



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: Planning Board
From: CDD Staff
Date: May 30, 2018
Re: Special Permit **PB #337, 178 Elm Street**

This memo contains an overview of the proposed project at 178 Elm Street, the special permits being requested, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

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, but will provide lockers for six long-term bicycle parking spaces. CDD staff consulted with the Historical Commission staff and has been informed that the building was originally constructed as a Hebrew Free School in 1913 and designed by architect Nathan Douglas. 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.

Requested Special Permit

The project is located in the 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 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 below. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

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"> • 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.
Townhouses and multifamily dwellings (Section 10.47.4)	<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.
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"> • not comply with the Zoning Ordinance; • cause traffic congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established character; • adversely affect the continued operation or development of adjacent uses; • create nuisance or hazard to the detriment of health, safety and/or welfare; • impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of the Zoning Ordinance; or • be inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Area Planning and Zoning

The site is located in the Residence C-1 District within the Wellington-Harrington neighborhood, which has predominantly residential uses with a mix of housing types, generally two or three-story wood-frame houses. The recently renovated Elm/Hampshire Plaza, a city park, is within walking distance from the parcel. Elm Street connects directly to Cambridge Street to the north and Hampshire Street and Broadway to the south, which feature a variety of retail, office, and residential uses and are served by various bus routes. The site is about a 10-minute walk from both the Central Square MBTA station and the future Union Square MBTA station that is under development, and is about a 15-minute walk from Kendall Square.

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.

The conversion of an existing non-residential structure to residential use would usually trigger many dimensional non-conformities requiring variances. During the Citywide Rezoning in 2001, a provision was added under Section 5.28.2 allowing the Planning Board to approve such non-conformities by special permit, rather than variances, when altering a building originally built for non-residential use to accommodate a residential use. This allowed the preservation of existing buildings in an economically feasible way that is generally consistent with the allowed uses in the district, and to maintain some of the historic character of the neighborhoods. The criteria for approval, which were amended in 2011, are meant to address concerns such as parking impacts where the density of the project is greater than what is typical in the neighborhood, privacy of abutters in cases where normal setbacks are reduced, and provision of adequate landscaping where the amount of private open space is less than usual for the district.

Proposed Project

The lot is currently non-conforming with regard to use (though, under the Institutional Use Regulations in Section 4.50, a club may be allowed by special permit on a lot that was not previously residential) and dimensional requirements.

Multifamily residences are allowed by right in the base zoning district. With two units being three-bedroom units and the other four units being two-bedroom units, the proposal supports the city's policy to encourage development of units that can accommodate families with children.

The existing FAR is more than twice the allowed FAR in the base district. The proposed internal addition of a floor will further increase the non-conforming FAR of the lot. Per Section 5.28.2, the Board may permit additional Gross Floor Area (GFA) to be added, provided that all additional GFA is within the existing structure and that the Board finds that such additional floor area is necessary to accommodate a reasonable arrangement and layout of residential units within the existing structure.

Section 5.28.2 also allows the Planning Board to permit a number of dwelling units that is greater than the number normally allowed under base zoning limitations. The maximum number of units is limited to one unit for each 1,100 square feet of GFA, although in a case where GFA is added to an existing structure and the resulting GFA is greater than twice what would be allowed under normal zoning district regulations, then half the amount of additional GFA is deducted from the total proposed GFA for

the purpose of calculating the maximum permissible number of dwelling units (Section 5.28.21). In this case, the application of this formula results in a maximum of seven dwelling units that may be permitted by the Planning Board, and the proposal of six units is within that limitation. As the project contains less than 10,000 square feet of GFA and fewer than 10 dwelling units, it is not subject to inclusionary housing requirements, and no affordable units are proposed.

Required long-term bicycle parking is located on grade in the rear yard, which will be accessed by an external path through the side yard. In the plan set, Sheet A-020 indicates covered bike spaces, which will not meet city long-term bike parking, whereas Sheet SK-A1 indicates bike lockers, which will meet city long-term bike parking zoning requirements. TP&T has indicated their support for the bike lockers.

