

Monday, July 7nd, 2014

The Cambridge Planning Board
c/o the Community Development Department
344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
RE: PB #292 (180R CambridgePark Drive)

Introduction

On behalf of the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance, we submit comments regarding Planning Board application #292 (aka The Residences at 180R CambridgePark Drive). In sheer size and location on the Alewife flood plain, this proposed development would have a significant impact on our area of the City, and we ask that all parties accept our feedback on this project in the positive, constructive spirit with which we offer it.

To begin, let us say that we appreciate the proponent's willingness to engage with local community groups. We have found Richard McKinnon to be open and responsive in his interactions with residents, and he seems willing to consider creative alternatives to mitigate negative impacts and to look for ways to provide compensating community benefits – to the extent that he is able to do so, given the demands of his equity backers. Our respect for Mr. McKinnon's can-do spirit notwithstanding, we feel that it is incumbent on the Planning Board to impose conditions that ensure there is a realistic action plan for the proponent's delivering on all these good-faith promises.

We see this project as very much a work in progress, one that still raises numerous concerns and leaves significant questions unanswered. This proposal is the fourth in a series of residential projects on CambridgePark Drive put forward by McKinnon & Company and its equity backers in a sequence that has requested special permit relief for each project without a comprehensive neighborhood plan and without a full analysis of the total projected population or the level of neighborhood services needed. Once these four new projects are completed and leased over the next two to three years, there will be over 3,000 residents in the Triangle District, excluding the hundreds of commuters who work in the area's commercial buildings. When finished, the Triangle district will have a greater population than Cambridge Highlands or Strawberry Hill, and may approach the population levels of Agassiz, MIT/Kendall, and, possibly, even West Cambridge. In short, we are rapidly turning one of the least dense population centers in the City into one of the densest. (That newly dense area also happens to be the most flood-susceptible section of the City). In addition, the high concentration of small units aimed at a single market sector is a dangerous precedent for the City, and every effort should be made to expand the range of unit types and affordability to more closely resemble the socio-economic diversity of other similarly sized neighborhoods.

Overall, we feel that much of the application relies too heavily on the precedent of the proponent's three prior approved projects in the Triangle District, and that the narrative offers self-referential or evasive justifications in instances where the proposal does not meet the Special Permit criteria, the Concord Alewife Plan guidelines, or the Citywide Urban Design Objectives codified in Articles 19 and 20 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. We will lay out both our questions and our objections in the following pages with the hope that they can better inform the process and improve outcomes for this and future projects.

While we will frame our comments around the criteria enumerated in the relevant articles of the Zoning Ordinance, we do feel that narrowly following a special permit checklist on a project-by-project basis ignores the broader context and the cumulative impacts that the addition of 1,467 residential units and an estimated 4,838 daily vehicle trips generated by the five new buildings in the Triangle alone¹ are bound to have on the surrounding neighborhoods. To be sure, the proposal satisfies a key planning goal to create more housing (though nearly all of it is targeted to meet the perceived market demand for small luxury units), but there also are significant uncounted externalities (detriments to traffic, housing affordability, and the flood plain environment and its adjacent conservation area), which taken together defeat many of the other goals of the Ordinance and the area planning study, and should give us all pause about continuing blindly on this course without more serious and objective consideration. With the citywide master planning process now in its initial goal-setting phase, there are widespread calls for more rigorous scrutiny of such large-scale development until a new growth plan is completed.

After the rapid and largely unchallenged permitting of four large residential projects in the Triangle since 2012, it is now time to recalibrate the cost-benefit scale and to tip the balance more in favor of citizen input and creating a vibrant and functional mixed-use neighborhood with a greater sense of place, rather than galloping ahead to construct more small luxury units to serve a narrow slice of Cambridge's diverse community – and to create wealth for the global private equity funds, like Blackstone, investing in the Cambridge real estate market.

In conclusion, we believe that just because an opportunity was missed to get the Triangle “right” with past projects, we should not ignore an opportunity to get it right this time. In fact, this project may be the final and best chance to redress the area's shortcomings, as it represents the last large, undeveloped parcel in the Triangle District. In light of that, we ask that review of this project be thorough and transparent with ample time provided for citizen input of any subsequent design changes. Where clear criteria exist, we ask that they be considered broadly and applied rigorously. Where changes are needed to improve the project for the public good, we ask that the Board exercise its statutory duty to do so by attaching appropriate and binding conditions to any approval. In short, we ask that all parties work towards reaching the best possible outcome for the community as a whole.

In the weeks ahead, we look forward to hearing more from the proponent and from the Planning Board and CDD regarding this significant development proposal. In the meantime, we thank you again for your careful consideration of our comments.

A Note on Deadlines and Process

We had hoped to submit these comments before the July Fourth holiday weekend, but needed additional time to read and study the three lengthy documents that were posted on the CDD website on the morning of July 3rd (a project review memo, traffic memo, and special permit decision checklist amounting to over 60 pages of material) as well as a 30-page “neighborhood memo” the proponent sent us on the night of July 2nd. Citizens are placed at a distinct

¹ 130, 160, 165, and 180R CambridgePark Drive and 223-31 Concord Turnpike. The figures above exclude the existing 311-unit residential building at 30 CambridgePark Drive and its associated daily vehicle counts.

disadvantage in trying to fairly and accurately assess the many potential impacts of a project of this scale and technical complexity when so much new information comes on such short notice. We ask, therefore, that this first hearing remain open for more comments and that additional hearings be scheduled, as needed, to ensure full participation by all stakeholders.

