

City Planning Department



Memo

To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Doug McLean, AICP - Principal Planner / Administrative Officer
Date: April 29, 2021
Re: **Variance Application for 34 Commercial Street**

Owner/App: Stephen A. Rodio and Chunmei Du

Location: 34 Commercial Street, AP 1, Lot 83

Zone: B-1 (Single-family and two-family dwellings)

FLU: Single/Two Family Residential Less than 10.89 units per acre

DIMENSIONAL VARIANCE REQUESTS:

1. To allow a two-family dwelling on a lot totaling 6,000 ft² where 8,000 ft² is required [Section 17.20.120 – Schedule of Intensity]
2. To allow a two-family dwelling within the front yard setback from both the Commercial Street and the Sheldon Street rights-of-way (building is on a corner lot with 2 front yards). [Section 17.20.120 – Schedule of Intensity]
3. To allow the conversion of an existing building into a two-family dwelling that has several pre-existing non-conformities (side setbacks and lot coverage for example). [Section 17.20.120 – Schedule of Intensity]

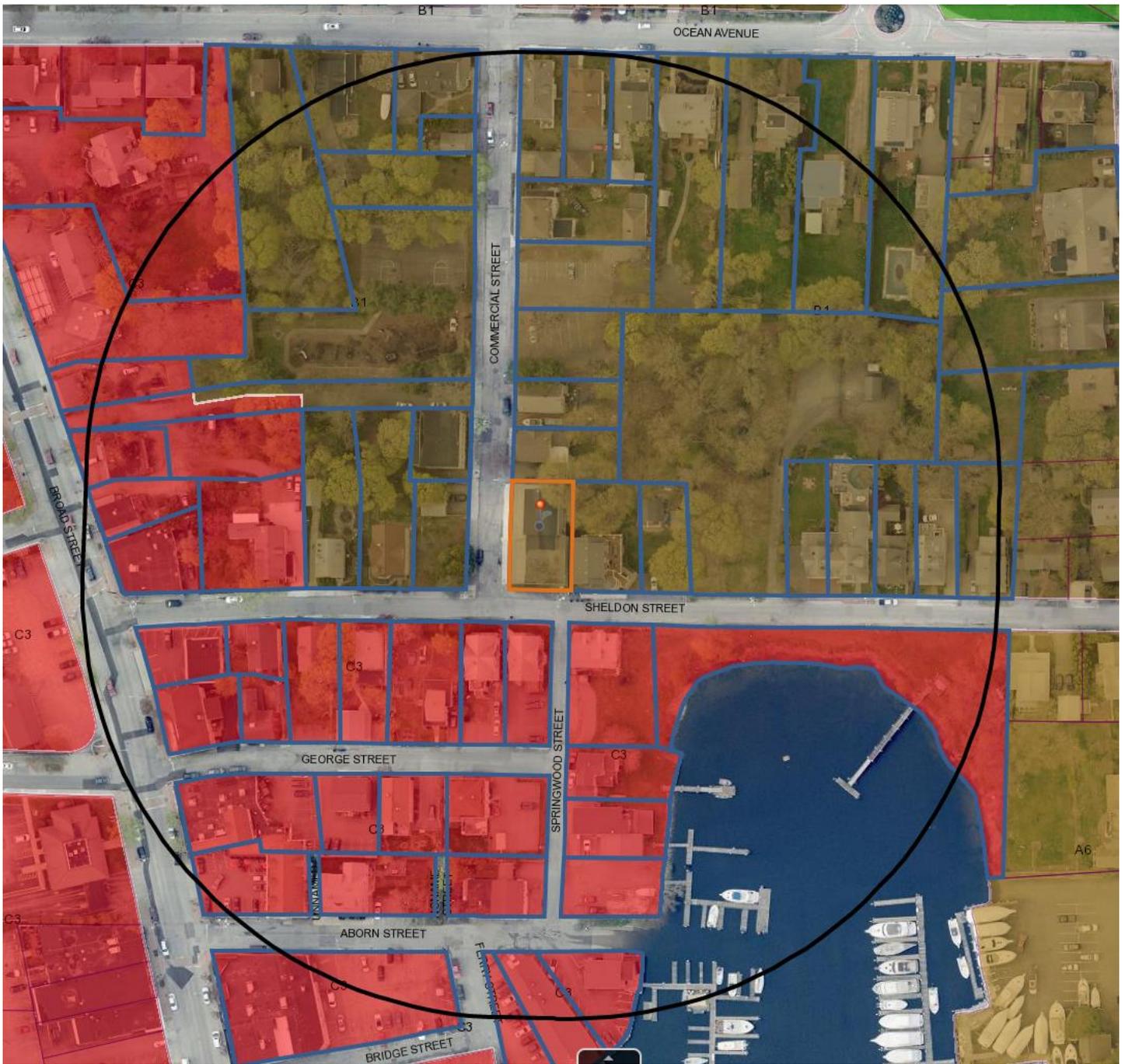
AERIAL VIEW (400 ft radius marked in black)



