



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

CITY HALL ANNEX, 57 INMAN STREET, CAMBRIDGE 02139

NOTICE OF DECISION

AMENDED NOTICE

Case No: PB#119

Address: 129-139, 157-175, & 181 Richdale Avenue

Owner: New Cambridge Housing Group, INC.

Applicant: Cambridge Cohousing, LLP

Application Date: September 19, 1996

Public Hearing: October 15, 1996

Planning Board Decision: October 29, 1996

Date of Filing Decision: November 13, 1996

Application: A multi-family Special Permit in an Industry A-1 district for 46 dwelling units. A request is also made to approve a subdivision of the lot into two parcels, each parcel of which is conforming as to the dimensional requirements required in the IA-1 district. A Special Permit is sought to allow a curb cut greater than the 30 feet permitted in a nonresidential district.

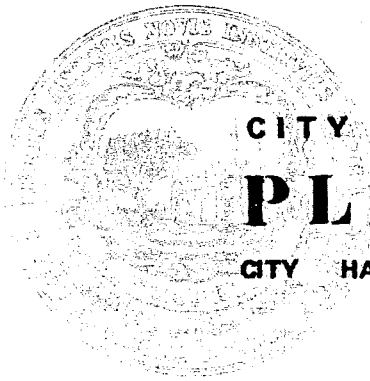
Decision: GRANTED with conditions.

Appeals, if any, shall be made pursuant to Section 17 of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40A, and shall be filed within twenty (20) days after the filing of the above referenced decision with the City Clerk. Copies of the complete decision and final plans, if applicable, are on file with the Office of the Community Development Department and the City Clerk.

Authorized Representative to the Planning Board

Elizabeth J. Malenfant

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96 NOV 13 PM 2:09
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Application

1. Completed application dated September 17, 1996, with ownership form, plans showing the site plan, first floor, building plans, and elevations at 1"=20', boundary survey, City Engineering Plan #202, Plan of Land: Richdale Terraces Condominium dated 6/25/93; and photographs of the existing site, and text requesting the special permit.

Other Documents Submitted

1. Addendum to Special Permit for 175 Richdale Avenue, undated, in response to questions raised at the public hearing, and proposed grading plan, sheet C-2.
2. Revised plans for the site dated October 28, 1996.
3. Petition from abutters at Cogswells Avenue, in support of the proposed project with stipulations as listed.

Public Hearing

At an advertised public hearing held on October 15, 1996, Gwen Noyes of Oaktree Development, on behalf of Cambridge Cohousing LLP and herself as a potential future occupant of the project presented the proposal. The applicant requests a special permit to develop the remaining parcel which has been subdivided from the existing condominium development.

The request is for 46 dwelling units based on financing concerns and considerations. The applicant proposes to build 41 units and common area which if needed could be converted into 5 additional units to a total of 46. The original permit, #58, was granted 53 units.

The development would be developed using energy efficient systems and would include affordable units. The construction schedule would also include a possible subdivision to phase the construction costs.

Bruce Hampton, the architect presented the plans. The design is such as to minimize the noise from the train tracks, separate pedestrian access from vehicular, provide for convenient bike storage, and open space to include some gardening space. There will be a large open lawn space fronting on Richdale Avenue. There are 12 parking spaces to be allocated to Richdale Terraces, 40 spaces below the housing with 3 below the townhouses and spaces on grade at the end of the development. The site is within 10 minutes of the MBTA station. There will be landscaping between the site and the abutters. The service areas are to be located at each end of the site.

There were questions regarding the height of the buildings, and where the height is to be measured from. Also the Board asked about scheduling the dumpster pickup and the parking at the ends of the development.

There was discussion of how to handle the issue of the number of units and the potential need for the 46 units when the current plan was to develop 41 units. There is concern regarding granting one plan and developing something else.

There was discussion of the on street parking and residential parking restrictions. There is a question if the Industry A-1 district could have residential parking restrictions.

Two of the three affordable units are to be located in the elevator building and of the three, one is a studio, one a 2 bedroom, and one a 2 bedroom walkup. There is also the commitment to a developmentally delayed group home, with the care giver to be in an adjacent unit.

The costs range from \$85,000 for the one bedroom, to \$310,000 for the townhouse with 4 bedrooms.

There was discussion with the abutters on the following issues. The height and where it would be measured from as there had been some infilling of the lot; transformer noises, and dumpster location next to the abutters; security fencing around the site; setback, facade and landscaping on the railroad edge facing the Cogswell Avenue housing; concerns over the possibility of this development of 41 units not being completed and the need for additional hearings on changes of the plan and the associated subdivision concerns.

A board member pointed out that this development did not qualify as a townhouse special permit; and therefore there was no need for the relief from the open space requirement.

There were seven statements in support of the development and associated comments to be further discussed as listed above. There were no statements in opposition.

