



# CITY OF MELROSE

## OFFICE OF PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Melrose Planning Board

**FROM:** Denise Gaffey, Director & City Planner

**DATE:** June 29, 2020

**RE:** Staff Report for 272 Tremont Street

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#### OVERVIEW

On May 29, 2020, 495 LLC c/o Eric Kenworthy submitted an application for Site Plan Review pursuant to Chapter 235, Section 16.1 of the Melrose Zoning Ordinance (MZO) for the property at 272 Tremont Street. The proposed project is a mixed-use building with 15 residential units and 14 off-street parking spaces. The development will include two affordable residential units as required in MZO §235-73.1. On the ground floor will be a 600 square-foot commercial space.

The property is approximately 10,490 square feet and is located on Tremont Street between Franklin Street and Ellsworth Avenue. The project site is located within the BA-2 Transit-Oriented Mixed Use District, which permits mixed residential/business uses where all dwelling units are above the first floor level as of right. It is along the border with the UR-B Urban Residence District.



This site is within the Melrose Highlands business district, which consists mostly of one-story commercial buildings and two-story mixed-use buildings. A one-story auto-repair shop is located next to the project to the north and a four-story multifamily apartment building with 23 units is located to the south. Other abutting properties on Tremont Street are a three-family home and single-family homes.



The proposed project will require Variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for the off-street parking. The Applicant will need a Variance for number of parking spaces since 17 spaces are required for the dwelling units and commercial space but 14 spaces are being provided (MZO §235-17.Q). In addition, a Variance for driveway width will be required since the proposed driveway is 18 feet wide and the MZO requires a minimum of 24 feet for two-way traffic (MZO §235-41.O).

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Applicant is proposing to demolish the existing three-family house at 272 Tremont Street and replace it with a four-story mixed-use building. A 600 square-foot commercial storefront will be located on the left side of the building at ground level. The main entrance to the residential units will be located on the right side. A vestibule with intercom system will open into the residential lobby, which will contain seating, mailboxes, a transportation information screen, and a single-occupancy restroom. Within the lobby will be access to the elevator, one of two staircases, and a door to the parking area. The other staircase will be located toward the center of the parking area, which will contain space for 14 vehicles at-grade under the upper stories of the building. Also on the ground floor will be trash and recycling rooms accessible from the driveway and three covered bicycle racks.

On floors two through four will be 15 apartments, including nine two-bedroom/two-bathroom units and six one-bedroom/one-bathroom units. Each unit will have its own balcony and washer/dryer. Of the 15 apartments, two will be affordable as per MZO §235-73.1. In addition to designating two of the units as affordable, the Applicant will also be required to make a payment to the Melrose Affordable Housing Trust for the fraction of a required unit ( $15\% \times 15 = 2.25$ ). The payment will be equal to the fraction (0.25) multiplied by the difference between the fair market value of a comparable market-rate unit recently sold within the City of Melrose and the price of an affordable unit in the development, assuming the value of the unit if it was sold rather than rented.

In terms of the design, the architectural plans illustrate a contemporary building with a mix of modern and more traditional features. The façade of the first floor will consist of a thin, dark grey Bauhaus brick with commercial glazed windows and door for the commercial space. There will be a double door with black trim for the entrance to the lobby. A strong white cornice will separate the commercial ground floor from the residential floors above and white columns will help support the building overhang over the first floor. Materials for the façades of the upper stories will be a mix of grey 4" exposure HardiePlank clapboards and HardiePanel with reglets in Artic White. There will be vinyl double-hung windows in black that match the balcony doors and white cornices above and below the top floor of the building. In addition, there will be black standing seam roofs over the balconies for the units on the top floor.

### DEPARTMENT REVIEW

As required, Planning staff distributed copies of the Site Plan Review application to the City Engineer, Board of Health, and Building Commissioner. In addition, the Fire Chief, Police Chief, Mayor, Conservation Agent, School Superintendent, and City Solicitor were made aware of the application and provided the opportunity to comment. OPCD scheduled a meeting in which the aforementioned department heads were invited to attend in order to facilitate the coordinated review of this proposal. This meeting occurred on June 18, 2020 and was attended by the City Planner, Senior Planner, DPW Superintendent, Deputy Engineer, Fire Chief, Fire Prevention Captain, and the Applicant and representatives. The following is a summary of the issues raised at the meeting and other comments received from department heads:

- Driveway: When the Planning Board reviewed this project as a part of the initial ZBA application, they expressed concern with the curb cut that would be shared between this site and the auto-repair shop. For the Site Plan Review submission, the Applicant has added in a small curb between the two properties so instead of one excessively wide curb cut, there will be a 16-foot curb cut for this property and a 30-foot curb cut for the auto-repair shot. Though the Applicant will need a Variance for the 18-foot wide driveway, City staff had no issues with the reduced width from a public safety perspective. The DPW Superintendent mentioned that on-street parking is not allowed on either side of Tremont Street in front of the building.