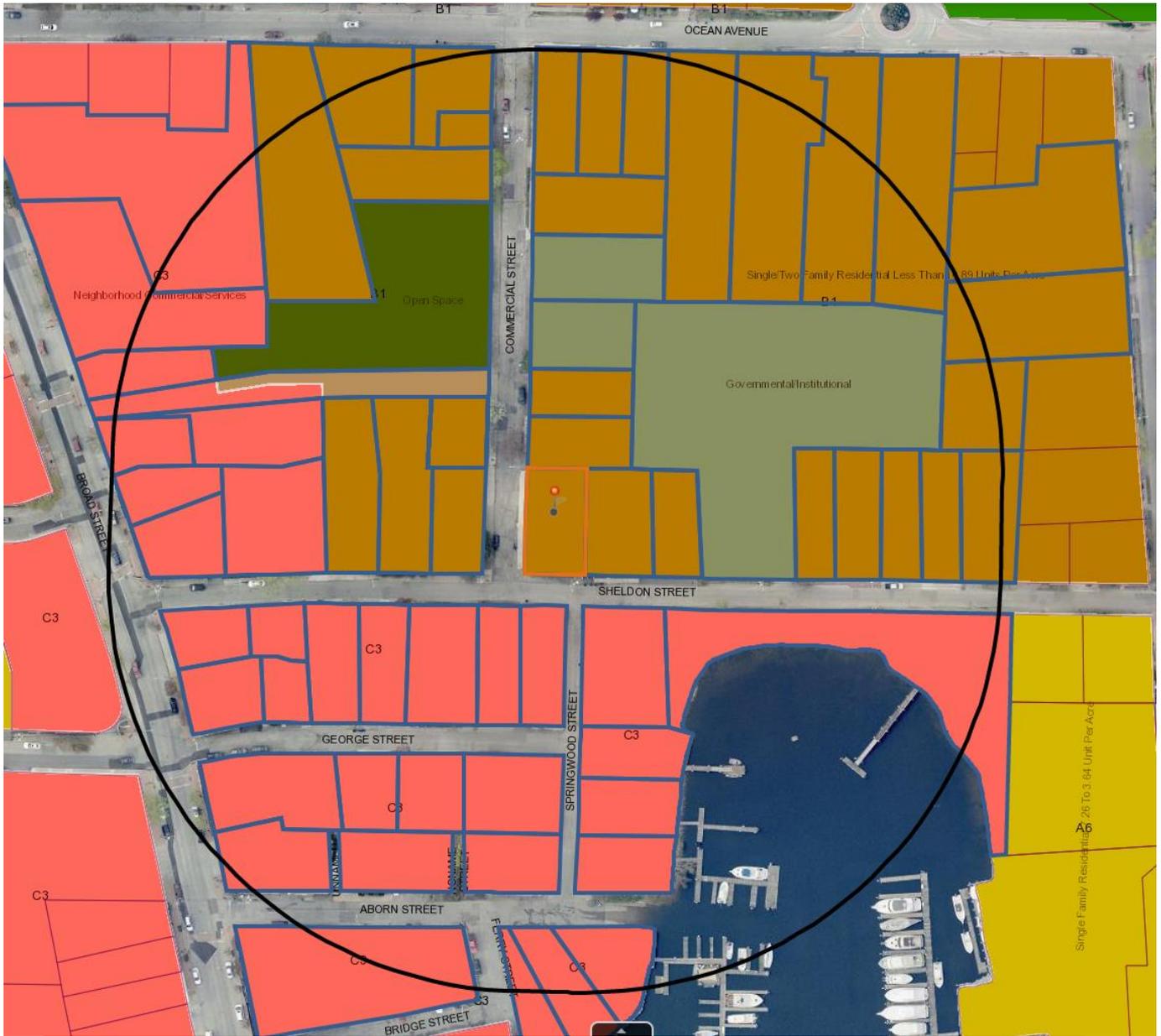
AERIAL VIEW (close up)



