



RECEIVED BY  
OFFICE OF CITY CLERK  
MAY 15 4 45 PM '79  
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE MASSACHUSETTS  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
CITY HALL ANNEX, 57 INMAN STREET, CAMBRIDGE 02139

June 7, 1979

To the Honorable, the City Council.

Re: Reuse of the Putnam School

Dear Councillors:

Under Cambridge Ordinance No. 733, the Planning Board is required to study and report to the City Council on the sale, lease or rental of City-owned land. The Planning Board has reviewed and evaluated options for the disposition and reuse of the Putnam School at 69 Sciarappa Street.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Board recommends that the Putnam School building be sold to the Cambridge Housing Authority for the purpose of rehabilitating the structure to accommodate 29 units of elderly and handicapped housing. The Board's recommendation is based on the need for elderly housing, the history of the building and the Housing Authority's site plan.

It is the opinion of the Board that this recommendation adheres to the City's obligation to provide housing for the elderly as stated in its Housing Assistance Plan and that re-occupancy of the structure will provide a general upgrading of the area, ensure the retention of this historically important structure, and at the same time create minimal if any additional traffic and parking pressures on the area.

The Planning Board notes that the Cambridge Housing Authority's proposal will require zoning variances for density and parking. It is the opinion of the Planning Board, based on testimony submitted by the City's Traffic Department, that two parking spaces should adequately service the residents of the building. Furthermore, the 5 additional units above the zoning limit would not adversely affect the sensitive reuse of the building or create unreasonable congestion or other problems for the surrounding community. The Housing Authority's proposal also includes a dumpster on the lot for trash collection. The Planning Board recommends that all refuse disposal facilities be provided in the basement of the building. Compactors and frequent collection would minimize the amount of space devoted to trash disposal and would avoid creating a potential neighborhood nuisance and health hazard.

The Hearing (Excerpts from Planning Board Minutes attached)

On May 15, 1979, the Planning Board held a public hearing to discuss disposition and reuse of the Putnam School. Mr. Michael Smith of Monacelli Associates, architects for the Cambridge Housing Authority, presented a schematic design for reuse

of the structure. The design calls for a total of 29 units with 8 units on floors 1 through 3 and 5 units in what is now the attic area. Each unit will have 654 sq. ft. of net floor area which is a standard one-bedroom unit size for elderly housing. The basement will include 3,550 sq. ft. of net floor area for community space including storage facilities. The Authority will build new interior staircases and install one elevator. The exterior of the building will be altered only by the enlargement of two small dormers (one facing Sciarappa Street and the second on the south side of the building) to approximately the same size and design as the four original dormers. The grounds area will have 2,940 sq.ft. of open space and two parking spaces. One parking space will be entered and exited from Otis Street and the second from Sciarappa Street.

Mr. Smith pointed out that the plan will require density and parking variances. The plan shows 5 units above the zoning allowance of 24 units and provides only two of the eight required parking spaces. In order for the Authority to meet the open space requirements they can allocate only two spaces on-site. The Authority has unsuccessfully made several attempts to provide additional parking spaces in the immediate vicinity. Mr. Smith submitted to the Planning Board a letter from Mr. George Teso of the City's Traffic Department stating that the maximum number of parking spaces for elderly housing developments are never fully utilized and that visitors are infrequent and visits are often of short duration.

At the hearing, Mr. Luke Agneta, President of the East Cambridge Planning Team, informed the Planning Board that the neighborhood held two hearings to discuss the Cambridge Housing Authority's proposal. At their second meeting on May 8, 1979, the Planning Team took an ad-hoc vote on the proposal. Of those residents present, 33 favored the plan and 17 were opposed. Several residents also commented that the building had been vacant for some time and that the Authority is the only organization that has had existing funding to implement their proposal. Mrs. Elaine Daly presented to the Planning Board a letter from six abutters to the Putnam School supporting the CHA plan.

Mr. Joseph Szulewski showed a petition to the Board with 160 signatures in opposition to the CHA plan and recommending that the building be returned to the School Department for renovation as school administration offices. Mr. Szulewski and several other residents commented that the CHA proposal would create additional parking pressures. They noted that the area already has severe parking problems due to the presence of the Otis Hospital, Szulewski Funeral Home and the County Courthouse.

#### Conclusion

The Putnam School building, designed by James Fogarty, a well-known local architect, was built in 1889 and, according to the Cambridge Historical Commission, is an excellent example of the Queen Anne style used for public architecture. The building has been vacant since June 1974 when the Cambridge School Department relocated the grammar school to the new Kennedy School building. Over the past five years reuse of the building has been the subject of much local discussion. However, the proposal by the CHA is the only one that has had financial backing. It is the opinion of the Planning Board that the structure should be preserved for its historical significance and as an integral element of the general fabric of the East Cambridge community.

