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# CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

**SANDRA CLARKE**  
*Deputy Director  
Chief of Administration*

Date: September 25, 2018

Re: Special Permit **PB #337, 178 Elm Street – Continued Hearing**

**KHALIL MOGASSABI**  
*Deputy Director  
Chief of Planning*

## 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. This memo comments on the additional information and proposed changes. The applicant is in communication with the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department (TP&T) and Department of Public Works (DPW).

## Planning Board Action

As a reminder, the applicant is proposing to convert the existing building, previously used as an institutional social club, into a multifamily residential building with six dwelling units. The project will not provide off-street parking due to the existing conditions of the site, but will provide lockers for six long-term bicycle parking spaces. Since the property is not located in a local historic district and the project is not proposing demolition, there will be no formal review by the Historical Commission.

The project is located in Residence C-1 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 project is also seeking a special permit for reduction of required parking per Section 6.35.1. In addition, the project seeks a special permit to modify the access standards for long-term bicycle parking, because the width of the path from the street to the bike lockers located behind the building will not meet the access standards set forth in Section 6.106 due to the existing conditions of the site. The applicable special permit findings are summarized on the following page.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text in appendix)</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.</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> </ul>
Reduction in required parking (Section 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.</p>
Modification of Bicycle Parking Standards (Section 6.108)	<p>Proposed bicycle parking design or layout shall be durable and convenient for the users whom it is intended to serve.</p>
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 because the proposal would (unlike uses or development otherwise allowed in the district) either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not comply with the Zoning Ordinance;</li> <li>• cause traffic congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established character;</li> <li>• adversely affect the continued operation or development of adjacent uses;</li> <li>• create nuisance or hazard to the detriment of health, safety and/or welfare;</li> <li>• impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of the Zoning Ordinance; or</li> <li>• be inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.</li> </ul>

### **Planning Board Comments from the First Hearing**

The following summarizes some of the key comments made by the Planning Board at the June 5, 2018 hearing.

- Consider making arrangements to secure off-site shared parking or measures to discourage car ownership.
- Explore options to make the existing entrance on Elm Street the main entrance to all six units.
- Consider changes to the Elm Street façade to bring it closer to its original appearance
- Respond to façade treatment options mentioned in CDD memo, including explore options to extend the first-floor windows upward to the arches over the openings.
- Provide further details on bicycle access to the rear.

### **Staff Comments on New Materials**

#### *Design Changes*

The revised application materials dated August 7, 2018 address many of the concerns raised by the Planning Board and staff, and incorporate the following specific changes:

- Relocation of residential entrance from the side alley to the main entrance on Elm Street. To provide ADA access, the front door has been lowered to sidewalk level, and the existing steps have been removed. A lift has been added inside the front vestibule to serve the building's first-floor/basement level units.
- Extension of first-floor windows on the street façade upward to give them a more vertical proportion, more in keeping with the building's original appearance.
- Raising of sills of second floor windows on the street façade upward so that they are farther from the tops of the first-floor arches.
- Addition of a horizontal mullion in the central third floor window, increasing its compatibility with the windows on either side.
- Relocation of gas meters from the side alley to the areaways at the street façade basement windows, allowing freer movement to the bicycle storage area in the rear yard.

Some issues that should be given further consideration include:

- The possibility that the arched window over the main entry on Elm Street could be transparent, possibly incorporating a shadow box where the proposed second floor passes behind it.
- Recessing the brick infill in the arches above the first-floor windows.
- Two trash/recycling bins may be insufficient for 6 units.

### *Parking*

The revised application documents do not propose the use of off-site, off-street parking spaces. The owner was unable to secure an arrangement to use off-site parking facilities at a location that would comply with zoning and other parking regulations. The Applicant has met with TP&T to discuss the issue.

In lieu of providing arrangements for off-street shared parking, which was investigated by the applicant but determined to be infeasible, TP&T recommended to the Applicant, and the Applicant had agreed that the Property Owner shall offer to pay an annual Gold-level Bluebikes bikeshare membership for residents (up to 2 per household) that choose to be Bluebike members. For apartment tenancy, this benefit would be a one-time annual membership (up to 2 per unit), and offered to new household tenants upon unit turnover. The purpose of this is to help establish the habit of bicycling and taking transit by tenants instead of needing to own a vehicle. For condominium units, the original property owner that sells a unit as a condominium will offer the new condominium purchasers (up to 2 adults per unit) a Bluebikes annual membership. This is intended to incentivize the first condo owners to use the bikeshare system but is not required if individual condominium owners subsequently sell their unit.

For short-term bicycle parking, due to the existing conditions of the site, TP&T would support the applicant's request to make a public contribution for bicycle parking in lieu of providing it on their property. This would be a one-time contribution to the city for one (1) bicycle rack through Section 6.104.2b of the zoning ordinance.

### **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 landscape details, including planters, railings and storage locations for trash/recycling bins.
- Review of all façade and exterior material details, including masonry repairs, repointing, window details, doors, paint, lighting, and other preservation issues in consultation with CHC staff.
- Location of any site-located electrical equipment that may be required.