



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

# PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

## NOTICE OF DECISION

Case No: #207

Address: Switch House at 25 - 45 Blackstone Street, and 217 - 229 Putnam Avenue

Zoning: Residence C-1

Owners Applicants: President and Fellows of Harvard College, c/o Steven Nason, Senior Real Estate Development Manager, Harvard Real Estate Services, 1350 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

Application Date: July 20, 2005

Public Hearing: September 6, 2005

Date of Decision: September 6, 2005

Date of Filing Decision: November 3, 2005

OFFICE OF THE  
CITY CLERK  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
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Application: Conversion of Non-Residential Structures to Residential Use Special Permit (Section 5.28.2) to convert non-residential structure to residential use, and Multifamily Special Permit (Section 4.26) to construct a multifamily dwelling containing 12 or more dwelling units.

Decision: GRANTED with conditions

Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17 of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after filing of the above referenced decision with the City Clerk. Copies of the complete decision and final plans, if applicable, are on file with the Community Development Department and the City Clerk.

Authorized Representative of the Planning Board  
For further information concerning this decision, please call Liza Paden at 617 349 4647, TTY: 617 349 4621, or [lpaden@cambridgema.gov](mailto:lpaden@cambridgema.gov).

### **Application Documents Submitted**

Special Permit Application dated July 20, 2005 certified as complete on July 21, 2005, containing the project narrative: dimensional form; list of zoning violations; ownership certificate: context and building images: site plan. existing and proposed: building details: open space diagram. Architectural and site plans entitled "Blackstone Street Switch House" by Boyes-Watson Architects, dated July 12, 2005.

### **Supplemental Materials Submitted**

1. Summary description of NSTAR easements
2. Letter to NSTAR from Harvard University regarding easements. dated June 20, 2005
3. Letter of Commitment between Harvard University and the City of Cambridge, dated October 27, 2003
4. Letter of support to the Cambridge Planning Board from Charles Sullivan, Executive Director of the Cambridge Historical Commission dated August 23, 2005

### **Other Documents**

1. Letter to Harvard University from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection regarding determination of applicability pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 91. dated September 20, 2004, re: 24-46 Blackstone Street.

### **Project Application and Summary**

On July 20 2005, Harvard University submitted to the Planning Board its application for a Conversion Special Permit pursuant to Article 5.28.2 of the Zoning Ordinance and a Multifamily Special Permit pursuant to Article 4.26 for the development of affordable housing at 25-45 Blackstone Street and 217 – 229 Putnam Avenue. The application was certified by the City, as complete on July 21, 2005.

The application and the supporting and supplemental materials submitted to the Board, describe the project consisting of 41,783 sf of gross floor area of renovated space within an existing building formerly known as the Switch House. The project will create a total of 33 affordable home-ownership housing units. The Switch House is located on a 44,080 sf parcel of land bounded by Blackstone Street, Western Avenue, and Putnam Avenue. The housing units will be made available for purchase in accordance with the City of Cambridge affordable housing policies. A total of 33 off-street parking spaces will be provided on site and the project will include 7,051 sf of usable open space.

## Findings

Based on its review of the application documents, supplemental materials, and other documents submitted to the Board, testimony taken at the public hearing and submitted in written form to the Board, and the review and consideration of the relevant special permit criteria, the Board makes the following findings.

### I. Conformance with General Special Permit Criteria in Section 10.43:

*A special permit will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when the particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in the district, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest for the following reasons:*

*a. It appears that the requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met.*

It appears that the requirements of this Ordinance will be met. With the granting of this Project Review Special Permit, the Project will conform to the dimensional provisions of Section 5.28.21 through 5.28.25 applicable to the conversion of non-residential structures to residential use.

*b. The traffic generated or patterns of access or egress will cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character.*

The traffic generated or patterns of access or egress will not cause congestion, hazard or substantial change to neighborhood character. There is a single driveway on Putnam Avenue for vehicular access and egress. Given the number of units in the project and access to transit, new trip generation will be relatively small. Existing patterns of traffic on abutting streets will not change with the reuse of this building.

*c. The continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use.*

The continued operation of the adjacent residential and institutional uses will not be adversely affected by this residential development. Adjacent uses will in fact be enhanced by the conversion of the structure to residential use.

