



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

12/5/19

PLANNING BOARD

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To: Planning Board
From: Planning Department
Date: December 12, 2019 Planning Board Meeting
Subject: Construct an addition to an existing 4-unit dwelling
Location: 1618 Beacon Street

Atlas Sheet:	21	Case #:	2019-0057
Block:	92	Zoning:	G-1.75
Lot:	3	Lot Area:	4,229 SF

Board of Appeals Hearing: To Be Determined

12/5/19 STAFF UPDATE

The Planning Board first reviewed this case at their meeting on September 12, 2019, and then again at their meeting on November 7, 2019. At the meeting on November 7, the Board expressed ongoing concerns with the scale of the proposal, its effect on the front façade, and the petitioner's ability to satisfy the criteria for a Variance. The applicant has made minor revisions to the plans. The most notable change is an adjustment to the floor plans that creates an additional dwelling unit, for a total of 6 units (previously 5, existing 4). The rear elevation has also seen a substantial revision in that the 3rd and 4th floors are now stepped back and what was previously interior living space is now balconies. These changes, and associated revisions to the floor plans have caused a reduction in the floor area, from the previously proposed 10,835 SF (FAR of 2.56) to the currently proposed 9,291 SF (FAR of 2.20). Staff remains unconvinced that the criteria for a Variance are met. Below is the staff report issued for the September 12, 2019 meeting:

SEPTEMBER 12, 2019 PLANNING DEPARTMENT REPORT (Zoning Table updated to reflect new plans):

DEMOLITION/PRESERVATION

On January 22, 2019, Preservation staff determined that the existing building at 1618 Beacon Street is significant. The Preservation Commission then confirmed the staff's initial determination at a meeting on February 19, 2019. The property is also located in the Beacon Street National Register District. Partial demolition of the structure is therefore subject to an 18-

month stay that would expire on August 19, 2020. The applicants have not applied to lift the stay.

SITE AND NEIGHBORHOOD

The building at 1618 Beacon Street was constructed as a single-family house ca. 1900. It is the third of 5 identical buildings that predate the surrounding commercial and multi-family development surrounding Washington Square. In 1950, the building was converted into a 3-family dwelling. Sometime since then, the building was converted to a 4-unit dwelling. The building is Tudor-style, and according to Preservation planners, retains integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, and workmanship. The building also contains retail space, which is currently occupied by Swiss Watch and Jewelry (formerly Little Swiss House), that occupies about 1/3 of the total width of the lot. The property is located in Washington Square, a commercial area on Beacon Street that consists primarily of commercial uses and multi-family dwellings.

APPLICANT'S PROPOSAL

The owner, 1618 Beacon Street LLC, is proposing to construct an addition to the existing building by adding a fourth story and expanding the building towards the rear. The rear-side expansion would include a 4-car garage on the first floor and additional living area on the second and third floor. The scope of work also includes significant interior renovations. Parking requirements, which are currently met with open air parking stalls, would be met with 4 spaces in the garage and 3 open air compact spaces. Total added square footage amounts to 539 sf in the basement, 437sf on the first floor, 1,606sf on the second floor, 1,606sf on the third floor, and 2,547sf on the fourth floor for a total increase in FAR of 6.670 sf from 5,080 to 11,750.

FINDINGS

ZONING: G-1.75	Required/ Allowed	Existing	Proposed	Relief
Use		4-Unit	5-Unit	None
Lot Size	None	4,229sf	4,229sf	None
Floor Area Ratio	1.75 / 100% 7,401sf	1.19 / 68% 5,015sf	2.20 / 126% 9,291sf	Variance
Lot Width	None	31'	31'	None
Height	45'	31'	43'	None
Setbacks: F/S/R	none/ "h+1/10" / 30'	0/0/64.3	0/0/30	Special Permit, §§ 5.07¹, 5.43²
OS: Landscaped/Usable	none/10%	none/5%	none/2%	Special Permit, § 5.07¹
Parking Spaces	9	7	7	None

¹ **Section 5.07: Dwellings in Business and Industrial Districts** – This provision states that dwellings located in business or industrial districts shall conform to the open space and side and rear setback requirements of the M district with the same FAR requirement as the business or industrial district in which the property is located. It also allows the ZBA to waive, by Special Permit, any of those requirements if it finds that such a waiver would promote reasonable development of the site compatible with adjacent buildings and the surrounding area.