ZONING MAP



FUTURE LAND USE MAP



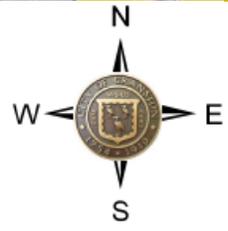
Future Land Use

- Governmenta...
- Highway Commercial/...
- Industrial
- Mixed Plan Development
- Multifamily

- Neighborhood Commercial/...
- Open Space
- Residential Less Than 10.39 Units Per Acre
- Right Of Way

- Single Family Residential 3.63 To 1 Unit Per Acre
- Single Family Residential 7.26 To 3.64 Unit Per Acre
- Single Family Residential Less Than 1 Unit Per Acre

- Single/Two Family Residential Less Than 10.89 Units Per Acre
- Special Redevelopm... Area
- Water



3-D AERIAL VIEW



STREET VIEW (from Commercial St.)



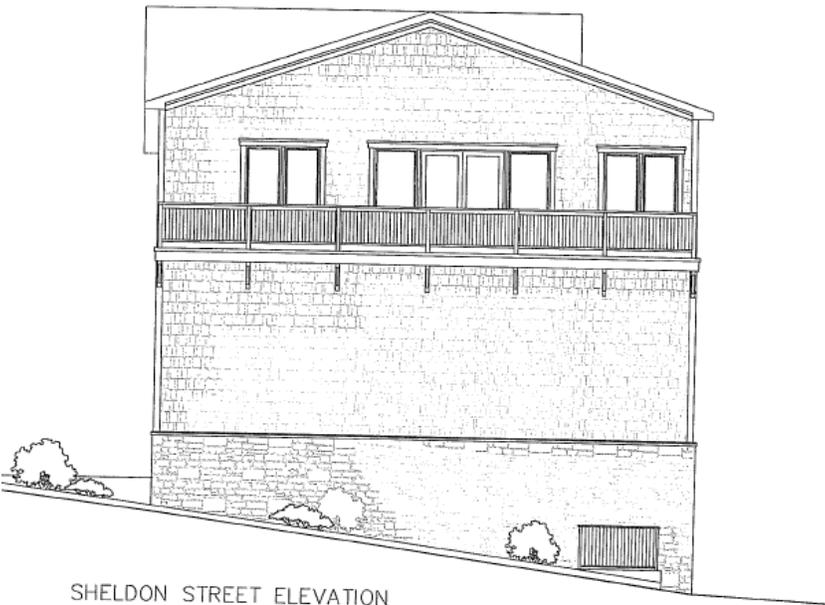
STREET VIEW (from Sheldon St.)