The Board voted to keep the record open and continue the hearing at the meeting of October 29th.

On October 29, 1996, Gwen Noyes, representing the applicant, returned to present alterations to the plan in response to discussions at the public hearing held on October 15, 1996. New engineered drawings were presented illustrating the entire proposal and incorporating the changes made in response to comments and concerns expressed at the hearing. The issues to which a response was made were: drainage within and off the site; alterations to the walk and service drive; building height; parking arrangements and allocation within the site; service drop-off; siting of dumpsters and transformers; and the architectural and landscaping character of the north-facing portion of the site. The following modifications have been made: Drainage - site drains have been positioned at the low points within the site; drainage is typically to the north, off site and away from 155 Richdale Avenue. Service drive and walk - the service drive has been replaced with a single pull-off parking space for temporary loading and unloading of a car or van; the remainder of the drive has been converted to a walkway and landscaping. Building height - the main floor elevation of structures near 155 Richdale Avenue have been lowered by two feet. Parking - at the east end of the site diagonal parking has been provided that allows full access to all required spaces. In addition the new arrangement allows more efficient access to the dumpster, which has been located to the rear of the site. Four additional surface parking spaces have been shown within the "garden" area proposed at the east end of the site, in response to neighborhood

concerns that the spaces allocated for the east end units in the west end of the site might not be used should future owners have cars and require off-street parking. A pull-off along the front of the site, with a 40 curb cut, has been provided for short term service. Dumpsters - all are accessed by truck, will be of a hard plastic construction that can be tightly sealed, and will be enclosed within a stockade fence. Transformer - there may not be a need for one on the east end of the site, but if one is necessary its location in a manhole (the referred option) or on a utility pole away from neighbors is possible. North elevation - further work has been done on the north elevation which is as well developed as the other elevations. Coniferous trees will be planted along with other landscaping.

As a result of questioning from the Board and neighbors in attendance the following information was also provided. The final plans still indicated the possibility of construction of 46 total units although the pre-sale has been so successful that that option might be academic. The four new surface parking spaces added are not thought to be needed by the applicant (48 spaces will be provided without them) but they are shown because of concern expressed by some on the Board and neighbors that they might be necessary for subsequent owners. The subdivision is desired by the applicant as it facilitates the financing of the project, giving more comfort to banks and allowing more efficient use of the funds provided by cohousing subscribers. There is every expectation that the second cluster will be built and it may be most efficient, in any case, to construct the foundations at a minimum when construction on the foundations for the west half of the project are initiated. If the subdivision is to prove helpful, it will necessary to have it available within weeks. The baiting for rodents in the warehouse has already been done in anticipation of its imminent demolition. To accommodate the 46 dwelling units, the common space would be converted to three units, an additional townhouse would be built, and an additional (fourth) floor would be constructed over two townhouses. The dumpster adjacent to 123 Richdale Avenue would be between 9 and 12 feet below the level of the house and well beyond 50 feet away from the house.

After considerable discussion neighbors in attendance, both those adjacent to the site and across the RR tracks, were comfortable with the revised plan, which is limited to 43 units, and which allows the subdivision with a requirement that should that portion of the site not be immediately built out, a condition of the permit require it to be cleaned up and reasonably landscaped.

Findings

The Planning Board considered the site plan and information presented by the developer and the architect at the public hearing and found the following. (The site does not meet the standard for a townhouse development and so is not granted this special permit.)

1. Residential construction on this site is appropriate and a principal objective of the Industry A-1 district, when it was created, for sites like this. Construction of housing will secure the residential character of this edge of the abutting neighborhood and will preclude the use of the site for inappropriate nonresidential uses.

2. The proposed development is less dense than the second phase of development approved in the original special permit (which phase could be constructed under the terms of that original permit): The number of units proposed is less than permitted (43 vs. 53) and the height of buildings is generally less than the 45 feet permitted. The Board finds a Floor Area Ratio of 1.25 acceptable, provided that the associated gross floor area over an FAR of 1.12 be in basement area.

3. The criteria for approval of special permits for townhouses and multi-family dwellings, as set forth in Section 10.47.4, are met.

a. The site is mostly derelict and devoid of significant, valuable vegetation. Trees at the periphery worth saving will remain; the site, upon completion will be heavily landscaped.

b. The new structures will be more varied and smaller than had been previously approved for the site and will be oriented in a manner that will impact less the existing houses along the street. The intrusion of the MBTA commuter rail line will be minimized and the open space elements of the design will be disposed on the lot in a manner that will benefit abutters as well as the residents of the development.

c. The landscaping will be prominently visible from the public street and from abutting residential lots. It will be substantial.

d. Parking will be predominantly below grade, with the surface parking carefully located and screened from adjacent properties.

e. On site surface parking is at a very minimum, particularly given the large size of the parcel.

f. Trash and utility facilities have been carefully located and adequately screened.