To the Honorable, the City Council

Page 3.

June 7, 1979

The elderly housing need in Cambridge cannot be ignored. The City has already committed itself to providing 80 units of elderly housing and during 1979-1982 must develop 120 new rental units of elderly housing as part of its overall Housing Assistance Plan. By adhering to its commitments, the City ensures the continued funding of the Community Development Block Grant program and is in a more favorable position for additional state and federal funding for both human services and capital improvements. Finally, the CHA proposal will enhance the Otis-Sciarappa Street area by creating a residential use for a vacant institutional structure.

Respectfully submitted

For the Planning Board



Arthur C. Parris  
Chairman

ACP:jp

Excerpts from Planning Board Minutes,  
Planning Board Meeting held May 15, 1979

Putnam School Site Reuse 8:00 P.M.

Mr. Parris opened the hearing and introduced the members of the Board. Next, Mr. Michael Smith, of Monacelli Associates, presented the CHA's elderly housing proposal. Mr. Smith stated that the historic Putnam School building is ideally suited for elderly housing. The proposal calls for the renovation of the building to twenty-nine 600 sf. units and recreation space. Mr. Smith informed the Board that as planned, the proposal will require two variances, one for violation of the minimum LA/DU requirement and the other to allow a reduction of the number of required parking spaces from 7 to 2. The limited open space available on the site prevents any workable scheme for on-site parking for seven cars. The proposal calls for two parking spaces and maintenance of the remaining open space. Mr. Smith stated that attempts have been made to establish parking arrangements on nearby existing lots. At this point, no firm commitments have been received. However, it is unlikely that many elderly residents will have cars or that traffic and parking will be substantially increased by this use. In other CHA elderly projects 1 in every 13 units has a car. George Teso, Director of the Traffic Department submitted a letter to the Planning Board, recommending that the CHA project be approved.

Mr. Parris asked for questions from the Board.

- Q. Why have you increased the number of units from 24 to 29?  
A. The project will work better financially with more units.
- Q. How does 600 sf/per unit compare with the space provided in other CHA projects?  
A. Mr. Smith answered that 600 sf. is larger than the average DCA unit. Mr. Wuenschel of the CHA stated that 600 sf. is slightly larger than the other elderly units they maintain.
- Q. Will the extra five units reduce the planned 600 sf. size?  
A. The five units will be located in the present attic space and will have no impact on the size of units on the other floors.
- Q. Will the elevator service all levels?  
A. Yes.
- Q. How many people are there per unit in the other CHA elderly projects?  
A. Less than 1.5.

Mr. Parris then asked for questions from the public.

- Q. Is it legally possible to restrict the building to individuals who do not own cars or to allow only two families with cars?
- A. Mr. Wuenschel replied that although he was not sure of the answer, he suspected that such restrictions were discriminatory and would not be allowed. He stated that the CHA would re-search the issue.

Further discussion of the parking issue illustrated the concern of some residents that the already congested parking conditions would be aggravated by the CHA proposal. Residents cited the courthouse, the funeral home, the hospital and nearby churches as contributing to the parking problem. It was suggested that the units at the back of Roosevelt Towers would be better suited to elderly housing units and that the Putnam school should be used as an administration building.

- Q. Can you build 29 units without providing parking?
- A. Not unless a variance is obtained.

Mr. Parris asked for closing statements either in support of or in opposition to the CHA proposal.

Charles Sullivan-Executive Director, Cambridge Historical Commission.

Mr. Sullivan stated that he is in support of the elderly housing proposal as it will be the least disruptive use of the property. However, the first priority should be preservation of the building.

Luke Agnetta- President, East Cambridge Planning Team

Mr. Agnetta stated that a vote on the Putnam school issue was taken at the last meeting of the East Cambridge Planning Team. The results were 2:1 in favor of elderly housing on that site.

Elaine Daley - 72 Sciarappa Street

Ms. Daley submitted a letter in support of the CHA proposal signed by six abutters.

The Planning Board also received a petition signed by 160 residents stating their opposition to any housing proposal for this site.

Ken Daley - 72 Sciarappa St.

Mr. Daley stated that the East Cambridge Planning Team had looked at a number of alternatives for the reuse of the Putnam school site. Of these, the elderly housing proposal was the least disruptive and the most acceptable in terms of traffic impacts.

Mr. Parris concluded the Putnam School debate by stating that the Board would make a recommendation to the City Council, who will vote on the issue.

027

Comm. from Arthur C. Parris, Chairman,  
Planning Board, transmitting report of the  
Planning Board re: reuse of the Putnam  
School.

In City Council,  
June 11, 1979

6/11/79  
Referred to the  
Ordinance Committee  
Check also Howell  
School