ELEVATIONS

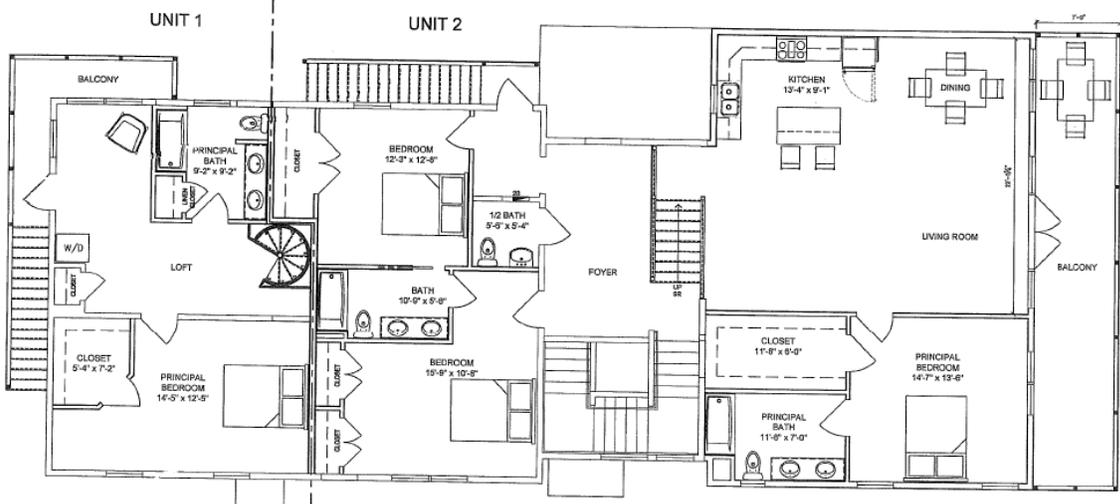


COMMERCIAL STREET ELEVATION

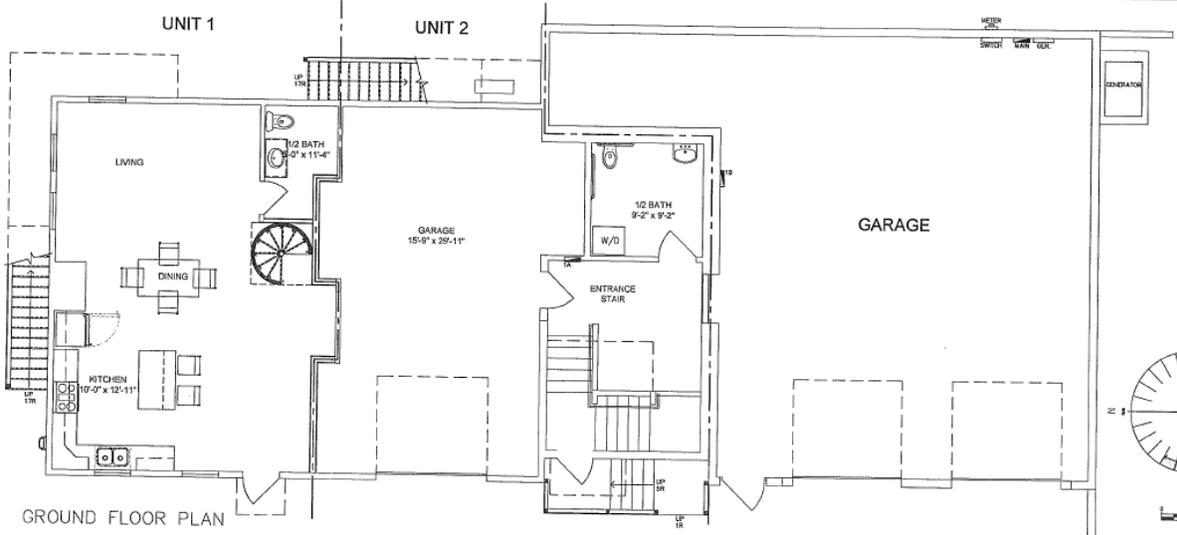


SHELDON STREET ELEVATION

FLOOR PLANS



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

FINDINGS OF FACT:

