Town of Arlington, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Community Development
730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, Massachusetts 02476

Public Hearing Memorandum

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Arlington Redevelopment Board and public with technical information and a planning analysis to assist with the regulatory decision-making process.

To: Arlington Redevelopment Board
From: Claire V. Ricker, AICP Secretary Ex-Officio
Subject: Environmental Design Review, 30 Mystic, Arlington, MA, Docket #3834
Date: January 23, 2025

I. Docket Summary

This is an application by Qing Gao, Cambridge Center for Chinese Culture, 410 Trapelo Rd, Belmont, MA 02478, to open Special Permit Docket #3834 in accordance with the provisions of MGL Chapter 40A § 11, and the Town of Arlington Zoning Bylaw Sections 3.3, Special Permits, and 3.4, Environmental Design Review.

The applicant proposes to renovate the interior of an existing two-story, vacant commercial building with off-street parking located at 30 Mystic Street, Arlington, MA, in the B3 Village Business District. The applicant proposes to establish a mixed-use building with nonprofit services, including a language school, child care center, and adult day care. The proposal would continue the accessory parking use located on two adjacent parcels under common ownership with the subject property. The opening of the Docket is to allow the Board to review and approve the application under Section 3.3, Special Permits and Section 3.4, Environmental Design Review.

Materials submitted for consideration of this application include:

- EDR Application
- Architectural Drawings and Photographs
- Site Plan
- Solar evaluation
- LEED checklist
- Bicycle rack specifications
- Supplemental applicant response, dated 1/22/25

II. Application of Special Permit Criteria (Arlington Zoning Bylaw, Section 3.3)

1. Section 3.3.3.A.

The use requested is listed as a Special Permit in the use regulations for the applicable district or is so designated elsewhere in this Bylaw.

As per Section 5.5.3, Use Regulations for Business Districts, a mixed-use building is allowed in the B3 Village Business District with a Special Permit under the jurisdiction of the ARB due to its location on Mystic Street. The Board can find this condition met.

2. Section 3.3.3.B.

The requested use is essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare.

The Master Plan recommends supporting commercial areas by encouraging new mixed-use redevelopment, including service and commercial uses, in and near commercial corridors. This proposed redevelopment is in close proximity to the Arlington Center commercial district and businesses along Massachusetts Avenue. The project proposes adult day care, childcare center, and a Chinese cultural school. The Board can find this condition met.

3. Section 3.3.3.C.

The requested use will not create undue traffic congestion or unduly impair pedestrian safety.

The proposed uses will be staggered and not all concurrent. The adult day care will operate during weekdays with peak van service hours in the morning and afternoon ending by 3:00 p.m. The child care center will also operate primarily during weekdays. The language school will operate weekend and after-school programs. The proposed adult day care, childcare center, and Chinese cultural school uses will not create undue traffic congestion or impair pedestrian safety. The Board can find this condition met.

4. Section 3.3.3.D.

The requested use will not overload any public water, drainage or sewer system or any other municipal system to such an extent that the requested use or any developed use in the immediate area or in any other area of the Town will be unduly subjected to hazards affecting health, safety, or the general welfare.

The commercial building, now vacant, had been in continuous use for decades. Most recently, the building was used as offices for government services and prior to that, a telecommunications company. The Project will not overload any public water, drainage, sewer system or other municipal system. The Board can find this condition met.

5. Section 3.3.3.E.

Any special regulations for the use as may be provided in the Bylaw are fulfilled.

There are no special regulations provided in the Bylaw for the proposed use. The Board can find this condition met.

6. Section 3.3.3.F.

The requested use will not impair the integrity or character of the district or adjoining districts, nor be detrimental to the health, morals, or welfare.

The use does not impair the integrity or character of the B3 district or the adjoining R6 district and will not be detrimental to health or welfare. The surrounding uses are made up of residential, commercial, and mixed-use properties. The Board can find this condition met.

7. Section 3.3.3.G.

The requested use will not, by its addition to a neighborhood, cause an excess of the use that could be detrimental to the character of said neighborhood.

There will be no excess of mixed-use in the neighborhood as a result of this development; rather the Applicant's proposal will comport with the objectives of the Master Plan to maintain mixed-use development in business districts. The Board can find this condition met.

III. Environmental Design Review Standards (Arlington Zoning Bylaw, Section 3.4)

1. EDR-1 Preservation of Landscape

The landscape shall be preserved in its natural state, insofar as practicable, by minimizing tree and soil removal, and any grade changes shall be in keeping with the general appearance of neighboring developed areas.

