

35 Cherry Street - AHO Community Meeting #2 Notes

Project: 35 Cherry Street, Cambridge MA

June 26, 2024

@ 55 Norfolk Street & Zoom | 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Presentation:

Just A Start - Madeline Lee, Project Manager

Davis Square Architects – Laura Cella-Mowatt, Vice President & Anna Arscott, Designer

Attendees (18 total):

Attendees by Zoom – 6 people

Attendees In-Person – 12 people

City of Cambridge, CDD – Anna Dolmatch, Christine Yu

Just A Start – Noah Sawyer, Carl Nagy-Koechlin, Yolanda Gilibert, Connor Ring

Distribution RSVPs (received presentation slides & recording) – 58 people, including above.

Presentation

2nd Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) Meeting

- Recap of 1st meeting (AHO Community Meeting #1 – May 15th, 2024)
- Sharing initial designs
- Q&A

Design

10 units total; 3, 3-story buildings

All buildings will be 5 feet above the ground level for flood resilience.

Site Option 1: With Parking

3 Parking Spaces

- Keeps massing of buildings closer to the context of the neighborhood
- Ground floor units have direct entrance into their units.

Site Option 2: Larger Yard, No Parking

No Parking Spaces

- Site gets more green space
- Less heat island effect, more green buffer between neighboring properties

Interior Floor Plans

- Each unit has private open space: patio, yard, or roof deck
- Bedrooms on the side to help with privacy
- Each unit will have ample storage space, in and outside of units
- All 3-bedroom units will have 2 full bathrooms

- All 2-bedroom units will have 1.5 bathrooms

Exterior

- Buildings meant to go together, but not be identical
- 2 Color Scheme options presented for feedback

Next Steps

Future Meetings:

- Feedback on Design
- Homeownership application timeline and process
- Contracting and community employment opportunities

Q&A:

Q: Lives at 57 Cherry Street. Concerned about what happens on space. Better marking/signage for meeting would be helpful. Neighborhood is short on open space and greenery. Is there any open space on the designs?

A: Two site options. First one accommodates three parking spaces. The second one favors green spaces and opens up the site more. Strategies for thinking about green space. Setbacks consistent with other houses and buildings consistent with other buildings. We've tried to keep back open and natural. We've also been careful with existing and new street trees. We'll be working with City to confirm location of new trees. Quite a few trees on back lot line. Our intention is to preserve those as much as possible.

Lydia is right next door (45 and 45 ½). Absolutely think the huge tree needs to be preserved.

A: Every unit will also have direct access to outdoor space. There is even more green space than you see. Thinking about back building as the potential for a roof deck to allow that family to have access to outdoor space.

Q: Thinking about building at Main and Cherry. Have you played around with putting parking spaces underneath? Or would that mean less housing?

A: That would mean less housing, likely. Turning radius of cars start to eat into available living area.

Q: Do the plans show 6 different places to live?

A: 10 units total.

Q: So that means the potential for 10 extra cars?

A: Unsure about how many cars people will own.

Q. Parking is such a nuisance. What about bike parking?

A: Dotted boxes represent bike lockers on the plans. These are located at ground level to use the space below the elevated first floors.

Q: Alec – lives on Suffolk St – Questions about parking but not because I am like *that*. Would there be facilities for EV charging? Would there be semi-permeable materials?

A: We will have permeable paving where we can. But we don't normally recommend permeable paving where vehicles will park. City has regulations around number of EV charging stations.

Q: 3 parking spaces mean that 7 units won't have access to parking spaces. Green spaces will be nice for residents and neighbors. I would advocate for having no parking. (The project) It's all very exciting.

Q: What's happening at the Margarate Fuller House?

A: Not sure about the current project status. Noah: Haven't seen any details yet on the project.

Q: Pablo, resident: Will there be a mix of affordability levels?

A: Working with City to follow their guidelines. Our goal is to make the home prices available to between 50% and 100% AMI. 70%-90% AMI is usually where they fall. There is a range.

Q: Can you clarify what the numbers are?

