

Truman Apartments: Summary of Proposed Renovations and Relief Requested

Harry S. Truman Apartments is located on 25 Eighth Street (a.k.a. “17 Eighth Street” or “17-33 Eighth Street”) in a C-1 Residential Zoning District. The building was constructed in 1969 and offers 59 deeply affordable units for seniors and people with disabilities. Cambridge Housing Authority plans to renovate this building, beginning in January 2021, in order to expand community spaces for residents and preserve these deeply affordable units for the long-term. CHA is requesting relief from regulations applicable to the property’s Ratio of Total Floor Area to Lot Area, Side Yard Setback, Distance Between Accessory Building to Principal Building, and Off-Street Parking Regulations. In addition, the CHA is requesting to confirm existing non-conforming Front Yard Setbacks at the site.

Proposed Renovations

The majority of the units at Truman Apartments have never been comprehensively updated since their construction in 1969. Apartment systems, fixtures, and finishes are in poor to failing condition, with some original to the building. The proposed renovations will remedy these issues.

The roof and windows are past their useful life and failing, as is the masonry façade, which is creating water infiltration issues. The renovations will replace the roof and windows and re clad the building with fiber-cement siding. Previous similar renovations to other properties in CHA’s portfolio have led to a reduction in energy consumption of 35%. The fiber-cement siding is approximately 4 inches thick, and the new windows will be pushed out by four inches in order to preserve the window to wall relationship and the shadow-line at the window openings. The new windows will be awning style instead of the existing double-hung, as awning windows are easier to operate for seniors and people with disabilities. The amount of glass in each apartment will stay the same. **NOTE: We have not yet finalized the color scheme of the façade; the attached renderings are to show materials, fenestration, and details, not to present a final color scheme.** Other planned renovations include the installation of a mechanical ventilation system, which will improve air quality in the apartments, as well as central air conditioning which will support the health and welfare of senior residents during hot summer weather.

In addition, community spaces for the building are undersized. Between December 2019 and March 2020, the CHA held six resident meetings and multiple walk-in hours during which residents could express their opinion on the renovations in a smaller group. The CHA also issued a design questionnaire with a 50% response rate. Taken together, resident engagement illuminated the need for a larger community room and more expansive program spaces. As a result, the CHA is proposing a 1,759 square foot addition, critical to improving programming and services for our residents as part of the upcoming rehabilitation of Truman Apartments. 1,105 square feet of this addition is on the first floor, and 653 square feet on the second floor.

The construction of this addition triggers the need for CHA to bring several aspects of the building into conformance with zoning ordinances, as outlined below.

Zoning Relief Sought

This substantial change request seeks relief from the BZA for the following:

Relief from Dimensional Regulations: Truman Apartments will require dimensional relief regarding Ratio of Total Floor Area to Lot Area (“FAR”), Side Yard Setback, and the Distance to the Nearest Building in the C-1 District.

- FAR: The existing 8-story apartment building and generator building total 46,502¹ square feet and are proposed to remain. In addition to renovations to the existing building, the CHA is proposing a 1,759-square-foot of addition in order to expand common spaces for the residents of Truman apartments. The additions on the west side of the building (expansion of first floor community room, common kitchen, laundry room, and addition of a social worker office, computer room, TV room, and fitness areas) total 1,557 square feet and the additions on the east (expansion of first floor vestibule and second floor multi-purpose room) total 202 square feet. The Ordinance requires a maximum FAR of 0.75. The 1967 Variance and 2002 and 2004 Comprehensive Permits all allow a maximum FAR of 2.17². In order to account for the proposed addition, the CHA is requesting a maximum FAR of 2.21.
- Minimum Setback — Side Yard: The 2002 Comprehensive Permit granted a 35-foot side yard setback. The Ordinance requires a 41.8-foot side yard setback. In order to account for the proposed addition, the CHA is requesting a 22.3-foot side yard setback. This reduction is necessary as the common area expansion fits best in the side yard of the building based on the building’s proximity to the parking lot to the north, Thorndike Street to the south, and Eight Street to the east.
- Distance Between Accessory Building to Principal Building: The existing generator building is proposed to remain. However, because of the new building addition, which will extend the apartment building by approximately 15 feet, the Project will need relief from Section 4.21(h) of the Ordinance, which states that “an accessory building shall not be located nearer than 10 feet to the principal building”. The addition will reduce the distance between the principal building and the generator building from 10 feet to 7.25 feet. This decrease in the distance between the main building and accessory building is

¹ The 2004 Comprehensive Permit incorrectly lists the Total Gross Floor Area (“GFA”) as 47,373 square feet. We believe this is due to the inclusion of the elevator penthouse in the GFA calculation.

² The 2004 Comprehensive Permit granted a maximum FAR of 2.17, but the CHA only built to an FAR of 2.13, excluding the elevator penthouse.

necessary to accommodate the addition of much-needed common space to Truman Apartments.

Existing Non-Conforming Dimensional Regulations: The CHA requests to ratify existing non-conforming front yard setbacks.

- Minimum Front Yard Setback — Thorndike Street: The Ordinance requires a 10-foot minimum setback from the front yard property line. However, Truman Apartments was built with a 7.4-foot setback from the front yard property line. This is an existing non-conforming condition.
- Minimum Front Yard Setback — Eighth Street: The 2002 Comprehensive Permit granted a 28-foot minimum setback from the centerline of the street. However, Truman Apartments was built with a 26.7-foot setback from the centerline of the street. Furthermore, the Ordinance requires a 10-foot minimum setback from the front yard property line; however, Truman Apartments was built with a 9.6-foot setback from the front yard property line. These are existing non-conforming conditions.

Parking Lot: Truman Apartments will require relief regarding the Number of Parking Spaces in the C-1 District.

- Number of Parking Spaces: The Project's original variance and 2002 Comprehensive Permit granted Truman a minimum of 18 parking spaces. Truman currently has more parking spaces than was previously granted, a total of 19. In the course of renovations, CHA will be re-striping the parking lot in order to transform one of the three current handicapped parking spaces into a van-accessible handicapped parking space as required by code. This re-striping will decrease the number of parking spaces from 19 to 18. According to Section 6.12(a) of the Ordinance, however, adding an addition to the existing building requires the CHA to meet parking minimums as outlined in the Ordinance. Section 6.36 of the Ordinance requires one parking space per dwelling unit in multifamily housing or one parking space per two dwelling units (and down to one parking space per four dwelling units) in a C-1 Residential area. We are requesting relief to preserve the 18 parking spaces, or one parking space per 3.33 dwelling units, granted in the 2002 Comprehensive Permit. The proposed addition will not increase the number of residential units or the number of people using the building, so 18 parking spaces remains a suitable number of parking spaces for the building.

Approval of these substantial changes will enable the CHA to expand amenities and service opportunities for its residents, and proceed with the rehabilitation of Truman Apartments. We

appreciate the Cambridge Historic Commission's assistance as we pursue renovations that will preserve 59 deeply-affordable apartments in the East Cambridge neighborhood.