1. The applicant proposes to convert a commercial property (Salvation Army) into a 2-family dwelling in a B-1 zone. The proposed use is allowed in this zone, however there are a number of dimensional variances needed to accommodate the project.
2. The previous use of the property was as a Salvation Army Emergency Disaster Center. Previous to that it was the headquarters of the Pawtuxet Volunteer Fire Company. The previous commercial uses at this site were not allowed by-right at this property. The immediate proposed use of a two-family dwelling is allowed as a by-right use.
3. The structure requires dimensional relief for a number of conditions include front and side setbacks and lot coverage percentage.
4. The applicant is proposing a cantilevered deck that will extend over the building by 3 feet along the Sheldon Street right-of-way. This will result in the deck being approximately 5 feet from the property line. Aside from this change, there are no other expansions to the structure. Setback relief is requested along Sheldon Street to accommodate this expansion.
5. The applicant provided a neighborhood analysis with an itemized breakdown of the number of land use within a 400' radius. The majority of surrounding land uses are residential. Of the surrounding residential uses, approximately 16 lots are single family residences, 11 lots are 2-family residences, 7 lots are 3-family residences, 2 lots are 4-family residences, 9 lots are residential condos. Staff finds the applicant's neighborhood use analysis to provide positive evidence that the conversion of a commercial use to a 2-family residential use fits with the character of the neighborhood.
6. The applicant provided a neighborhood analysis with a breakdown of the size of other parcels within a 400' radius. The subject lot is 6,000 ft². The average lots size within a 400 foot radius is 7,037 ft². The average lots size of the surrounding eleven (11) 2-family dwellings is 7,766 ft². The requirement for a 2-family in this zone is 8,000 ft². Although the subject lot (6,000 ft²) is smaller than the average surrounding 2-family parcels (7,766 ft²), staff finds the applicant's neighborhood parcel size analysis to provide helpful information that the majority of surrounding 2-family dwellings are also on non-conforming, smaller-sized lots.
7. The property has interior garages and exterior parking opportunities that provide ample parking spaces. Per code, the property is only required to have 2 parking space (1 space per unit).
8. Based on the submitted building elevations (shown on page 9) as compared to the previous building conditions (shown on page 7), staff finds that the proposal would represent an overall aesthetic improvement to the property. The aesthetics improvements bring this property into greater conformity with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.
9. The Cranston Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map designates the subject parcels as "Single/Two Family Residential Less Than 10.89 units per acre". The proposed density

of the project is 14.52 units/per acres so the application is **inconsistent** with the Future Land Use Map despite the fit with community character.

10. The Land Use Plan Element recognizes that many existing lots in the eastern portion of the city are undersized, and the Comprehensive Plan supports the development of these lots, stating: “...the City grants variances routinely when properties are 5,000 square feet limiting the purpose and effectiveness of the existing minimum size requirements. The City needs to address this issue and consider changing regulations to reflect the higher density in these areas, which are essentially built out and have an older housing stock.” The Comprehensive Plan supports the development of undersized lots and provides clear policy direction relevant to this proposal.
11. The proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Housing Element in that development of infill lots is encouraged in Eastern Cranston.
12. Per findings #9-11 above, staff have found both positive and negative evidence relating to this application with regard to the Comprehensive Plan. It is staff’s opinion that it is **inconclusive** as to whether this proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

PLANNING ANALYSIS:

When looking at the application through the resulting outcomes to community character (as opposed to a zoning or Comprehensive Plan lens), the strengths of the application are evident. The conversion of the property from a commercial use to a residential use is well-suited for the surrounding neighborhood. The aesthetic improvements to the property provide further positive evidence for a fit with community character.

Although the proposal is denser than the property’s designation in the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map, the Plan also encourages this type of infill development through other policies within the Housing Element. Staff is of the view that a clear finding with regard to consistency with the Comprehensive Plan is not possible with both positive and negative evidence for this project. As a result, staff have determined that it is **inconclusive** as to whether this proposal is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Staff is of the view that this request is reasonable and would not have a negative impact on the surrounding neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATION:

Due to the finding that it is inconclusive as to whether this application is consistent with the comprehensive plan, and balancing that against the finding that the application will not negatively alter the character of the surrounding neighborhood, staff recommends the Plan Commission forward a **positive recommendation** on this application to the Zoning Board of Review.