

CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT



Memorandum

To: Cranston City Plan Commission
From: Beth Ashman, AICP | Assistant Planning Director
Date: November 26, 2024
Re: **Use and Parking Variances for 1728 /1730 Cranston Street**

Owner / Applicant: Alexandria Realty LLC
Location: 1728 /1730 Cranston Street
Parcels: Assessors Plat 11/2, Lot 3364
Zoning: Commercial C-5 – Heavy Business Industry
FLUM Designation: Neighborhood Commercial/Services

Subject Property:

The subject property is located in Knightsville at 1723 / 1730 Cranston Street, identified as Plat 11/2, Lot 3364, with a land area of \pm 0.080 acres, (3528 \pm sq. ft.)

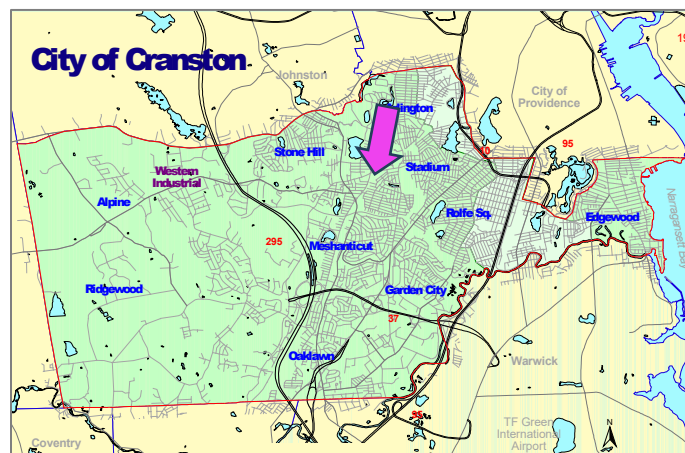
Request:

The applicant seeks to convert half of the first floor of this commercial building to a residential use. The building has an approved residential apartment on the second floor. The request for the use variance is to create a new residential unit on the first floor.














Relief from 17.92.010- Variances:

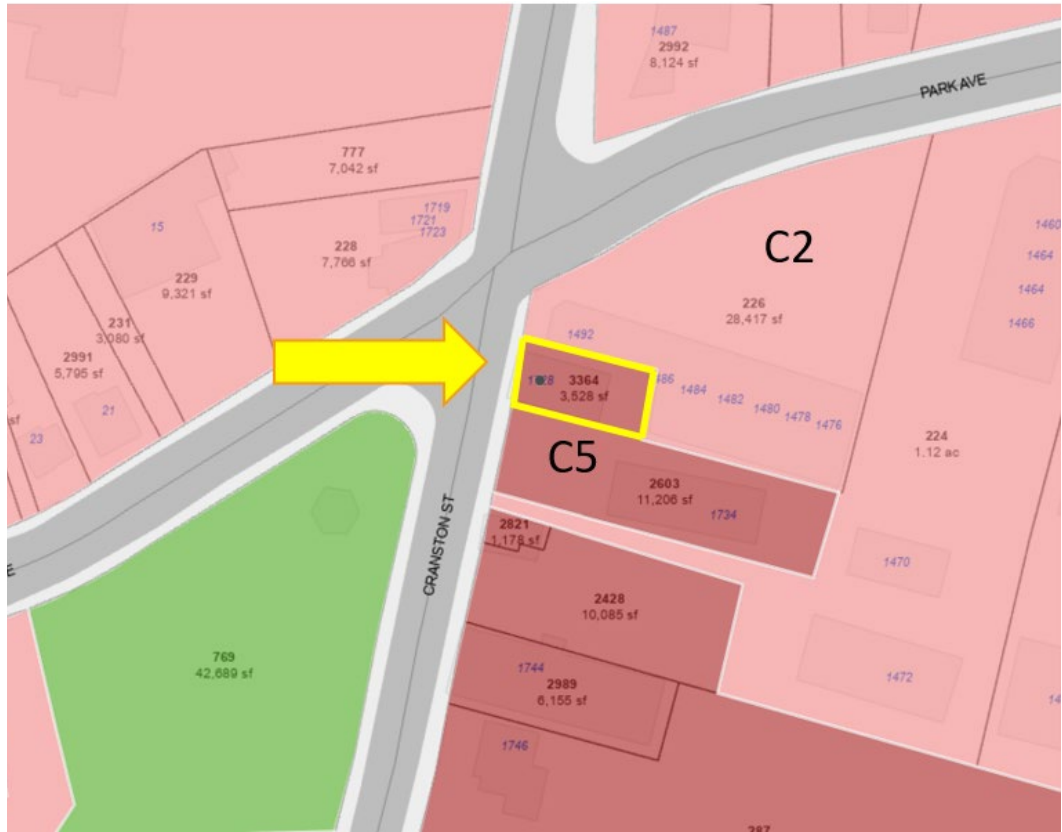
- *Use: C-5 zone does not allow any form of residential use including 1) multifamily dwelling, two-family dwelling, or residential above first floor commercial.*
- *Parking for residential: Parking ordinance requires 2 spaces per residential. There is no room on the property to add any parking for the second residential unit.*