4. The general standards for the issuance of a special permit as set forth in Section 10.43 have also been met.

a. The requirements of the ordinance will be met.

b. Vehicular access to the site will be kept to a minimum, with the least disruption to the provision of on-street public parking.

c. The adjacent, established residential uses will be enhanced by the strengthening of the residential character of the neighborhood at this marginal edge with the addition of up to 43 new dwelling units. A vacant and derelict lot will be eliminated, the negative impacts of the adjacent railroad right of way will be moderated for the existing residents of the neighborhood, and the addition to the neighborhood will be carefully designed and well landscaped.

d. No hazard or nuisance will be created; in fact an existing nuisance will be eliminated.

f. The integrity of the adjacent residential neighborhood and its zoning district designation will be enhanced and strengthened.

5. The Board finds, as required in Section 6.43.5, that the expansion of the curb cut for the proposed drop-off facility, from the 30 feet permitted in a nonresidential district, to the 40 feet proposed will facilitate traffic safety by providing a more useful facility for short term deliveries to the site and allow the elimination of a more intrusive driveway into the site, both to abutters and residents of the future community, that would have served the same function.

6. The Planning Board has no objection to the possible subdivision of the lot into two parcels as indicated on the approved plans. Future subdivision is not inconsistent with this special permit and shall be permitted subject to the conditions set forth below with regard to the allocation of parking spaces and interim use.

7. The Board finds that the provision of substantial open space on the lot is a major benefit both to the future residents of the site and to the existing residential neighbors. Therefore the Board will not approve the provision of additional surface parking at the east end of the site, as it significantly compromises the quality of the open space proposed there.

8. While the Board may consider 46 units on the site appropriate, only 43 units are approved as part of this special permit. Any future expansion to accommodate three additional units shall require approval from the Board as a minor amendment to this special permit.

Decision

After review of the application documents, and discussions at the public hearing and at subsequent regular Board meetings, and based on the above findings, the Planning Board GRANTS Special Permit #119 for the construction of forty-three dwelling units at 175 Richdale Avenue and the expansion of a driveway curb cut in a nonresidential district, subject to the following conditions and limitations.

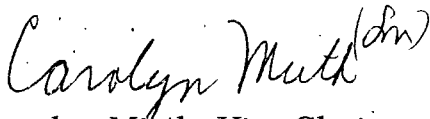
1. Final plans submitted for the issuance of a building permit shall be generally consistent with the approved plans dated October 28, 1996 bh, sheets Pa, 1a, 5a, 7a and 8a. Before issuance of a building permit the Community Development Department shall certify to the Superintendent of Buildings that the final plans are consistent with and meet all conditions of this Decision. All plans shall be consistent with the approved dimensional limitations as approved by the Board and set forth in Appendix I. The Community Development Department shall review and approve a final landscape plan prior to issuance of any Certificate of Occupancy for dwellings on the site.
2. The final plans may contain no more than 43 dwelling units.
3. Subdivision of the lot as shown on the approved plans shall not be prohibited by this permit. However, in the event that the subdivision occurs, an easement or such other legal instrument as may be appropriate shall be provided in the recorded deed to each separate parcel guaranteeing the provision of and access to parking spaces on the west parcel that have been assigned to those dwelling units constructed on the east parcel (as shown on the approved plans), such that no dwelling unit on the east parcel shall be without access to at least one parking space in perpetuity. A copy of such easement or other instrument shall be filed with the Planning Board within five

days of the recording of the subdivision plan with the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds.

4. In the event that construction on the eleven dwelling units proposed on the east parcel has not begun (which shall mean issuance of a building permit and initiation of construction on portions of the structure above the foundations) prior to the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy for twenty -five dwelling units on the west parcel, the permittee shall be obligated to clean up, grade and landscape the entire east parcel in conformance with a landscape plan for that parcel, previously submitted to and approved by the Planning Board, before issuance of any additional Certificates of Occupancy for the remaining dwelling units on the west parcel.. The Planning Board may modify this schedule at any regular meeting, upon written request of the permittee, if the Board finds that such alternate schedule will meet the intent of this condition that the east parcel be maintained in a neat and attractive manner in the event that it is to remain vacant for any extended period of time after occupancy of the dwellings on the west parcel. Nothing in this condition is intended to require elaborate landscaping as if the site were to remain permanently vacant but rather to ensure that the space is an attractive neighbor to residents of the west parcel and abutters to the site for whatever time it remains vacant.

Voting to GRANT the special permit were H. Salemme, S. Lewis, A. Cohn, H. Russell, C. Mieth, and L. Sheffield constituting two-thirds or more of the membership of the Planning Board.

For the Planning Board

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carolyn Mieth". To the right of the signature, there is a small handwritten mark that appears to be "(dm)".

Carolyn Mieth, Vice Chair