



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: December 5, 2022

Re: Special Permit **PB-393, 23 Reed Street**

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE
Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

KHALIL MOGASSABI
Deputy Director
Chief of Planning

Overview

Submission Type: Special Permit Application

Applicant: Marcelo Tagore Hernandez

Zoning District(s): Residence B

Proposal Summary: Construct a single-family residence greater than 75 feet from the front line and to the rear of an existing single-family residence. The existing nonconforming single-family structure will be renovated.

Special Permits Requested: Special Permit for more than one structure containing a principal residential use (Section 5.53.2)

Other City Permits Needed: Received BZA special permit for altering the existing non-conforming structure

Planning Board Action: Grant or deny requested special permits.

Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

Other Staff Reports: None

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - 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"> • 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> • 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"> ○ Extent to which preservation of a large contiguous open space in the rear of the lot or series of adjacent lots is achieved ○ Incentives to locate buildings and parking in the front half of a lot per the prevailing development pattern in the neighborhood ○ Providing an enhanced living environment for residents on the lot ○ Incentives to retain existing structures, particularly structures that are preferably preserved ○ Opportunities to reduce visual impact of parking from the public street and adjacent lots ○ Opportunities to reduce height and bulk of new construction is deeper into a lot or closer to structures on abutting lots • Conforms to general criteria for issuance of a special permit.
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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (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

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
	(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.

