



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board

From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner
Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Planner
Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner

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Re: Special Permit **PB #313, 135 Fulkerson Street**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 135 Fulkerson Street, the special permit being requested, and related comments. Comments from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) is provided in a separate memo.

Summary of Proposal

The applicant is proposing to demolish the existing single-story garage building to construct a new three-story building with 40 residential units, above-grade parking for 40 cars, and a shed for 42 long-term bicycle parking spaces. The proposal also includes addition of sidewalks on Fulkerson Street in addition to a pathway along the northern side of the property that is intended to provide a potential future public access from Fulkerson Street to the planned Grand Junction Rail-with-Trail multiuse pathway.

Requested Special Permit

The project is primarily located in the Residence C-1 (C-1) District and requires a Multifamily Special Permit for the construction of a multifamily dwelling containing 12 or more units per Section 4.26 *Multifamily Special Permit Applicability*. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Construction of Multifamily Dwelling in Residence C-1 District (Section 4.26.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key features of natural landscape are preserved. • New buildings relate sensitively to existing built environment. • Open space provides visual benefits to abutters and passersby and functional benefits to occupants. • Parking, access and egress are safe and convenient. • Intrusion of onsite parking is minimized. • Services such as trash collection and utility boxes are convenient yet unobtrusive. <p>(See full 10.47.4 criteria in appendix)</p>
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43 (see appendix).

Area Planning and Zoning

The majority of the site (44,065 square feet) is located in the Residence C-1 District (C-1). A small portion of the site (721 square feet) at the southern tip is located in the Industry A-1 District (IA-1), within which the base zoning is also modified by the Eastern Cambridge Housing Overlay (ECHO) district, which creates incentives for residential development including a higher FAR and a graduated set of height limits. However, on this site the height limit is a uniform 35 feet, as in surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The most recent planning effort in this area was the Eastern Cambridge Planning Study (ECaPS), completed in 2001, which led to the creation of the ECHO district. This site is located within what ECaPS describes as a “Transition Area,” which is characterized by a mix of evolving industrial and other commercial uses, distinct from Kendall Square’s high-tech commercial cluster, and adjacent to but also distinct from the traditional lower-scale residential neighborhoods. The key objective in the Transition Area, reflected in the ECHO zoning, is to encourage new residential development and conversion of existing buildings to residential use, but to continue to allow commercial uses as conforming uses. According to ECaPS, this area has the potential to incorporate pedestrian improvements, to promote well-designed new development, and to enhance the connections between East Cambridge and Wellington-Harrington.

Another aspect of the zoning that emerged from ECaPS was the creation of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) mechanism, which allows property owners, with a special permit, to increase development capacity on sites south of Binney Street in exchange for a commensurate reduction on sites north of Binney Street. One goal of this mechanism was to create opportunities for public open space, with the area across from Ahern Field on Fulkerson Street identified as a potential open space site. However, the

base zoning was retained in order to continue to allow residential development at the scale of the surrounding neighborhoods as an as-of-right option.

ECaPS also included a set of *Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines* that are referenced in the zoning for the area. While conformance with these guidelines is not an explicit condition for approval of the requested multifamily special permit, these guidelines are meant to inform urban design review for all new projects in the area, and are discussed in the Application Narrative and in the Urban Design section further below.

Another important planning consideration in the review of this project is the aforementioned Grand Junction Rail-With-Trail multiuse pathway, which has been in Cambridge's open space and transportation planning for many years. As discussed with prior projects, it is important that new development allows for a range of future options, including a bicycle and pedestrian pathway on either side of the existing rail line, and the possible conversion or addition to the existing line to accommodate transit options. This site is particularly important because it could serve as part of a future connection from Ahern Field and the Kennedy-Longfellow School to the future pathway.

Proposed Project

As it exists, the lot is currently non-conforming with regard to all setbacks and some other dimensional requirements. The Applicant has reviewed the proposal with staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission, who did not find the existing buildings to be significant and therefore no demolition review hearing will be required.

The proposed new residential building is designed to conform to the base zoning requirements, including FAR, unit density, height, setbacks, parking and bicycle parking. Although it is a split-zoning lot, nearly all of the lot and all of the proposed built area is located in the more restrictive C-1 district, and the proposed development does not exceed the allowed density in that district. Required automobile parking is located at grade and required long-term bicycle parking is located at grade within a shed and the building itself. The project exceeds the minimum requirement for open space with landscaped areas and a shared patio area near the bike shed.

As noted, the zoning for the site allows for either residential development under base zoning limitations, or for a transfer of development rights by special permit to provide open space or other public benefits as envisioned in ECaPS; this proposal takes the former option. However, the proposed future public pathway access to the Grand Junction Rail-With-Trail will provide an open space benefit by facilitating a connection of existing parks to new open spaces, which is highly recommended in the guidelines for Transition Areas in ECaPS and is otherwise consistent with the city's open space planning objectives. Moreover, new residential uses have the potential to benefit Ahern Field by promoting activation and safety for park users.

