



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

To: Planning Board

From: CDD Staff

Date: November 18, 2024

Re: Special Permit **PB-22 Amendment 6, 3 Michael Way**

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Overview

Submission Type: Special Permit Application

Applicant: Justin Caravella and Shwu Kong

Zoning District(s): Residence C-1 District (C-1)

Proposal Summary: Construct an addition and dormer to an existing townhouse.

Special Permits Requested: Modification of a townhouse development after a subdivision
has been recorded (Section 11.15b)

Other City Permits Needed: None

Planning Board Action: Grant or deny requested special permits.

Memo Contents: CDD Zoning Report & Urban Design Report

Other Staff Reports: None

Zoning Section	Required Planning Board Findings <i>(Summary - see appendix for zoning text excerpts)</i>
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.
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 due to one of the criteria enumerated in Section 10.43:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or (e) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and (f) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.

Summary of Proposal

The site is located in the Residence C-1 District and was part of a 54-unit Cambridge Redevelopment Authority development in the Wellington-Harrington neighborhood. The development abuts the Grand Junction corridor to the east. The original special permit and amendments approved the site plan and arrangement of townhouse units, and includes conditions pertaining to tree protection, landscaping, perimeter fencing, parking, and vehicular circulation on the site.

The applicant proposes adding a two-story addition to the south side of the existing townhouse unit and a shed dormer to the south side of the existing building. Some of the other townhouses in this development have been expanded or renovated subject to approved Planning Board amendments over the years, the latest one being 7 Cornelius Way in 2021.

Requested Amendment

The project is located in the Residence C-1 District and was granted a Townhouse Special Permit in 1982. The Applicant seeks a special permit for a modification to the plans not enumerated in the original special permit, per Section 11.15b to construct an addition and a dormer. Applicable sections of the zoning are provided in an appendix.

Zoning Comments on Proposed Amendment

The proposal remains within the allowable gross floor area (GFA) for the Residence C-1 zone. The proposal provides additional living space through a 2-story addition to the rear of the building where a patio currently exists and a dormer on the third floor. The total GFA allowed on the lot is 2,502 square feet and the existing unit's GFA is proposed to increase from 1,255 square feet to 2,065 square feet with no increase to the existing building height. The percentage of open space on the lot will increase under the proposed addition as the addition to the unit will occupy the current patio and the front entry walkway will decrease in width.

The front yard setback along Michael Way will not change and the rear yard setback will decrease by 14ft but will still exceed the required minimum. The existing side yard setbacks are nonconforming and will not change under the proposed addition. The required setback on the west side of the property is 13.5ft but the existing setback is 10.2ft which will be retained with the new addition.

The proposed modification does not trigger Green Factor review. The proposed scope of work will preserve the key existing landscape features of the site, including fences, planting, and the relationship of the building to the public right-of-way. No existing trees will be removed, and the applicant does not propose regrading the site. There are no changes to the number of parking spaces, nor to the arrangement of parking on-site. Similarly, the number of dwelling units will not increase.

Design Comments on Proposed Amendment

The proposed addition is relatively modest in scale and generally follows the footprint of the existing patio. Though the addition is two stories, the flat, occupiable roof makes it visually subservient with regards to height when compared to the existing structure with its gable roof. Its proposed location places it at the center of the parcel which is a common condition throughout this development and ensures adequate offsets from the adjacent properties. A slight offset in plan of the west wall could further reinforce the secondary reading of the addition. However, an almost identical condition to what is proposed can be seen at 15 Cornelius Way and appears acceptable despite the lack of an offset.

The proposed shed dormer on the rear of the existing gable roof follows some but not all of the recommendations in the City's "Design Guidelines for Roof Dormers". The exceptions are:

- Side Wall Offset: It is less than 3'-6" from the east side wall of the building,
- Front Wall Offset: Aligns with the wall below instead of being offset 1'-6" back,
- Ridge Connection: The connection is not offset 1'-0" from the existing ridge,
- Length: It is longer than 50% the length of the existing roof.

Most seem acceptable within the context:

- Side Wall Offset: The dormer is justified to the east side of the roof, reducing its visual impact by locating it fully out of view from the public right of way. Additionally, since there is an attached

townhouse to the east of the project the asymmetry is less apparent. The gable eave on the east side is important to the reading of the dormer and should be constructed as depicted.

- Front Wall Offset: The design includes a continuous eave across the southern elevation which is important for differentiating what would otherwise read as a three-story building. Conforming to the recommended 1'-6" offset would reduce the usability of the modest proposed attic space with minimal benefit.
- Ridge Connection: An offset between the ridge and roof of the proposed dormer would negatively impact interior clearances with minimal benefit.
- Length: While the dormer's length (15'-0") exceeds 50% of the roof (24'-0"), it does conform to the Guidelines' maximum recommended length of 15'-0". Relocating the closet towards the interior may allow the dormer length to be reduced while preserving access to the Roof Deck, though the impact would be relatively minimal as it is not visible from the public right of way.

Cladding materials and window fenestration from the addition and dormer are proposed to match the existing conditions. The proposed skylights on the north side of the existing gable are relatively small and unobtrusive. Their frames should be gray or black to minimize their appearance.

Special Permit Conditions

The following is a summary of recommended as conditions if the Board decides to grant the special permit:

- The project shall continue to be subject to all the Conditions set forth in the original Special Permit Decision (PB-22) dated January 5, 1982.
- The design modifications will be subject to continuing design review by CDD staff prior to issuance of a building permit and certificate of occupancy.

Appendix - Zoning Text Excerpts

Special Permit for Townhouse Development

11.15 *Dimensional Standards for Townhouse Development.* The following development controls apply to the parcel of land upon which a townhouse development is constructed and are not applicable to the initial subdivision of the townhouse parcel into individual lots.

However, modifications to the townhouse development after a subdivision plan has been recorded in the Registry of Deeds shall be subject to the dimensional standards as set forth in this Section 11.15 applied to the individual lot lines of the subdivided lots; modifications that do not so conform may be permitted as set forth below:

- b. For any townhouse development for which a special permit has been granted by the Planning Board, modifications specifically enumerated in the special permit. For those modifications not so enumerated, or where the special permit fails to specifically enumerate allowed modifications, after issuance of a new special permit (a Major Amendment to the original special permit) by the Planning Board to allow the proposed modification(s).

General Criteria for Issuance of a Special Permit

10.43 *Criteria.* Special permits will normally be granted where specific provisions of this Ordinance are met, except when particulars of the location or use, not generally true of the district or of the uses permitted in it, would cause granting of such permit to be to the detriment of the public interest because:

- (a) It appears that requirements of this Ordinance cannot or will not be met, or
- (b) traffic generated or patterns of access or egress would cause congestion, hazard, or substantial change in established neighborhood character, or
- (c) the continued operation of or the development of adjacent uses as permitted in the Zoning Ordinance would be adversely affected by the nature of the proposed use, or
- (d) nuisance or hazard would be created to the detriment of the health, safety and/or welfare of the occupant of the proposed use or the citizens of the City, or
- (g) for other reasons, the proposed use would impair the integrity of the district or adjoining district, or otherwise derogate from the intent and purpose of this Ordinance, and
- (h) the new use or building construction is inconsistent with the Urban Design Objectives set forth in Section 19.30.