



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

IRAM FAROOQ
Assistant City Manager for
Community Development

To: Planning Board
From: Jeff Roberts, Land Use and Zoning Planner
Suzannah Bigolin, Urban Design Planner
Date: January 5, 2016
Re: **PB #307, Proposed Project at 9 Donnell Street**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 9 Donnell Street, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

The proposed project consists of demolishing the existing two-family residential building and constructing two single-family detached dwelling units on the lot with required off-street parking in an underground garage located on the site.

The Cambridge Historical Commission (CHC) identified the existing structure to be a preferably preserved significant building (see attached letter dated 4/27/2015), causing demolition to be delayed for up to six months in order to consider initiating a landmark study. The six month delay has expired without the Commission initiating such a study; therefore, the existing building may be demolished upon the Applicant's receiving any applicable special permits and building permits for the replacement project.

Requested Special Permits

The proposed project is located on a parcel with frontage on Donnell Street in the Residence B base zoning district. The Applicant is seeking a Special Permit to allow construction of more than one structure containing a principal residential use pursuant to Section 5.53.2 of the Zoning Ordinance. The Zoning Ordinance allows for more than one structure containing a principal residential use as-of-right in a Residence B zoning district provided all portions of all structures are located no farther than 75 feet from any street line to which the lots abut. One proposed structure has portions that are more than 75 feet from Donnell Street. Therefore, the proposal requires the Planning Board to issue a Special Permit if the proposal is found to meet the requirements of Sections 10.43 and 5.53.2 of the Zoning Ordinance. The project also requires a Special Permit for locating a driveway within five feet of the side property line pursuant to Section 6.44.1(b) of the Zoning Ordinance. The Board of Zoning Appeal would typically grant that special permit, but since the proposal requires Planning Board review, the Planning Board may grant all necessary special permits per Section 10.45.

The applicable special permit findings are summarized on the following page. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings (see appendix for zoning text excerpts)
Special Permit for more than one structure containing a principal residential use (Section 5.53.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of two structures on the lot will not significantly increase the impact of the new construction should it occur in a single structure, <u>OR</u> • The development of two structures will provide identifiable benefits beyond that provided by construction in a single structure. • Conforms to general criteria for issuance of a special permit. <i>(See attached)</i>
Special Permit for locating driveway within 5 feet of the side property line (Section 6.44.1.b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The placement of the driveway within 5 feet of the side property line will only be a minor modification.

Staff Comments

Area Planning and Zoning

The neighborhood generally consists of single-family, two-family and some multi-family dwellings. Most lots contain one residential structure, although some lots contain two separate dwellings. Each of the neighboring lots at 7 Donnell and 11 Donnell contain two residential structures, with a “front” building facing Donnell Street and a “rear” building at the back of the lot.

The lot at 9 Donnell Street is similar in depth but narrower than its neighboring lots, with approximately 45 feet of frontage and almost 170 feet of depth. The grade of the lot slopes downward from front to rear. The proposal would demolish the existing building and build two new structures, one at the front and one at the rear, roughly aligned with the existing front and rear buildings at 7 and 11 Donnell. The entire rear building would be more than 75 feet from Donnell Street, triggering the special permit requirement of Section 5.53.2. The as-of-right option would be to continue to use the existing building as a single-family or attached two-family dwelling, or to demolish and build one new single-family or two-family structure on the lot.

The proposal will provide the required front, rear, and side setbacks as well as private open space for both units, including a significant proportion maintained in the rear of the lot. Between the two buildings will be a partially-depressed garage structure for three off-street parking spaces (only two would be required), above which a usable “courtyard” space is proposed.

Urban Design

As noted above, the context has a mixed built form character with several architectural styles present, including traditional wood-framed cottages and flat roofed triple-deckers, as well as recent additions and remodeled houses. The proposed development of two detached single-family dwellings maintains

the prevailing landscaped street setback and is of a scale that is consistent with the existing pattern of development in the area. The change in grade across the site enables the construction of the partially depressed garage, which is a preferred urban design as it limits the visual impact of the parking from the streetscape and neighboring properties. To achieve an adequate garage height and driveway slope, a retaining wall is required along the sidewalk edge. While there are examples of similar structures in the neighborhood, the height of this wall should be minimized and/or softened to ensure that its impact on the pedestrian environment is limited.

The two proposed dwellings have a relatively modest footprint and will introduce a modern built form character to the neighborhood. While the proposed contemporary architectural language and simple massing responds to the evolving character of the area, there are some elements of the proposed design, primarily associated with the solid and void elements of the Donnell Street façade that contrast with the streetscape character. Perhaps there is potential to create more transparency and establish a visual rhythm that better relates to the street. Ensuring that windows and doors are prominent elements of the building façade is also consistent with citywide urban design guidelines.

Staff recommends that the Board consider the following issues in their review, or to incorporate them into any conditions for ongoing design review by staff:

- Consideration be given to exploring design options that better relate to some of the features of the neighborhood's built form character, including creating additional visual connections between the front dwelling and the street.
- Review of the retaining wall height as it relates to the pedestrian experience of Donnell Street.
- Final plans for the underground garage and sidewalk construction should be reviewed by the Department of Public Works (DPW) prior to construction.