LOCATION MAP






ZONING MAP

-  B1
-  B2
-  C1
-  C2
-  C3
-  C4
-  C5
-  EI
-  M1
-  M2
-  MPD
-  Other
-  S1



FUTURE LAND USE MAP



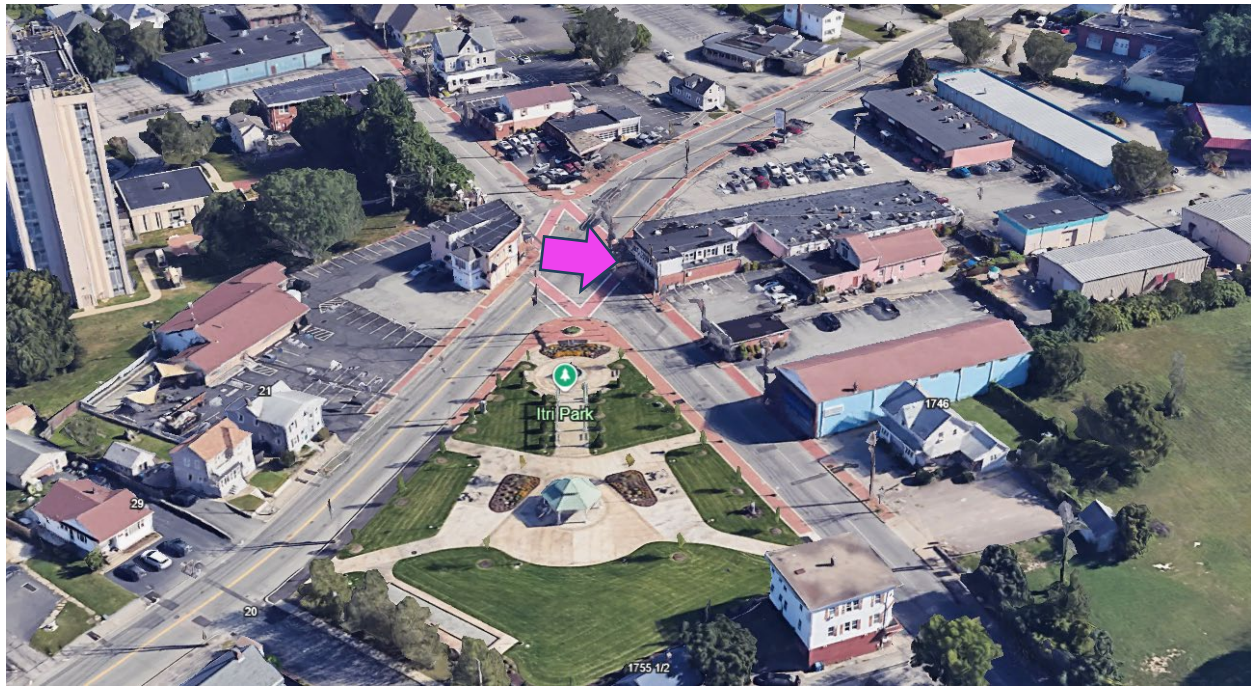
-  Multifamily
-  Neighborhood Commercial/Services
-  Open Space

OVERHEAD AERIAL VIEW



Source: Cranston GIS. Aerial Photo March 2024.