Zoning & Development Staff Report

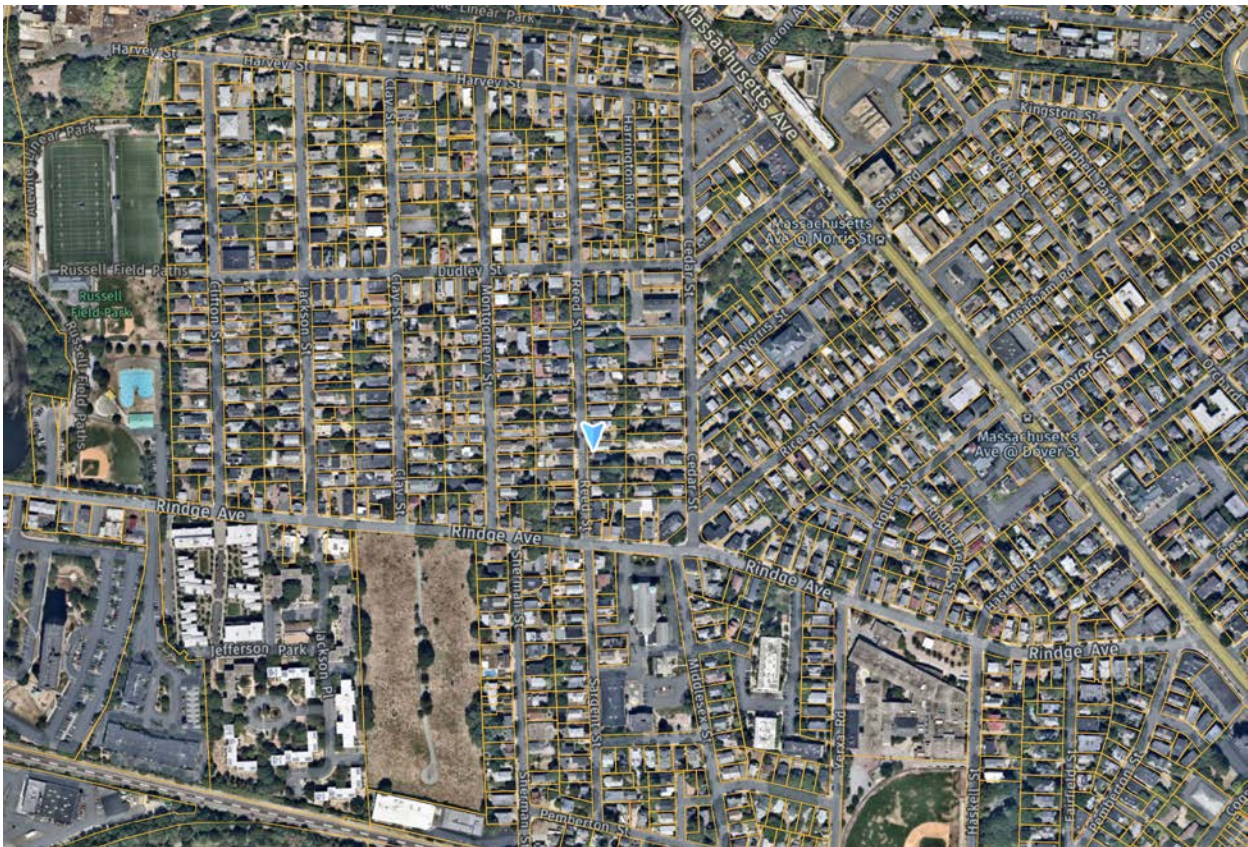
Area Planning and Zoning

Site Context

Neighborhood/Area: North Cambridge

Development Patterns: Predominantly residential development consisting of single, two- and multifamily structures built close to the street line.

Nearby Features: The area is generally located between Alewife Brook Pkwy to the west and Mass Ave/Porter Square to the east. Site is located within approx. ½ mile of Jerry's Pond to the west and Danehy Park to the southwest.

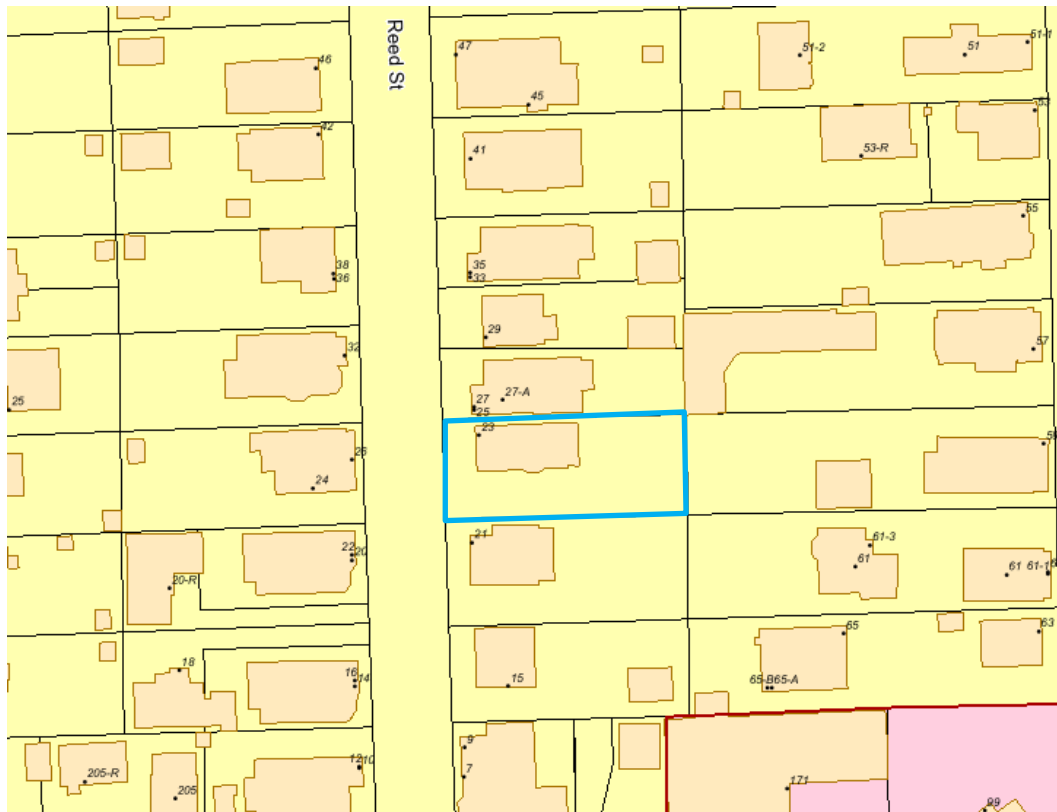


Aerial Context Map showing 23 Reed Street. Source: Nearmap, 2022.

Site Zoning

General description: Residence B is a low intensity residential district which permits one and two-family dwellings by-right, and townhouse dwellings (with Planning Board approval for developments of 6 or more units).

	Base District
District(s):	Residence B
Allowed Uses:	Single, Two-Family and Townhouse Dwellings.
Max. Building Height	35'
Max. FAR/GFA	0.5 (reduced to 0.35 for portions of the lot over 5,000 SF)
Max. Unit Density	1 unit per 2,500 SF lot area (reduced to 1 unit per 4,000 SF for portions of the lot over 5,000 SF)
Required Setbacks	Front – 15'; Side 7'6" (sum of 20); Rear 25'
Required Open Space	40%
Other District Standards or Requirements	N/A



Zoning Map of Reed Street section. Source: Cambridge Cityviewer, 2022.