Project Overview

McKinnon & Company's proposal for The Residences at 180R CambridgePark Drive (which the firm has successfully petitioned to be renamed "88 CambridgePark Drive") represents the fourth residential project that McKinnon & Company has proposed within the so-called "Triangle," a 60-acre area bounded on by the Alewife Reservation, the commuter rail tracks, and Alewife Brook Parkway. The proponent's previous three projects in the area (160 CambridgePark Drive, 223-231 Concord Turnpike, and 130 CambridgePark Drive), together with this new proposal, bring a total of 1,223 new luxury residential units to this formerly office and industrial zone.

This fourth project now under review is also by far the largest; 180R offers 401,768 square feet of residential space plus a structured garage that holds 661 cars, covering over 80% of a full city "block" measuring 750' long by 150' wide. The 9-story parking garage at the center of the project would amount to some 5.5 acres of structured parking. At 105 feet tall, the East portion of the residential building would be taller than any of the surrounding buildings in the district. From a land use standpoint, the proposed building represents a significant improvement over the current use (a 571-car surface parking lot), but there are equally significant tradeoffs that argue against granting special permits to increase height, reduce setbacks, and allow above-grade parking on such a long, narrow parcel sandwiched between the railroad tracks and existing buildings fronting CambridgePark Drive. The net increase in parking (220 spaces, for a total of 791 spaces) runs counter to the premise that this represents smart, transit-centered design, and argues against the requested permit to exclude the above-ground garage from FAR. Ironically, for a site located a mere 3/10 of a mile from a T station, the need to create parking for shared-use commitments appears to be what is driving the design.

The zoning requirements for the site are complex, given that the property under consideration lies within 3 different zoning overlay districts (Parkway, Flood Plain, and AOD-6) in addition to its base Office 2A zoning designation. The result is that numerous Special Permits (11 in all) would be required to construct the proposed development as currently designed. In spite of the challenge of interpreting overlapping zoning overlays, we will present our analysis of the 180R proposal in light of the numerous criteria associated with each of these Special Permit requests. The amount of new information received within two business days of the hearing has added to the challenge, so we will address the criteria that are most significant to the decision.

Executive Summary

To begin, we would like to first mention those aspects of the project that we like, in the hope that inclusion of these components will be made conditions of any special permits for this and any future large-scale projects in the Fresh Pond-Alewife area. These components of the proposal represent significant steps in the right direction for our City. As called for in the Concord-Alewife Planning Study, they should immediately become a minimum base standard for new development going forward.

The favorable components are:

1. The construction of new housing that is easily accessible to public transit without use of a car
2. The creation of deed restricted, 3-bedroom affordable units
3. TDM measures and creation of a new TMA to reduce resident and commuter car trips
4. Efforts to reduce on-site parking
5. Efforts to provide better pedestrian & bicycle connections, including funding of the study for a possible new bridge and the design of five possible landing sites
6. Pursuit of LEED certification
7. A willingness to build onsite (hopefully with local workers) versus using prefabricated construction seen elsewhere in the area
8. Funding of upgrades to the City's storm water infrastructure
9. Inclusion of some (though modest in square footage) retail on the ground floor of the West building
10. The proponent's offer to subsidize ground floor retail rents at neighboring 30 CambridgePark Drive
11. Creation of the Alewife Business Association to further encourage mixed use and community-building activities in the area

However, there remain major areas of concern where we request further improvements be made and conditions attached to the proposal:

1. Reduce building scale and detach the components to permit more open space between
2. Additional reductions in both shared-use and resident parking to further reduce the size of the garage as well as limit car trips
3. Additional ground-floor, public mixed-use spaces
4. Publicly accessible open space & amenities
5. Further funding of City infrastructure to enhance pedestrian, bike, and traffic circulation and safety throughout the Triangle
6. Flood hazard mitigation measures that would protect not only this project but properties in the vicinity as well as the natural environment of the Alewife Reservation and the City's water supply at Fresh Pond
7. Adherence with both the letter and the spirit of the Concord-Alewife Plan and Citywide Urban Design Guidelines to create an authentic sense of place and to foster community

Based on a review of Massachusetts case law, we believe that it is fully within the Planning Board's legal mandate to require additional changes in these areas, and we ask that the Board, working with the proponent, break free of the narrow confines of the special permit checklist to protect the public interest and to better meet the goals of prior area planning studies dating back to 1979.

List of Special Permits requested (with our position in parentheses)

1. Section 6.35 – reduction of required parking to permit the shared parking arrangements **(SUPPORT with conditions)**
2. Section 6.43.6 – to permit a common driveway located on 130 CambridgePark Drive, 150 CambridgePark Drive and 180R CambridgePark Drive **(SUPPORT with conditions)**
3. Section 6.44.1 – to permit on grade open parking spaces and driveways within 5 feet of the side and rear property lines **(INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION)**
4. Section 20.63.7 – divergence from the Parkway Overlay District standards **(INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION)**

