



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: Harvard Square Advisory Committee

Date: November 1, 2021

Re: **5 Bennett Street – Board of Zoning Appeal Variance**

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE
Deputy Director
Chief of Administration

KHALIL MOGASSABI
Deputy Director
Chief of Planning

Overview

The Harvard Square Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) met on Wednesday, October 20, 2021 to discuss the application by Carpenter & Company for a zoning variance for the Charles Hotel at 5 Bennett 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 a variance from the Board of Zoning Appeal. Committee members present were Lauren Curry, Jemel Derbali, Frank Kramer, Kari Kuelzer, Alexandra Offiong, and Matt Simitis. Committee member John DiGiovanni was also present at the meeting but recused himself from the discussion of this application. After discussion, the Committee decided unanimously to forward a report to the Board of Zoning Appeal with a positive recommendation.

Proposal Description

The applicant proposes to convert the former swimming pool in the Charles Hotel to eight hotel rooms. Doing so would exceed the Gross Floor Area (GFA) and Floor Area Ratio (FAR) requirements set forth in Section 5.31 of the Zoning Ordinance, which is why the applicant is seeking a variance. The applicant also proposes to decrease the total number of parking spaces from 500 to 497, which complies with zoning.

Committee Comments

Members of the Committee were generally supportive of the applicant’s proposal. They recognized that the pool was no longer functional as an amenity for hotel guests and health club members, but some Committee members were disappointed by the loss of the pool. These Committee members saw the pool as a public-facing facility that contributed to the vitality of the community. However, they understood that the applicant had made an effort to keep the pool operational and had not succeeded.

On the whole, Committee members found that the proposed renovation did not have any significant negative impacts on the public realm. They agree that it will be a good use for the existing space and believe in supporting hotels in Harvard Square.

Given the Committee’s discussion, a motion was made and seconded to forward a

344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
Voice: 617 349-4600
Fax: 617 349-4669
TTY: 617 349-4621
www.cambridgema.gov

(continued)

report to the Board of Zoning Appeal with a recommendation that it grant the requested variance. All six members present voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

Sarah Scott

Sarah Scott

Associate Zoning Planner

Community Development Department