*d. Nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City.*

No nuisance or hazard will be created to the detriment of the health, safety and /or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City. No extraordinary activities will occur at the site.

*e. For other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance.*

The proposed use will not impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district or otherwise derogate from the intent or purpose of this Ordinance. The proposed conversion of an industrial building to residential use will fulfill the intent of the district and the conversion provisions of Section 5.28.2.

*f. The new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.*

- *New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.*

This project preserves and re-uses a former industrial building and preserves its relationship with other Blackstone Station buildings. The project, by its very nature as a reuse of an existing building, responds to the development pattern in the neighborhood, which is characterized by both residential uses and industrial style buildings.

- *Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to the surroundings.*

The development will be bicycle and pedestrian friendly. The existing streetscape along Blackstone Street will be preserved and enhanced, and new pedestrian pathways will connect building entrances to the surrounding sidewalks. The building will have 5 bicycle spaces located near the building entrance and 12 bicycle storage spaces inside, accessed from the main entry. The existing barren parking lot along Putnam Avenue will be significantly improved visually with substantial landscaping.

- *The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.*

The site plan minimizes any impacts. HVAC equipment will be located on the roof (where they will have the least impact on neighbors) and all other mechanical equipment will be located in the building basement. The trash dumpster will be located away from neighbors and screened by a vinyl fence. New open space on the site will enhance its appearance and reduce the amount of storm water runoff. The existing transformer adjacent to the proposed parking lot will be better screened.

- *Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.*

The development does not overburden city infrastructure. The City of Cambridge and utility providers have confirmed the adequacy of the existing infrastructure capacity to service the development.

- *New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.*

The project preserves the Switch House building and reinforces the prevailing urban fabric and historic character of the area by providing a new, contemporary use for a valuable old industrial building.

- *Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.*

The project consists entirely of affordable housing with one, two, and three bedroom units in flats and two level duplexes.

- *Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.*

The development will feature on-site open space amenities where there are currently none, including grassed areas, landscaped pedestrian walkways, and tree plantings.

## **II. Conformance with Special Permit Criteria for Townhouse Development and Multifamily Dwellings – Section 10.47.4**

- a. *Key features of the natural landscape should be preserved to the maximum extent feasible. Tree removal should be minimized and other natural features of the site, such as slopes, should be maintained.*

Other than a planting bed and two street trees, there are no natural elements on site. The street trees and plantings will be retained and augmented with much new landscaping.

- b. *New buildings should be related sensitively to the existing built environment. The location, orientation and massing of the structures in the development should avoid overwhelming the existing buildings in the vicinity of the development. Visual and functional disruptions should be avoided.*

There are no new buildings proposed. The existing building and lot will be upgraded: new window openings will be created to produce more engaging building facades and extensive landscaping will be introduced.

- c. *The location, arrangement, and landscaping of open space should provide some visual benefits to abutters and passersby as well as functional benefits to occupants of the development.*

New and enhanced landscaping along Putnam Avenue and Blackstone Street will provide visual benefits to abutters and passersby.

- d. *Parking areas, internal roadways and access/egress points should be safe and convenient.*

Vehicle access/egress is limited to a single location on Putnam Avenue, which is a logical and safe location. A curb cut will be removed as part of the project.

c. *Parking area landscaping should minimize the intrusion of onsite parking so that it does not substantially detract from the use and enjoyment of either the proposed development or neighboring properties.*

On site surface parking is substantially buffered with landscaping.

f. *Service facilities such as trash collection apparatus and utility boxes should be located so that they are convenient for residents, yet unobtrusive.*

Trash facilities are located in a fenced and gated enclosure in a location that is convenient for residents but also screened and unobtrusive.

### **III. Conformance with Special Permit Criteria for the Conversion of Non-Residential Structures to Residential Use – Section 5.28.27 (1) and (2):**

1. *The impact on residential neighbors of the new housing use as it may affect privacy. The location and size of windows, screening elements, decks, entries, and other aspects of the design shall be reviewed to maintain reasonable levels of privacy of abutters where significant variations from the normally required dimensional standards for the district are granted.*

The new window openings are typical for a residential neighborhood and are appropriate in scale, well designed and not overwhelming for abutters.