² **Section 5.43: Exceptions to Yard and Setback Regulations** – The Zoning Board of Appeals may waive any setback requirement in the Bylaw if appropriate counterbalancing amenities are provided.

Other Zoning Requirements

5.09.2.a: Design Review

The proposal involves a structure or outdoor use that is located within 100 feet of Beacon Street. It also involves multiple dwellings with four or more units on the premises. Both of these conditions require Design Review. Below are staff's comments on the relevant standards and criteria of design review. See also the applicant's statement on the Community and Environmental Impact and Design Standards.

Preservation of Trees and Landscape: There is little to no vegetation on the existing site and the proposal would not affect the existing conditions.

Relation of Buildings to Environment/Streetscape/Neighborhood: The proposed additional massing is significant but the altered structure would remain reasonably consistent with the scale of structures in the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed building is also generally appropriate in size for the proposed use and location.

Open Space: Neither the existing nor the proposed conditions provide an adequate amount of open space, although the proposed conditions further reduce the amount of open space provided. That being said, the surrounding area does not feature much open space, and there are a number of parks and playgrounds in close proximity that the residents will be able to use.

Circulation: Safe circulation for all means of transportation is provided for, at least as adequately as the existing conditions.

Stormwater Drainage: The project will be subject to the provisions of the Stormwater Bylaw.

Heritage: The existing structure is historically significant and the proposed addition has been designed to be distinct from the original structure, thereby helping to distinguish and preserve the historical portion of the building. However, the architecturally distinct entrance is being demolished.

Section 6.02.2.f: Off-Street Parking Space Regulations

This section states that 10% of all required parking spaces must be designed and marked for use by visitors and tradespeople. A Variance is required to waive this requirement.

Section 8.02: Alteration or Extension

A Special Permit is required to alter and/or extend this non-conforming structure.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT COMMENTS

The Planning Department is not supportive of this proposal. The proposal does not meet the statutory requirements for the granting of a Variance, and it needs Variance relief from at least 2 important sections of the Zoning Bylaw – Floor Area Ratio and Parking requirements. Variances can only be granted where a property experiences unique circumstances related to lot shape, topography, or soil conditions and that enforcement of the Bylaw would cause a hardship that stems from one of those unique conditions. None of those circumstances exist on this property. Furthermore, the proposal would reduce housing variety and affordability in this building. The current building provides 4 dwelling units with a variety of bedroom counts (1 studio, 1 1br, and 2 2br) with modest square footages and likely modest affordability. The proposal would convert all 4 units to 3 bedroom units with large square footages, thus reducing the diversity of housing units and significantly increasing the cost of the units. The additional square footage being requested by Variance would essentially be used to reduce/eliminate the affordable nature of the housing units on this property. Additional square footage in this building should be accompanied by additional housing units. Therefore, staff finds that the application not only fails to meet the criteria for a Variance, but that the motivation behind the increased FAR is not justified.

The Planning Department recommends that the Zoning Board of Appeals deny the requested zoning relief. If the Planning Board chooses to recommend approval of the site plan by VTP Associates, dated August 12, 2019 and architectural plans by Hendren Associates, dated August 28, 2019, staff recommends the following conditions:

- 1. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit a final site plan, floor plans, and elevations subject to the review and approval of the Assistant Director of Regulatory Planning.**
- 2. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit a final landscaping plan showing proposed counterbalancing amenities subject to the review and approval of the Assistant Director of Regulatory Planning.**
- 3. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit to the Building Commissioner for review and approval for conformance to the Board of Appeals decision: 1) a final site plan stamped and signed by a registered engineer or land surveyor, and 2) evidence that the Board of Appeals decision has been recorded at the Registry of Deeds.**

Subject Site



Aerial Photograph - Neighborhood Context