The project seeks a special permit to modify the access standards for long-term bicycle parking, because the width of the path from the sidewalk to the long-term bicycle parking will not meet the five foot access standards set forth in Section 6.106. The path will be about 4'4" wide with a 3'-2 ¾" pinch point due to the proposed location of hydro meters. Because of the constraints due to the existing conditions, TP&T has indicated that the 4'-4" path should be reasonably functional for access to the 6 bicycle spaces. The Planning Board may also want to ask the applicant if there are options to relocate the hydro meters elsewhere to eliminate the pinch point.

No off-street parking spaces are proposed for this project, and the footprint of the existing structure and lack of driveway access would make on-site parking infeasible without making substantial modifications to the structure. A parking analysis prepared by Vanasse & Associates, Inc. has been provided to support a requested waiver from off-street parking requirements for the Planning Board's consideration.

Even with the removal of the existing shed in the rear yard, 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 (Section 5.28.25). The existing building footprint makes it challenging to create new private open space and permeable open space. The existing open space in the rear yard will be retained and improved with new plantings.

Two units will have bedrooms in the basement, and hence susceptibility to flooding risk is a potential concern. The Department of Public Works (DPW) has reviewed the proposal and the comments regarding potential flood risk are included in a memo from the City Engineer. As it is less than 25,000 square feet in GFA, this project is not subject to the City's Green Building Requirements.

The existing building is over 100 years old, a handsome and substantial structure, and an important component of Elm Street's built fabric. It has been significantly modified, however, since its original construction, and is suffering from deferred maintenance. The staff at the Cambridge Historical Commission has reviewed the project, as the building has significance for its associations with the early Jewish residents of Cambridge and as an early New England example of a free Hebrew school, but concluded that there will be no formal review by the Historical Commission, as the building has already undergone significant façade alteration mostly by way of changes to the window sizes (refer to attached Cambridge architectural inventory report). Historical Commission staff have provided comments that are included in the "Urban Design" section below, and are available for consultation regarding preservation issues.

Urban Design

To convert the building to residential use, the proponents propose to raise the building's second and third floors, and slightly lower the roof. New fenestration systems will be installed. Numerous window openings will be added, moved, or reinstated on all four facades to accommodate the new floor levels and interior layouts, increasing the number of openings back to approximately the original number. As part of the work, repairs will be made to the building's facades.

On the building's side and rear elevations, an increased number of windows will look onto a variety of conditions: the very close neighboring building on the south side and its back yard, a motor court and set-back building on the north side, and the small rear yard on the east side.

The proposed adaptive reuse of 178 Elm Street will add to Cambridge's housing stock and will preserve this historically significant building. The project is consistent with the citywide urban design objectives, in particular the reinforcement and enhancement of Cambridge's complex urban aspects, the preservation of historic structures, and the expansion of housing inventory. The additional residential units, including two three-bedroom units, will be welcome additions to Cambridge's residential mix.

Some areas where the project could be improved or where further study is recommended include:

- Replace the mismatched brick patches present on the Elm Street façade, and if possible on all the building's facades, with brick that more closely matches the original material.
- Maximize the usable width of the alley on the south side of the property for access to bicycle parking and the trash/recycling area. Opportunities include:
 - Possibly recessing the proposed "hydro meters" into the building's south wall, or locating them internal to the building.
- Verifying the location of new gas meters, and avoiding locating them where they will impinge on the width of the alley.
- The Historical Commission staff noted that the addition of a floor between the existing first and second floors of the building will further alter the fenestration pattern. Because the Elm Street façade has already been heavily modified, the proposed new and changed window locations are not prohibitively detrimental to the historical integrity of the building. It would, however, be preferable to restore the original appearance of the façade, as seen in historical photographs, or to at least more closely approach it. Opportunities include:
 - Extend the first-floor fenestration up to the arches at the tops of the masonry openings, either as actual windows at the level of the new second floor, or as shadow boxes.
 - Create recessed brick panels below the new third-floor windows, to simulate their original vertical extent.

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.

- Resolution of any internal inconsistencies in the application materials.
- Further development of site plans, including:
 - Location of any electrical transformer equipment that may be required.
 - Location of utility meters.

