



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board

From: Swaathi Joseph, Associate Zoning Planner
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Re: Special Permit **PB #320, 47 Bishop Allen Drive**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 47 Bishop Allen Drive, the special permits being requested, and related comments. Comments have been provided by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) in combination with the associated "Mass and Main" proposal, and the applicant has been in communication with the Department of Public Works (DPW).

Summary of Proposal

The applicant is proposing to replace the existing three-story garage with a new four-story building with 23 residential units, with off-street parking for 12 cars provided off-site (at 65 Bishop Allen Drive), and a shed for 26 long-term bicycle parking spaces in the rear yard. The proposal also includes a shared patio area in the rear yard and private decks in the front and rear yards at ground level.

Requested Special Permits

The site is mostly located in Business A (which has the same dimensional standards as Residence C-2B for residential development) and partially in Residence C-1 district. The project seeks a Project Review Special Permit for the construction of a new building of gross floor area greater than 20,000 square feet per Section 19.23 *Special Permit Threshold* and a Multifamily Special Permit for the construction of a multifamily dwelling containing 12 or more units per Section 4.26 *Multifamily Special Permit Applicability*. It is also seeking Special Permits to reduce the parking requirements and to locate all parking off-site within 400 feet of the site. The project also seeks a waiver of required front and side yard setbacks in accordance with the Central Square Overlay District zoning. 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>
Construction of Multifamily Dwelling in Residence C-1 & Business A-3 Districts (Section 4.26.1)	<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 10.47.4 criteria in appendix)</p>
Waiver of setback requirements in Central Square Overlay District (Section 20.304.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements are in conformance with objectives contained in <i>Central Square Development Guidelines and Central Square Action Plan</i> (see attached). • No National Register or contributing building is demolished or altered as to terminate or preclude its designation (either now or within the past 5 years). • Building and site designs adequately screen the parking provided and are sensitive to the contributing buildings in the vicinity (see map attached).
Reduction of parking requirement (Sections 20.304.6 & 6.35.1)	<p>Lesser amount of parking will not cause excessive congestion, endanger public safety, substantially reduce parking availability for other uses or otherwise adversely impact the neighborhood; or will provide positive environmental or other benefits to the users of the lot and the neighborhood, including assisting in provision of affordable housing units. <i>(See appendix for details.)</i></p>
Approval of Off-Site Accessory Parking (Section 6.22.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convenient and safe access from the parking facility to the use being served is provided. • No off site accessory parking may be located on a lot which has a more restrictive zoning classification. • Off-site parking is located within 400 feet of the lot being served for residential uses.
Project Review Special Permit (Section 19.20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project is consistent with the urban design objectives of the City as set forth in Section 19.30 (see appendix).
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 due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43 (see appendix).</p>

Central Square Design Guidelines, 2013 – Summary of Design Goals

<i>Streets and Sidewalks</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Establish Mass Ave and Main Street as great public spaces in an improved system of streets and sidewalks.2. Enhance the street network to make walking more convenient, safe and fun.3. Balance the goals of active Street edges and residential privacy on streets other than Mass Ave and Main Street.
<i>Integrating Buildings with Public Places</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. As the design of existing public spaces is revisited and redevelopment of adjacent properties occurs, seek to improve the attractiveness and functionality of the open space at all levels.2. Create new outdoor and indoor gathering spaces.
<i>Ground Floor Design</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Storefronts should be oriented to the pedestrian and provide visual interest both day and night along Mass Ave and Main Street.2. Pedestrians should be encouraged to window shop by the provision of varied and interesting display areas and ground floor facades.3. Every effort should be made to create welcoming storefronts and to express an individual building or store identity.4. Windows should be expansive and illuminated from within to create interesting display or viewing areas for retail space.5. Provide a framework for variation in the design of the ground floor, so that the architecture of the building does not dominate the architecture of the street.6. Encourage expansion of the definition of ground floor articulation to the lowest 2 levels to further enhance the pedestrian experience.7. Pedestrian level treatments should relate to the human dimension and be rich in detail to enhance the pedestrian experience through the use of architectural elements such as trim, sills, lintels, awnings and canopies or, in more modern fashion, should be inviting and interesting through dramatic treatment of space, lighting, and signage.8. Enliven the public realm by expanding the publicly accessible private spaces along sidewalk, in association with the creation of retail, cultural and office space.
<i>Built Form - height</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Variation of height is encouraged.2. While buildings are encouraged to align facade elements with tops of adjacent buildings, overall building height does not necessarily need to be uniform from one building to another.3. Allow the greatest height and bulk on Mass Ave with a diminution in height and bulk as the project approaches the lower residential uses in abutting areas4. Consider opportunities to maintain and enhance views to significant historic structures when composing building height and bulk.

