

**35 Cherry Street**

**Affordable Homeownership**

**AHO Community Meeting #3**

**August 21, 2024**

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

**Presenters:**

Madeline Lee - Just A Start

Laura Cella-Mowatt - DSA (Davis Square Architects)

Anna Arscott – DSA (Davis Square Architects)

**Attendees (22 total):**

*Attendees by Zoom – 11 people*

*Attendees In-Person – 6 people*

*City of Cambridge, CDD – Anna Dolmatch, Christine Yu*

*Just A Start – Yolanda Gilibert, Molly Kaviar*

*Haitian Creole Interpreter – Jimmy Guerrier*

*Distribution RSVPs (received presentation slides & recording) – 97 people, including above.*

**Meeting Notes**

Just A Start Conducted Introductions, gave a recap for last meetings, and introduced the timeline for the process for this project. This is the third community meeting since May 2024, and Just A Start is working with Davis Square Architects on a submission to the City of Cambridge Planning Board this fall (2024). Construction is expected to be finished around December of 2026, and people would be able to move in the earlier part of 2027. Just A Start noted an array of brochures from the City and other sources regarding First Time Homebuyer information, Income Limits for homeownership projects, etc. available in the meeting room.

**Design Presentation**

DSA Presented the current schematic design with added information regarding site plan, landscape, and small adjustments to the architecture design.

**Existing Trees**

Trees are being identified, the dash lines in the site plan are the canopies, design is making efforts to preserve the big tree on the back. Organic and wide sidewalk on the back of the lot for residents to connect with the outdoor space. There is no parking lot or parking spaces but more green space. Everyone has their own outdoor dedicated space.

**Open Space**

Each of the 10 units will have its own private open space, roof deck or balcony, green space or yard.

The units will also have bike parking that will slide under the 5ft elevated floor. There will be a total of 20 lockers (2 per residential unit).

#### Floor 1 -Sample unit Interiors.

We have examples of 2 and 3BR units. DSA used the city guidelines to come up with the square footage and design features for the indoor and outdoor spaces. The goal was to locate windows, so they don't look into each other.

Each building, in addition to open space, has a stoop, little patio in the front door. There are also backdoors like similar buildings in the neighborhood.

Zoom in on 3BR units. These are for families that will families in mind that will grow over time.

#### Context & Exterior

In the design of the façade DSA looked at the context, abutters, and other residential buildings in the neighborhood. There is a very eclectic mix of styles.

On the corner View of Cherry and School St. DSA pulled all these colors from the neighborhood. This time DSA integrated more colors as suggested in the previous meeting. Dark blue is included from structures in the context. Showing vegetation is also a big part of the project.

On the View from School St., there are some decks. DSA added the view from Cherry that neighbors wanted to look at. The Aerial View shows context with trees surrounding the buildings.

### **QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS**

**Question:** Could there be more homes if there was one larger building? There would be fewer stairs, which would take up a lot of space? Does there need to be a walkway in back?

**Answer:** This is something that has come up in the past. We decided on 3 different buildings thinking about future homeowners. Individual utility and mechanical systems provide first-time home buyers with greater control, smaller to maintain, and independence, which can be particularly appealing when making one of their first major investments in real estate.

**Question:** People want to hear more about the shared utilities. What is the unit cost?  
Utilities cost for each unit.

**Answer:** DSA mentioned individual units have their own systems, and people are in charge of their own systems repair, cost, operation. There would also be separate sprinkler and water systems.

**Comment:** Someone in the audience thinks shared systems would be less expensive overall, and better for more people to be in the condo association to make decisions with one building.

**Question:** Does there need to be a walkway in the back?

**Answer:** There is not a lot of space between each building. DSA reduced the number of walkways from the previous proposal. It would be nice for bikers and people to have an access point from Cherry St., not only from School St. only. The back is curved to connect and make the open space more cohesive. We are open to ideas to make the path narrower. This path also provides access to trash collection. That's one of the reasons it is wider as well.

**Comment:** Someone mentioned access on School St. with the stairs running in the same direction as the street is a great improvement. This prevents a kid running down the stairs into the street without stopping. They appreciated this.

**Comment:** Someone mentioned that rear access on Cherry St. for bikers doesn't make a difference. Having some space at the back is great in the common area but a unit could be added as there are lots of green spaces around.