The proposed renovation is an interior fit-out. The exterior of the building and the site design are proposed to remain in the existing condition and all existing landscaping and trees shall be preserved. The Board can find this condition is met.

2. EDR-2 Relation of the Building to the Environment

Proposed development shall be related harmoniously to the terrain and to the use, scale, and architecture of the existing buildings in the vicinity that have functional or visible relationship to the proposed buildings. The Arlington Redevelopment Board may require a modification in massing so as to reduce the effect of shadows on the abutting property in an R0, R1 or R2 district or on public open space.

The proposed renovation is an interior fit out of an existing building that has stood on the site for decades. As no changes to the building's exterior are proposed, the project will relate to the neighborhood harmoniously in its existing condition as it has for many years. The Board can find this condition is met.

3. EDR-3 Open Space

All open space (landscaped and usable) shall be so designed as to add to the visual amenities of the vicinity by maximizing its visibility for persons passing by the site or overlooking it from nearby properties. The location and configuration of usable open space shall be so designed as to encourage social interaction, maximize its utility and facilitate maintenance.

This proposed project is an interior fit out of an existing building. There are no changes to the existing landscaping proposed. The project will retain all existing landscaping including trees and

other elements. The proposal includes approximately 8,507 square feet of landscaped open space around the exterior footprint of the building with two lawn areas directly in front of the building – well in excess of the required 10-15% landscaped open space requirements of the B3 and the R6 districts. There is no requirement for useable open space for mixed use both in the B3 and R6. As the project proposal does not include any changes to the exterior project site, the applicant has not included provision for public shade trees. Given the scope of the project as an interior fit out, the Board may consider delaying the installation of street trees to such a time as additional exterior site plan changes are proposed.

4. EDR-4 Circulation

With respect to vehicular and pedestrian and bicycle circulation, including entrances, ramps, walkways, drives, and parking, special attention shall be given to location and number of access points to the public streets (especially in relation to existing traffic controls and mass transit facilities), width of interior drives and access points, general interior circulation, separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, access to community facilities, and arrangement of vehicle parking and bicycle parking areas, including bicycle parking spaces required by Section 6.1.12 that are safe and convenient and, insofar as practicable, do not detract from the use and enjoyment of proposed buildings and structures and the neighboring properties.

There are 77 existing vehicle parking spaces on site that are accessed two curb cuts on Prescott Street and one curb cut on Mystic Street. 21 vehicle parking spaces are available on the south side of the building which is only accessible from Prescott Street. 56 vehicle spaces are available to the north of the building and are accessible from both Mystic Street as a right in/right out only turning movement and from Prescott Street with both right and left turn accessibility. The applicant proposes to convert one of the parking spaces into a loading space. Additionally, a section of the southern parking lot with one curb cut on Prescott Street will be reserved for overnight and weekend van parking.

Vehicle Parking Requirements for Adult Day Care*		
Required parking spaces	80	
Proposed parking spaces	76	
Loading Requirements		
Required loading spaces	1	
Proposed loading spaces	1	
**20 employees per shift; 4 spaces per practitioner required*		
Bicycle Parking Requirements		
Use	**Long-Term Parking**	**Short-Term Parking**
Office	1	1
Non-exempt educational	4	20
Total Required Bicycle Parking	5	21
Total Proposed Bicycle Parking	18	26

The table above shows the parking calculations for the adult day care only; other proposed uses are exempt under M.G.L. c. 40A, §3. The applicant does not have sufficient parking and would need to seek a parking reduction as either a mixed-use development or in compliance with §6.1.5.C of the Zoning Bylaw – Transportation Demand Management.

Additionally, DPCD staff note:

- A large portion of parking is located on two adjacent parcels zoned B3 and R6, respectively. The applicant should clarify whether their lease agreement includes off-site parking on those parcels.
- To ease circulation and increase visibility on the site, the removal of parallel parking spaces on the site would result in widened drive aisles near the Prescott Street curb cuts. However, this would reduce available parking overall.
- The northern driveway on Prescott Street and the two nearby parallel parking spaces appear to be partially located on the abutting parcel (11 Prescott Street). The applicant should clarify whether easements exist for access and/or parking.
- Lastly, this project is required to comply with all applicable AAB regulations for accessible parking, as confirmed by the Town's Director of Inspectional Services.

