CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

P L A N N I N G   B O A R D

CITY HALL ANNEX, 344 BROADWAY, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139

Date:	April 22, 2022
Subject:	Initial Report of Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Design Consultation
Project Location:	49 Sixth Street
Date of Planning Board Meeting:	April 5, 2022

Overview

The Planning Board (the "Board") met on Tuesday, April 5, 2022 to review and comment on the design for 49 Sixth Street, a residential building being developed by Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) under the Affordable Housing Overlay (Section 11.207 of the Zoning Ordinance). The Board reviewed a plan set submitted by POAH dated December 29, 2021 and presentation dated April 5, 2022. They also reviewed memos from the Community Development Department (CDD) and the Department of Public Works (DPW), which are attached.

Proposal Description

The developer, POAH, proposes to rehabilitate a portion of an existing church complex and adapt it for use as affordable housing. Three of the existing five buildings will be converted into housing; the remaining two buildings on the site will continue to be used by the church. The development will take place inside of the existing buildings. The project is pursuing Enterprise Green Communities certification for environmental sustainability.

The total Gross Floor Area (GFA) of the development is 59,400 square feet and there will be 46 permanently affordable rental apartments. The building height will remain at approximately 68 feet. Building entries will be located on the Seventh Street, Thorndike Street, and Sixth Street elevations. The development will provide long-term bicycle parking within the building and two off-street parking spaces on-site. It will also improve an existing courtyard at the corner of Sixth Street and Thorndike Street, as well as an interior courtyard.

Board Comments

Board members were generally supportive of the proposed project and were excited to see the adaptive reuse of an historic structure. The project's inclusion of units for families with children was also commended. In advance of the second advisory design consultation, Board members encouraged POAH to address the following comments:

- **Building Design.** One Board member raised a comment from the staff memo, noting that the windows on the rectory building at the corner of Sixth Street and Thorndike were originally two-over-two and should be restored. They also would like to see the partially infilled window to the right of the rectory's main entrance on Sixth Street be restored. A Board member suggested dual-draw blinds to balance natural light with privacy in the units with windows near the sidewalk.

- **Building Plan.** One Board member noted that the unit layouts were unclear and that the designs could be further refined. A Board member asked for more information about the adequacy of the ramp access to the long-term bicycle parking, as noted in the CDD memo.

- **Site Plan**. Board members raised concerns about the drop-off area on Sixth Street, noting that it is near an entrance that is not accessible for all users. They also noted and that parking in a front setback conflicts with the City's urban design objectives. A Board member would like to understand the potential for short-term bicycle parking on-site or on the public sidewalks.

- **Landscape.** Board members would like to see additional street trees. They would also like to understand what trees currently exist on site and any measures that will be taken to preserve them.

- **Parking and Loading.** Board members would like more information on the discussions that the developer has had with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department about exploring off-site parking solutions.

Additionally, Board members endorsed the comments made in the memos provided by CDD and DPW and asked that they be considered when refining the design.

Submitted for the Planning Board,

Swaathi Joseph

Representative to the Planning Board, authorized by Catherine Preston Connolly, Chair.