5. Section 20.70 – construction in the Flood Plain Overlay District **(INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION)**
6. Section 20.95.1 – increase of the base Floor Area Ratio to approximately 2.0 at the site **(INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION)**
7. Section 20.95.2 – increase of maximum height to 105 feet **(OPPOSE)**
8. Section 20.95.34 – reduction of applicable front, side and rear yard requirements **(OPPOSE)**
9. Section 20.97.2 – permit pooled parking between the Site and 100, 125 and 150 CambridgePark Drive **(SUPPORT with conditions)**
10. Section 20.97.3 (and Section 5.25.42) – to exclude the on grade parking facilities and Parking Structure from the applicable Floor Area Ratio limitations **(OPPOSE)**
11. Section 19.20 – Project Review Special Permit (including adherence to Section 19.30 – Citywide Urban Design Objectives and Section 20.93.2 – Concord-Alewife Plan criteria) **(INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION)**

Our Position as to Each Special Permit Requested

In response to the proponent's specific proposal, we offer the following opinions, grouped based on our current position in regards to each Special Permit request. These positions are "Support," "Oppose," and "Insufficient Information." Note that for the five Special Permits listed under the last category, we have listed questions that we need answered before forming an opinion either to support or oppose the specific relief sought. *Note that our responses are italicized and in blue for clarity.*

I. SUPPORT (with conditions)

- a. Section 20.97.2 – to permit pooled parking between the Site and 100, 125 and 150 CambridgePark Drive

Currently, 32% of the City's households do not own a car. In light of this, we believe that steps to reduce onsite parking are an appropriate method to reduce car trips overall within Cambridge. As a result, we support this Special Permit, so long as the proponent's proposed TMA and the City's recommended TDM measures are made a condition of the permit.

- b. Section 6.35 – to permit reduction of required parking to permit the shared parking arrangements

As above, we believe that steps to reduce onsite parking can help to reduce car trips overall, and that the proponent could reduce resident parking even further, given the building's proximity to public transit and to potential employment opportunities for future residents. For a building to be positioned – and permitted at a higher density -- as "transit oriented development" while resulting in a net increase of 220 parking spaces is inconsistent with the tenets of smart TOD. Pricing of the resident spaces in the garage should be high enough to discourage tenants from owning cars; the monthly parking rate should be greater than the cost of a monthly T pass. We also ask that the proponent continue his efforts to reduce the number of required shared use commercial spaces. Further, if the promised TMA and TDM measures succeed in reducing the need for commuter parking in the shared garage, then those spaces should be re-assigned to serve the customers of future retail development in the Triangle, and not be made available to residents, thus preventing the construction of yet more parking garages to support future development in the Triangle. Lastly, we would ask for details of any Zip Car or Hubway facilities planned for the project.

- c. **Section 6.43.6** – to permit a common driveway located on 130 CambridgePark Drive, 150 CambridgePark Drive and 180R CambridgePark Drive

Creation of a shared driveway is helpful in enabling shared parking and presents a better utilization of outdoor space by reducing the need for multiple driveways. Ideally, it would also make possible more open space, but that does not appear to be the case here. We support this Special Permit, so long as it is a condition that the proponent makes all of the City's recommended changes (see page 4 of the CDD's Project Review memo dated July 2, 2014) to improve circulation and pedestrian and bike safety on the private access road and along CambridgePark Place and that additional open space is added at ground level.

II. OPPOSE

- a. **Section 20.95.2** – to permit increase of maximum height to 105 feet

This section of Article 20 allows for additional building height within the Alewife Overlay Districts when certain additional conditions are met. However, due to the property's inclusion in the Parkway Overlay District, additional height anywhere in the building can be a concern, as the structure will be highly visible from the adjoining section of the Parkway. Viewed from the south, the building will appear to rise up very sharply from the railroad bed. None of the other three residential buildings recently permitted in the surrounding area (160, 165 and 130 CambridgePark Drive) requested relief for increased height; in fact all three are 69' 11" which is lower than the 85' base height allowed by zoning. The proponent is requesting a special permit to increase the height of the 320-unit East portion of this project (the larger of the two residential components) to 105'. We disagree with the CDD Project Review memo that this height is "compatible" with the surrounding uses.

Further, reduced setbacks coupled with increased building heights present a potential danger to public safety in the event of an emergency, as will be discussed in greater detail below (Section 20.95.34). For these reasons, we are concerned with the proposed height increase.

Lastly, because this Special Permit was added to the proponent's application after the fact, no formal justification for this Special Permit has been included in the project documents distributed on the CDD's website. In this circumstance, we request that the proponent provide a written explanation of the precise relief sought so that we may review and comment appropriately. As part of this, we also request a clear summary of the calculations called for in Section 20.95.2 of the Ordinance, as well as an explanation as to why this additional height is not problematic in light of the above concerns.

- b. **Section 20.95.34** – to permit reduction of applicable front, side and rear yard requirements

The application does not provide a clear and compelling rationale for reduced setbacks. The proposed building would cover more than 80% of its 174,768 square foot lot; the application classifies 17.3% of the total lot area as open space, but does not break down the different types of open space. We do not know the percentage that is public and at ground level or the various types of surfaces. 25% of open space is listed as permeable, a figure which cannot easily be compared to the current conditions of the parking lot to be replaced (83% paved). An itemized list of the types, locations, and uses of open space would better inform a decision on whether the requested reductions to setbacks are appropriate and justified.