2. *The impact of increased numbers of dwelling units above that normally permitted in the district, on on-street parking, particularly in neighborhoods where off street parking is limited.*

There is no increase in dwelling units above that normally permitted in the Residence C-1 district utilizing the bonus provisions of Section 11.200; therefore this project has no increased impact.

### **Decision**

Based on a review of the application documents, comments made at the public hearing, and based on the above findings, the Planning Board **GRANTS** the requested Multifamily Special Permit – Section 4.26 and Conversion of Non-Residential Structures to Residential Use Special Permit – Section 5.28.2 subject to the following conditions and limitations:

1. All use, building construction, and site plan development shall be in substantial conformance with the plans and application documents submitted to the Planning Board as referenced above and dated July 20, 2005 (application) and July 12, 2005 (plans). Appendix I summarizes the dimensional features of the Project as approved.

2. Before issuance of the Building Permit for the project, the Community Development Department (CDD) shall certify to the Superintendent of Buildings that the final plans submitted to secure the Building Permit are consistent with and meet all conditions of

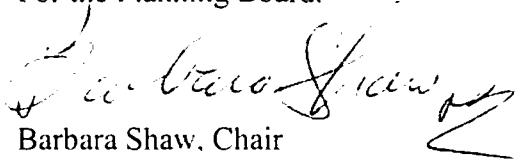
this Permit.

3. All authorized development shall conform to the requirements of the City of Cambridge *Noise Control Ordinance*, Chapter 8.16 of the City Municipal Code.

4. The Permittee is requested to cooperate with a City-initiated process led by the CDD and the Traffic Parking and Transportation Department (TPTD) to analyze existing traffic conditions in the vicinity of the site and make recommendations for actions the city might take to improve circumstances to the extent that such actions might be effective. This Condition shall not affect the issuance of the Building Permit.

Voting in affirmative to **GRANT** the Special Permit were B. Shaw, H. Russell, P. Winters, W. Tibbs, T. Anninger, and J. Molinsky, alternate appointed by the Chair to act on this case, constituting at least two thirds of the membership of the Board.

For the Planning Board.

  
Barbara Shaw, Chair

A copy of this decision #207 shall be filed with the Office of the City Clerk. Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17, Chapter 40A, Massachusetts General Laws, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after the date of such filing in the Office of the City Clerk.

ATTEST: A true and correct copy of the above decision filed with the Office of the City Clerk on November 11, 2015 by Elizabeth M. Paden, authorized representative of the Cambridge Planning Board. All plans referred to in the decision have been filed with the City Clerk on said date.

Twenty (20) days have elapsed since the filing of the decision.  
No appeal has been filed.

DATE:  
City Clerk of Cambridge

**Appendix I – Dimensional Form**

**Special Permit # 207                      Address: 25-45 Blackstone Street**

	Allowed/Required	Existing	Proposed	Granted
<b>Total FAR</b>				
Residential	.75	N/A	.95	.95
Non-Residential		.89		
Inclusionary Bonus	N/A	N/A	N/A	
<b>Total GFA in Sq. Ft.</b>				
Residential	33,060	N/A	41,783	41,783
Non-Residential	N/A	39,035		
Inclusionary Bonus	N/A			
<b>Max. Height</b>				
Range of heights	35' – 0"	36' – 8"	36' – 8"	36' – 8"
<b>Lot Size</b>	44,080	44,080	44,080	44,080
<b>Lot area/du</b>	900	N/A	1,266	1,266
<b>Total Dwelling Units</b>	46	0	33	33
Base units				
Inclusionary units				
<b>Min. Lot Width</b>	50	297.06	297.06	297.06
<b>Min. Yard Setbacks</b>	Existing building			
Front		4.08	4.08	4.08
Side, Left		4.90	4.90	4.90
Side, Right		14.94	14.94	14.94
Rear		18.56	18.56	18.56
<b>Total % Open Space</b>	30% (13,224)	3%	31% (13,837)	31% (13,837)
Usable	50% (6,612)	0%	51% (7,051)	51% (7,051)
Other	50% (6,612)	3%	49% (6,776)	49% (6,776)
<b>Off Street Parking</b>				
Min #	1 per unit	N/A	33	33
Max #				
Handicapped	5%		2	2
<b>Bicycle Spaces</b>	1 per 2 units		17	17
<b>Loading Bays</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A