

**CITY OF CENTRAL FALLS
OFFICE OF PLANNING +
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**



ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATION TO THE ZONING BOARD OF REVIEW

CASE 2016-01-29-1 (115 ILLINOIS STREET)



SUMMARY

Application Type: Special Use Permit + Dimensional Variance

Address/AP/Ward: 115 Illinois Street
Assessor's Plat 5, Lot 278
Ward 3

Applicant: The City of Central Falls, 580 Broad Street, Central Falls, RI 02863

Property Owner: The City of Central Falls, 580 Broad Street, Central Falls, RI 02863

Parcel Size: 5,140 sq. feet

Zoning: R-3

Project Description

The City is requesting a Special Use Permit for Educational Institution in an R-3 Zone per Sec. 304 Table 1 - 21.1, and a Dimensional Variance of off-street parking requirements per Sec. 801.8 The project has received Preliminary and Master Plan approval from the Central Falls Planning Board to convert a multi-family home to classroom and residential space for a tutoring center: The Rhode Island College Innovation Lab. This project will create ground-floor tutoring space with residence area for the tutors on the upper floors. The project will take advantage of the existing building as much as possible, while introducing some changes to accommodate the new spaces proposed.

The structure originally was a grand Victorian single-family home. During the twentieth century, it was converted to a multi-family home. Over time, the property declined to the point where it became a nuisance and haven for illegal activity. As this property is across the street from the high school, the City identified it as an opportunity for public investment to eliminate blight. After acquiring the property, it was the subject of suspected arson last winter. This project will restore much of the older character of the structure with materials selected for their durability. The existing structure will be retained.

Discussion

Prior to approval of a Special Use Permit, the Board is required to make positive findings on the following standards:

- (1) That the special use is specifically authorized by sections 304 and 514 of this ordinance, and setting forth the exact subsection of this ordinance containing jurisdictional authorization;

Educational Institutions are authorized in an R-3 Zone per Sec. 304 Table 1 - 21.1.

- (2) That the special use meets all of the criteria set forth in the subsection of this ordinance authorizing such special use; and

There are no criteria set forth in the subsection of the Zoning Ordinance authorizing Educational Institutions.

- (3) That the granting of this special use permit will not alter the general character of the surrounding area or impair the intent or purpose of this ordinance or the comprehensive plan of the city;

An mixed-use renovation of the structure at 115 Illinois will not alter the general character of the surrounding area, as the structure already exists. Renovating this structure will add-value to the surrounding area by eliminating the blight and illicit activity that have become associated with the building, and providing a safe place for CF students to extend their learning opportunities. The purpose of the Zoning Ordinance includes "Provide for a range of uses and intensities of use appropriate to the character of the city and reflecting current and expected future needs" (Section 100 B) and "The availability and capacity of existing and planned public and/or private services and facilities." (Section 100 C5). The proposed use is congruent with these outlined purposes. The Comprehensive Plan contains goals that promote projects like this, such as "Promote orderly growth and development that recognizes...the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities" (State Goal 1) and "To promote the protection of...cultural resources" (State and Municipal Goal 4).

Prior to approval of a dimensional variance, the Board is required to make positive findings on the following standards:

- (1) That the hardship from which the applicant seeks relief is due to the unique characteristics of the subject land or structure and not to general characteristics of the surrounding area; and not due to a physical or economic disability of the applicant;

The lot and building only allow for a certain number of off-street parking spaces. As this was once a single family home, the parcel does not accommodate the parking of multiple vehicles

and thus the hardship from which the applicant seeks relief is due to the unique characterizes of the subject land or structure and not to general characteristics of the surrounding area.

- (2) That said hardship is not the result of any prior action of the applicant and does not result primarily from the desire of the applicant to realize greater financial gain.

There is no evidence that the applicant's hardship is the result from prior action or the desire to realize greater financial gain as this will be for the use of students and student teachers.

- (3) That the granting of the requested variance will not alter the general characteristic of the area or impair the intent or purpose of this zoning ordinance or the comprehensive plan for the city;

The renovation of a blighted and vacant building that harbored illicit activity will not alter the general characteristics of the area, but add value to the area by reimagining the beauty of the building, to increasing Central Falls students' exposure to learning opportunities as well as by bringing the presence of higher education into the city. The bullet points below show how this project supports the zoning ordinance and comprehensive plan for the city.

- State Goal 1, "To promote orderly growth and development that recognizes...the availability of existing and proposed public and/or private services and facilities."
- State Goal 1, Municipal Goal 5: "Encourage creative combinations of commercial and residential uses;"
- State Goal 3, Municipal Goal 2, "Target specific areas of the City in phases for comprehensive renewal;" and
- State Goal 6 and Municipal Goal 2, "Promote redevelopment of blighted areas."

- (4) That the relief to be granted is the least relief necessary

Recommendation

Based on the above discussion, staff believes that all standards have been met and recommends that the requested Special Use Permit and Dimensional Variance be granted.