



City of Stamford
Zoning Board

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD

FROM: VINEETA MATHUR, PRINCIPAL PLANNER

SUBJECT: **ZB #223-39 & 40 Zoning Text Change, Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses, Addition to Stamford Cultural Resources Inventory**

APPLICANT: KCI Summer Street, LLC

DATE: March 19, 2024

MASTER PLAN: Master Plan Category 4 (Medium Density Multifamily)

ZONING: C-B, C-L (Community Business, Limited Business)

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

223-39	Text Amendment	Amendments to Section 7.3.C
223-40	Special Permit	<p>Section 7.3.C.4.d to allow additional building coverage</p> <p>Section 7.3.C.3.a. to permit 1 parking space per unit.</p> <p>Section 7.3.C.4.b to allow a front setback of 5' along 5th street</p> <p>Section 7.3.C.3.c. to reduce setback of parking spaces from lot lines and buildings</p>
	Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Use	Section 19.D - Site plan approval for the preservation of the existing home and addition of four dwelling units in the rear.

Administrative Approval	Section 12.K.5 approval of the proposed sidewalk configuration
Addition to Stamford Cultural Resources Inventory	Adding the historic building at 1911 Summer Street to the CRI

INTRODUCTION

The Applicant requests the approval of the related applications for Zoning Text Amendment, Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses and addition to the Stamford Cultural Resources Inventory to facilitate the addition of four (4) dwelling units behind an existing historic structure at 1911 Summer Street.

The Historic Preservation section of the zoning regulations incentivizes the preservation of historic homes in the City by allowing certain reliefs from the zoning standards. Such requests for reliefs requires the historic properties to be added to the Cultural Resources Inventory ensuring that the historic structure and façade is protected creating an asset for the City.

SITE & SURROUNDINGS

The subject property is located at 1911 Summer Street, at the south east corner of Summer Street and Fifth Street. The site is flanked by a series of historic buildings on the south side along Summer Street as well as along its east side along Fifth Street built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The area to the north (across Fifth Street) is occupied by Webster Bank and a Community Health Center of Stamford. The area to the west of the site, on the west side of Summer Street is occupied by two condominium complexes (Greenbriar and Brighton Court). The property is located one block west of the Revonah Manor Historic District. The site contains a house built in 1914 by Mr. Edward B. Hoit. The remainder of the property is paved and used for parking.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The Applicant proposes to renovate the existing historic home and to add a structure with four three bedroom dwelling units in the rear. The siding on the house will be repaired and repainted. The access to the new units will be off Fifth Street with a curb cut leading to a covered driveway. Each unit will have one garage parking space on the ground floor. Two surface parking spaces are proposed in the rear of the building.

Existing historic structure



Proposed restoration and addition



Landscaping

The application includes foundation planting around the historic house and along Fifth Street including Hydrangeas, Junipers and Daylilys. Two trees are proposed to be planted along Summer Street including Red Oak on the corner of Fifth and Summer and Yoshimo Cherry tree further south on Summer Street. Fifth Street will have five Winter King Hawthorne street trees. Based on comments from the board at the March 4 Zoning Board hearing the applicant has updated the narrow landscape strip on the south side to be planted with ground cover instead of grass.

223-39 ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT

The applicant requests amendment to three standards for sites seeking historic preservation bonus under Section 7.3.

1. Distance of parking area from buildings and dimension of parking spaces

7.3.C.3.

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c. [The Zoning Board may reduce or waive the development standards of Table 12.5 (Minimum Distances of Parking Areas from Lot Lines and Buildings) in order to facilitate the provision of on-site parking. All parking spaces or areas encroaching within the setbacks specified in Table 12.5 shall be constructed with pervious pavers. The Zoning Board may modify the dimensions of Parking Spaces exclusively used for residential uses, as defined by Section 12.A of these Regulations where the Transportation, Traffic and Parking Bureau finds that such modification would not reduce circulation or affect maneuverability of parking operations.]

For certain multi-family districts including C-B and C-L, Section 12 currently requires a 10' setback of parking areas from streets, 5' from interior lot lines and 5' from buildings. Staff believes that while some relief in distance of Parking Areas from lot lines and buildings is appropriate, additional safeguards and limitations on such reduction should be included to avoid excessive reduction. Staff recommends adding the following language "Reduction in setback from internal lot lines shall be limited to no more than 50% of the length of such lot line. Staff also recommends removal of the requirement to use pervious pavers. In discussion with the Engineering Bureau it is understood that pervious pavers in parking spaces may result in percolation of oil and grease into the underground drainage system. If feasible, pervious pavement may be considered for areas such as walking paths and driveways on a case by case basis.