- Visual and acoustical screening measures for all exterior HVAC units.
- Review of all façade and exterior material details, including masonry repairs, repointing, window details, doors, paint, and other preservation issues in consultation with CHC staff.
- Landscape details including planters, plant species, bicycle storage lockers, railings, and fences.
- Bicycle parking (to be reviewed by the Traffic, Parking, and Transportation Department).
- Stormwater management measures (to be reviewed by the Department of Public Works).
- Verify the appropriate number of trash/recycling bins required for the 6 units, and identify sufficient storage locations for them.

CAMBRIDGE ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY -- CHURCHES SCHOOLS

ADDRESS 178 ELMT ST SURVEY AREA CP

NAME Club Recreio

DATE 1913 ARCHITECT Nathan Douglas

ORIGINAL CONGREGATION ^{USE} Y.M.H.A. ~~synagogue (7)~~ JEWISH SCHOOL

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

REFERENCES Sanborn 1929

SITING

TOWER/STEEPLE

ENTRANCES STAR of DAVID over entrance. actual entrance intersects basement level with its several bands of molding.

WALLS

WINDOWS two levels of arched windows linked as bands by a continuous archivolte motif resting on "heavy" impost "blocks" between windows.

ROOF

SANCTUARY LOCATION

ANCILLARY STRUCTURES

OTHER FEATURES

See MDPS plan file, 1913
Cambridge Literary Assoc.



128/12



(Jacoby)
1969-70

ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY: CAMBRIDGE, MASS. 196 4

ADDRESS: 178 Elm St Tract _____ Block _____

USE: residential commercial religious

TYPE: single double row _____ 2 deck 3 deck double 3d tenement Apart.

STORIES: 1 2 3 4 MATERIAL: Frame Brick Mod. compo

ROOF: gable front gable flank mansard flat hip _____

PLACEMENT: narrow to street broad to street square

ENTRANCE: flank front side front center

STYLE: L.Geo. Grk.Rev. Brk-It. Mans. Med. Q.A. C.Rev. None+ None-

ORNAMENT: little moderate elaborate

DATE: 1790 1800 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 1900 10 20 30

DEGREE OF REMODELING: drastic moderate minor CONDITION: poor fair excel.

IMPORTANCE TO SETTING: detrimental none moderate great INITIALED RHN

DESCRIPTION: (for more important structures only)

sign - CLUB
RECREID

young men's Helen
assoc. 1916

has star of David motif worked into space over
door

windows linked together by continuous report
blocks of architrave archivolts

~~1916~~ 1916

178 Elm Street

1903, land owned by David Murphy

1916, Y.M.H.A. Hebrew Literary Association
called "Jewish School" on early Sanborn

after 1930 became
~~NEW~~ Club Recreio Madeirense

*Founded in 1898
HLA previously met at 280 Windsor St.*

ADDRESS: 178 Elm St.

1913 (1-14)

DATE	REF.	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	PRICE	DESCRIPTION
29 Oct. 1904	3127- 495	John P. Martin of Cambridge	Jacot Walter of Cambridge	\$1. to.	land + bldg. 176 + 178 Elm St. beg. SW. cor. r - NE - Elm St. 40' SE - Gannon 100' SW - Turner 40' NW - Welch 100'
9 Aug. 1911	3625- 200	Jacot Walter of Cambridge	Cambridge + Somerville Hebrew Literary association	\$ 1.	"
22 Apr. 1913	bp. 15036		"	arch bldr	Nathan Douglas L. Ievanthal 178 Elm St. School Brick 35 x 70' 2 stories flat roof \$12,000
10 Mar 1914	3865- 245	Harry Yanovitch or Yanovitz	Hebrew Literary Association of Cambridge + Somerville	mech. lien \$5075 4000	account of amount due to Yanovitz for labor performed + for materials furnished + used in erection of a bldg. on a lot on Elm St., Cambridge = complete mason + stone work in erection of bldg., 178 Elm St.; credit - ceased working on s? bldg. 17 Feb. 1914
27 May 1914	3884- 520	"	"	\$ 775	Discharge lien