Further, we agree with the CDD memo that greater effort must be made to enlarge and activate public open spaces at ground level. The illustration of the proposed “urban plazas” for both the East and West buildings show paved areas that appear primarily designed as shared driveways for garages and drop-off/pick-up areas for visitors. There are no benches, tables, tot lots, or parklets where people might gather. The renderings make these areas look attractive when flowers are in bloom, but they will be far less inviting between November and April. In short, we wish to emphasize the differences between “urban plazas” and “driveways,” and to draw attention to our desire to see true pedestrian-only areas included in the design.

Though we recognize and appreciate the proponent’s goal of maximizing the very limited outdoor public space in strategic areas, the chosen approach (minimizing setbacks elsewhere) also raises public safety concerns, primarily due to the narrowness of the rear setback and the height of the building on its southerly face. In the event of an emergency, it is unlikely that fire apparatus would be able to safely access the upper stories of the building due to the structure’s overall height, as well as the impediment created by the ground floor parking structure. As a result, the desired open space increases should be achieved by reducing the overall building footprint, and, therefore, the gross FAR. This would also result in a reduction of the building’s overall scale, a scale that strikes many as excessive (described as “monolithic” in the CDD’s memo), even for its immediate neighborhood.

- c. **Section 20.97.3 and (Section 5.25.42)** to exclude the on grade parking facilities and Parking Structure from the applicable Floor Area Ratio limitations

We do not understand why this relief is needed, except in as much as it enables the construction of a larger structure at a lower cost for the proponent’s equity backers. We request that the proponent provide clear figures (in square feet) as to the exemption being sought. That is, what would the actual FAR and unit count be if the parking structure were included in the proposal’s total? Barring a more compelling justification than a higher profit margin, we oppose this and ask for a reduction in the proposal’s total FAR to compensate for the fact that zoning requires that above ground parking be included in Gross FAR.

Our understanding is that the size of the garage is necessitated to fulfill the proponent’s legal obligations to honor prior shared parking agreements, and that he has been making an earnest effort to buy back those easements. We believe all parties should be urged to negotiate in good faith to reduce the need for the proponent to provide so much parking in a location so close to public transit.

III. INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION

- a. **Section 20.63.7** – to permit divergence from the Parkway Overlay District standards

To begin, we would ask the following procedural question. If any part of a parcel falls within an Overlay District, does the overlay apply to the entire parcel, or only to that the portion located in the Overlay District? If so, wouldn’t the requirements of the Parkway Overlay District apply to the entire building? This needs further clarification.

Further, the proponent admits that the building “exceeds the maximum heights of 55 feet and 85 feet permitted under Section 20.64.2, and is inconsistent with the façade requirements of Section 20.64.3 and, potentially, the fencing requirements of Section 20.65.”

We ask that the Planning Board request additional clarification as to the nature of these inconsistencies and whether the proponent's proposal adequately addresses the visual concerns addressed by the Parkway Overlay.

b. **Section 20.70 – to permit construction in the Flood Plain Overlay District**

Though we do not claim to be experts in matters relating to flooding, we would oppose a Special Permit under this section due to the pending nature of the City's Climate Change Vulnerability study, which, when completed, will provide clarification as to whether or not continued construction in the Little River flood plain presents an eminent hazard to residents of other areas. The flood mitigation techniques employed to minimize the impact on the new residential buildings running along CambridgePark Drive are designed to allow the flood waters to pass under the buildings and to continue across the railroad right of way into existing and projected new residential areas south of the railroad right of way and toward Fresh Pond Reservoir. We share the great concern of local environmental groups for combined impacts of increased population and runoff on the wetland habitat of the adjacent Alewife Reservation and for the potential for runoff to impact the City's water supply at Fresh Pond. We now understand that the historical numbers (including rainfall data, storm frequency, and sea levels) used to make such judgments have increased, in some cases drastically. The City is still defining exactly how much they may have changed, and what exactly that means for areas like the greater Alewife watershed. Prudence would dictate that we wait for answers to these questions before proceeding with any further development at this scale in the flood plain. Additional flood mitigation measures may be warranted, and it would be foolish to rush to permit a multi-million dollar residential development with an incomplete risk assessment.

Lastly, we would ask for exact figures as to what percentage of the current property falls within the 100-year flood plain. A video provided by the proponent refers to this number as a "small amount," but does not provide a clear total.

c. **Section 20.95.1 – to permit increase of the base Floor Area Ratio to approximately 2.0 at the site**

We would like more clarification on what basis the additional FAR is being sought. As a matter of policy, we would normally oppose such relief until such time as there is a definitive plan to design, fund, and construct the pedestrian-bicycle bridge on which this FAR increase is based. Otherwise, we are likely to end up with numerous future projects incorporating numerous potential landing points – and projects receiving an FAR bonus -- but still no actual bridge. That said, since this is the last undeveloped site along the north side of the tracks, it should be a prerequisite that the proponent and the City work together to obtain assurances in writing that the funding will be available, a landing spot on the opposite side will be secured, and the bridge will be constructed by a certain date. In the meantime, we continue to seek more information from all parties about when we can realistically expect to see a functioning bridge as called for by the City in prior studies dating back as far as 1979. The bridge was categorized as a "high priority" improvement in 2006, yet it seems highly unlikely that construction will have begun by 2016, when this building and the other two residential projects on the street will be nearing completion. Paper priorities have proven inadequate, and the City needs to exert stronger demands on the developers on both sides of the tracks whose projects will increase in value with the addition of a bridge.