OBLIQUE AERIAL VIEW



Source: Google Earth viewed 11/12/2024

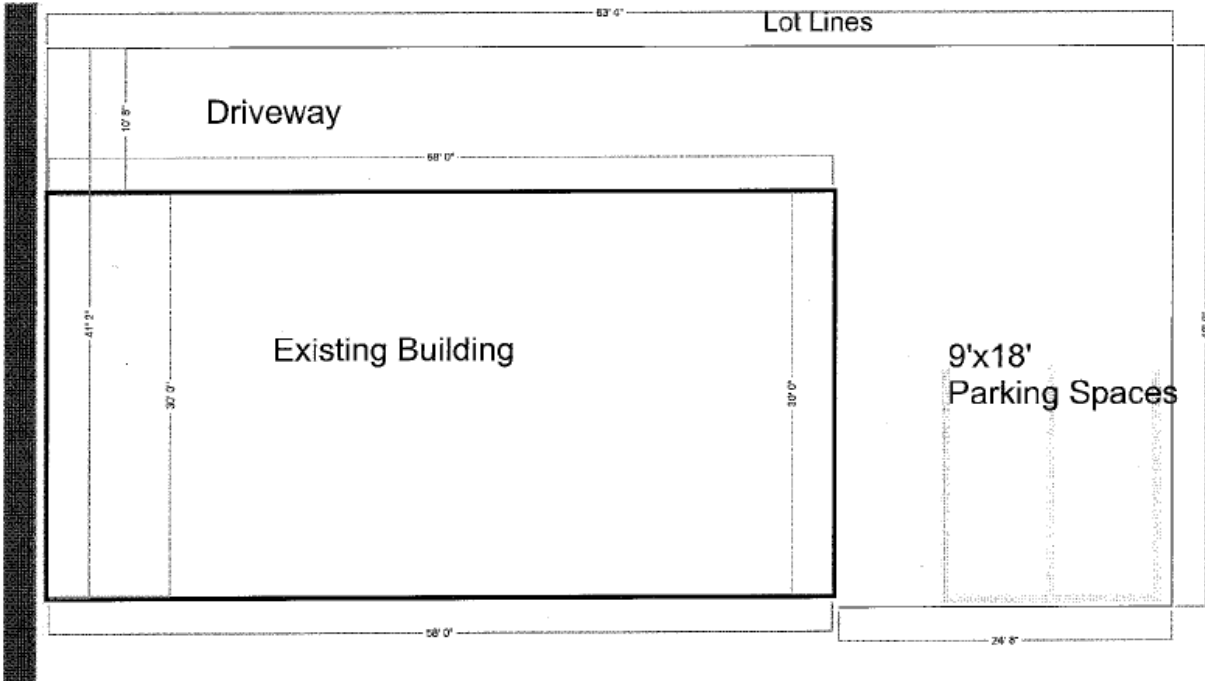
STREET VIEW



Source: Google Street View viewed 11/12/2024

SITE PLAN

Existing Site Plan and Parking at 1728 Cranston St.



FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The applicant seeks convert the rear half of the first floor of this commercial mixed-use building to a residential use. The building has an approved residential apartment on the second floor. The request for the use variance is to create a new residential unit on the first floor.
2. The first-floor residential dwelling unit would be approximately 800 sq ft, with 100 sq ft dedicated to the stairway, leaving 840 square feet of leasable commercial space.
3. Memorandum from 7/19/ 2016 signed by Stanly Pikul, Building Official confirms the property is a legal, non-conforming use as a residence above a business use in a C5 zone (mixed use). Tax assessor records document the 2nd floor residential use back to 1954.
4. Zoning Certificate issued 2/22/2022 indicates that conversion to a two-family dwelling would require ZBR approval.
5. Knightsville is one of the four village centers in Cranston called out in the Economic Development element of the Comprehensive Plan. The city has invested in new sidewalks, roads, lighting and a upgraded the park at Itri Square to enhance Knightsville as a restaurant district for economic development.
6. This commercial building on Itri Square in Knightsville dating back to at least 1954 is a good example of traditional neighborhood commercial development with storefronts lining the sidewalk and featuring large display windows.
7. Economic Development Director, Franklin Paulino noted that the lack of off-street parking combined with the lack of street parking in front has been a negative factor in leasing this property to commercial tenants.
8. The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) designates the subject parcel as Neighborhood Commercial/ Services. This designation is consistent with C-1, C-2., and C-3 zones. Multi-family and two-family residential are allowed uses in C-1 and C-2 districts.
9. The Comprehensive Plan outlines goals, policies, and action items pertaining to this proposal.
 - *Housing Goal 4: Promote housing opportunity for a wide range of household types and income levels.*
 - Housing Policy H-6: Maintain a varied housing stock, with units of different age, size, and type that are affordable to a wide range of incomes.
 - Housing Action H-4: Encourage housing that is mixed into commercial projects.
 - *ED Goal-2: Attract capital into Cranston and expand the City's economic base.*
 - Economic Development ED-14: Promote the development or redevelopment of neighborhood commercial centers including Knightsville to service local market areas to reduce cross-town traffic.

