



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 #329, 3-5 Linnaean Street**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 3-5 Linnaean Street, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

The applicant is proposing to create 5 additional one-bedroom units in the basement of the existing 37-unit multi-family residential building located at 3-5 Linnaean Street, within the Basement Housing Overlay District. The proposal also includes addition of 5 long-term bicycle parking spaces in the basement of the existing building. No new off-street vehicular parking is proposed.

Requested Special Permits

The project is within the Basement Housing Overlay District and requires a Special Permit for the creation of new basement dwelling units per Section 20.600. The project is also requesting that required parking for the additional units be waived, which is allowed by Paragraph (e) of Section 20.630 (the application also references the general criteria for reduction of required parking in Section 6.35.1).

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 <i>(see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
Conversion of Basement into Dwelling Units (Section 20.600)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project complies with all the requirements noted in Section 20.640 (see appendix). • The project meets the affordability standards as set forth in Section 20.650 (see appendix).
Reduction in required parking (Section 20.630, Paragraph e; Application also references Section 6.35.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction will not result in substantial adverse impacts to on-street parking, based on information provided by the Applicant regarding the availability of alternate transportation options or other factors that would result in a reduced demand for parking.
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).

Area Planning and Zoning

The property is within the Residence C-2 District with a small portion along Massachusetts Avenue in Business A-2. The site is also within the Basement Housing Overlay District, which was established for the purpose of allowing the creation of studio or one-bedroom apartments in basement level space of larger, older, existing multi-family residential buildings meeting certain criteria, and subject to approval by the Planning Board.

Proposed Project

According to the application documents, the existing building was built on or around 1910, with no precise year given (the Cambridge Assessing Database also lists 1910 as the year of construction). The lot with the existing building is currently non-conforming with regard to dimensional requirements for gross floor area, FAR, and yard setbacks. However, the proposed project will not increase any of the existing non-conforming dimensional elements except for minimum lot area per dwelling unit, due to the proposed increase in the total number of units. As presented, the proposal would comply with the applicability standards set forth in Section 20.620 (see appendix). As per Section 20.650 one of the five new units should be an affordable unit, though the application makes no mention of an affordable unit.

Flood Risk

One of the key elements of the Basement Housing Overlay District zoning is the requirement to assess the probability of flood risk to the basement units and to incorporate measures to mitigate that risk. The applicant has provided a report that has been reviewed by the City Engineer. A letter from the City Engineer indicates that this site has not been identified to have increased potential for surface flooding. The construction will be subject to further review by the Department of Public Works (DPW).

Parking

According to the Basement Housing Overlay District, the Planning Board may waive the off-street parking requirements for the 5 additional units. The project is not proposing the addition of new off-street parking because none can be accommodated on the lot. The site is in proximity to the MBTA stations at Harvard Square and Porter Square as well as bus routes along Massachusetts Avenue. Carsharing vehicles and Hubway stations are also available in the neighborhood, which provide additional transportation options. The Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) has not been consulted regarding the parking waiver and has not provided any comment at this time.

Bicycle Parking

The basement housing overlay zoning requires a minimum of 5 long-term bicycle parking spaces (one for each new unit) that meet the zoning requirements for bicycle parking design, layout and access, which are detailed in Section 6.100 of the Zoning Ordinance. The plans submitted do not demonstrate that they are meeting the requirements for layout and spacing, and the access route to the bicycle parking area is not shown. If there is some aspect of the requirement that cannot be met given the existing conditions of the building and site, an alternative plan can be proposed, but it requires seeking and receiving a special permit from the Planning Board as per Section 6.108 (see appendix). CDD and TPT staff are available to review an alternative plan and suggest measures that will make the access routes as convenient as possible for bicycle users.

Urban Design

The submitted plans show alterations taking place primarily within the interior of the building. Some minor exterior alterations are shown, such as enlarging the size of some windows to meet building code requirements, and unit entrances and stairs. While the alterations seem minimal, no elevations are provided and therefore it is difficult to assess potential urban design impacts of the changes.

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 any exterior alteration details.
- Further review of bicycle parking location, layout, and access.
- The Board may seek comment from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TPT) regarding the parking waiver after consultation with the Applicant.
- The Board may seek confirmation that one of the new dwelling units will be provided as an affordable unit.