Main Street. The new building could connect to 90 Broadway where there are other google spaces.
2. The proposed building plan should insure that a new public passage between Main and Broadway is provided
3. That trucking services are provided below grade in either the existing or newly provided facilities
4. That the project provide retail facilities in smaller units above and below grade to attract owner occupied shops
5. That the development offer affordable retail space for sale as condominiums to local owner occupied vendors.
6. That the development consider the opening of a new a portal at the west end of the station and rebuild the Kendall MiT station entrance at the east portal to provide for all weather access from both street level and basement level to meet ADA requirements
7. Contribute to the development of a covered entrance to the east portal of the station including ADA Access.
8. Redesign the plaza with retail frontage on the west side and consider a new landscape plan that would provide for more flexible use of the plaza space for farmers markets and other events.
9. Initiate discussions with the city and the MBTA to relocate the terminals for bus lines now laying over in Kendall Square.
10. Focus on providing retail services for the working and residential population that would include the following—

An inexpensive Food court
Gift shop
Book store
Men's clothing store
Women's clothing
Shoe Store
Children's clothing and children's equipment store
Barber shop
Salon
General and Specialty food stores
Ice cream shop
Pharmacy
Stationary store
Jewelry Store
Sporting goods
Real Estate office
Fish Store
Cleansers
Art Gallery
Child Friendly restaurant
Medical services including acupuncture, dental services, and other medical offices

10 In addition, consideration should be made to provide facilities for a visitor center and a police sub station