<p><i>Built Form - massing</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Continuation of a strong linear retail frontage is critical to preserving the strength and historic character of the commercial district.2. Building fronts should maintain a strong linear edge along Mass Ave.3. Adjacent structures should build to a common party wall, although occasional setbacks of up to 15 feet to accommodate outdoor dining or retail sales, integrated with ground floor design and programming, are encouraged.4. Alleyways between buildings are not encouraged except at identified locations where public pedestrian passages are desirable.5. Limit shadow impacts of new development on portions of neighborhoods outside the study area and public parks within approximately 1-2 blocks or 500 feet of development site. Shadow impacts should not substantially reduce the appeal of public spaces, nor direct sun access to neighborhood housing, during spring and fall.
<p><i>Streetwalls and Bulk Control</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Building facades along Mass Ave and Main Street should both reinforce the traditional 55 foot height range of traditional buildings, and introduce variation in height.2. Added height is especially encouraged where it can help buildings serve as attractive landmarks.3. Streetwall height should step down towards the neighborhoods.4. Relate architectural elements of new construction to significant architectural elements, including cornice heights, on adjacent buildings.
<p><i>Building Facade</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respond to orientation with regard to environment, place, and site, while providing context by acknowledging the importance of building profile, edges and corners.• New projects should be conceived with enduring and durable qualities, such that, many years from their conception, they are seen as strong contributors to the liveliness of the Square and to its role as presenting a diverse set of architectural statements over a century or more.
<p><i>Parking and service areas</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Off-street parking and service areas should be screened from the public realm wherever possible2. Enrich neighborhood walkability with safe, green streets. Promote use of transportation modes other than driving.

Area Planning and Zoning

The site is located within the Port neighborhood and 9,933 square feet of the property along Bishop Allen Drive is located in the Business A District (BA) and 1,960 square feet in the rear is located in the Residence C-1 District. BA is a mixed-use district allowing a range of commercial uses at a relatively modest scale (1.0 FAR), but allowing residential use at a slightly higher scale (1.75 FAR) and height (45 feet, or about four stories). Residential development in BA is subject to the dimensional requirements of the Residence C-2B District, including yard setbacks and private open space. The portion of the site located in BA is also modified by the Central Square Overlay District.

The last major rezoning affecting the site was the 2015 “Mass and Main” zoning, which placed the entire site within the Bishop Allen Drive Residential Support Zone of the Mass and Main Residential Mixed Income Subdistrict (governed by the regulations and procedures of Section 20.307). This new zoning did not change the base development standards for the area, but allowed for existing parking in the area to be used to serve higher-scale development allowed along Massachusetts Ave. The 65 Bishop Allen Drive site is also within the Bishop Allen Drive Residential Support Zone.

The stated goals of the Central Square Overlay District include to preserve and enhance the unique functional environment and visual character of Central Square, to mitigate the functional impacts of new development on adjacent residential neighborhoods, and to maintain the present diversity of development and open space patterns and building scales and ages. The Central Square portion of the Kendall Square Central Square or “K2C2” Planning Study complemented these goals with the goals of promoting public spaces to build community, diversity in retail, non-profit and cultural institutions, increased housing and residential diversity, connecting people to the square, and encouraging sustainable development choices. The study designated the area of this site as the “Neighborhood Edge” subdistrict, where residential development is recommended to appropriately transition in scale and character to abutting residential neighborhoods.

Proposed Project

While the 2015 zoning made it possible to retain the existing parking garage to serve denser residential development along Massachusetts Avenue, the current proposed residential development at the “Mass and Main” intersection (reviewed in a concurrent application) includes below-grade parking, making the retention of the existing parking garage unnecessary. Therefore, its replacement with residential use, at the scale and density allowed under base zoning, is consistent with the goals of the zoning in the area as well as the goals of the more recent planning work in Central Square.

As it exists, the lot is currently non-conforming with regard to front, back and side setbacks and some other dimensional requirements. The existing building does not require demolition review as it is less than 50 years old.