The project will also be subject to the Green Building requirements per Section 22.20. The requirement is to design to a minimum "Certified" standard under the LEED rating system, and the application materials indicate that the design could potentially reach a "Gold" level under LEED for Homes. The

project will be subject to continuing Green Building review by CDD staff prior to receiving a Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy.

The project proposes street edge improvements to Fulkerson Street, including new sidewalks, landscaped areas with shade trees and two crosswalks across Fulkerson Street to connect to Ahern Field. The crosswalk proposed on the northern side will link the public access route leading to the Grand Junction Rail-with-Trail with Ahern Field as well. These changes have the potential to significantly improve pedestrian and bicycle connections within the neighborhood.

The residential building is proposed to contain units of a variety of sizes, with three-bedroom units, two-bedroom units and one-bedroom units. The project will provide affordable units in accordance with Inclusionary Housing requirements.

Urban Design

While the project is of a relatively modest scale, the City's urban design objectives and guidelines are still relevant. In particular, the importance of promoting new residential development and a high-quality pedestrian environment in Transition Areas are key issues. Relevant principles from the Eastern Cambridge Design Guidelines are summarized in the attached appendix.

At the site planning level, the proposal transforms a currently unappealing streetscape into a more pleasant and lively pedestrian environment with round-the-clock residents. The site is constrained by its odd parcel shape and zoning setback requirements, which results in an L-shaped building located at one end, with the remaining half of the site dedicated to at-grade parking that fronts Fulkerson Street. While reasonable attempts have been made to screen the parking with landscaping and planters, visually prominent parking areas along street frontages are discouraged. Further opportunities to reduce the visual impact of the parking lot should therefore be explored.

The Ahern Field interface represents a significant opportunity for the site. The project proposes a strong urban edge to the field, which is softened by projecting two-story elements clad in green metal panel with Juliette and projecting balconies, and a landscaped front setback. This frames and helps to activate the open space while minimizing shadow impacts; however, a stronger presence could be achieved by introducing individual entries to each ground floor unit in accordance with the design guidelines. In addition, the cornice line has little variation, particularly where the clapboard siding is used, which accentuates the length of the building. The rear elevation appears to more successfully utilize similar modulation techniques to create a finer vertical grain and visual interest, which helps break down the massing and length of the building.

A dark, metal-clad volume successfully anchors the corner with a modest lobby space oriented towards both the parking lot and Fulkerson Street. This is likely to assist with pedestrian wayfinding and will help evolution of Fulkerson Street into an activated public realm. The use of storefront windows at the corner signifies the main building entrance; however, it does create a commercial/office feel. Perhaps more could be done to make the lobby, social lounge and stairs more welcoming and spatially interesting features from the street.

As described above, several positive pedestrian improvements are proposed as part of the application. A new sidewalk will be constructed, and new pedestrian crosswalks connecting the site to the park are also proposed. As described in the memo from the TP&T, the proposed pedestrian improvements will require further discussion with City staff. Subject to DPW and TP&T requirements, the sidewalk should maintain a continuous width, rather than narrow per current conditions, and curbside street trees should also be considered to create a more amenable pedestrian environment.

The rear patio provides semi-private open space for residents, but it does not seem well-located or accessible for residents, nor is it visually accessible from the street. The quality of this space should be carefully considered so that it provides a meaningful amenity for residents and is not dominated by vehicles. Per the City's urban design objectives, the prominent siting of the transformer, as well as the visible trash storage area, should be further studied with regard to possible alternative siting behind the building, potential to integrate with the architecture of the building, and more decorative screening treatments.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the hearing to a future date, or as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Review of landscape details, including planters and benches and opportunities to minimize the perceived extent of asphalt paving.
- Investigation of opportunities to improve the siting and appearance of the transformer, and trash storage area.
- Review of sidewalk improvements and prospects for street trees (with DPW and TP&T).
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details.

Special Permit for Multifamily Dwelling in Residence C-1 District

4.26.1 The construction of a multifamily dwelling containing twelve (12) or more dwelling units or of elderly oriented congregate housing containing twenty-four (24) or more separate living spaces in a Residence C, Residence C-1, Residence C-1A, Office 1, Business A-1, or Business A-3 district shall require a special permit granted by the Planning Board.

10.47.4 Criteria for approval of Townhouses and Multifamily Dwellings. In reviewing applications for townhouse developments and multifamily dwelling, the special permit granting authority shall consider and address the following site plan criteria as applicable:

- (1) 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.
- (2) New buildings should be related sensitively to the existing built environment. The location, orientation and massing of structures in the development should avoid overwhelming the existing buildings in the vicinity of the development. Visual and functional disruptions should be avoided.
- (3) 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.
- (4) Parking areas, internal roadways and access/egress points should be safe and convenient.
- (5) 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.
- (6) Service facilities such as trash collection apparatus and utility boxes should be located so that they are convenient for resident, yet unobtrusive.