We share the City's concerns about the quality and feasibility of connections to ground level from the eventual bridge landings (see page 5 of the CDD Project Review memo), and suggest further study. Landing a bridge within a parking garage may not be ideal from a security standpoint; how many pedestrians and bikes can fit in the elevator and might there be a queue at peak hours? Will bridge users feel safe entering an elevator in a parking garage after dark?

- d. **Section 6.44.1** – to permit on grade open parking spaces and driveways within 5 feet of the side and rear property lines

We are currently unclear as to why and where this relief is needed and ask that the proponent better explain the specific locations that have triggered the need for this Special Permit. That said, if this relief will result in a fire lane being placed in a narrow space between a fenced property line and a tall structure, we would be opposed to such a situation due to the reasons already explained above. Similarly, if such relief is solely designed to allow for a larger building, either in its FAR or its dimensions, then we would also object to the granting of such relief.

- e. **Section 19.20** – Project Review Special Permit (Traffic and Urban Design Guidelines)

19.25.1 Traffic Impact Findings: In granting a Project Review Special Permit under this section of the Ordinance, the Planning Board is required to find that the project will have no substantial adverse impact on city traffic within the study area as analyzed in the required traffic study.

We must point out that there is a critical difference between “no substantial adverse impact” (as called for in Section 19.24) and “little impact” (as mentioned in the proponent’s response). The traffic study finds that traffic congestion associated with the project would degrade service levels at a nearby intersection from grade “D” to grade “E,” and thus the project is not in compliance with the first objective stated in Section 1.30 of the Zoning Ordinance “to lessen congestion in the streets.” The study also reports that the project would trigger 15 Special Permit exceedences along one of the city’s most notoriously congested roadways and 14 pedestrian levels of service criteria. We feel that applying Vickery’s Law shirks the City’s duty not to make a bad situation worse. As anyone who has ever witnessed a single disabled car trigger gridlock at rush hour, even a small increase in volume is enough to bring an overburdened system to its knees, and the problems cannot be willed away by blaming regional traffic. Traffic is an area where we believe that the cumulative impact of recent development in the Alewife area has been dangerously discounted time and again. The best-guess projections of 4,838 new daily vehicle trips from the five new residential buildings in the Triangle cannot reasonably be said to have “no substantial adverse impact” when a system is already close to its breaking point.

19.25.2 Urban Design Guidelines: In addition, the Zoning Ordinance requires that large projects adhere to the requirements of Section 19.30 – Citywide Urban Design Objectives. The Planning Board shall grant the Special Permit only if it finds that the project is consistent with the objectives set forth in this section of the ordinance.

To begin, we would point out that we find at least some of the responses offered in the proponent’s narrative to be non-responsive, even evasive, in their failure to address the numerous mixed-use criteria presented in Section 19.30. We also found similar evasiveness in

responding to the Concord-Alewife Plan criteria. Regardless, we have particular questions or concerns about the following criteria listed under Section 19.30:

1) Pursuant to **Section 19.31** of the Ordinance, new projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development. Indicators include:

(a) Heights and setbacks provide suitable transition to abutting or nearby residential zoning districts that are generally developed to low scale residential uses.

At its proposed 105' height, a large portion of this project is substantially taller than the abutting buildings and the setbacks are minimal both within and between the new and existing residential parcels. It is hard to tell how crowded the new private access road running parallel and behind CambridgePark Drive will feel with large buildings on 3 sides. The renderings of the private access road do not show 30 CambridgePark Drive at all, though it would be in plain view all along the north side. A 3D simulation of the streetscape is needed to gauge whether the design creates a pleasant, human scale experience for pedestrians and cyclists traveling this new corridor, or whether the tall buildings will produce a canyon effect. It is also unclear how the new private access road relates to the rear retaining wall of 30 CambridgePark Drive, which presents a fortress-like concrete retaining wall (and a chain link fence) along its south (rear) side that protects the privacy of that building's residents while turning a cold shoulder to passersby. Will its chain link fence be removed once the new access road is created? (Of course, we realize the abutter's fence is not in the proponent's control but it speaks to the challenges of creating a new high-density neighborhood piecemeal, without the benefit of coordinated urban planning that would result in spaces that work together.)

(c) In mixed-use projects, uses are to be located carefully to respect the context, e.g. retail should front onto a street, new housing should relate to any adjacent existing residential use, etc.

Like the other four new buildings in the Triangle, this project is envisioned as single-use residential. The neighborhood context is somewhat awkwardly evolving from a suburban-style office park to a hybrid "live-work" neighborhood that offers over 1,500 units of housing without the benefit of any significant "shop" or "play" facilities for the many hundreds of office workers and residents who will spend significant parts of their day in the Triangle. Most of the other new housing has not yet been constructed, so it is hard to tell well how this project will relate to the others without the benefit of a 3-D model or a 360-video simulation.

2) Pursuant to **Section 19.32** of the Ordinance, development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings. Indicators include:

(a) Ground floors, particularly where they face public streets, public parks, and publicly accessible pathways, consist of spaces that are actively inhabited by people, such as retail stores, consumer service businesses and restaurants where they are allowed, or general office, educational or residential uses and building lobbies. Windows and doors that normally serve such inhabited spaces are encouraged to be a prominent aspect of the relevant building facades. Where a mix of activities is accommodated in a building, the more active uses are encouraged facing public streets, parks and pathways.