The proposed residential use will be more conforming for the entire site than the existing garage. The proposed building is designed to conform to most of the base zoning requirements, except for front and side setbacks and parking, for which flexibility by special permit is allowed by the Central Square Overlay District zoning. The proposed development does not exceed the allowed density in the district. Required

long-term bicycle parking is located at grade within a shed located behind the building. The project meets the minimum requirement for open space, with open space provided on-grade along with decks and patio area.

The project proposes a reduced parking ratio of 0.5 space per unit, which is supported by the recent Central Square study and consistent with the observed demand at other residential projects in Central Square. Parking is proposed at the existing surface parking lot at 65 Bishop Allen Drive, which is within 400 feet from the site, accessible to pedestrians from the sidewalk and also within the Bishop Allen Drive Residential Support Zone, which specifically allows existing parking to serve new residential development. Since no parking is proposed on the site, on-site screening measures are not needed to mitigate the proposed reduction in yard setbacks. The residential buildings are proposed to contain a range of units, including studios, 1-bedroom units, 2-bedroom units and 3-bedroom units. The project will provide affordable units in accordance with Inclusionary Housing requirements. The project is not subject to Green Building requirements as it is less than 25,000 square feet in Gross Floor Area.

Urban Design

While the proposal is of a relatively modest scale in comparison to the “Mass and Main” project, the City’s urban design objectives and guidelines are still relevant. Guidance for urban design review is primarily provided in the *Central Square Design Guidelines* (2013) developed during the C2 study process to inform property owners, business owners, developers, and the general public about the desired form and character of development in Central Square.

The key objectives of these design guidelines are to:

- Enrich the Square’s public realm as a place that invites community interaction at many levels.
- Celebrate and maintain the mix of old, new, funky, and locally-based enterprises activating Central Square’s Cultural District.
- Support community diversity through more varied housing choices.
- Enrich neighborhood walkability and livability with safe, green streets and improved access choices.

The C2 design guidelines also build upon work completed in earlier studies, including the Central Square Action Plan and Development Guidelines. The main goal of the Central Square Action Plan was to strengthen the retail environment while maintaining a culturally and economically diverse neighborhood shopping area. The plan recommends:

1. That new development reflect the existing neighborhood by providing a mix of affordable housing opportunities;
2. Preserve structures which contribute to the historical fabric of the Square;
3. Maintain an active streetscape both during the day and evening;
4. Promote compatibility with existing uses; and
5. Improve the overall physical and visual environment.

The development guidelines were written to promote, through physical design, the attainment of the Action Plan's goals and objectives.

At the site planning level, the proposal will transform a currently unappealing streetscape into a more pleasant and pedestrian friendly environment with round-the-clock residents. Relatively modest in scale, with a simple form and plan, the proposal includes a successful site layout that is not compromised by vehicle access or parking, which is often the case with similar projects.

The design takes its cues from the church housing next door, as well as multi-family housing typologies within the neighborhood. This is most evident in the use of clapboard siding, projecting bays that help to provide a scale transition, balconies, and individual unit entries and patios at the sidewalk level. Such intimately scaled residential design elements are entirely appropriate for this side street location and help enliven the façade. Perhaps there is more scope to enhance the bays, as well as provide a greater level of interest, detail and warmth at the ground floor, particularly around the main entrance.

The proposed muted color palette is reflective of the colors of the church and results in more of a background building that blends with its immediate neighbors. To gain a complete understanding of the project's role within the streetscape it would be useful to see a rendering of the building from further west on Bishop Allen Drive, or a streetscape elevation showing adjacent buildings.

The site plan does not provide enough information about the landscaping to be provided on the site. It would be helpful to review such details to ensure that the proposed landscape treatments provide visual benefits to abutters and future residents, and consider opportunities for street trees. Additional details should also be provided to clarify the design of the patios and proposed privacy treatments.

Continuing Review

The following is a summary of issues that staff recommends should be further studied by the Applicant, either in preparing revised materials if the Planning Board continues the hearing to a future date, or as conditions for ongoing design review by staff if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- Review of the front entry design ground floor unit entries and patio details.
- Details of all landscape treatments, including species, planter details, and opportunities to provide visual benefits to abutters and passersby, and street trees.
- Clarification of the switchgear location and potential siting of the transformer if needed.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, and details.
- Review of bicycle parking, access and egress by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.