



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board
From: Harvard Square Advisory Committee
Date: May 23, 2022
Re: **PB-390, 57 JFK Street**

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Community Development*

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Overview

The Harvard Square Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) met on Wednesday, May 18, 2022 to discuss the special permit application by Crimson Galeria Limited Partnership for the property known as the Crimson Galeria at 57 JFK Street. The meeting was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Section 20.50 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance in advance of the applicant’s request for three special permits from the Planning Board. Committee members present were Allison Crosbie, Lauren Curry, Jemel Derbali, John DiGiovanni, Frank Kramer, Kari Kuelzer, Sara Li, Steven Ng, Alexandra Offiong, and Matt Simitis. After discussion, the Committee decided to forward a report to the Planning Board with a recommendation that the requested special permits be granted only if the applicant adequately mitigates the impact of the development.

Proposal Description

The applicant proposes to construct a residential addition to an existing commercial building. The addition would maintain the current building footprint, adding three stories to the two-story building. The addition will include 40 units and total 30,527 square feet. With the proposed addition, the building will total 66,904 square feet and will be 65 feet in height. No off-street parking or loading will be provided. Pedestrian and bicycle access to the residential addition will be off Winthrop Street.

Committee Comments

Members of the Committee supported the applicant’s proposal, but only if their concerns are addressed with enforceable special permit conditions. Many Committee members thought that the building was attractive and well-designed. They were also supportive of the proposed residential use, noting that the addition of housing units would benefit Harvard Square.

However, Committee members believed that the application, as presented, would unnecessarily burden abutters and the neighborhood as a whole. In particular, Committee members were significantly concerned that existing issues related to the site’s current use and operations would worsen, causing numerous negative impacts. They agreed that the applicant needed to do more to mitigate the externalities of the proposed development.

The Committee identified the following issues that needed to be addressed:

- Curb Management. Loading and deliveries are proposed to take place on Winthrop Street, which is a shared street that is limited to vehicles for most of the day. The Committee was concerned about the potential for unauthorized parking and loading activity on both Winthrop Street and JFK Street, given that this is a recurring issue at the site. Rather than rely on enforcement, Committee members asked the applicant to take a proactive approach to reduce conflicts and negative impacts.
- Trash Collection. Trash collection will also take place on Winthrop Street. Committee members noted that the residential addition will generate a significant amount of additional trash and questioned the applicant's estimate of how much trash would be generated by the proposed development. They were concerned about the applicant's ability to manage the additional capacity and space requirements, as well as impacts to Winthrop Street.
- Side Yard Setback. The applicant proposes to encroach into the side yard setback between their property and the abutting property at 96 Winthrop Street by constructing a lobby and an elevator shaft. The Committee found that this would negatively impact the abutting historic building, known as the Hasty Pudding Building. Committee members were particularly concerned that the height and massing of the proposed elevator shaft towered over the building.
- Open Space. The applicant noted that they may also apply for a special permit to waive the requirement for Green Area or Permeable Open Space. The Committee was concerned that the proposed development would not include enough permeable area to benefit residents and mitigate concerns about climate resiliency.
- Restaurant Kitchen Exhaust. Committee members asked for more information about the exhaust system that services the restaurant kitchens and how it impacts abutting properties and businesses.
- Residential Parking Demand. The Committee expressed concern about the impact of adding 40 units of housing without providing any on-site parking.

With all 10 members present voting in favor, the Committee voted to recommend that the three requested special permits be granted only if the following conditions are met:

- Curb Management Plan. Committee members recommend that the applicant commit to a curb management plan as a condition of the special permit. Such a plan would detail the operations related to loading, deliveries, trash collection, and residential move-in, among other activities that use Winthrop Street and JFK Street. It should also include information about staffing and would ideally be developed in consultation with abutting businesses and property owners.
- Winthrop Street Planters. To further reduce conflicts on Winthrop Street, the Committee recommends that the applicant install planters along the edge of Winthrop Street abutting the property. Committee members noted that this has been done successfully along Mt. Auburn Street in coordination with the City.
- Residential Lobby and Elevator Shaft. The Committee recommends that the applicant revise their design for the lobby and elevator shaft to reduce the massing and therefore the impact on the Hasty Pudding Building at 96 Winthrop Street.

- Open Space. Committee members recommend that the applicant increase the amount of Green Area and Permeable Open Space on the site. If sufficient open space cannot be provided on-site, the Committee recommends that the applicant commit to supporting the routine maintenance of Winthrop Park.
- Restaurant Kitchen Exhaust. The Committee recommends that the applicant provide additional information to the Planning Board on the location, type, and height of the exhaust system so the Planning Board can assess any impacts to abutters.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

Sarah Scott

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Associate Zoning Planner

Community Development Department