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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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IRAM FAROOQ  
Assistant City Manager for  
Community Development

SANDRA CLARKE  
Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration

To: Planning Board  
From: CDD Staff  
Date: April 17, 2018  
Re: Special Permit **PB #335, 47 Dudley Street**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 47 Dudley Street, the special permit being requested, and related comments. The applicant has been in communication with Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) and Department of Public Works (DPW).

### **Summary of Proposal**

The applicant is proposing to repurpose the existing single-story office building into a single-family residential dwelling with 632 square feet of gross floor area (GFA). The GFA will be increased by 210 square feet by an internal addition of loft area and no changes to the exterior of the existing structure are proposed. The lot also contains two three-family dwellings, which will be retained. No additional off-street parking spaces or long-term bicycle parking spaces are proposed, though exterior bicycle racks are proposed to be installed on the lot.

### **Requested Special Permit**

The project is located in the Residence B District and seeks a Special Permit to modify base zoning requirements to convert a non-residential building to residential use, which is allowed pursuant to Section 5.28.2 of the Zoning Ordinance. 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"> <li>• Increased number of dwelling units will not increase on-street parking demand in the neighborhood.</li> <li>• The location, orientation, and use of the structure and yard of the new housing use will not impact the privacy of residential neighbors.</li> <li>• Due consideration has been given to address the impacts of reduction in private open space.</li> <li>• Reasonable efforts have been taken to address concerns raised by abutters and neighbors. (See full 5.28.28.1 criteria in appendix)</li> </ul>
Townhouses and multifamily dwellings (Section 10.47.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key features of natural landscape are preserved.</li> <li>• New buildings relate sensitively to existing built environment.</li> <li>• Open space provides visual benefits to abutters and passersby and functional benefits to occupants.</li> <li>• Parking, access and egress are safe and convenient.</li> <li>• Intrusion of onsite parking is minimized.</li> <li>• Services such as trash collection and utility boxes are convenient yet unobtrusive.</li> <li>• (See full text in appendix)</li> </ul>
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 site is located in the Residence B District within North Cambridge at the corner of Dudley Street and Cedar Street, across from Reverend Williams Park. Cedar Street and Dudley Street each connect directly to Massachusetts Avenue, about 500 feet away, which features a variety of retail, office, and residential uses. There is an MBTA bus stop at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Dudley Street and Davis Square T station is half a mile from the site. Also, the Alewife Linear Path can be accessed at Trolley Square.

While the neighborhood has a mix of housing types (including single-family, two-family, and multifamily dwellings) and some scattered non-residential buildings, allowed development in Residence B includes only single or two-family structures or townhouse-style residential development at a relatively low density with generous setbacks and open space areas.

The Cambridge Growth Policy for residential neighborhoods promotes maintaining the prevailing pattern of development, building density and scale that has evolved historically. It also recommends conversion of underused non-residential buildings to residential use if there is a demand for housing, especially in areas with good access to public transportation.

### **Background on Requested Special Permit**

Ordinarily, the conversion of a non-residential structure to residential use would create many zoning non-conformities requiring variances. During the Citywide Rezoning in 2001, a provision was added under Section 5.28.2 allowing the Planning Board to grant a special permit, rather than variances, to alter a building originally built for non-residential use to accommodate a residential use. The rationale is to allow existing buildings to be preserved in a way that is economically feasible and generally consistent with the allowed uses in the district, while maintaining some of the historic character of the neighborhoods. The provisions of Section 5.28.2 were amended in 2006 and again in 2011, to strengthen requirements related to parking, to limit density, and to provide additional criteria for Planning Board consideration.