Existing pedestrian paths on site are adequate. The applicant has proposed two bicycle storage rooms with 9 spaces each, or 18 total (5 long-term spaces required). The applicant should clarify the size of the elevator and whether a bicycle could fit in the elevator without the owner having to lift the bike. The required short-term bicycle parking is provided by 3 bike racks total (26 spaces provided; 21 required). One rack is located near the main entrance on the Mystic Street and other two are proposed to be installed within the parking lots in proximity to the rear entrances of the building. The location of the 6-space bike rack in the southern parking area appears to conflict with vehicular traffic due to the narrowness of the drive aisle.

Overall, the ARB may want more detailed information regarding circulation around the site to adequately assess the proposal. In addition to the suggestions above, it may be appropriate to ask for:

- Operating hours for the child care center
- Specifications for bike racks to be installed in the bike storage rooms
- Whether overflow parking is expected to be utilized in nearby municipal parking lots on a regular or occasional basis (for special events, for example)
- A comprehensive plan for circulation of vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists on the property.

5. EDR-5 Surface Water Drainage

Special attention shall be given to proper site surface drainage so that removal of surface waters will not adversely affect neighboring properties or the public storm drainage system. Available Best Management Practices for the site should be employed, and include site planning to minimize impervious surface and reduce clearing and re-grading. Best Management Practices may include erosion control and stormwater treatment by means of swales, filters, plantings, roof gardens, native vegetation, and leaching catch basins. Stormwater should be treated at least minimally on the development site; that which cannot be handled on site shall be removed from all roofs, canopies, paved and pooling areas and carried away in an underground drainage system. Surface water in all paved areas shall be collected in intervals so that it will not obstruct the flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic and will not create puddles in the paved areas.

In accordance with Section 3.3.4., the Board may require from any applicant, after consultation with the Director of Public Works, security satisfactory to the Board to ensure the maintenance of all stormwater facilities such as catch basins, leaching catch basins, detention basins, swales, etc. within the site. The Board may use funds provided by such security to conduct maintenance that the applicant fails to do.

The Board may adjust in its sole discretion the amount and type of financial security such that it is satisfied that the amount is sufficient to provide for any future maintenance needs.

The application materials state that as the project is an interior fit-out, no changes are proposed for surface water drainage which will remain in the existing condition. The applicant shall utilize and maintain all the existing and proposed storm water facilities such as catch basins, leaching catch basins, detention basins, swales, etc. within the site. The Board can find this condition is met.

6. EDR-6 Utility Service

Electric, telephone, cable TV, and other such lines of equipment shall be underground. The proposed method of sanitary sewage disposal and solid waste disposal from all buildings shall be indicated.

The building will utilize existing utility services currently located underground including sanitary sewage disposal. The Board can find this condition is met.

7. EDR-7 Advertising Features

The size, location, design, color, texture, lighting and materials of all permanent signs and outdoor advertising structures or features shall not detract from the use and enjoyment of proposed buildings and structures and the surrounding properties.

The applicant has indicated an existing freestanding sign located on the parcel will remain in the same location. The applicant should submit representative signs and signage specifications for the Board to assess. Additionally, lighting and any other potential outdoor features relative to the building should be provided. Any signage and advertising will be in accordance with the provisions of Section 6.2 of the Zoning By-Law, compliant with the B3 Village Business District requirements. Final signage will need to be submitted, reviewed, and approved administratively by the Department of Planning and Community Development or reviewed by the Board for a sign permit.

8. EDR-8 Special Features

Exposed storage areas, exposed machinery installations, service areas, truck loading areas, utility buildings and structures, and similar accessory areas and structures shall be subject to such setbacks, screen plantings or other screening methods as shall reasonably be required to prevent their being incongruous with the existing or contemplated environment and the surrounding properties.

There are no special features proposed as part of this project. The Board can find this condition met.

9. EDR-9 Safety

With respect to personal safety, all open and enclosed spaces shall be designed to facilitate building evacuation and maximize accessibility by fire, police and other emergency personnel and equipment. Insofar as practicable, all exterior spaces and interior public and semi-public spaces shall be so designed to minimize the fear and probability of personal harm or injury by increasing the potential surveillance by neighboring residents and passersby of any accident or attempted criminal act.

The Board may consider requesting a lighting plan to determine if existing exterior illumination is sufficient for the proposed change in use. The interior and exterior of the building are designed to facilitate building evacuation including two forms of egress. The property provides access to the building for fire, police and other emergency personnel and equipment from Mystic and Prescott Streets. The Board can find this condition met.