Comments on Development Proposal

Overview

The proposal involves the renovation of an existing 2-story, single-family structure and the construction of a new detached single-family structure in the rear yard. The Application notes that the majority of lots on Reed Street consist of a variety of dwelling unit densities and sizes, and that many lots on Reed Street and adjacent streets (such as Jackson Street) contain secondary structures in rear yards.

The proposed rear structure is proposed to be offset from the main structure and rotated 90 degrees so that the front entry can be seen and accessed directly from Reed Street. The rear structure is designed as a net zero energy structure and proposed to be built using Passive House guidelines.

Consistency with Development Plans and Guidelines

Infill rear yard residential development in Residence B neighborhoods helps to implement broader City planning goals of increasing housing production without disrupting the overall prevailing development pattern of the neighborhood.

Consistency with Zoning Requirements

The proposal has the following dimensional characteristics:

Dimension	Proposal	Requirement	Relief Sought?
Lot Area	6,000 SF	5,000 SF	None
Gross Floor Area (GFA)	2,847 SF	2,850 SF max	None
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.473	0.475 max	None
Height	26.3' ; 29.2'	35'	None
Setbacks	15' front; 7.5' side; 25' + 5' rear	20.5' front; 3.0' existing and 7.5' new building side; 30' rear	None*
Open Space	49%	40%	None
Off-Street Parking	2 spaces	0 spaces	None

**The front structure's side yard setback is a pre-existing nonconformity.*

Special Permits

In a Residence B district, the Zoning Ordinance permits more than one structure containing a principal residential use on a lot. However, if the second structure is located more than seventy-five feet from the street line, a Planning Board Special Permit is required.

The criteria for approval of the special permit include: whether the development of two or more structures will reduce the potential impact of new construction should it occur in a single structure; whether two or more structures provide additional benefits beyond the construction of a single structure; whether the development of two or more structures helps to maintain a pattern of development that is compatible with the existing development pattern in the neighborhood; whether the development of two or more structures enhances the living environment for residents; and whether the visual impact of parking and the structure’s height and bulk can be minimized in the development of more than one structure.

The Application notes that the development of two structures at this location will continue to allow for open space on all sides of the structures, and will ensure a development scale that is of similar height and bulk to other structures on Reed Street. Further, the development of two structures will allow for both structures to maximize natural light, air and privacy for residents and existing abutters, and ensure new development is of a similarly modest scale and bulk to existing structures along Reed Street. The Application states that the proposed site plan will utilize an existing curb cut to the south of the existing structure and allow for a parking arrangement that is consistent with other lots in the neighborhood. The Application proposes to restore the exterior of the existing structure, and eliminate a portion of the rear in order to meet the zoning requirements for a minimum 10’ separation between structures.

Community Engagement

The Applicant held a virtual pre-application community engagement meeting on October 6th. The Application notes that the proposed plan was generally well-received, with suggestions for refinement including the addition of a 6’ privacy fence between the site and one abutter, the inclusion of a low-landscape wooden fence between the front yards of the site and an abutter, and modifying proposed window sizes to maximize privacy between neighboring properties. These suggestions have been incorporated into the proposal.

Special Permit Conditions

If the Board decides to grant the special permit, the following list summarizes the general categories of conditions recommended for this development based on the requested special permits:

1. **Approved Development:** Authorized development would need to conform with the submitted application materials. An Approved Dimensional Form would be attached as an Appendix.
2. **Continuing Design Review:** CDD staff would review and approve design details at the construction documents phase, prior to issuance of a building permit, to certify that the plans conform to the Planning Board's approval. Board members may cite specific areas of focus for detailed review, based on the Urban Design Report and Board discussion.
3. **Non-Zoning Requirements:** The development would need to comply with all other applicable City Ordinances, such as the Noise Ordinance and Tree Protection Ordinance.

Appendix - Zoning Text Excerpts

Special Permit for More than One Structure Containing a Principal Residential Use

5.53 In Residence A-1 and Residence A-2 districts, only one structure containing a principal use shall be allowed on a lot.

