

To: Cambridge City Council, Planning Board, Community Development Department, City Manager

From: Steve LaMaster, Esther Hanig, Peter Crawley as Neighborhood Representatives on the City of Cambridge Volpe Working Group

Re: Volpe Redevelopment (PUD-7 District) – Community Space Requirement

Date: August 2, 2017

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As neighborhood representatives to the City's Volpe Working Group (representing East Cambridge, The Port and Wellington-Harrington), we feel obligated to pay particular attention to the public benefits included in the MIT Volpe Site Zoning Proposal (PUD-7 District). While public benefits can be defined broadly and include Open Space, Transportation Improvements, Job Training, Affordable Housing, Retail, Environmental Impact Mitigation, etc., we will focus in this letter on the important public benefit of a Community Center and provide both questions and recommendations to help optimize its usefulness and long-term value to the community.

The guiding principle for the Volpe Civic Spaces developed by the Volpe Working Group is to:

- Create beautiful, legible, varied and welcoming public places that support and symbolize community, bring together a diverse range of demographic groups, as well as attract community members and visitors to share in the unique experience of Kendall Square.

To achieve this goal, and successfully connect the neighborhoods to Kendall Square and the Volpe site, we believe there needs to be the draw of a Community Center that features dynamic educational, recreational and entertainment uses.

A Community Center on the Volpe site, which serves the needs of the three adjacent neighborhoods, as well as residents and workers on the site, offers a unique opportunity to interconnect the Volpe site -- and Kendall Square itself, to the rest of the city.

A current complaint about Kendall Square is that its high-tech buildings and economy do not welcome and integrate adequately with the surrounding neighborhoods that experience their impacts, such as gentrification, traffic, noise, etc. With additional development, Kendall Square risks becoming more of an island of tall buildings housing corporate tech workers, lacking in socio-economic diversity and disconnected from the majority of area residents.

A sizable, well-funded and ably operated Community Center on the Volpe site, providing vital community gathering spaces for educational, recreational and entertainment uses, would help create a more demographically diverse and integrated Kendall Square

community. And given MIT's educational mission, it is the right partner to facilitate connections between residents and the innovation economy via educational and mentoring programs. Imagine a broad population of residents being drawn to the Community Center for recreational or entertainment purposes, but also being exposed to educational and career training opportunities. Some YMCA's currently use this model to good effect. It should also be noted that a Volpe Community Center would provide services complementary and not overlapping with the Foundry, such as recreational uses.

As guiding principles and measures of success for the Community Center, we propose the following:

- Successfully attracts surrounding neighborhood residents of broad socio-economic, ethnic and age demographics;
- Is family friendly and affordable;
- Provides amenities for both surrounding neighborhoods and Kendall Square/Volpe residents;
- Promotes community-building, cohesion, interaction and understanding amongst residents;
- Responds to resident needs for:
  - Education and training regarding participation in the innovation economy;
  - Recreational uses, including indoor pool;
  - Other community gathering spaces and programming.

Toward this end, we appreciate that MIT included in its zoning proposal "Community Space Design and Construction Funding" (Section 13.910.5.2.) that contemplates a Community Center and look forward to working with them and the community to better clarify the proposal. Some open questions that need to be addressed in the zoning (or a separate commitment letter) include:

- When would the Community Center be built? We recommend Center be built in first phase of Non-Federal building development and have a deadline.
- Who would build the Community Center? We recommend that MIT is responsible to build Center.
- What minimum size and allowed use types should be specified? How will the interests and needs of adjacent neighborhoods be incorporated?
- Given size of development, and community goals of Center, \$15MM "aggregate, one-time" contribution proposed in current zoning seems low. Given the precedent of public benefits funding in major cities for large-scale developments and the financing needs of a significant Center, we believe a funding target of \$30MM is more appropriate. (These monies should be deposited in a separate fund, earmarked for the Center and not commingled with City funds for other purposes.)
- How should the Operating Budget endowment (including an on-going funding mechanism) be structured? The funding mechanism should allow and encourage other Kendall Square private entities to make on-going contributions.
- Given their experience managing the Foundry process, what role might the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) play in the programming/oversight of a Volpe Community Center?

- Who would own the Community Center? Who would operate it? Like the Foundry structure, we recommend a qualified third party operator.
- We agree that the Community Center square footage should be exempt from the Gross Floor Area of the development but do not think it should be included in the Public Open Space calculation, as proposed.
- We recommend that the Community Center be a free-standing, low-rise building that borders both open space and major public streets for maximum public exposure. This will also help create a sense of public ownership and identity for the Center versus being co-opted by the development.

We appreciate that the Volpe PUD represents a complex zoning and design-review process and that many topics in addition to the Community Center need to be considered and balanced. We remind City Officials that the Volpe development is perhaps the last large development opportunity in the heart of Kendall Square and the best opportunity to create a Community Center that helps transform Kendall Square into a more balanced “live, work, play” community connected to the adjacent neighborhoods. The Kendall Square area generates a high percentage of the City’s tax revenue while absorbing a high level of development impacts; as mitigation and enhancement of the Volpe site, a Community Center is an ideal contribution that benefits a wide range of residents. Most importantly, a Community Center would help foster healthy connections between the high-tech, corporate development and the surrounding communities.

As a sub-group of the Volpe Working Group, we look forward to working with the City, MIT and our neighborhoods to further define the vision and zoning parameters of the Community Center, and work hard to assure that this long-awaited promise and benefit of Kendall Square development finally gets built. Thank-you for your help!

CC: MITIMCo, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority