

Project Narrative
1021 Boylston Street, Newton, MA
Special Permit Application

This application for a Special Permit is being made to convert the existing retail building at 1021 Boylston Street (“Retail Store”) into a drive-through only coffee shop (“Coffee Drive-Through”).

The Existing Retail Store/Property

The existing Retail Store was first constructed in its current form and location in 1949, and has been run as a ceramics/pottery store since before the existing owner purchased it in 2006. The property includes a single, two-story building totaling approximately 3,050 square feet, fronting on Boylston Street. From its Boylston Street frontage, the existing Retail Store appears as a single-story, with the second story appearing as you travel to the back side of the lot that slopes down. The building reflects its original 1940’s condition and has never been substantially renovated. The site itself is in need of drainage improvements in the back lower point of the lot that currently collects stormwater runoff not only from the property itself, but also from neighboring properties almost all of which are at a higher elevation. The rear of the property has a thick natural vegetative buffer between the property and its neighbors, including planted vegetation and a privacy fence to the west, and varied fencing with minimal vegetation to the east. There is a sparsely planted area directly to the south of the building, between the building and the Boylston Street frontage.

The Retail Store has two existing curb-cut driveways – one on each side of the building. A large, free-standing sign advertising the existing Retail Store is located in a planted area to the south of the building, along the Boylston Street Frontage, and a second sign is located flush to the building front.

Zoning

The existing Retail Store is located in a multi-residence 2 (MR-2) zoning district, on the same block as a business zoned lot, and immediately abutting a commercial building (hardware store). Both the Retail Store and hardware stores are pre-existing legally non-conforming buildings/uses located in the MR-2 district. A large business district is located on the corner opposite the Retail Store, along Boylston Street.

Use

Within the MR-2 zoning district both retail and drive-through uses are prohibited, unless they are pre-existing non-conforming uses. As set forth in Section 7.8.2 of the Newton Zoning Ordinance, a property use may be changed from one pre-existing prohibited use to another prohibited use, by the grant of a special permit.

Dimensional

The MR-2 district also includes certain dimensional and setback regulations. The Retail Store complies with the majority of the dimensional regulations – as set forth in the Site Plan/Zoning Review Application materials submitted herewith – but for minimum open space, front yard setback, and parking stall setback – each of which are pre-existing legal non-conformities that will be improved, left untouched, or extended by the proposed project. As set forth in Section 7.8.2 of the Zoning Ordinance, each of these proposed dimensional changes that will cause the property to remain non-conforming may be approved by special permit.

The Proposed Project & Improvements

The proposed Coffee Drive-Through project includes an interior renovation and update to the Retail Store in order to convert the use to a drive-through only coffee shop. The renovation will include the removal of a back-deck, an exterior face-lift and update to the building at all elevations, new signage, the addition of a drive-through pick-up window and a pedestrian walk-up - pick-up window, and landscape, paving and drainage improvements and updates. The driveway curb-cuts will remain, and the driveways will continue to be used for circulation in and out of the site.

The landscape, hardscape and drainage will be significantly improved. Each elevation of the building will be improved with additional mature and native vegetation and plantings adding to the vegetative buffer surrounding the property and increasing the privacy of the neighboring properties. A new compliant drainage system will be put in place on the site that will then cause the site to properly drain, including the existing run-off from neighboring sites. The site will be also be re-paved, and privacy fencing will be placed around the property.

As proposed, the Coffee Drive-through is laid out to accommodate up to thirteen cars in the queue, and the intended tenant, Starbucks Coffee, has reported that the average transaction time for each car at one of its drive-through locations is three minutes and eight seconds from entrance to exit. Due to its increased focus on drive-through only locations arising from customers' pandemic period, and expected post-pandemic period, behavior, Starbucks has publicly committed to improving its drive-through transaction speed and experience.

Traffic

A traffic study by Howard Stein Hudson was conducted for the proposed project, to ensure customer, commuter, and pedestrian safety, and to determine the trip increases that should be expected by the proposed change in use. The traffic study is being submitted with this special permit application, and it concludes, most significantly, that:

- Approximately 89% of the expected trips to the Coffee Drive-through would be from “passby” trips. A passby trip is a car that was already on the road in this location, choosing to temporarily pull off of Boylston Street into the Coffee Drive-through and then continuing in the previous travel path;

- The sight distance for the Coffee Drive-through exit exceeds the minimum required for this roadway, meaning that exiting cars can be viewed by a sufficiently safe distance as vehicles approach these exiting cars; and
- Based on Starbucks' standard drive through design criteria, and observations at local Starbucks, the 13 vehicle queue is expected to be accommodated entirely on site.

Drive-Through Use

Although not abundant in Newton, drive-through use is permitted by special permit in all business districts, light manufacturing districts, and, as with this property, at any property that changes from a pre-existing non-conforming use to drive-through where drive-through is not otherwise permitted.

As shown on the demonstrative **Exhibit A** submitted herewith, the areas of Newton where drive-throughs may be allowed are clustered along Boylston Street – both surrounding the subject property and further down Boylston Street in Chestnut Hill, along the Massachusetts Turnpike, in Newton Highlands Village, and in Newton Centre. These zoned clusters are located in City-selected areas along or alongside higher speed roadways and highways, and in two intentionally selected village centers. The property that is the subject of this application is located within one of the zoned cluster areas, at a location spaced a safe distance from the nearest regulated intersection, with an intended draw of 89% pass-by visits, thus, not expected to create any significant increase in traffic.

Conclusion

The proposed Coffee Drive-Through project will improve the existing dated property, improve the property landscape, hardscape, drainage, and vegetative buffer, is an appropriate use for the location, and is not expected to create any material increase in traffic.