



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: December 8, 2020

Re: Special Permit **PB #22, 2 James Way**

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This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 2 James Way, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

The applicant is proposing to modify the existing townhouse with a conforming addition to the existing structure and to continue using it as a single family residence.

Requested Special Permits

The project is located in the Residence C-1 District and was granted a Townhouse Special Permit in 1982 and three subsequent amendments. The Applicant seeks a special permit for a modification to the plans not enumerated in the original special permit, per Section 11.15b of the Zoning Ordinance. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Townhouses and multifamily dwellings (Section 10.47.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key features of natural landscape are preserved. • New buildings relate sensitively to existing built environment. • Open space provides visual benefits to abutters and passersby and functional benefits to occupants. • Parking, access and egress are safe and convenient. • Intrusion of onsite parking is minimized. • Services such as trash collection and utility boxes are convenient yet unobtrusive. <p>(See full text in appendix)</p>
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	<p>Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest because the proposal would (unlike uses or development otherwise allowed in the district) either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not comply with the Zoning Ordinance; • cause traffic congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established character; • adversely affect the continued operation or development of adjacent uses; • create nuisance or hazard to the detriment of health, safety and/or welfare; • impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of the Zoning Ordinance; or • be inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30. <p>(See full text in appendix.)</p>

Comments on Proposal

The site is located in the Residence C-1 District and was part of a 54-unit Cambridge Redevelopment Authority development in the Wellington-Harrington neighborhood. The development abuts the Grand Junction corridor to the east. The original special permit and amendments approved the site plan and arrangement of townhouse units, and includes conditions pertaining to tree protection, landscaping, perimeter fencing, parking, and vehicular circulation on the site.

Zoning Standards

The base zoning is Residence C-1, as it was when the original special permit was granted. The site is located on the corner of James Way and Cardinal Medeiros Avenue, which means that it has two front

yards for the purposes of calculating setback requirements. The front yard setback along James Way will not change and the front yard setback along Cardinal Medeiros Avenue will decrease by only 3 feet 9 inches, and appears to stay within the allowed setback requirement.

The height of the proposed dormer is lower than the height of the current roof, so the building height will not increase. The gross floor area (GFA) of the site will increase by only 361 square feet, so the floor-area ratio (FAR) will remain substantially below the maximum in the district. While the amount of open space on the lot will decrease, it will still be more than double the required amount. There are no changes to the number of parking spaces nor the arrangement of parking on-site. The number of dwelling units will not increase.

The proposed scope of work will preserve the key existing landscape features of the site, including fences, plantings, and the relationship of the building to the public right-of-way. No existing trees will be removed and the applicant does not propose regrading the site. The third-floor shed dormer and the roof skylight will not directly face neighbors' houses, thus preserving privacy. It is unclear from the project plans if the proposed sunroom will be continuously glazed on all elevations. While this could cause privacy concerns, the abutter at 4 James Way has stated their support for the proposed project.

Urban Design

Four elements of the project affect the building's exterior: the sunroom, the deck extending north from the sunroom, the shed dormer on the rear slope of the existing roof, and the skylight on the front slope of the existing roof.

Staff has no objection to the sunroom, which appears to be located within required setbacks. Its solid walls will be clad with siding to match the existing building. Consideration could be given to providing a shading device to minimize light trespass from the interior.

The proposed deck seems fine, and in any case will be hidden by the property fence along the Cardinal Medeiros Avenue side of the property. Staff appreciates that the existing tree will be preserved, understands that the proposed deck is not expected to be detrimental to its health, and recommends that measures be taken to protect the tree during construction.

The proposed shed dormer on the rear slope of the existing roof follows most of the recommendations in Cambridge's "Design Guidelines for Roof Dormers". The exceptions are that its outer face is in the same plane as the wall below, where the guidelines recommend that it be set back, and that it extends to the east end wall of the townhouse unit, where the guidelines recommend a minimum distance of 3'-6" to the gable end rake of the roof. Neither of these seem to be problematic. The proposed dormer is on the rear side of the roof and not a prominent element of the streetscape on Cardinal Medeiros Avenue, and the rear slope of 2 James Way's roof continues eastward as the rear slope of the adjoining townhouse's roof. The dormer's overall length of 15' equals the maximum length recommended by the guidelines. Its end walls will be clad in siding to match the existing building.

The small proposed skylight on the front slope of the roof is unobtrusive, and in fact will be less prominent than the solar panel arrays on the street facing roof slopes of several houses in the neighborhood.