A: Cambridge takes into account the condo fees, interest rates in the market. Housing prices will adjust accordingly to their details. Can the City share what current two and three-bedroom units are selling for? The goal is that the family that moves in will be successful.

Q: What is the income level off the top?

A: 50% AMI is around \$70,000 for a family of 2.* Homeownership is an income category for folks who are priced out of Cambridge but who are ready for homeownership who couldn't dream of affording a house on the market.

***Correction:** 50% AMI is around \$70,000 for a family of 3 in Cambridge as of May 1, 2024.

Q: Are the folks who live there going to be asked about greenspace vs. parking?

A: we're trying to do broad outreach. We've gone over to the Pisani Center [feedback from first meeting], been talking to other community groups, CHA workforce program. We're trying to make sure that people who would be interested are joining the conversation.

A: Anna Dolmatch – City of Cambridge – Conversation for RFP involved a mix of incomes. We at the City have experience with knowing what people looking for housing want. People want private open space and parking. That is part of what went into the Community guidelines that was shared with Just A Start as the developer.

Q: Who owns the parking across the street? Is it ever full?

A: Unsure, it is a different owner.

Q: Tess Hoffman, CRA: Expecting to see a much bigger building. How does this compare to what zoning allows on the lot?

A: The entire design is allowed as of right. If we had done a larger building, it would have been allowed as of right. But I feel confident saying we could have done a large building that would have been done as of right. We could have gone another floor, another story as of right. And I think we had some play with our FAR. We could have had more built out space. We explored a unit count up to 15. We felt this was the right balance for the neighborhood and homeowners.

A: One of the pieces for the homeownership is maintenance of shared systems is more costly; moving to smaller separate buildings was a decision geared toward future homeowners.

C: We have two very large housing projects within two blocks. One of the renovations seems to be moving away from having a common door going more towards individual entrances. It certainly looks better and for safety.

Q: A lot of young people have already left the state to go to another state. How can we help build houses for young people? We cannot afford to let young people leave our state. What can we do to stop that trend?

A: These units are for first time homebuyers. The City sets preferences for people who live and work in Cambridge. Seven of the ten units will have preference.

C: I have three kids and they are all thinking about moving to another state. They've been complaining for awhile about how can I stay in this City. I am afraid that they are going to move to another state.

Developer Question: Design Feedback - Thoughts on Color Schemes presented?

Community comments:

- Option 1 (blue/green) blends with the neighborhood.
- Red scheme is more unique. Another building was built in the blue. The warmer tones of the red.
- 75 School St house is now dark blue (shown lighter color in context photo). We have a lot of darker blue houses in the neighborhood

Q: Curious about how many residences in each building

A: West to East on School Street (Left to Right on rendering)

Building A - 4 units (3 - 3 bedrooms; 2-bedroom townhouse in the back)

Building B – 3 units

Building C – 3 units

Q: Is there an image showing the building facing Cherry Street to help visualize what the buildings will look like?

A: We can produce that for future meetings.

C: The City pays the church to use that parking lot. It would be interesting to speak to the church to see if they want to sell a portion of the parking lot.

Q: An estimate on the initial construction?

A: Goal is to get to construction mid-next summer. We think it would take about 1.5 years to construct.

Q: I'm curious with respect the affordable homeownership, how does Just A Start stay involved? How we help homeowners who may not address the cost of homeownership?

A: In addition to the development, we work with the City when the unit goes up for sale. Usually Just A Start will buy the unit and renovate it so that it is ready to be sold again. We also help with renovation loans and mediation. The City understands that we want people to be in their homes and has set up a great system to ensure that happens.

Q: I'm sure you are familiar with the flooding on Bishop Allen Drive (knee deep). There are canals in Area 4. I'm sure you have done research in the soil? Is that something you have taken into account? We have a huge rat problem. How are you going to handle that?

A: Flood resilience – elevation and coordinating with the City. Doing additional soil testing in the meantime. Contractors have to put together pest management plans to help us be proactive.

Visit our website to view past 35 Cherry Street meeting materials:

<https://justastart.org/housing/upcoming-projects/>

Contact for questions / comments:

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