10. EDR-10 Heritage

With respect to Arlington's heritage, removal or disruption of historic, traditional or significant uses, structures or architectural elements shall be minimized insofar as practical whether these exist on the site or on adjacent properties.

This property is not listed on the *Inventory of Historically or Architecturally Significant Properties in the Town of Arlington* and is not under the jurisdiction of the Arlington Historical Commission. The Board can find that this condition is met

11. EDR-11 Microclimate

With respect to the localized climatic characteristics of a given area, any development which proposes new structures, new hard surface, ground coverage or the installation of machinery which emits heat, vapor or fumes shall endeavor to minimize insofar as practicable, any adverse impacts on light, air, and water resources or on noise and temperature levels of the immediate environment.

There are no new structures, hard surfaces, or other impacts to the micro-climate of the immediate area as there are no changes to the exterior of the building proposed. The Board can find this condition is met.

12. EDR-12 Sustainable Building and Site Design

Projects are encouraged to incorporate best practices related to sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality. Applicants must submit a current Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) checklist, appropriate to the type of development, annotated with narrative description that indicates how the LEED performance objectives will be incorporated into the project.

The applicant has provided the required LEED checklist and an evaluation of rooftop solar capacity. The project will utilize sustainable building practices and include energy-efficient systems. Additionally, the property owner has recently installed geo-thermal energy infrastructure on the property to serve the existing building. The Board can find this condition is met.

IV. Findings

The following findings are for the Board's consideration:

1. The ARB finds that the project is consistent with Environmental Design Review per §3.4 of the Zoning Bylaw.

2. The ARB finds that the project is consistent with §3.3, Special Permits of the Zoning Bylaw.

3. The ARB finds that, subject to the submission of lease sections related to parking provisions to the Department of Planning and Community Department, the project may provide parking off-site within 600 feet of the premises per §6.1.10 of the Zoning Bylaw.

4. The ARB finds that the weekday van service for adult day care users, the availability of nearby on-street parking and off-site parking on adjacent parcels, and the proximity of municipal parking lots justify reducing the number of onsite parking spaces required per §6.1.5 of the Zoning Bylaw.

5. The ARB finds that the number of proposed long-term bicycle spaces in excess of what is required, the proposed use types and shuttle to be provided, and parking lot layout justify reducing the number of short-term bicycle spaces and/or allowing short-term bicycle spaces to be located more than 50 feet from the main entrance per §6.1.12.A of the Zoning Bylaw.

V. Conditions

A. General

1. The final design, sign, exterior material, landscaping, and lighting plans shall be subject to the approval of the Arlington Redevelopment Board or administratively approved by the Department of Planning and Community Development.

2. Any substantial or material deviation during construction from the approved plans and specifications is subject to the written approval of the Arlington Redevelopment Board.

3. The Board maintains continuing jurisdiction over this permit and may, after a duly advertised public hearing, attach other conditions or modify these conditions as it deems appropriate in order to protect the public interest and welfare.

4. Snow removal from all parts of the site, as well as from any abutting public sidewalks, shall be the responsibility of the owner and shall be accomplished in accordance with Town Bylaws.

5. Trash shall be picked up only on Monday through Friday between the hours of 7:00 am and 6:00 pm. All exterior trash and storage areas on the property, if any, shall be properly screened and maintained in accordance with Article 30 of Town Bylaws.

6. The Applicant shall provide a statement from the Town Engineer that all proposed utility services have adequate capacity to serve the development. The applicant shall provide evidence that a final plan for drainage and surface water removal has been reviewed and approved by the Town Engineer.

7. Upon installation of landscaping materials and other site improvements, the Applicant shall remain responsible for such materials and improvement and shall replace and repair as necessary to remain in compliance with the approved site plan.

8. All utilities serving or traversing the site (including electric, telephone, cable, and other such lines and equipment) shall be underground.

9. Upon the issuance of the building permit, the Applicant shall file with the Building Inspector and the Department of Community Safety the names and telephone numbers of contact personnel who may be reached 24 hours each day during the construction period.

10. Building signage shall be filed with and reviewed and approved by the Department of Planning and Community Development and Inspectional Services.

11. The applicant must comply with the conditions set forth herein, with the State Building Code, including the Town of Arlington requirements, and, where applicable, with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board regulations.

12. The applicant must obtain the necessary building permits and work with the Town Engineer to ensure compliance with all applicable codes.