Staff recommends the following changes to the proposed text:

“The Zoning Board may reduce or waive the development standards of Table 12.5 (Minimum Distances of Parking Areas from Lot Lines and Buildings) in order to facilitate the provision of on-site parking. All parking spaces or areas encroaching within the setbacks specified in Table 12.5 shall be constructed with pervious pavers. The Zoning Board may modify the dimensions of Parking Spaces exclusively used for residential uses, as defined by Section 12.A of these Regulations where the Transportation, Traffic and Parking Bureau find that such modification would not reduce circulation, affect maneuverability of parking operations. Reduction in setback from internal lot lines shall be limited to no more than 50% of the length of such lot line. Where reduction in setback is granted, Parking Areas shall be screened from adjoining properties through a privacy fence such as a solid vinyl fence.”

2. Front setback reduction for corner lots

[A Corner Lot where Historic Structures or Sites are located and utilized for residential purposes shall comply with the Front Yard setback standard on all Streets, but may reduce the setback on one (1) frontage to no less than 5’ in a commercial district, or no less than 10’ in a Multi-family residential district, and shall comply with the Side Yard setback standard (as may be modified by this subsection) for all other yards. There shall be no Rear Yard requirement.]

Corner lots have two or more frontages. Provision of the front setback on two frontages constrains the developable area of the property. Allowing the modification of the front setback along one frontage is a reasonable request for properties already constrained by parameters of the historic building.

3. Usable Open Space modification

Usable Open Space – Not less than seventy-five (75) square feet of Usable Open Space shall be provided per Dwelling Unit. Provided; however, the total amount and minimum dimensions of required Usable Open Space may be modified as detailed below when the Zoning Board finds the modification supports contextual new Development and/or preservation of a Historic Structure or Historic Site:

- 1) The total amount of Usable Open Space may be reduced by up to twenty-five percent (25%); and*
- 2) Qualifying contiguous Usable Open Space must have a minimum dimension on each side of no less than fifteen (15) feet.*

The Usable Open Space requirement applies to all developments with three or more dwelling units. The current standards require the Usable Open Space to be at least 20 feet on each side. The above language allows modest reduction in the standards in the context of historic preservation. The subject project at 1911 Summer Street provides the required amount of Usable Open Space however one of the dimensions is less than 20 feet.

Special Permits requested

The purpose of the historic preservation Section (Section 7.3) is to incentivize the preservation of historic buildings in Stamford by allowing certain modifications to zoning standards to developments which restore/reconstruct historic structures. This program has resulted in the preservation of over 60 historic buildings.

The Applicant seeks the following Special Permits Application pursuant to Section 7.3.C – Development Standards:

i. Building Coverage - Special Permit Approval pursuant to Sec. 7.3.C.4.d of the Zoning Regulations to permit Building Coverage of 3,849 sf in lieu of 3,331.94 sf.

The proposed increase of 517 sf in building coverage is within the threshold of the reduction contemplated in Section 7.3. The regulations allow for a 25% increase whereas the Applicant is requesting a 15% increase.

ii. Number of Parking Spaces - Special Permit Approval pursuant to Sec. 7.3.C.3.a. of the Zoning Regulations to permit 1 parking space per proposed dwelling unit.

The request for a reduction in the number of parking spaces to 1 space per unit is in line with the request granted for historic bonus projects. The subject site is in a walkable neighborhood in close proximity to Ridgeway Shopping center, along various retail stores, restaurants and service uses on Summer Street and Bedford Street. The site has convenient access to bus lines along Summer Street, Bedford Street and Washington Boulevard.

iii. Parking setbacks - Special Permit Approval pursuant to Sec. 7.3.C.3.c (as proposed in the Text Amendment Application) to permit the location of onsite parking within the setbacks established by Table 12.5 (Minimum Distances of Parking Areas from Lot Lines and Buildings) of the Zoning Regulations.

The applicant requests the parking to be located closer than the 5' minimum distance from lot line. The two open visitor spaces will be 1.15' from the lot line at the closest point.

iv. Front setback - Special Permit Approval pursuant to Sec. 7.3.C.4.b (as proposed in the Text Amendment Application) to permit the proposed addition to be located 5' from the Front Lot Line located along Fifth Street.

The new units will be located 5.35' from Fifth Street. Staff believes that this setback is satisfactory given that the new construction will be designed to be complementary to the historic building. The front setbacks along Fifth Street

v. Side Yard setback - Special Permit Approval pursuant to Sec. 7.3.C.4.b (as proposed in the Text Amendment Application) to permit a Side Yard Setback from the southerly lot line of 10' in lieu of 15' in the C-L Zone (note 6' Side Yard required in the C-B Zone).

The proposed side yard setback of the new development is 10' which is larger than the 3'8" side yard setback of the existing building. Staff believes that the proposed setback is appropriate in the context of the surrounding properties and the proposed screening fence.

vi. Light and Air - Special Permit Approval pursuant to Sec. 7.3.c.4.e to permit Light And Air along the south side of the Property of no less than 20'.

This reduction is critical for the accommodation of the new development within the width of the lot and consistent with the reduction allowed for other historic preservation projects.

vii. Usable Open Space - Special Permit Approval pursuant to 7.3.c.4.h (as proposed in the Text Amendment Application) to permit Useable Open Space with a minimum dimension of 16.93' in lieu of 20'.