Issues could potentially arise regarding the nine-foot easement that provides access to the dumpsters belonging to the two abutting parcels that front onto Franklin Street. Enforcement will be necessary to ensure that only temporary loading and not parking occur in this area as to not impede access to the 14 parking spaces.

- Trash/Recycling: The Applicant initially proposed a trash and recycling room off the front of the driveway that would accommodate about four to six bins and City staff expressed that there may be concerns about inadequate space or frequency of pickups. Following the meeting with department heads, the Applicant resubmitted a plan that allocated some space away from the lobby to create separate trash and recycling rooms that should be able to accommodate at least nine bins. They wanted to avoid the need for a dumpster at the end of the driveway.

- **Utilities:** There will be new water and sewer connections to the building from the mains on Tremont Street, including separate domestic and fire services. The existing building has gas and that connection will not change.
- **Stormwater Management:** Drainage will be handled on-site by two subsurface infiltration facilities, one at the back of the site and the other under the driveway towards the front of the site. The Deputy Engineer inquired if the Applicant had conducted soil tests to determine soil conditions. The Applicant would prefer to do test pits during demolition and have that be a condition of the decision, which the City Planner is comfortable with.
- **TMP/Sustainability Measures:** Transportation Management Plan submitted by the Applicant includes a one-month MBTA pass for new residents, LCD television in the lobby to display transit information, and three covered bike racks that hold six bikes. They are willing to add bike parking in front of the building if that is desired by the Planning Board. Other sustainability measures include using LED exterior lighting, Energy Star products, and making the roof solar-ready.

The City Planner encouraged the Applicant to unbundle parking from the rent of the units to both encourage residents to forgo car ownership and because there are not enough parking spaces for each unit as proposed.

- **Fire Safety:** The Fire Prevention Captain explained that he would like to see a fire alarm call box on the exterior of the building. There should be a Fire Department connection at the front of the building that access a standpipe and sprinkler system.
- **MassDOT Consent:** Consent from MassDOT is required because the property abuts the railroad tracks. The Applicant's attorney believes that MassDOT has changed their process so they only require public hearings if work is being done within the rail bed. If the work will be outside of this area, they will provide a letter of consent without a public hearing. This issue is pending.

#### WAIVER OF APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

The Applicant has requested waivers from *Site Plan showing existing and proposed topography and the location of all natural features* and *Site Plan showing areas subject to a 100-year flood* since the site is flat, no wetlands or bodies of water are near this property, and no bedrock is being excavated. The existing site is almost entirely impervious. They have also requested waivers from *Estimated average daily and peak hour traffic* and *Level of Service Analysis for nearby intersections* since the addition of eight vehicles to the site is not expected to have any material impact on traffic in the neighborhood nor the Level of Service at the Tremont Street and Franklin Street intersection.

#### SITE PLAN REVIEW CRITERIA

Melrose Zoning Ordinance Section 235-16.1.E specifies that the Planning Board as Site Plan Review Committee shall find that the following criteria are fulfilled.

*1. Consistency with the design, character, and scale of the surrounding area.*

This site is in a transitional area between the Melrose Highlands business district and the surrounding residential neighborhood. The contemporary design and scale of the proposed building is appropriate for the transit oriented location. No dimensional relief is needed for the building and this area of Melrose can support the added site density based on the site's proximity to the Melrose Highlands Commuter Rail Station, businesses, and services.

*2. Consistency with all sign, design, landscaping, lighting, buffering, and public safety requirements and standards established by City of Melrose departments.*

The project is consistent with the requirements and standards established by City of Melrose departments. The building has a contemporary design with attractive materials, minimal exterior lighting, and is ADA-accessible. Though the open space proposed is fairly minimal, it is an increase over what exists today.

While City staff had no concerns with the proposed 18-foot width of the two-way driveway, they acknowledged a potential issue with the nine-foot easement that provides access to the dumpsters belonging to the two abutting parcels that front onto Franklin Street. Enforcement will be necessary to ensure that only temporary loading and no parking occur in this area as to not impede access to the 14 parking spaces.

