

# Zoning handling Grand Junction, substation ‘just beginning’ after years of piecing together (corrected)

---

By Marc Levy

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/author/marc-levy/>)

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

**Last revised on:** Wednesday, March 4, 2020

([http://www.cambridgeday.com/public\\_html/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/030320i-Blue-Garage.jpg](http://www.cambridgeday.com/public_html/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/030320i-Blue-Garage.jpg))

([http://www.cambridgeday.com/public\\_html/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/030320i-Blue-Garage.jpg](http://www.cambridgeday.com/public_html/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/030320i-Blue-Garage.jpg))

**Boston Properties’ Blue Garage in Kendall Square could become underground parking with a power substation and new aboveground commercial buildings. (Photo: Google)**

In granting the Alexandria petition Monday, the council brought a Grand Junction path closer to reality after many years trying to piece together the narrow but city-length stretch of land. But an equally big win could be the piece of the plan that kept Eversource from building a power substation on Fulkerson Street in residential

East Cambridge, with the Kennedy-Longfellow elementary school and John A. Ahern field right across the street.

On the corporate side of things, it wasn't just Kendall Square life sciences developer Alexandria Real Estate Equities that came out a winner, getting rights to greater height and density for its own development at the former Metropolitan Pipe site at Binney and Fulkerson streets.

Boston Properties, a developer even more identified with Kendall Square lab and office towers, also looks to benefit, by taking on the substation and getting a new 800,000 square feet of development space out of it – a \$160 million value, city councillor and urban designer Dennis Carlone said.

### **Changes from a process**

The substation will move a short distance south and west to replace around one-third of Boston Properties' Blue Garage, which residents have been expected to be topped with apartments and condominiums – still basically the plan, Alexandria says. “The potential addition of 800,000 square feet of commercial ground-floor area

will not replace the proposed residential component” of Boston Properties’ infill development plan, an Alexandria spokesman said Friday in anticipation of Monday’s council vote.

The location of the residences could change, though. Along with demolition of the garage – with parking moving underground – might come the removal of another existing building. What’s built on the two-thirds that isn’t substation “originally it was said [would be] one residential, one commercial. That could change ... if we found another location for the residential, that could maybe move things. But [it would be] in that general area,” said Robert Reardon, the city’s retired director of assessment. He was brought back by City Manager Louis A. DePasquale as a consultant, serving as point person to coordinate solving the real estate puzzle.

(<https://cambridgeday.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=eecd3ef37a64e583227e98281&id=50134283f9>)

It was Reardon who brought Boston Properties to the table as a substation site when finding one looked impossible, Alexandria senior vice president Joe Maguire said.

The whole process took some two years and nearly 40 public meetings, by Alexandria's accounting.

“After asking the council to be patient, asking the residents we had been working with to be patient, especially the Wellington-Harrington [neighborhood] team, I really had concerns that maybe we were too patient and this might not become a reality,” DePasquale admitted Monday.

### **Just the beginning**

But in many ways, this is still just the beginning of an elaborate process that includes Eversource, Alexandria, Boston Properties, the Grand Junction path, the City Council and various neighborhoods, DePasquale said. The Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, which oversees Kendall Square, is also involved.

“This is a recommendation for an alternative site to Eversource, that’s all it is,” DePasquale said. “For this process, it begins tonight in terms of what the council needs to do to feel like this is a good move.”

That is true, Reardon said, but one cause for optimism is that the plan was at least put together by its stakeholders – including Eversource, which spent engineering time and money to pin down what would work for its needs.

Every one of the various projects involved still needs individual design and approval processes – and if history is any guide, each could be tremendously complicated. The Redevelopment Authority, which will coordinate the ongoing work, noted that it requires also approval of the underlying zoning for Kendall Square and its status as an urban renewal project, which need not just city approvals, but “various state approvals” as well, said its executive director, Tom Evans.

“For us, the process is really just beginning as we start to figure out how we take what are essentially bubble diagrams and concepts ... and put that out to the community, put that out to the council, put that out to the CRA board, start looking at how this will fit,” Evans said.

### **Kumbaya ...**

Still, the mood in the council chamber was relieved and pleased overall, and nearly every speaker expressed gratitude with the collaborative approach of other stakeholders. With Alexandria making its third attempt at zoning for Binney Street, Maguire noted that, “To be perfectly candid, I was a bit discouraged when the [Eversource] issue was linked to the adoption of our petition, because I was familiar with with how limited the opportunities were in the area for alternative substation sites.”

But obstacles have been knocked down with the help of Reardon, with the latest being a solution for temporary parking while the Blue Garage is unusable, Maguire said.

In a city where development has often set neighbor against neighbor, raised bitter suspicions of bought-off public officials and incited cutting attacks in letters to the editor and on social media, the Alexandria deal was only half of the night's Kumbaya narrative – the similarly unanimously approved Harvard Square zoning also drew praise from one speaker as “the Hatfields and the McCoys coming together.”

### **... but not for MIT**

Rare notes of dissatisfaction were directed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, including from East Cambridge Planning Team member Heather Hoffman, who praised Alexandria (and critiqued Boston Properties for “asking for way too much,” considered past questionable behavior in Kendall Square). She blasted MIT for failing to make room for a substation when it's that Kendall Square institution “with big chunks of open space.” The East Cambridge Planning Team as a whole was “dismayed that MIT has not opted to be part of this solution,” president Chuck

Hinds said. “In our initial conversations with Eversource, [its] Volpe project was cited as the primary reason the substation was necessary; MIT should step up and take responsibility for the substation that will serve them.”

During public comment, resident Lee Farris suggested the problem went even deeper, considering that the solution for a substation forced on the city by its own increasing power use including construction of additional buildings that would need even more power.

“I wonder if we’re entering a vicious cycle,” Farris said.

---

*This post was updated March 4, 2020, to correct that Robert Reardon is retired and helped with the Alexandria-Eversource issue on a consultant basis.*



**A better Cambridge Day**

Please consider making a financial contribution to maintain, expand and improve Cambridge Day. Click this box to see how.

(<https://squareup.com/store/cambridge-media-systems>)





◆ business

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/business-2/>), City Council

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/city-council/>), Development

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/development/>), East Cambridge

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/east-cambridge/>), Kendall Square

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/kendall-square/>), Redevelopment Authority

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/redevelopment-authority/>), utilities

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/utilities/>), Wellington-Harrington

(<http://www.cambridgeday.com/tag/wellington-harrington/>)