

Development Activities Meeting Report (Version: 06/24/2020)

This report created by the Neighborhood Planner and included with staff reports to City Boards and/or Commissions.

Logistics	Stakeholders
Project Name/Address: 925 Mellon St Ground-Floor Apartment Conversion	Groups Represented (e.g., specific organizations, residents, employees, etc. where this is evident): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applicant • Highland Park Community Council (HPCC) president and board members • Highland Park residents
Parcel Number(s): 82-R-25	
ZDR Application Number: DCP-ZDR-2020-05080	
Meeting Location: Virtual (Zoom) hosted by Highland Park Community Council	
Date: 8/20/2020	
Meeting Start Time: 7:00 PM	
Applicant: Ryan England (architect at citySTUDIO)	Approx. Number of Attendees: 37 at peak
Boards and/or Commissions Request(s): Zoning Board of Adjustment: 1) special exception request for change from one nonconforming use to another (existing three-unit residential with ground-floor retail space in R2-M District, with proposed addition of one new residential unit in place of the vacant ground-floor retail space); 2) variance request to waive the requirement for an additional parking space due to the addition of one apartment.	

How did the meeting inform the community about the development project?

Ex: Community engagement to-date, location and history of the site, demolition needs, building footprint and overall square footage, uses and activities (particularly on the ground floor), transportation needs and parking proposed, building materials, design, and other aesthetic elements of the project, community uses, amenities and programs.

- The Applicant explained that he would be seeking a Special Exception to change the current nonconforming use of a multi-unit mixed-use building with three apartments and a ground-floor retail space to a multi-unit all-residential building with a fourth apartment in the vacant retail space. He stated that the conversion would be the most conducive reuse of the ground-floor space for the building.
- The Applicant shared photographs of the existing mixed-use building and rear parking area, as well as an aerial map, Street View, and architectural drawings.
- The Applicant remarked that almost all of the work would be taking place on the ground floor and that the upper floors would only see minor brick pointing and painting in order to preserve the historic façade.
- The Applicant discussed the repositioning of the doors on the front ground-floor façade, the raising of the windowsills, the replacement of the rooftop air conditioning unit with a smaller and quieter model, and the improvement of the unimproved rear parking area to more clearly define the existing parking spaces.
- The Applicant explained that the addition of another apartment triggered the requirement of one additional parking space but that he would be seeking a variance to waive the additional parking requirement.
- HPCC board members remarked that the apartment conversion would convert the building into a more appropriate use for the street and neighborhood, despite the continued nonconformity.
- The HPCC president mentioned that Applicant reached out to them very early in the process and thanked him for bringing them into the loop early.
- HPCC intends to provide a letter of support to the ZBA for the Applicant' project, with a few caveats and recommendations.

Input and Responses

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
How is the parking area allocated now?	None of the tenants in the building currently own cars, so the parking area is empty.
Seems very thoughtful and well-considered.	
What is that back cinder block extension?	We will clean up the cinder block bar extension, which is part of the ground floor unit, and replace the door there with a window. The area was previously primarily used for storage.
Couldn't you use the broken concrete for an additional parking space? Also, just to set the record straight — not being and immediate neighbor, I don't know how much of a nuisance Sandy's was, but they had the best corned beef in Pittsburgh.	We won't pave the parking but will put some wheelstops in and fix some drainage issues and repair the concrete.
What about the fences? Can you talk about the fences and cinder block retaining walls? Are those on this property or adjacent properties?	We would only deal with property line issues with the neighbors. We honestly don't know whose fence it is.
The fence on the left side is owned by 927 Mellon.	
Does waste get picked up in the alley or down the street?	It depends on the house. Some homes on that block have trash picked up in the alley and some on Mellon Street.
Do you have a plan to better handle the waste? Current tenants just set bags of trash on the stoop. Could we utilize the back to set up trash cans?	We may just have wheeled trash containers on a hard paved area in the rear. We'll have a property screened and contained trash area.
Could you use permeable pavement in that parking area? If you reformat the back parking area, be considerate of the impervious surfaces — water will run into my yard and into my basement.	We may put area drains and have as much water percolate into the ground. Unfortunately, there's too much topography to do more than that.
Our roof overlaps — call us when you have contractors doing repairs to your roof, so we can point out sensitive areas on the roof. We are generally supportive as next-door neighbors as long as the construction is thoughtful.	
What zoning district is it?	It is in the R2-M district.
Will this project set a precedent for the street and neighborhood for more apartment conversions?	A variance would set a precedent; a special exception will not, because this would not change the character of the use, and the space would also never become commercial again.

Questions and Comments from Attendees	Responses from Applicants
An apartment is a much more appropriate use for the block than a commercial use. The ZBA would view this as unique to the property, a change from a more impactful use to a lesser-impact use, which would be positive. This should have no precedent setting for neighbors. I don't think we're setting any dangerous precedent with this change.	
Are the tenants staying in place?	Yes, those apartments will continue to be occupied by the current tenants, though they may be inconvenienced for a while by the construction activity. The tenants have separate entries.
We are also happy that Ryan's proposal includes leaving the people who currently live in the units upstairs in place.	
There are currently two other properties that are 3 rental units on the same block. 925 has had 3 units.	
Do you need anything formal from HPCC?	I don't think we necessarily need a letter of support or anything.
Other projects you've done?	A number of single-family residences. LaScola's Italian Ice.
citySTUDIO is doing a wonderful extensive renovation for us.	

Other Notes

Planner completing report: Phillip Wu