General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

10.43 *Criteria.* Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:

- (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or
- (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or
- (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, or
- (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, or
- (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, and
- (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30. **[SEE FOLLOWING PAGE]**

19.30 Citywide Urban Design Objectives [SUMMARIZED]

Objective	Indicators
New projects should be responsive to the existing or anticipated pattern of development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition to lower-scale neighborhoods • Consistency with established streetscape • Compatibility with adjacent uses • Consideration of nearby historic buildings
Development should be pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, with a positive relationship to its surroundings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited ground floor spaces • Discouraged ground-floor parking • Windows on ground floor • Orienting entries to pedestrian pathways • Safe and convenient bicycle and pedestrian access
The building and site design should mitigate adverse environmental impacts of a development upon its neighbors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location/impact of mechanical equipment • Location/impact of loading and trash handling • Stormwater management • Shadow impacts • Retaining walls, if provided • Building scale and wall treatment • Outdoor lighting • Tree protection (requires plan approved by City Arborist)
Projects should not overburden the City infrastructure services, including neighborhood roads, city water supply system, and sewer system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water-conserving plumbing, stormwater management • Capacity/condition of water and wastewater service • Efficient design (LEED standards)
New construction should reinforce and enhance the complex urban aspects of Cambridge as it has developed historically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional use focused on existing campuses • Mixed-use development (including retail) encouraged where allowed • Preservation of historic structures and environment • Provision of space for start-up companies, manufacturing activities
Expansion of the inventory of housing in the city is encouraged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing as a component of large, multi-building development • Affordable units exceeding zoning requirements, targeting units for middle-income families
Enhancement and expansion of open space amenities in the city should be incorporated into new development in the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly beneficial open space provided in large-parcel commercial development • Enhance/expand existing open space, complement existing pedestrian/bicycle networks • Provide wider range of activities

Summary of relevant East Cambridge Design Guidelines

1. Street-level Uses and Design

- a. Create a consistent residential edge, with small setbacks for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- b. Buildings should be designed with individual units and front doors facing the street, including row house units on the lower levels of multi-family buildings.
- c. Blank walls should be avoided along all streets and pedestrian walkways.

2. Building Height and Orientation

Neighborhood Streets:

- a. Set back any portion of the building above 45 feet by at least 10 feet from the principal facade. Where appropriate, design these setbacks to include balconies and rooftop terraces.
- b. For residential uses, provide small setbacks (5 to 15 feet) for stoops, porches, and front gardens.
- c. Provide individual entrances to ground floor units along the street.
- d. Locate courtyards and open spaces to maximize sun exposure.

Park Edges:

- a. The height of the principal façade of buildings surrounding a park should be no greater than 1/3 the width of the park. The buildings must conform to overall district height limits in the zoning.
- b. Locate buildings to minimize shadows on the park, especially in the afternoon.
- c. Surround public parks with uses that create an active environment throughout the day and evening and increase safety for park users, such as:
 - i. Buildings with individual units and front doors facing the street. Where residential lobbies face the street, doors should generally be spaced no more than 75 feet apart.
 - ii. Shops, cafés and other public uses that enliven the street.

3. Scale and Massing

- a. Buildings should avoid continuous massing longer than 100 feet facing residential streets and 200 feet facing mixed-use and retail streets.
- b. Buildings should reflect a rhythm and variation appropriate to the urban context.
- c. Buildings should have a clearly expressed base, middle, and top.
- d. Use variations in height and architectural elements to create interesting and varied rooflines and to clearly express the tops of buildings.
- e. Emphasize corners using taller elements such as towers, turrets, and bays.

4. Architectural Character

- a. Create varied architecture and avoid flat facades by using bays, balconies, porches, stoops, and other projecting elements.
- b. Maximize the number of windows facing public streets to increase safety.

5. Public Realm

Open Space

- a. Provision of open space of diverse sizes and use is encouraged to enhance the public environment.
- b. Provision of interconnected series of open spaces is encouraged to provide connections to neighborhoods and to encourage pedestrian movement.

Semi-private open space:

- a. For residential development, create semi-private open spaces that create a transition from public sidewalks and courts to private interior spaces.
- b. Design residential courtyards to be visually accessible from streets to enhance safety and activity along the street.

Streets and Sidewalks:

- a. Character
 - i. Use streetscape elements such as trees, benches, signage, and lighting to support active pedestrian uses and to reinforce the character and identity of each district.
 - ii. Design streets to encourage pedestrian and cycle activity, and to control vehicle speed in residential areas.
- b. Provide sufficient pavement width to accommodate on-street parking where appropriate in order to provide short-term parking and to serve local retail.
- c. Provide pedestrian-scale lighting to enhance pedestrian safety.

Connections:

- a. Provide strong pedestrian, bicycle and visual connections to public parks through view corridors, signage, and/or art installations.
- b. Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle connections to existing and new bus stops and to transit stations.

6. Parking

- a. While underground parking is preferable everywhere, if above ground parking is to be built it should be designed so as not to be visible from public streets or pathways.
- b. Locate vehicular parking entrances on side streets and alleys and provide safe pedestrian access from public streets.
- c. Design and locate lighting fixtures in surface parking lots and garages to enhance safety while minimizing light spillover onto adjacent properties.