STAFF ANALYSIS

The application to the ZBA asks for a variance to allow a new residential unit on the first floor but is silent on plans to occupy or lease the first-floor commercial space.

A mix of residential and commercial uses is entirely consistent with the walkable traditional neighborhood center of Knightsville as it has existed in the last century or as it envisioned as "Neighborhood Commercial / Services" in the Future Land Use Map. The City Comprehensive

Plan supports giving zoning flexibility to owners trying find productive uses for older buildings. The existing mixed-use building at 1728-1970 street is an architectural asset, which would be easier to keep fully-occupied if it had greater access to off-street parking. Ideally, the owner of this property could lease parking from a nearby property owner to be more attractive to commercial tenants. An occupied store-front with visual interest in the display windows would contribute the vitality and attractiveness of Itri Square.

Staff notes two major concerns. 1). The vacant commercial space and display windows are a detriment to Itri Square and shrinking the commercial space to under 1000 sq. ft. will probably make it more difficult to rent to a commercial tenant. One solution would be to get a live/work tenant to operate a small business in the front, while residing in the back. Another solution would be to invite a community arts, historic, or education organization to use the display space in a way that would provide visual interest to the street, while the commercial space is vacant.

2). Parking is a limitation at this site and cannot be overcome with the existing structure without acquiring adjoining property or leasing parking spaces from an adjoining property. It is not impossible to find residential tenants for two units that do not maintain more than the two automobile-sized vehicles that can be accommodated on this lot.

It is the public interest and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan to grant this property variances necessary to continue to find economically productive uses while preserving the structure, which is an asset to Knightsville.

Staff has reviewed the requested relief for conformance and consistency with the required Findings of Fact in accordance with RIGL § 45-24-41 and finds as follows:

This property has a hardship stemming from its development before zoning or minimum parking requirement. It was built to serve neighborhood customers who arrived primarily as pedestrians. The subject property has a very narrow drive between it and the adjoining building leading to a limited space for parking, accommodating two cars or more smaller vehicles. There is no space on the property to add parking without demolishing/modifying the historic mixed-use property. The parking requirements for the commercial and residential mixed use could not be met on this property prior to this proposal and cannot be met with the addition of the first-floor residential unit. There do not appear to be any prior actions by the applicant that would have resulted in hardship. Granting the use and parking variances is reasonable and beneficial to support the continued productive use of this historic mixed-use property.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff find that this request for the use and parking variances is generally consistent with the Comprehensive Plan compatible with the general character of the surrounding neighborhood. Staff therefore recommends forwarding a **POSITIVE RECOMMENDATION** on the application to the Zoning Board of Review.

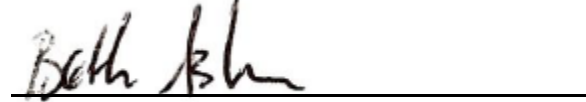
While staff is not recommending any conditions be placed on the approval, we have two recommendations for consideration by the applicant.

1. The residents of the building (combined for all units) cannot not keep more than two automobile-sized vehicles on site. The residential leases need to be clear about the allocation of parking spaces.

2. It is recommended that while the commercial space is vacant, the property owner find a creative way for the display in the front commercial windows to provide visual interest and contribute to the vitality of Itri Square.

Recommended Conditions of Approval: none

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beth Ashman", is written over a horizontal line.

Beth Ashman, AICP
Assistant Planning Director / Administrative Officer

Cc: City Planning Director
File