The project provides 1,236 sf of Usable Open Space where only 500 sf is required. This Usable Open Space is provided along Summer and Fifth Streets. Staff believes that the reduction in the dimension of the Usable Open Space is minor and the space will remain functional. Summer Street front yard has additional lawn area which is part of the Street right of way and can thus not count towards the Usable Open Space dimension.

(5) Special Permit Approval pursuant to Section 12.A.1 to allow parking stall width of 8.5' in lieu of 9'.

In speaking with TTP, staff believes that this request is acceptable given that the width 8.5' is currently permitted in Downtown and in this scenario will only apply to two parking spaces and will thus have limited impact.

(6) Administrative Approval from the Zoning Board pursuant to Sec. 12.K.5 to maintain the existing 5' wide sidewalk and 2.6' planted buffer located along the Fifth Street Frontage of the Property.

(7) Administrative Approval from the Zoning Board pursuant to Sec. 12.J.4.a(5) and 12.K.5. to maintain a 5.5' sidewalk along the Summer Street Frontage of the Property, and the locate all required street trees along said frontage along the easterly side of the proposed sidewalk.

The applicant will be replacing the existing sidewalk along both Summer Street and Fifth Street in kind. The request was ok'd by TTP.

Addition to the Cultural Resources Inventory

Addition to the Cultural Resources Inventory is essential to the application for the consideration of the remaining Special Permit requests. Staff believes that the house is a valuable architectural and historic resource for the City of Stamford. As noted in the historic research provided, the house was owned by Mr. Hoit who later started the Grand Central Market on Bedford Street. As such the building is significant both for its place in the streetscape of Summer and Fifth Street and its cultural significance.

In 2014, Summer Street lost an important historic structure when 898 Summer Street a house built in 1875 was demolished to be replaced by a generic bank building. Similar to 1911 Summer Street, 898 Summer Street was a corner lot. Allowing relief through Section 7.3 for historic buildings is key to saving these buildings when such opportunities arise.



898 Summer Street circa 1875 (Northwest corner of Summer Street and North Street – This historic structure was demolished in 2014)



The historic building was replaced by a non-descript bank building in 2015

Referral Comments

Planning Board

During their regularly scheduled meeting held on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, the Planning Board recommended approval of the proposed Zoning Text Change application 223-39 and found that this request is in general harmony with the 2015 Master Plan and that it allows for greater flexibility in meeting the Zoning Regulations and should be considered in the context of increasing the probability and feasibility of preserving historically significant structures in Stamford. The Planning Board also recommended approval of application 223-40. They found that this request is in general harmony with Master Plan Category #4 (Residential – Medium Density Multifamily). The Planning Board further stated that the proposed project is aligned with the Master Plan policy to maintain residential communities and supporting neighborhood revitalization. In addition, the project further supports the Master Plan policy to encourage density along transit corridors through Land Use regulations and developer incentives.

Engineering Bureau

Willetta Capelle, P.E. - Coordinator of Site Plan Reviews and Inspections in a letter dated December 5, 2023 made technical comments on the civil plans and the drainage summary. The applicant provided a response to these comments through revised civil plans dated March 1, 2024.

Transportation Traffic and Parking Bureau

In a letter dated March 4, 2024 Transportation Traffic and Parking Bureau (TTP) provided comments on the plans and proposed text amendment. TTP expressed concern over the text allowing reduction in the dimensions of the parking spaces given that the general trend in vehicle size is moving towards larger vehicles. The Applicant is agreeable to removal of that language.

Fire Marshall

Assistant Fire Marshall Chad Armstrong in an email dated February 5, 2024, provided several comments related to fire safety including alarm system design, fire separation between the existing and new building and the size of the curb cut.

Environmental Protection Board

In a letter dated November 03, 2023, Jaclyn Chapman, Environmental Analyst stated that EPB has no objections to the proposed activity and provided conditions to be satisfied prior to the Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy.

WPCA

Ann Brown in a letter dated December 12, 2023 stated that the department had no comments on the text amendment and made technical comments on sewer connection and statement regarding future sewer charges.

Historic Preservation Advisory Commission

In a letter dated December 14, 2023 the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission made a recommendation to include the application on the Cultural Resources Inventory. In a letter dated December 15, 2023, the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission recommended approval of the project with four comments related to the design of the building including confirmation that the historic shingles will be restored and replaced as needed, windows to be replaced with the 9 over 0 mullion pattern, recommendation for portions of the new building to match the shingles of the old house and lastly stated the recommended colors for the historic home and the new addition. HPAC further had comments regarding the proposed text amendment and expressed concern regarding the reduction of front setback.

Summary

The proposed development includes historic preservation along with construction of four new three bedroom townhomes in a walkable neighborhood of Stamford and thus achieves multiple City goals. The proposed addition is complementary to the historic structure and the scale of the development is suitable for the location. The units will each have three bedrooms which fills an important housing need in the City. The proposed text amendment will further incentivize historic preservation.