


FROM	NAME & TITLE	CHRIS RYER, DIRECTOR	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 TH FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET		
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #25-0071 / ZONING – CONDITIONAL USE CONVERSION OF SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLING UNIT TO 2 DWELLING UNITS IN THE R-8 ZONING DISTRICT – VARIANCES – 15 EAST WEST STREET		

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 North Holliday Street

DATE: July 29, 2025

At its regular meeting of July 17, 2025, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #25-0071, for the purpose of permitting, subject to certain conditions, the conversion of a single-family dwelling unit to 2 dwelling units in the R-8 Zoning District on the property known as 15 East West Street (Block 0965, Lot 046), as outlined in red on the accompanying plat; granting a variance regarding certain bulk regulations (lot size area); and providing for a special effective date.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report, which recommended approval of City Council Bill #25-0071 and adopted the following resolutions, with eight members being present (eight in favor):

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission finds, in accordance with §5-308 and §5-406 of Article 32 – *Zoning*, that:

- (1) the conditions on which the application is based are unique to the property for which the variance is sought and are not generally applicable to other property within the same zoning classification;
- (2) the unnecessary hardship or practical difficulty is caused by this Code and has not been created by the intentional action or inaction of any person who has a present interest in the property;
- (3) the purpose of the variance is not based exclusively on a desire to increase the value or income potential of the property;
- (4) the variance will not:
 - (i) be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity; or
 - (ii) substantially diminish and impair property values in the neighborhood;
- (5) the variance is in harmony with the purpose and intent of this Code;
- (6) the variance is not precluded by and will not adversely affect:
 - (i) any Urban Renewal Plan;
 - (ii) the City's Comprehensive Master Plan; or
 - (iii) any Historical and Architectural Preservation District; and
- (7) the variance will not otherwise:
 - (i) be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare; or
 - (ii) be in any way contrary to the public interest.

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its departmental staff, and adopts the findings, with consideration for testimony and facts presented in the meeting, and recommends that City Council Bill #25-0071 be **approved** by the City Council.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Tiso, Division Chief, Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-8358.

CR/ewt

attachment

cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office
The Honorable John Bullock, Council Rep. to Planning Commission
Ms. Rebecca Witt, BMZA
Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administration
Ms. Stephanie Murdock, DHCD
Ms. Hilary Ruley, Law Dept.
Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC
Mr. Luciano Diaz, DOT
Ms. Nancy Mead, Council Services
Mr. Basheer Abdalla, Applicant



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Jon Laria, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer
Director

July 17, 2025

REQUEST: City Council Bill #25-0071/ Zoning – Conditional Use Conversion of Single-Family Dwelling to Two Dwelling Units in the R-8 Zoning District – 15 East West Street

For the purpose of permitting, subject to certain conditions, the conversion of a single-family dwelling unit to two dwelling units in the R-8 Zoning District on the property known as 15 East West Street as outlined in red on the accompanying plat; granting variances regarding certain bulk regulations (lot area); and providing for a special effective date.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt findings and approve.

STAFF: Justin Walker

PETITIONER: Basheer Abdalla

OWNER: Basheer Abdalla

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: 15 East West Street is an end-of-row, single-family attached dwelling located within the South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan area. The surrounding row of single-family dwellings appears occupied and well maintained. Although the subject property is currently vacant, it retains essential structural elements, including intact doors, windows, and roofing. The subject property measures approximately 15 feet by 93 feet and is improved with a three-story structure measuring 15 feet by 50 feet. The property is zoned R-8.

General Area:

The subject property is located in the Federal Hill neighborhood, within the South Planning District. The property is zoned R-8, which spans several blocks to the south and encompasses a predominantly rowhouse residential area. To the north lies the East Cross Street corridor, zoned C-1, and characterized by neighborhood-level commercial uses. The block consists primarily of single-family structures, adjacent to a large multi-family building located at the opposite end of the block. Immediately across the street is the West Street Parking Garage, operated by the Parking Authority of Baltimore City.