In commercial districts, such active space consists of retail and consumer service stores and building lobbies that are oriented toward the street and encourage pedestrian activity on the sidewalk. However, in all cases such ground floor spaces should be occupied by uses

(a) permitted in the zoning district within which the building is located,

(b) consistent with the general character of the environment within which the structure is located, and

(c) compatible with the principal use for which the building is designed.

By virtue of the necessity to locate parking at the ground floor level as a precaution in the event of flooding, this building, like the three other new residential buildings in the Triangle, does little to activate the street front, having no public interior or exterior amenities that would attract non-residents to the building, and only a token retail presence in the West building. Unlike the other residential buildings recently permitted, it offers no ground floor apartment entrances to further activate the street. We do not feel that ground floor unit entrances are desirable in this instance (convenience retail is preferable), but the presence of ground floor units was used to satisfy this design objective in the proponent's prior applications, and we simply note that nothing equivalent has been substituted to fulfill the goal with the current application. These shortcomings might be less of a concern for a large residential-only building erected in a thriving mixed-use neighborhood like Central Square, but the very limited options for convenience shopping, restaurants, and entertainment within a short, appealing stroll make the building's lack of active, public uses more troubling in light of the clear design guidelines set forth in the Ordinance. To this end, we also request a precise breakdown of the square footage devoted to each ground floor use type under the proposed plan (parking, bike storage, residential amenity, public amenity).

(b) Covered parking on the lower floors of a building and on-grade open parking, particularly where located in front of a building, is discouraged where a building faces a public street or public park, and publicly accessible pathways.

Virtually the entire ground floor of the project is dedicated to covered parking. The lack of on-street parking necessitates a few on-grade open parking spots; we ask that these spaces be reconfigured as parallel to the street rather than vertical, and dedicated to handicap accessible and visitor drop-off/pick-up. All other parking should be located within the garage.

(c) Ground floors should be generally 25-50% transparent. The greatest amounts of glass would be expected for retail uses with lesser amounts for office, institutional or residential use.

In keeping with the spirit of this section to encourage more mixed-use development, we again ask to see more retail or a café included in the proposal itself. A ground level bike room, even with the benefit of an air pump and a repair station, does not substitute for a place where residents and the public might gather or interact for more than a few minutes. The proponent's recent efforts to persuade neighboring property owners to expand the retail options within their buildings, while appreciated, offer no firm assurance that more retail and dining options will actually appear, and these efforts should not relieve this proponent of the responsibility to create true mixed use in his own properties. This project is his third chance to develop his own property to create a more vibrant mixed use neighborhood.

3) Pursuant to **Section 19.33** of the Ordinance, the building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors. Indicators include:

(a) Mechanical equipment that is carefully designed, well organized or visually screened from its surroundings and is acoustically buffered from neighbors. Consideration is given to the size, complexity and appearance of the equipment, its proximity to residential areas, and its impact on the existing streetscape and skyline. The extent to which screening can bring order, lessen negative visual impacts, and enhance the overall appearance of the equipment should be taken into account. More specifically:

(i) Reasonable attempts have been made to avoid exposing rooftop mechanical equipment to public view from city streets. Among the techniques that might be considered is the inclusion of screens or a parapet around the roof of the building to shield low ducts and other equipment on the roof from view.

(ii) Treatment of the mechanical equipment (including design and massing of screening devices as well as exposed mechanical elements) that relates well to the overall design, massing, scale and character of the building.

(iii) Placement of mechanical equipment at locations on the site other than on the rooftop (such as in the basement), which reduces the bulk of elements located on the roof; however, at-grade locations external to the building should not be viewed as desirable alternatives.

(iv) Tall elements, such as chimneys and air exhaust stacks, which are typically carried above screening devices for functioning reasons, are carefully designed as features of the building, thus creating interest on the skyline.

(v) All aspects of the mechanical equipment have been designed with attention to their visual impact on adjacent areas, particularly with regard to residential neighborhoods and views and vistas.

The visual images provided in the proponent's proposal do not include any images of the building's mechanical equipment. As a result, we are unable to comment on whether the proposal meets the requirements of this section. The building's roof elements will be in full view from the bridge across the parkway and from the Quad across the railroad tracks.

(c) Loading docks that are located and designed to minimize impacts (visual and operational) on neighbors.

The application states that the building will not provide loading docks for use by the residents. In our opinion, loading docks are essential in a 378-unit rental building that is likely to experience high annual turnover over its lifetime. We would like an explanation of how residents will move furniture into or out of the building during move-ins and move-outs. The access road is not wide enough for trucks to park without blocking traffic and risking the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Furthermore, we wonder whether moving trucks will be able to negotiate the turn-around at the end of the private access road after delivering furniture to the residents of the 320 units in the 10-story East building.

(f) The structure is designed and sited to minimize shadow impacts on neighboring lots, especially shadows that would have a significant impact on the use and enjoyment of

adjacent open space and shadows that might impact the operation of a Registered Solar Energy System as defined in **Section 22.60** of the Ordinance.

The application states that the shadow modeling shows that the proposed building will not impact uses of its abutting neighbor to the north (30 CambridgePark Drive) during the summer months, but shadows will likely detract from the quality of the outdoor uses and the new access road and pedestrian/bike corridor between the two buildings at other times of the year. Will there be a sunny side of the street to make the pedestrian experience more tolerable on the cold, short days from late fall through early spring? Most of the public open space is planned for areas on the building's north side, and thus is most likely to be compromised by shadows at all times of the year. We echo the City's request to see the shadow studies to better understand the potential for shadows to impact the quality of open spaces on and around the site.

