

Housing Trust Moves Forward With Odd Fellows Hall Project

By LANNAN M. O'BRIEN Apr 2, 2016

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The Falmouth Housing Trust could start advertising affordable apartments at Odd Fellows Hall, a historic building, in the coming month, pending final approval regarding parking plans on site.

Following a public hearing on the project last week, the Falmouth Zoning Board of Appeals voted to strike a condition it set in 2014 requiring grass pavers, or reinforced turf, for the parking lot instead of asphalt. At the time, the decision was based on aesthetics and as a means to create more green space at the Chancery Lane property, which is beside Falmouth Town Hall.

The housing trust since appealed the decision, then withdrew its appeal and requested a modification of the comprehensive permit that was issued for the project, arguing that the condition would impact cost and prevent handicapped access to the apartments.

Close to 30 people attended the March 24 hearing in support of the change, Falmouth Housing Trust executive director Anne E. Connolly said in a phone interview, some of whom provided public comment in favor of paved parking. The zoning board also received 20 letters of support for the project.

"We're appreciative of so much community support," Ms. Connolly said.

The majority of the board voted in favor of striking the condition, excluding chairman Kimberly A. Bielan, who voted in opposition. The board is expected to vote on the formal wording of the modification on Thursday, April 14.

Per the decision, four paved parking spots will be allowed at the property. There will be appropriate signage for handicapped parking, depending on whether there are handicapped tenants in the two first floor units—if there are none, the signage can be removed.

Ms. Connolly said that she hopes to start advertising the apartments in the next month. Because the project has been permitted for “adaptive re-use” through the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Development’s Local Initiative Program, she said that advertisements must be approved at the state level.

Odd Fellows Hall was built in 1856 and was originally a grammar school. In 1906, the building was moved one block southeast to its current location and rotated 90 degrees, after which it was used as a meeting place for civic organizations and a performance space.

The building has been owned by the town since 2004, and five years ago, Town Meeting voted to use the property for community housing. The Falmouth Housing Trust was awarded a request for proposals the following year.

At 550 square feet, Ms. Connolly said that the units are small. She described the design as “open concept,” which is similar to a studio, but includes divisions of space. For this reason, the housing trust plans to market them to young professionals.

“I think they’re going to be great apartments,” she said. “They’re somewhat traditional because they’re in this old, neat building.”

The units will be leased annually at \$950 per month. Because there is a level of affordability, only individuals earning up to 80 percent of the area median income, a maximum of \$46,100, will be eligible to become tenants.

There will be solar array on the building, Ms. Connolly said, and it is located on the sewer. A laundry room in the basement will have coin-operated washer and dryer machines. Accommodations will be made for any handicapped residents who cannot access the basement.

“It’s an affordable place to live right downtown,” she said of the building.

Ms. Connolly said that the housing trust hopes to receive certificates of occupancy for the apartments this August, in which case its target lease date is September 1.