

## City OKs affordable housing development in Porter Square

By Rob Carter / [cambridge@wickedlocal.com](mailto:cambridge@wickedlocal.com)

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The Board of Zoning Appeals Thursday night granted developers a comprehensive permit, which will allow them to build 40 units of affordable housing near Porter Square.

The development, at 1791 Mass. Ave. and 1 and 2 Frost Terrace called Frost Terrace, will consist of expansions and renovations to the three buildings already on the site to preserve them and better fit in with the neighborhood architecturally, according to the developers. The lot is located on Massachusetts Avenue between the North Prospect Church and a Lesley University building and the conditions of the permit stipulate that the buildings constructed cannot be used for anything other than affordable housing.

Sean Hope and Jason Korb, the co-developers on the project, said they plan to make more than two-thirds of the units two or three-bedroom apartments to make the space more appealing to families.

“These are wonderful. They’re hard-working.” Korb said. “A lot of them have multiple jobs and they would be just such a tremendous asset to the Porter Square community.”

The units will be available to families making between \$21,000 and \$67,000 a year depending on household size and the income restrictions for a particular apartment, with a three-bedroom apartment renting for between \$711 and \$1,517, according to Korb.

With the Jan. 11 BZA vote, the project will not need further approvals from elected city bodies.

### Many argue against shrinking building

The development has drawn a lot of attention from residents and local politicians and the petition hearing at the Citywide Senior Center quickly ran out of seats forcing residents to have to stand along the walls or out in the hallway.

Many of the site's direct abutters voiced concerns about parking and the scale of the project.

"Why can't we go back to the 27 units originally proposed?" Ken Smith of 7 Newport Road asked. "We aren't saying, 'No.' We're simply saying, 'Can we make it a little more manageable?'"

Mayor Marc McGovern was one of many in the audience that took exception to the idea of reducing the size of the development.

"People don't understand when they say let's just cut off 10 units, that's 10 families that aren't going to get to live here anymore," McGovern told the Chronicle after the meeting. "If we continue to say that affordable housing is our No. 1 priority, then we have to start living that value."

### **Benefits to neighborhood 'overwhelming'**

Chair of Cambridge's Board of Zoning Appeals, Constantine Alexander, was quick to let the attendees know that height and density would likely not be factors in their approval process, because of the nature of the permit requested, which allows many building guidelines to be waived to encourage affordable housing development. Parking, however, he said was a major concern, as the development includes only three parking spaces all of which are designated for handicapped drivers.

"You can show me all the surveys you want but parking is going to be an issue in this area going forward and that's just a reality," Alexander said.

Many residents disputed the claim that parking would be a large problem, citing the proximity to public transportation and increased bike lanes in the area. However, the appeals that seemed to sway the board members more were those who simply said the opportunity these apartments gave to the community outweighed the potential downsides.

"It made me cry to think that we might not do this," said state Rep. Marjorie Decker, D-Cambridge, who grew up in public housing. "This is an opportunity that we cannot walk away from."

"The trade-off is parking and I don't take it lightly, but I think the more important thing is to provide this type of housing in that neighborhood," board member Andrea Hickey said, calling the benefit of increasing the neighborhood's socioeconomic diversity "overwhelming."

The board approved the petition on the condition that the buildings all be exclusively reserved for low-income housing, that the developers have a comprehensive plan to keep stormwater runoff from impacting neighboring houses and that the final plans not stray in a meaningful way from the preliminary proposals they reviewed.



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