In addition, no studies have been made to assess the potential for a wind tunnel effect in this relatively narrow east-west corridor between relatively tall buildings.

(g) Changes in grade across the lot are designed in ways that minimize the need for structural retaining walls close to property lines.

The proponent's proposal defines the rear retaining wall to be constructed as "minimal". What is it "minimal" in relation to? How tall will this and any other required retaining walls be in height? Where these retaining walls will support roadbeds above them, what load are they rated for? Put more simply, if the rear access road is supported by a retaining wall, will it be capable of supporting the weight of fire apparatus?

(h) Building scale and wall treatment, including the provision of windows, are sensitive to existing residential uses on adjacent lots.

Again, without the benefit of a 3-D model, it is difficult to judge whether the wall and window treatments are "sensitive" to the abutting properties, one of which has not yet been constructed. Relying on watercolor renderings that depict only partial views of buildings this large demands an equally large leap of faith that the overall effect will be harmonious.

5) Pursuant to **Section 19.35** of the Ordinance, new construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically. Indicators include:

(c) In large, multiple-building non-institutional developments, a mix of uses, including publicly accessible retail activity, is provided where such uses are permitted and where the mix of uses extends the period of time the area remains active throughout the day.

Proponent's written response: "N/A to the Project."

Without further evidence from the proponent, we are hard pressed to see how this project meets the standard of reinforcing and enhancing the complex urban aspects of City's historical development. The mechanisms that have been suggested for servicing the projected population with retail and other convenience services, public open space recreation facilities, child care, school facilities and emergency services appear to depend on using existing services at some distance from the proposed residences. As the proponent plans to build a "large, multiple-building, non-institutional development", and

mixed use is permitted in the district, and mixed use can extend the period of time the area remains active each day (and in some cases, spread out evening commute times), we ask that the proponent be required to add additional mixed use space to the East building, where it could serve the larger East building resident population.

(e) Preservation or provision of facilities for start-up companies and appropriately scaled manufacturing activities that provide a wide diversity of employment paths for Cambridge residents as a component of the development; however, activities heavily dependent on trucking for supply and distribution are not encouraged.

Proponent's written response: "The Project will be a complementary use to the existing, and future commercial and residential uses in the area, introducing additional residential living, convenient for employees of the surrounding office buildings."

To comply with this goal, the proponent should be required to add co-working space, startup incubator space, and/or support for telecommuters in the building. Such additions would not only further the goals espoused by Article 19, but would also provide space for community members to work locally, as well as help to lessen the need for commuter trips among the residents.

6) Pursuant to **Section 19.36** of the Ordinance, expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged. Indicators include:

(b) Where housing is constructed, providing affordable units exceeding that mandated by the Ordinance. Targeting larger family-sized middle income units is encouraged.

While we applaud the proponent's intent to offer 10 three-bedroom units through the low-income inclusionary program, it is not clear what the total number of inclusionary units will be, or whether this number exceeds what is mandated. It is also not clear whether there also will be market-rate 3-bedroom units in addition to those designated as affordable. None of the new housing in this project (or in any of the four other residential projects on CambridgePark Drive) includes middle-income units and the great majority of it is not family-sized. The profusion of small, luxury units contributes to the displacement of middle-income families and produces an unhealthy "barbell effect" that endangers the City's socio-economic balance. To better guide us, we would ask for a simple summary table showing the breakdown of all proposed units by unit size and affordable/market rate status.

7) Pursuant to **Section 19.37** of the Ordinance, enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city. Indicators include:

(a) On large-parcel commercial developments, publicly beneficial open space is provided.

(b) Open space facilities are designed to enhance or expand existing facilities or to expand networks of pedestrian and bicycle movement within the vicinity of the development.

(c) A wider range of open space activities than presently found in the abutting area is provided.

Proponent's written response: "The Project enhances and expands open space amenities in the City. The outdoor courtyard spaces and pool area will provide new outdoor recreation areas for residents, and on-grade landscaping enhances the new neighborhood street. The planting strategy for the Site utilizes drought tolerant native or adapted species along the perimeter of the Site and transitions to a blend of native and hardy ornamental materials closer to the Residential Building. All irrigated planting areas will employ efficient drip tubing. The Site will provide the 25% permeable area required under Section 20.96.1 of the Ordinance."

The proponent should be required to provide additional "publicly beneficial open space," as interior courtyards and pool areas are not "publicly beneficial." Public open spaces that encourage active uses seem very modest relative to the building's scale and in light of the reduction in setbacks requested. Is the 25% permeable area expressed as a percentage of the open space (17.3% of the parcel) or of the building's gross area?

f. **Section 20.93.2 - Criteria for approval of an Alewife Overlay District Special Permit**

The City's Concord-Alewife Plan sets numerous design standards and project criteria for all projects located in within any of the Alewife Overlay Districts. In reviewing the proposal's details, we have questions or concerns related to the following Plan criteria.

1a. Break large blocks into smaller blocks of sizes similar to those in surrounding Cambridge neighborhoods, to improve circulation and to be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.

