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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: April 17, 2019

Re: Special Permit **PB #346, 23 May Street**

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This memo contains an overview of the of the proposed project at 23 May Street, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

## Summary of Proposal

The proposed project consists of altering the existing two-family residential building into a single-family dwelling and constructing a new detached single-family dwelling on the lot. A total of two required off-street parking spaces are proposed on the site.

## Requested Special Permits

The proposed project is located on a corner parcel with frontage on May Street and Vineyard Street in the Residence B base zoning district in the Strawberry Hill neighborhood. The Applicant is seeking a Special Permit to allow construction of more than one structure containing a principal residential use pursuant to Section 5.53.2 of the Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance allows for more than one structure containing a principal residential use as-of-right in a Residence B zoning district provided all portions of all structures are located no farther than 75 feet from any street line to which the lots abut. The proposed new structure is more than 75 feet from Vineyard Street, and so the proposal requires the Planning Board to issue a Special Permit based on whether the proposal is found to meet the criteria in Sections 10.43 and 5.53.2 of the Zoning Ordinance.

The existing structure is proposed to have a reduced building footprint. The Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) has administratively reviewed the proposed alteration and approved the partial reduction and roofline modification of the existing building. The City Council has also approved the second curb cut for this parcel. The applicable special permit findings are summarized on the following page. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Special Permit for more than one structure containing a principal residential use (Section 5.53.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The development of two structures on the lot will not significantly increase the impact of the new construction should it occur in a single structure, <u>OR</u></li> <li>• The development of two structures will provide identifiable benefits beyond that provided by construction in a single structure, considering the following:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extent to which preservation of a large contiguous open space in the rear of the lot or series of adjacent lots is achieved</li> <li>○ Incentives to locate buildings and parking in the front half of a lot per the prevailing development pattern in the neighborhood</li> <li>○ Providing an enhanced living environment for residents on the lot</li> <li>○ Incentives to retain existing structures, particularly structures that are preferably preserved</li> <li>○ Opportunities to reduce visual impact of parking from the public street and adjacent lots</li> <li>○ Opportunities to reduce height and bulk of new construction is deeper into a lot or closer to structures on abutting lots</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Conforms to general criteria for issuance of a special permit.</li> </ul>
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.

### Area Planning and Zoning

The lot is in the Strawberry Hill neighborhood. It is about a block away from MBTA bus service on Huron Ave, along with Glacken Field and Fresh Pond Reservation. This part of the neighborhood, which abuts Belmont and Watertown, generally consists of single-family, two-family and some multi-family dwellings. The lot is located in the Residence B district, which allows single-family, two-family, and townhouse dwellings with a maximum height of 35 feet. Lower-scale residential zoning districts, such as Residence B, are intended to allow development at the prevailing scale, density and pattern of the existing neighborhood.

## **Comments on Proposal**

### *Consistency with Planning and Zoning*

The lot at 23 May Street is larger in size than most of the other lots in that neighborhood. It is a corner lot abutting two-family dwellings on both sides. The existing building is a conforming structure but there are some non-conforming site conditions (see below). The footprint of the existing building is proposed to be reduced.

The proposed new single-family dwelling would be more than 75 feet from Vineyard Street and triggers the special permit requirement, but would otherwise conform to all the dimensional requirements of the district. The as-of-right option would be to continue to use the existing building as a two-family dwelling, to alter or enlarge the existing dwelling, or demolish and construct a new single-family or two-family dwelling. The site is large enough to accommodate up to 2 dwelling units per zoning. The existing driveway/ parking area is paved right up to the property boundary on the southern side and hence does not meet the setback requirements for on grade parking spaces or driveways in residential districts. The proposed site plan with two separate driveways and parking areas for each house will comply with that requirement.

### *Site Design and Landscaping*

The proposed new dwelling and the alterations to the existing dwelling are of a scale that is consistent with the existing pattern of development in the area. Being a corner lot, each dwelling will have a street frontage, its own driveway and parking space to the side, which mitigates many of the negative urban design impacts often seen in similar cases. A sense of openness between the two dwellings, and the rear yards of the adjoining lots will also be achieved. Additionally, the large trees on site are to be preserved, and new hedges are proposed, which will provide significant visual screening benefits.

### *Building Design*

While little of the historic fabric of the existing building is to remain, the two dwellings have relatively modest footprints. A more modern built form character will be introduced; however, the proposed gabled roofs, dormers, porches, and clapboards reflect the character of neighboring properties. The asymmetric placement of windows does seem odd on some elevations, particularly on Vineyard Street. There are some inconsistencies between the rendered and 3D elevations, relating to building materials and colors, that should be corrected.

## **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:

- All landscape details, including proposed hardscape materials, fence details, and treatment of the area between the two dwellings.
- Details, materials, and colors of all architectural elements.