In Residence B districts only one structure containing a principal residential use shall be allowed on a lot except as set forth below:

1. More than one structure containing a principal residential use shall be allowed on a lot provided all portions of all structures are located no farther than seventy-five (75) feet from any street line to which the lot abuts. However, those elements of a structure that are permitted to extend into required yards as set forth in Section 5.24.2, may extend in a similar manner beyond the seventy-five foot limit.
2. By special permit from the Planning Board provided the Board finds
 - (a) that development in the form of two or more structures on the lot will not significantly increase or may reduce the impact of the new construction should it occur in a single structure; or
 - (b) That two or more structures may provide identifiable benefits beyond that provided should all construction be in a single structure. In making its findings the Board shall consider the impact of the new construction on the following:
 - (1) the extent to which the preservation of a large contiguous open space in the rear of the lot or series of adjacent lots is achieved through the provision of a rear yard setback significantly greater than that required and through the dedication of that rear yard as Green Area, as defined in this Ordinance,
 - (2) incentives for the location of buildings and parking facilities in the front half of a lot in a pattern compatible with the development pattern prevailing in the neighborhood,
 - (3) the extent to which two or more structures provides an enhanced living environment for residents on the lot,
 - (4) incentives to retain existing structures on a lot, particularly any structure determined to be a Preferably Preserved Significant structure by the Cambridge Historical Commission,
 - (5) the opportunities presented to reduce the visual impact of parking from the public street and from adjacent lots,
 - (6) The increased opportunities to reduce the height and bulk as new construction is deeper into a lot or closer to structures on abutting lots.

In Residence A-1, A-2 and B districts there shall be no limit on the number of those structures on a lot that contain principal nonresidential uses exclusively, provided all other requirements of this Zoning Ordinance are met.

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
- (g) 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
- (h) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

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

Urban Design Staff Report

Urban Design Comments

Site Design and Landscaping

The design utilizes similar strategies to nearby infill rear yard projects. The generous rear yard setback results in the two dwellings being relatively close together; however, the building placement and staggered massing generally helps avoid privacy concerns by not directly aligning windows and maintains openness between the rear yards of the adjacent lots.

There is a large amount of space dedicated to vehicle parking, which looks excessive for the proposed two parking spaces and takes up the majority of the rear dwelling's frontage. Similar projects have accommodated a landscaped walkway within this frontage area, which helps to give the rear dwelling its own sense of address when viewed from the street frontage.

Overall, the landscaping appears thoughtfully done; the use of permeable pavers for hardscape areas, and a variety of plantings helps soften the impacts of the project. It is disappointing that two large maple trees will require removal to enable construction of the rear dwelling. Additionally, the proposed replacement trees do not have the same canopy function as these existing trees. More substantial trees with canopies should be considered within both the front and side yards. A higher-Solar Reflectance Index (SRI) paving color would also further the City's climate resilience goals and help mitigate urban heat island impacts.

Building Design

The second dwelling has a modest footprint, and the relatively simple massing and proposed building heights emulate neighboring structures. It is designed to have a contemporary appearance with the use of cementitious ship lap siding of various exposures and orientations. The siding will be installed with crisp edges so there will be no architectural details like posts and trim boards. The proposed windows also have a contemporary character with varying shapes and orientations. This seems like a reasonable approach for a new structure that is to be located to the rear of an existing dwelling.

The shed-roof of the new dwelling, while accommodating a PV array, does contrast with the character of surrounding development. This roof type is common among contemporary homes because it provides more interior space than traditional gable and hip roofs while delivering a sleek appearance. While staff do acknowledge that the roof seems to create some visual conflicts when viewed in elevation and in some perspectives, it is likely to become a more common form as the City moves towards Net Zero.

Changes to the existing dwelling seek to modernize it and complement the new structure with shingles, metal standing seam for the new entry and bay window roofs, casement/fixed windows, and a muted color palette. While the changes do help create a more crisp and sophisticated aesthetic, the existing covered porch had a unifying effect and relieved the flatness of the façade. The new portico entry does not have the same effect. Replacing the existing double hung windows with what appear to be casement windows and no trim further diminishes the traditional characteristics of the home. Other similar projects have sought to preserve and restore the period features of existing dwellings to help maintain the streetscape character.

Continuing Review

The following are additional recommendations for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Reduced hardscape area and provision of additional canopy trees.
- All landscape details, including proposed plantings, hardscape materials, fences, exterior lighting, etc.
- Design details, materials, and colors, including consideration of restoring some of the architectural details of the existing dwelling.
- Any necessary acoustic screening of air conditioning condensers.