*3. Protection and enhancement of important existing natural, historic or scenic site features.*

There are no existing natural, historic, or scenic site features that require protection or enhancement. The existing building is not significant architecturally and, compared to current conditions, the proposed building makes much better use of the property. It will have attractive landscaping and the commercial first floor will improve the streetscape.

*4. Protection of adjacent properties and surrounding areas from detrimental impacts during and after construction, including but not limited to air and water pollution, flood, noise, odor, dust, vibration, and lighting.*

A detailed Construction Management Plan has been submitted by the Applicant that specifies the hours of construction activity, vehicle access to the site, and protective measures that will be taken during construction. Secure fencing and barricades, coupled with proper signage, will be used to isolate construction areas from pedestrian movement around the site. Highlands Station, LLC has documented the procedures that they will follow for construction air quality and dust control, noise and odor control, handling construction waste, and more. No blasting will be required for this project.

Except for during utility connection work, the existing vehicle traffic patterns on Tremont Street will be maintained. Police details will coordinate traffic during construction when required. Any work in the right-of-way will be coordinated with the Department of Public Works and conform to their roadway standards.

It is expected that minimal exterior lighting will emanate from the proposed building, though the Applicant should clarify this. On the front of the building will be three cylindrical wall sconces to light the front entrances. A wall sconce in the “skyscraper” style will be located on each balcony. Flood lights will illuminate the parking area as well as the doorways to the trash/recycling rooms.

The condenser units will be located on the roof. The Applicant has not yet identified the make/model of the condenser units and should confirm that they are in accordance with the Melrose Noise Ordinance. It was suggested that the roof top units be located in the rear if possible, to minimize ambient noise on the neighboring residential properties and to provide more usable space for solar panels in the future

5. *Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and of the location of driveway openings in relation to traffic and/or adjacent streets.*

Vehicles will enter the site via a 16-foot curb cut to the right of the building on Tremont Street. The Applicant modified their initial proposal to the ZBA so that, instead of having one large curb cut shared by this property and the neighboring auto-repair shop, there will be a small curb between the two driveways. An 18-foot wide driveway will provide two-way access to the 14 parking spaces under the building. The first aisle off the driveway will contain six parking spaces, including an ADA-accessible space next to the entrance to the residential lobby. The second aisle will include the remaining eight spaces. Both aisles will be 20 feet wide as required by the MZO. The two easements that provide right-of-way access for the neighboring properties on each side of the building will remain in place.

In addition to the entrance to the residential lobby from the parking lot, there will be two separate entrances on Tremont Street for the retail space and residential lobby. They will be connected to the sidewalk via walkways between the landscaping. Residential tenants and their guests entering will use the double doors on the right side of the building, which is clearly distinct from the commercial entrance.

6. *Adequacy and arrangement of parking spaces, bicycle racks, internal ways, loading areas, and sidewalks, and the ability of the site plan to accommodate parking in areas other than the front of the building.*

Though a Variance from the ZBA is needed for providing 14 out of the 17 parking spaces required by the MZO, the amount of parking proposed is adequate given the transit-oriented location of the site and the presence of bicycle and pedestrian accommodations along Tremont Street. The Applicant should unbundle parking from the rent of the units to encourage residents to forgo car ownership and because there are not enough parking spaces for each unit. There is public parking available in the Melrose Highlands business district to service the commercial space, though on-street parking on Tremont Street in front of the building is forbidden.

Covered parking for six bicycles has been proposed for the site. The Applicant should consider ways to accommodate additional bicycle parking for visitors and customers.

*7. Adequacy of the local streets to accommodate the traffic generated by the proposed use.*

Currently the site has parking for six cars. The addition of eight vehicles is not expected to have any impact on traffic in the neighborhood nor the Level of Service at the Tremont Street and Franklin Street intersection. Ideally residents, as well as employees and customers of the commercial space, will utilize public transportation via the Melrose Highlands Commuter Rail Station. The site is also less than half of a mile from the 136/137 bus stop on Main Street.

*8. Adequacy of sewerage and water supply systems within the site to serve the proposed use without overloading the municipal systems to an extent that the health, safety or general welfare of residents of the City is put at risk.*

There will be new water and sewer connections to the building from the mains on Tremont Street. There will be separate domestic and fire services. The 2" domestic service will be Type K copper tubing and the 4" fire service will be ductile iron with taping sleeve and valve. There will be a 6" PVC sewer service out to the 6" sewer main within Tremont Street.