**Question:** How tall can we go high on the buildings?

**Answer:** The site is 10,000 and the zoning allows up to 45 ft. We are a little below now with 3 stories and an elevated first floor. The max under the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) zoning comes out to about 4 stories for this site (C-1 zoning). We are below the maximum, but on the upper end of the height nearby. We can't do 12 stories on this site, as you may see in the denser Central Square business district area nearby.

**Question:** On the interior, how are these apartments adaptable? What are people allowed to do and not?

**Answer:** Future residents will truly own their home and can make modifications. Just A Start is following the City's guidelines for homeownership livability. The design elements are around BR size, storage space, lots of closets, storage spaces. Bathroom sizes are larger than a regular Cambridge home. The 3BRs have 2 full bathrooms, and the 2BRs have 1.5 bathrooms. The goal is to build in these features upfront to make the spaces more adaptable over time.

**Question:** Are there accessible or handicap units?

**Answer:** It is a good question. For 10 Units, accessible units are not required for this site. We spent time considering this. The City has not seen a great demand for accessible units in their homeownership applicant pool, and has seen affordable homeownership units with accessible features that are being removed by homeowners. DSA reviewed from a design standpoint, and with the elevation of 5ft on all buildings, there would need to be over 60ft in ramping. While there are challenges for this site, Just A Start is focused on creating accessible housing opportunities across our projects collectively, making all of our new rental units visitable and including accessible units.

**Question:** Is there an opportunity for location of the ranges in the kitchen on interior walls?

**Answer:** DSA has been designing most projects to Passive House standards, a high energy-efficiency standard that increases indoor comfort and reduces energy consumption that is being increasingly

adopted into building codes. This project will work toward similar efficiency goals, in which ranges don't require exterior exhaust ventilation due to whole building indoor air circulation. Ranges will also be electric, reducing exhaust from cooking ranges.

**Question:** What is Passive House?

**Answer:** Passive House is higher standards for sustainability. It means that the building is constructed very well insulated, with really good air quality and ventilation which means it can have smaller and more efficient mechanical systems. The big thing is the regulation of fresh air inside the building. This standard is coming and starting to be adopted more widely and Cambridge is at the front.

**Comments:** Someone mentioned it is very interesting that all units have 2 entrances and possible sublet and rent.

**Question:** Why does the townhouse on the back have two entrances?

**Answer:** DSA noted that on a previous design it found that the townhouse didn't pop out as a volume in the project. They wanted this to have more presence. They also made the stoops on the stairs. There is not enough space for a table on the stoops, but there will be terrace or deck space on the upper floors for that.

**Question:** What is the back rectangle on Building C?

**Answer:** It is a patio.

**Comment:** If the townhouse will be 5ft high, wouldn't it make more sense to have this to be a deck instead of a patio? It would not feel like a good connection of the interior with the patio if they are at different levels.

**Question:** What is the total % of the open space on the ground?

**Answer:** 30% approximately. Project team will follow up with more accurate area and percentage after the meeting.

**Question:** Can there be a common cookout area?

**Answer:** There has not been a conversation yet, but the landscape architect will work on this, and is open to suggestions.

**Question:** Privacy, would the unit be private enough just because it is 5ft high from the street?

**Answer:** It's more the question of being private from the neighbors. That's why there is a lot of emphasis on window design location. Eye level from the street is not directly into units.

**Question:** Is there an update on the parking lot (across the street)? In the last meeting there were 3 parking spaces, so hard to divide with 10 units. So, the question if there is a possibility to park across the street on the parking lot.

**Answer:** We don't have an update regarding the parking lot across the street. We do want to note the City's Port Infrastructure project - there are plans to work on renovating and designing the walkways and sidewalks on Cherry St. and School St. There are new designated parking spaces to be built as part of a new program to expand sidewalks on these streets. There will be an Art In the Park event on September 28<sup>th</sup> (at Clement Morgan Park), at which the Port Infrastructure project will be present and sharing updates about street renovations. There is a brochure at the entrance, feel free to attend.

**Question:** The building next door has a fence, right? That should provide privacy for that house.

**Answer:** Yes there are fences around the rear; current proposal includes a fence on the 35 Cherry St side too to enclose the back yard.

Thank you all for attending.

There is information on the table for the homeownership programs and how to apply, and other events. Please feel free to contact Just A Start with any other questions.

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

<https://justastart.org/35-cherry-street/>

**Contact for questions / comments:**

Madeline Lee, Project Manager

[MadelineLee@justastart.org](mailto:MadelineLee@justastart.org)

617-918-7540