Through the naming conventions and variations in façade treatments, the proponent would have us believe that this project is three distinct buildings, but the application acknowledges that it is, in fact, a single large building, taking up an entire large block. This would appear to be in direct conflict with the intent of the Concord-Alewife Plan, as all surrounding neighborhoods (Cambridge Highlands, West Cambridge, Area 9, and North Cambridge) have much smaller block and building sizes. The comparison in the CDD project review memo to the scale along Mass. Ave. in North Cambridge is not only spurious, given the greater width of the avenue itself, but should be a cautionary tale, as much of the recent large development in North Cambridge has arguably detracted from the quality of the pedestrian experience in that once-vibrant mixed use neighborhood. We ask that the components be separated to create a less monolithic appearance and to provide more open space for pedestrian circulation through the area.

1b. Vary the design of individual buildings to create an architecturally diverse district and create building height/façade setbacks between 85' and 105'.

With three large McKinnon-backed projects all designed by the same architectural firm (Arrowstreet), it could be argued that the district is not evolving in an "architecturally diverse" manner. Are there other efforts that the proponent can make to create more distinction between the individual projects now approved or pending?

1c. Street-level facades should include active uses such as frequent residential entrances, with setbacks for stoops and porches; neighborhood-serving retail including shops, restaurants, cafés; services for the public or for commercial offices such as fitness centers, cafeterias, day care centers; community spaces such as exhibition or meeting spaces; and commercial lobbies and front entrances. Provide small setbacks (5' to 15') from the right-of-way for café seating, benches, or small open spaces.

With the exception of a small retail space in the West Building, the project includes no neighborhood-serving retail including shops, restaurants, or cafés; no services for the public or for commercial offices such as fitness centers, cafeterias, or day care centers; and no publicly accessible community spaces such as exhibition or meeting spaces. As a result, we struggle to see how the above requirement is met. We would encourage the proponent to include more of the above uses within the ground floor of the East Building.

1k. Parking below grade is preferred. If above grade parking is to be provided, design it so it is not visible from nearby residential neighborhoods, from public streets, or from pathways. Line above-ground structured parking with active uses (shops, cafés, and lobbies) along important public ways; use parking structures to provide visual and acoustical screening between the railroad tracks and the rest of the area.

In contrast to the Plan's goals, this proposal makes use of above ground and on-grade parking. In addition, the lining of above ground structured parking with active uses does not appear to be proposed under the current scheme. The requirement is ignored, and no comment on this topic is included in the proposal. Again, we would ask the proponent to increase publicly accessible active uses.

2a. Encourage forms of development, mix of uses, and range of improvements that will facilitate and encourage walking, biking and transit use and reduce the growth of auto trips in an area already burdened with regional vehicular traffic passing through to other destinations in the metropolitan region.

In narrative, the proponent states the obvious: "the Residential Building is not a mixed-use project." True, it is entirely residential in nature, in the same way that previous projects in the Triangle have been solely dedicated to Office, Research, or Residential use. As a result, and despite the inclusion of limited retail space in the West Building, we object to the lack of local retail services throughout the Triangle District as mandated by zoning, as well as the difficulty in accessing local retail services in the neighboring Shopping Center District. Easy access to local retail has been proven to reduce local car trips, as residents are able to meet their basic needs without resorting to driving elsewhere. While the proponent's idea to offer shuttle bus service to and from the Fresh Pond Mall and Trader Joe's is appreciated, we feel the service would need to be more frequent than evenings, three times a week. We would encourage the proponent to add additional retail or restaurant space in the East Building, as well.

2c. Minimize the negative impact of new development on the adjacent Cambridge Highlands residential neighborhood while introducing new amenities and services that will benefit the residents of that neighborhood.

Again, we would ask the proponent to add additional amenities and services that would be beneficial to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, rather than just providing amenities for the exclusive use of the building's residents.

2e. Introduce a significant component of residential living and support retail services to enhance the area's appeal for all persons who come to work, shop as well as live within the Districts.

This is not proposed under the current scheme. In contrast with the Plan's goal, the narrative informs us that, "The Residential Building is 100% residential...." Further, the narrative notes that, "The Project will introduce additional residential living, convenient for employees of

(and sharing parking with) the surrounding office buildings and the Alewife MBTA Station.” We note that the Plan’s clear references to support retail services and shopping are ignored in the proponent’s response.

As to what we would like to see instead of 100% residential proposals, we would look to neighboring areas for a suggested approach. Though no ground floor retail requirement exists within the Triangle District (Alewife Overlay District 6), the adjoining Alewife Overlay District 5 requires a minimum of 20% non-residential space. We continue to believe that a designation of 20% as non-residential space would be a good rule of thumb for this district, as well.

2f. Create an identity and sense of place for the Alewife Districts that parallels the development of the historic urban centers that characterize much of Cambridge.

The Plan’s goal of place making is a noble one that we support strongly, yet it is not being implemented. Even after all the new residential buildings being planned for the Triangle are completed, it will still be a stretch to compare CambridgePark Drive to any of Cambridge’s “historic urban centers.” The primary ingredient missing from all these projects is an active street life and a sense of place, as most buildings offer little or nothing to engage or attract pedestrians passing by on the street. In the future, we would ask proponents and the Planning Board to think more about what it can do to better activate these new districts in the same way that our historic squares are vibrant and dynamic mixed-use neighborhoods.

Submitted on behalf of the officers of the Fresh Pond Residents Alliance:

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