Section 5.28.2 allows the Planning Board to grant zoning relief only for development occurring within the original structure. This includes relief from floor area ratio (FAR) limitations and from lot area per dwelling unit limitations (with some restrictions), even in cases when GFA is added to the interior of the structure. However, any GFA added outside of the existing building envelope would need to conform to zoning limitations, or seek a variance. For other dimensional requirements such as building height, yard setbacks, and open space, 5.28.2 allows the existing conditions to be retained, with some flexibility. For instance, open space requirements may be waived in order to provide off-street parking spaces where required. As with other residential developments, off-street parking is required at a rate of one space per dwelling unit. In terms of use, 5.28.2 allows the Planning Board to approve a conversion to a multifamily dwelling even in districts where multifamily dwellings are not otherwise allowed.

### **Proposed Project**

The parcel identified as 51 Dudley Street contains three buildings, two multifamily buildings (29 Cedar Street and 51 Dudley Street) and an office building (47 Dudley Street) at the corner. There are six existing residential units on the lot, three in each multifamily building. The project will add one more residential unit on the parcel. The proposed residential development is not subject to Inclusionary Housing requirements or Green Building requirements. The Applicant has reviewed the proposal with staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission, who did not find that a demolition review hearing will be required as the existing building will be retained.

As it exists, the lot is currently non-conforming with regard to use, yard setbacks, and some other dimensional requirements. The proposed residential use, as a single-family dwelling, will conform to the use regulations of the district, unlike the existing non-residential use.

The existing building has a 422 square-foot basement and first floor, but the basement area does not count as GFA as it is defined in the Zoning Ordinance. The proposed conversion will change the existing basement into a dropped first floor of 422 square feet and will change the existing first floor into 210 square feet of loft space. The additional 210 square feet of GFA will further increase the non-conforming FAR of the lot without altering the footprint and volume of the existing structure. When GFA is proposed to exceed what is normally allowed in the base zoning district, the Planning Board shall review whether such additional floor area is necessary to accommodate a reasonable arrangement and layout of the residential unit per Section 5.28.21. The proposed development exceeds the allowed dwelling unit

density of the base zoning district, but the Planning Board special permit may allow a greater number of dwelling units per Section 5.28.22.

The project does not meet the minimum requirement for private open space, which may be reduced by the Planning Board in granting a special permit if the Board finds that full compliance is limited by the existing development of the lot per Section 5.28.25. The existing building footprints covering almost the entire site limit the ability to create private open space and permeable open space.

Two off-street parking spaces are existing on the lot, one of which is proposed to be assigned to the new residential unit to comply with Section 5.28.2 requirements. Long-term bicycle parking spaces are not provided on the site, but four outdoor bike racks (eight total spaces) are proposed between the existing multi-family buildings. TP&T has reviewed the proposal and concluded that the proposed change of use will have no adverse traffic impacts, as there are fewer vehicle trips to a residence than an office.

The proposed conversion will create basement-level residential space that may be susceptible to flooding risk. The applicant is in the process of reviewing the plan with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and comments from DPW regarding potential flood risk are provided in a separate memo.

### **Urban Design**

The building's proposed appearance will be compatible with the residential character of the surrounding neighborhood: The drawings show clapboards and trim, new windows, the removal of a through-wall air-conditioning unit, the removal of an existing chimney, and the repair/replacement of the cornice. These façade alterations will enhance the streetscape and the pedestrian experience. As shown in the photographs, the building's cornice does not match the submitted elevation and section drawings. The applicant should clarify whether additional exterior work will be completed as per the drawings.

A new exterior stair, ascending to grade from the unit's lower level, is proposed in the alley between the building in question and one of the other residential buildings on the site. According to the site plan, the stair will occupy almost the entire width of the narrow alley. This does not appear to pose a problem, however, as the alley is not an essential travel route and it is too narrow to count toward required open space on the site.

Further information regarding any rooftop HVAC units, appurtenances, and façade vents should be provided as these should be sited and screened to ensure that visually unobtrusive locations for both the streetscape, and abutting properties are achieved.

### **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:

- Clarification of all façade details, including the building's cornice and location of any through wall vents.
- Location and screening of any mechanical or electrical equipment
- Review of bicycle parking by the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department.
- Review of onsite infrastructure needs and below-grade flood mitigation measures by the Department of Public Works.