



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

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Re: **Special Permit PB #356 Amendment 1, 56 Creighton Street**

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This memo contains an overview of the proposed changes to project at 56 Creighton Street, the amendments being requested for the Special Permit PB-356, and related comments.

Summary of Proposal

In April, 2020, the Board approved a proposal at 56 Creighton Street to repurpose the existing two-story commercial printing building into a three-story building with 3 residential units, on grade open parking for 6 cars, and 3 long-term bicycle parking spaces. The proposal required special permits under Section 5.28.2 to grant relief from base zoning requirements to convert a non-residential building to residential use, and under Section 6.44.1(b) to allow location of parking spaces within five feet of the property line.

While the current proposal is still to convert the non-residential building to 3 residential units, the building layout and site layout have changed from the Board's initial approval, resulting in a decrease in gross floor area (GFA), increase in private open space, increase in building height, and reduction in long-term bicycle parking.

Requested Amendment

The project is located in the Residence B District. The amended proposal is seeking the same special permits as those previously granted. However, increasing the height within the allowed height limits will require a variance approval by the Board of Zoning Appeal as an addition that expands an existing non-conforming condition on the site (total GFA). The applicable special permit findings are summarized below.

Requested Special Permits	Summarized Findings <i>(detailed zoning text on following pages)</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.
Special Permit for locating parking space within 5 feet of the property line (Section 6.44.1.b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The placement of the parking space within 5 feet of the side property line will only be a minor modification.
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.

Comments on Proposed Amendment

Planning and Zoning

In concept, the proposal continues to follow the intent of Section 5.28.2 to allow the economic reuse of an existing non-conforming building for housing in a residential district. The revised proposal changes some of the development characteristics from the original proposal.

The earlier approved proposal included three long-term bicycle parking spaces. Though staff recommends providing bicycle parking for residents, it is not required when only 3 dwelling units are proposed. The narrative mentions that bicycle parking will be provided on Creighton Street in the former loading area. However, the dimensional form and plans do not indicate that bicycle parking will be provided.

The total GFA of the existing building, which has two stories, is 8,633 square feet, higher than what is permitted by district zoning. The approved proposal had 9,738 square feet of GFA, and included an additional story within the existing building volume. The amended proposal includes a total GFA of 8,885 square feet. The previously approved plan did not meet district zoning requirements for private open space. With the increase in private open space with the private roof decks, the project now meets the district zoning requirements.

The maximum allowed height in the zoning district is 35 feet. The amended proposal includes the addition of flex spaces and headhouses to enable roof access that will increase the existing building height from 30 feet to 35 feet. These additions would be in compliance with the height limits under zoning, but further increases the existing non-conforming GFA by more than 25%, for which a variance is

being sought. The previously approved plan retained the existing building height at 30 feet without additions.

Urban Design

The staff continues to support the proposed conversion of the existing commercial building to residential use. As noted above, the amendment proposes minor changes to the previously approved project's dimensions that do not affect its contribution to the streetscape. However, the amended project's site plan and façade design are notably different in appearance from the previous version.

Site Plan

The project's front yard on Creighton Street seems improved. The trash/recycling structure has been moved to the parking lot on the south side of the building. A 6' tall fence and planting delimit the property and give privacy to outdoor spaces dedicated to two of the units. Consideration should be given to reducing the height of the fence in the Creighton Street front yard to a height similar to other fences on the street, and to refining its design.

Elsewhere on Creighton Street, the sidewalks accommodate numerous curbside trees despite their limited widths. Consideration should be given to providing curbside street trees as part of the project.

It appears that a new curb is proposed on the Creighton Street sidewalk, and a new sidewalk to replace the existing wide parking apron. This improvement was supported in the Board's prior review of this project and, per the conditions of the special permit that was granted, should be done in coordination with city staff.

The following details of the site plan should be clarified:

- The location of the bicycle parking referred to in the narrative.
- Confirm that a curb will be provided in consultation with DPW to replace the broad sidewalk apron on Creighton Street to align with Condition #3 in the approved special permit.
- More specificity on the location of site lighting, including the locations of lighting at secondary entrances to units, and on light fixture types. Lighting should follow the recommendations of the Draft Outdoor Lighting Ordinance.
- Material and color of the fence.
- Identification of plant species.
- The locations of utility meters.

Building Design

While the dimensional changes to the previously approved design are minimal, the building's appearance is notably different. The previous design had an irregular arrangement of windows and a fine-grained horizontally-oriented cladding. In the amended proposal, facades have a regular window spacing and the cladding consists of broader vertical elements. The changes may be in part a response to suggestions in the previous hearing to reduce the blankness of the Creighton Street façade by providing additional windows. The revised aesthetic character seems fine, but an explanation would inform the discussion.

Consideration could be given to refinements of details and proportions, including adjustments to the widths of openings vs. the widths of piers, and to the widths of piers vs. the height of the upper façade above the 2nd floor window heads.

Consideration could be given to providing a window at the second floor over the entrance on Creighton Street; slight adjustments to the laundry and bathroom at that location would be required.

The scheme's north façade is designed to maintain the neighboring residence's privacy. Window openings are glazed with glass block, and the second-floor patio is recessed behind openings in the existing brick wall.

More specificity should be provided regarding exterior materials and features:

- Material and color(s) of exterior cladding systems.
- Fenestration system.
- Canopies at entrances.
- Acoustical screening of rooftop mechanical equipment.

Sustainability and Resilience

This project is not subject to Green Building Requirements, but staff encourages any efforts to minimize greenhouse gas emissions, promote resilience to flooding, and mitigate urban heat island effects. Staff appreciates the rooftop solar panels depicted on the drawings. Clarification of their function and time of installation should be provided. Staff also recommends installing a high albedo roof covering or planted green roof to reduce heat gain. Clarification should be provided regarding projected long term flood elevations relative to building floor levels. The City recommends protecting residential living and sleeping areas and critical building systems if they are below the 1% probability flood elevations anticipated in 2070 (information available on the City's online FloodViewer tool).

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:

- Consult with DPW staff to determine the feasibility of extending the sidewalk along the frontage of the lot and adding street trees in front of the building.
- Clarify whether long-term bicycle parking will be provided or not.
- Clarify whether the Creighton Street sidewalk will be revised and a curb installed.
- Review of landscape details, including plant species, pedestrian access pathways, sidewalk design, hardscape materials, exterior lighting, fencing, and trash enclosure details.
- Review of all exterior materials, colors, fenestration systems, façade alterations, and details.
- Review of mechanical screening.