

East Cambridge
ECPT
Planning Team

A Neighborhood Organization for the Betterment of East Cambridge

December 19, 2016

Re: PB#315 – Special Permits, Kendall Center, Boston Properties, MXD Infill Development Concept Plan

Dear Chair and Members of the Planning Board,

The MXD Infill Development Concept Plan represents a dramatic change to the character of this part of East Cambridge, and a major addition of development density (increasing the MXD from 3,300,000 SF to 4,273,000 SF). The proposal is complex and at the East Cambridge Planning Team (ECPT) we do not pretend to understand all of its implications, nor have we had the time to fully engage in a dialog with the CRA and Boston Properties about the details of the individual buildings. In the meantime we, as the Board of the ECPT, would like to make the following observations and suggestions for an area of further consideration and exploration:

- While we appreciate the relatively high level of inclusionary housing in the proposal, we are concerned about the lack of open space in the project, as a more broad community benefit (and requirement of the MXD zoning).
- We have recently conducted a survey of the neighborhood and membership and have found that a public Recreational Center is one of the most desired and critically needed uses in East Cambridge. Similar city facilities, like the War Memorial recreation center, are not within walking distance of Kendall Square and are drastically over-subscribed for certain uses, such as the indoor pool. And are private fitness facilities are too expensive for many area residents, especially families.
- By our letter of September 19, 2017, we asked the Planning Board and CRA to explore the possibility of locating a Recreation Center with public access on the large open space on the roof of the North Garage (between Binney St and Broadway). As we have learned from the rooftop “Google Garden”, for elevated open space to attract meaningful community use, it needs to be highly programmed – a “use destination”. We believe a rooftop recreation center would meet this requirement for all the area neighborhoods, as well as the worker population of Kendall Square.
- An indoor recreational center and covered recreational facilities on the garage would be different and complementary to the existing and planned neighborhood ground-level open spaces in the neighborhood (e.g., Rodgers St park). Additionally, Boston Properties/MXD does not have significant ground-level opportunities for contributing open space to neighborhood to bring ratios into healthy balance with its proposed 4,273,000 SF of GFA.
- A facility of this type would be a venue for the residents and workers of the MXD district to interact with their neighbors from other parts of Cambridge, functioning like the parks, proposed Foundry building and planned Rodgers Street dog park in this regard. As such it represents a special opportunity to bring the communities of Kendall Square and Cambridge together.
- There is space on the rooftop to consider the following program elements:

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- § Gym
- § Indoor multi-use space (basketball, volleyball, dance studio, gymnastics, futsal, etc.)
- § Indoor swimming pool
- § Outdoor multi-use space (running track, turf field, tennis, etc.)
- § Gardens/Greenroof
- § Café
- § Sustainable technology, such as wind or solar power (more as demonstration models, given space limitations)

We believe that a way to achieve this vision would be through zoning language that would exempt a public access facility like this from the FAR calculations of the project (like the provisions related to “innovation space”, etc.), and allow it to be applied to the Open Space requirements of the MXD. Such an adjustment to the zoning language could be sought by the CRA, or by the ECPT. We are excited by the potential of the over 1 million square feet of additional development in this project to yield significant neighborhood benefits in the same way that Alexandria, MIT East Campus and NorthPoint have done, and we believe that this type of facility could be an important component and catalyst for building a balanced and lasting community in this part of the city. We appreciate that funding considerations would need to be worked-out for both the capitalization and operation of such a facility by the developer, CRA and City, but we do not want the rare opportunity for such an important and needed facility to be excluded from the MXD planning and permitting process.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to further discussion of this project.

Sincerely,
Board of the East Cambridge Planning Team

Cc: Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, City Manager, City Council, Community Development Department