*9. Adequacy of proposed methods of refuse disposal and storage.*

Trash and recycling will be stored in separate rooms off the front of the driveway with space for at least nine bins. This should be sufficient for the site, though the frequency of pickup will be need to be adequate as well. The Applicant should clarify if residents will be responsible for bringing their waste to the trash and recycling rooms or if it will be collected within the building.

*10. Adequacy of snow management, including removal or on-site storage.*

There will be space for on-site snow storage at the back of the site. Since the building covers most of the site, the snow storage area will mainly be for whatever accumulates on the driveway.

*11. Adequacy of soil erosion plan and the plan for protection of steep slopes, both during and after construction.*

The site is essentially flat and will not require any blasting. According to the Drainage Report, haybales and silt fence will be placed at the downhill limit of work prior to the commencement of any construction activity. The integrity of the erosion control devices will be maintained by periodic inspection and replacement as necessary. The straw wattles and silt fence will remain in place until the first course of pavement has been placed and all side slopes have been loamed and seeded and vegetation has been established.

*12. Stormwater management.*

Stormwater management measures that have been proposed should be adequate for capturing most of the stormwater onsite. Drainage will be handled on-site by two subsurface infiltration facilities, one at the back of the site and the other under the driveway towards the front of the site. Stormwater runoff generated by the building roof, the west side of the driveway, walkways, and landscaped areas will be collected by a double-grated catch basin at the west end of the driveway via a catch basin. This stormwater will be infiltrated via a 36" perforated pipe (40 LF)

embedded in a 5' x 42' stone field. Stormwater generated on the north and east sides of the site will be collected by a catch basin on the east side of the driveway and will be infiltrated via an underground Cultec system located in the east side of the driveway. A water quality inlet will be installed upstream of each infiltration systems in an effort to further treat stormwater and reduce total suspended solids. The subsurface facilities have been sized to mitigate peak runoff rates of all storms up to and including the 100-year storm event.

*13. Adequacy of landscaping, including the screening of adjacent residential uses, street trees, landscape islands in any parking lots and landscape buffers along the street frontage.*

Though the open space proposed for this site is fairly minimal, it meets the minimum open space requirements and is also an improvement over current conditions. Some of the area marked as landscaping on the plan will be under an overhang of the building and cannot count towards open space. These areas will have to be carefully reviewed to ensure that they meet the landscaping goals of providing plantings and pervious surface. Three flowering pear trees (2.5" - 3" caliber) will be planted at the front of the site along with 50 one-gallon hostas and seasonal plantings (daffodils in the fall/spring and mixed impatiens in the summer). Three Armstrong maple trees (2.5" - 3" caliber) will be planted at the back of the site along with 60 one-gallon variegated hostas.

The proposal includes private usable outdoor space for each of the units by providing balconies. The balconies also provide an attractive feature on the front of the building.

*14. Adequacy of screening for storage areas, loading docks, dumpsters, rooftop equipment, utility buildings and similar features.*

Screening will be adequate. Trash and recycling bins will be located in their respective rooms off the driveway and the condensers will be on the roof. Given the height and size of the proposed building, the rooftop equipment should not be visible.

## RECOMMENDATION

Planning staff support the proposed project. The current site is not meeting its highest and best use given that it is well served by transit, existing infrastructure, and services. The proposal addresses the strong demand, both locally and regionally, for new housing units and affordable housing opportunities. Adding 15 one- and two-bedroom apartments in this location will allow more young professionals, empty nesters, and others to access the amenities that the Melrose Highlands business district offers. In return, these residents will support local businesses and bring vitality to this district.

The proposed project will also add a new commercial storefront to the Melrose Highlands business district and will improve the streetscape along that portion of Tremont Street. The contemporary design works for the location and the density is permitted by the MZO. Mixed use proposals of this nature are ideal for the BA-2 Transit-Oriented Mixed Use Districts and are consistent with smart growth principles. Because the location is so close to transit, City staff is comfortable with the number of parking spaces that have been proposed. Public parking is available on Franklin Street and elsewhere in the business district for customers to the



commercial establishment. The addition of eight vehicles to the site is not expected to have any impact on neighborhood traffic.

We look forward to reviewing the project at the upcoming public hearing and to further refinements that result through that process.