



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner
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Date: January 19, 2017

Re: Special Permit **PB #318, 55 Regent Street - Continued Hearing**

Update

Since the last Planning Board meeting, the Applicant has worked with staff to respond to comments and questions raised in the initial review of the application. The Applicant's recent submission provides additional information about the project in narrative and graphic form, and proposes changes to the building program and design. This memo comments on the additional information and proposed changes.

Planning Board Action

As a reminder, the project is located in the Residence B District and is seeking a Special Permit to modify base zoning requirements to convert a non-residential building to residential use pursuant to Section 5.28.2 of the Zoning Ordinance in addition to seeking a Special Permit to exempt basement area from the calculation of Gross Floor Area. The project also proposes a rooftop addition that will require variances from the Board of Zoning Appeal for Floor Area Ratio and Gross Floor Area requirements of Article 5.000 and alteration of a non-conforming structure per Section 8.22.3. The applicable special permit findings are summarized below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Conversion of non-residential structures to residential use (Section 5.28.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of dwelling units will not increase on-street parking demand in the neighborhood. • The location, orientation, and use of the structure and yard of the new housing use will not impact the privacy of residential neighbors. • Due consideration has been given to address the impacts of reduction in private open space. • Reasonable efforts have been taken to address concerns raised by abutters and neighbors. (See full 5.28.28.1 criteria in appendix)
Exemption of basement area in the calculation of Gross Floor Area (GFA)	The uses occupying such exempted GFA support the character of the neighborhood or district in which the applicable lot is located.
General special permit criteria (Section 10.43)	Special permits will be normally granted if the zoning requirements are met, unless it is found not to be in the public interest due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43 (see appendix).

If the Board acts to grant a special permit, the approval would be conditioned on continuing design review by CDD staff along with any other conditions the Board deems to be appropriate.

Planning Board comments from First Hearing

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the October 18, 2016 hearing. The Applicant has provided some responses in the submitted materials.

- Submit a geotechnical report analyzing the potential impact of the project on the surrounding built structures.
- Submit a parking analysis report to understand the impact of the project on the parking needs in the neighborhood.
- Verify structural integrity of the existing structure to accommodate the proposed project.
- Review options to resolve the impact on privacy of abutting properties.
- Provide additional community engagement to address neighborhood concerns and engage more with the issues of parking and density.

Staff Comments on New Materials

The scope of the project has been reduced from four to three units in response to the neighborhood concerns regarding the proposed density. Each unit is proposed to have two parking spaces each in the garage. As a result of the reduced unit count, bicycle parking is no longer required. Some of the

mechanical equipment has been relocated to the basement. A hydrostatic slab is proposed in the basement to reduce the risk of local groundwater depletion as per the geotechnical analysis.

Urban Design

The street elevation has undergone some modifications resulting from the change to three units. The main entrance is now located to one side with more of a traditional stoop character, and the windows have been rearranged. Overall, the façade generally maintains the historic fabric of the building. The side elevations will remain largely unchanged with the existing openings remaining filled with brick thereby preventing overlooking. Access to daylight will be provided to the units by four internal courtyards and the front and rear windows.

In response to concerns about privacy, the project now includes use of obscured glass block in the rear openings, which reduces the impacts on the rear abutter. The penthouse and deck have been reduced in size and modified to two structures so that there is no roof deck facing the rear and the setback from side property lines has increased. The Applicant has also proposed potential roof screens to further mitigate any overlooking concerns.

The proposed street edge treatments have improved with the removal of the bike shed and additional landscaping, which helps the project better respond to the surrounding residential character.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be subject to continuing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Review of landscape details, including the planter beds in the front yard.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, façade alterations and details with staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission.
- Review of stormwater management by the Department of Public Works.