From: "Arnold Schutzberg" <arnolds@gis.net>
To: "Charly Sullivan" <CSullivan@Cl.Cambridge.MA.US>
Subject: Hebrew School
Date sent: Wed, 6 Feb 2002 09:01:26 -0500

Dear Charley,

In researching the "Hebrew " School at 178 Elm St I have observed that the building's facade (the windows and probably the front door) needs some help. I am sure that modern technology offers solutions to the problems that are consistent with the original architectural intent. It is likely that the current owners, the Portuguese Social Club, could use some financial and technical assistance in bringing the facade into architectural harmony with its historical past. I know that these things take planning, time, and budget.

Be advised that my research confirms that both the Columbia and Elm St. structures in addition to having unique historic significance to Cambridge were also the first Grand Synagogue and Hebrew School erected in New England (not just Mass.) by late 19th century East European Jewish immigrants.

I want to thank you and the commission for your past interest and help and hope that both structures will receive appropriate explanatory Cambridge Historical Commission Blue markers in the near future.

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Cambridge Chronicle, 24 May 1913 — HEBREW FREE SCHOOL [ARTICLE]

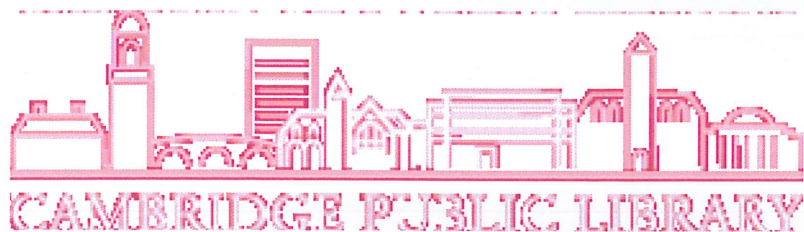
HEBREW FREE SCHOOL

Before a large assembly of members and invited guests, the corner stone of the new Hebrew Free school, which is being erected at 178 Elm street, by the Cambridge and Somerville Hebrew Literary association, was laid at 2 o'clock last Sunday afternoon. Those officiating at the ceremony were Mr. Silver, of Boston, J. Barr, of Webster avenue, Louis Saveronsky, of Portland street, Rabbi Hossu-vitz, of Roxbury and Rabbi Garsey, of East Boston.

The dimensions of the building are 35 by 70 feet, and it is two stories in height over an eighteen foot basement. The cost of the structure is to be \$15,000, exclusive of fittings. The contract calls for its completion August 1. There has been considerable delay, due to the refusal of the state inspector to allow the installation of a furnace as originally planned, and the substitution of a steam heating plant.

On the corner stone is cut the name of the Cambridge and Somerville Hebrew Ladies' auxiliary, out of compliment to them for the work they have done in raising funds. There is a brass box inclosed in the stone in which is a list of the contributors.

The Cambridge and Somerville Literary association is seven years old and numbers about one hundred members. Its object is the instruction of children in the Hebrew tongue and religion. There are about 120 pupils divided into four classes, under three teachers. None but students in the public schools may attend and the classes start at 4 and 5.30 in the afternoon. The sessions of the school are now being held in the synagogue.


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Cambridge Chronicle, 28 February 1914 — IN NEW HEADQUARTERS [ARTICLE]

IN NEW HEADQUARTERS

About 500 persons were present Sunday evening at the formal opening of the new headquarters of the Cambridge Young Men's Hebrew association, Elm street. The building which was recently erected for the Hebrew free school has been so arranged that the Y. M. H. A. will have excellent quarters in the large assembly hall, library and a number of small reception, reading and game rooms, while the school will occupy three large classrooms in another section of the building. The basement will be used for a gymnasium and will shortly be fitted with apparatus.

The opening exercises were conducted by the officials of the Y. M. H. A., David Slater, president of the association, presiding. One of the features was the reading of the reports of the chairmen of various committees showing the visitors the class and volume of work done by the organization in the past. The other speakers were Henry J. Cunningham, commissioner of public safety, Edward Cohen and officials of the associated Y. M. H. A.'s of New England, of which Cambridge association is an active factor. The musical program was furnished by members.