

Harvard Square Advisory Committee

c/o Cambridge Community Development Department
344 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02139
617/349-4647

Case: 18 Eliot Street

Applicant: 16-18 Eliot Street, LLC, c/o Charles River Capital, 180 Beacon Street, #4E, Boston, MA 02116-1401

Proposal and Zoning Issues: Building addition of 11,935 square feet of residential units to the existing two story retail building. The applicant requests relief from the Parking Requirement pursuant Section 20.54.4 and relief from the Yard Requirement pursuant to Section 20.54.5.

Harvard Square Advisory Committee: June 22, 2015

Summary: James Rafferty, of Adams & Rafferty, the applicant's representative, outlined the proposal and the requested relief under the Harvard Square Overlay District regulations. The applicant requests a waiver for the parking requirement as the existing building occupies almost the entire lot. It is not practicable to construct parking underground nor to provide a driveway. The existing retail building establishes minimal setbacks and does not meet the setback requirements for residential uses. Providing those setbacks would create an awkward design and minimal residential units. Peter Quinn, of Peter Quinn Architects, presented the plans and drawings of the site and the elevations. He explained how the building would be refaced establishing retail levels with the residential above. The units would be a mix of studios, one and two bedrooms.

The proposal has been reviewed by the Historical Commission and a Certificate of Appropriateness was granted.

There was some comment from the public which included a design for a greater front setback for the top floor.

HSAC comments:

Members of the Advisory Committee asked about and discussed the setbacks, building materials, and continuing retail use. The façade was discussed, as was the access to the rear of the building which contains the bicycle parking, trash enclosures, some open space as well as the historical wall. There is interest in preservation in the wall and making it more accessible if possible. Some members of the Advisory Committee would like to see the public access to the historic wall as appropriate in a residential building, possibly through tours.

There is some preference for a shorter building, to be more like the building to the left; this height could be setting a trend in Harvard Square for additional height, as many of the committee members believe the building to the left will be replaced someday.

Many of the surrounding buildings are brick, and this proposed finish fails to fit into the fabric of the area. Specifically, the scale of the material is not appropriate and there is not enough articulation as found in some of the older buildings. There is a desire for more patterning of the materials to create a building with more Harvard Square character.

Some Committee members are comfortable with contemporary design, and requested more color. This building was seen as a temporary building when constructed, the additional floors will improve the scale and make it fit better with the surrounding buildings and area.

The proposal is seen as part of the variety of the fabric in Harvard Square, in both the residential use and choice of materials.

Overall, the HSAC supports the granting of the requested Planning Board special permits. There is support for the parking waiver as there is available parking in the area. Most expressed support for the residential use and the waiver of the parking spaces as appropriate in this location. However, the Committee would like to see further study of the materials and the color selection, maybe a greater variety of color and a less muted gray color.

Committee Members in Attendance: John DiGiovanni, Bridget Dinsmore, Kari Kuelzer, Lauren Curry, Allison Crosbie, Alexandra Offiong, Matt Simitis, Max Frank, Frank Kramer, Bill Barry and Pebble Gifford.

Respectfully submitted for the Committee,

Liza Paden
Community Development Department staff