HISTORY

The applicant previously applied to the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals (BMZA) for a residential conversion under permit number BMZ2024-00262. However, the BMZA does not have the authority to grant residential conversions in the R-8 zoning district, as such conversions must be approved by ordinance of the City Council.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The 2024 Comprehensive Master Plan for the City of Baltimore was enacted by Ordinance #24-426, dated December 2, 2024. The subject property is designated in the residential: higher density group in the General Land Use Plan. This proposed development conforms to that designation.

The property is located within the South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan area. While the plan does not specifically address this property or block, it does identify, through public input, that “residents are seeking a diverse set of housing types at a range of prices that would be affordable to current renters and homeowners alike.” Returning this property to productive use by bringing two rental units online would contribute to this objective.

ANALYSIS

Background: The proposal involves the conversion of an existing single-family dwelling unit into two, two-bedroom units. The project would return the currently vacant property to productive use.

Conditional Use Approval Standards:

§ 5-406. Approval standards.

(a) *Evaluation criteria.*

As a guide to its decision on the facts of each case, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals must consider the following, where appropriate:

- (1) the nature of the proposed site, including its size and shape and the proposed size, shape, and arrangement of structures;
- (2) the resulting traffic patterns and adequacy of proposed off-street parking and loading;
- (3) the nature of the surrounding area and the extent to which the proposed use might impair its present and future development;
- (4) the proximity of dwellings, churches, schools, public structures, and other places of public gathering;
- (5) accessibility of the premises for emergency vehicles;
- (6) accessibility of light and air to the premises and to the property in the vicinity;
- (7) the type and location of adequate utilities, access roads, drainage, and other necessary facilities that have been or will be provided;
- (8) the preservation of cultural and historic landmarks and structures;
- (9) the character of the neighborhood;
- (10) the provisions of the City’s Comprehensive Master Plan;
- (11) the provisions of any applicable Urban Renewal Plan;
- (12) all applicable standards and requirements of this Code;
- (13) the intent and purpose of this Code; and
- (14) any other matters considered to be in the interest of the general welfare.

(b) *Limited criteria for denying.*

The Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals or the City Council, may not approve a conditional use or sign unless, after public notice and hearing and on consideration of the standards required by this subtitle, the Board or Council finds that:

- (1) the establishment, location, construction, maintenance, or operation of the conditional use or sign would not be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare;
- (2) the use or sign would not be precluded by any other law, including an applicable Urban Renewal Plan;
- (3) the authorization would not be contrary to the public interest; and
- (4) the authorization would be in harmony with the purpose and intent of this Code.

Below is the staff's review of Article 32 – *Zoning*, §5-406 {“Approval standards”}: Staff finds no evidence that the proposed conversion would negatively affect public health, safety, or welfare. Rehabilitating this vacant structure will return it to productive use. The site is not located within an Urban Renewal Plan area, and no other regulations preclude the proposed conversion. The request is consistent with the General Land Use Plan as well as the goals of the applicable area master plan.

Insufficient Lot Area: In this zoning district, multi-family dwellings require 750 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit (Zoning Code Table 9-401). In this case, for two dwelling units, 1,500 square feet of lot area is required. The lot only encloses 1,395 square feet and so does not meet this requirement. A variance of 105 square feet, or 7%, is required.

Variance Approval Standards:

§ 5-308. Approval standards.

- (a) Required finding of practical difficulty.
To grant a variance, the Zoning Administrator, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals, or the City Council, as the case may be, shall find that:
 - (1) because of the conditions peculiar to the property, including particular physical surroundings, shape, or topographical conditions of the specific structure or land involved, a practical difficulty, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience, would result if the strict letter of the applicable requirement were carried out; or
 - (2) because of exceptional circumstances related to the specific structure or land involved, a practical difficulty, as distinguished from a mere inconvenience, would result if the strict letter of the applicable requirement were carried out.
- (b) Other required findings.
The Zoning Administrator, the Board of Municipal and Zoning Appeals, or the City Council, as the case may be, must also find that:
 - (1) the practical difficulty is caused by this Code and has not been created by the intentional action or inaction of any person who has a present interest in the property;
 - (2) the purpose of the variance is not based exclusively on a desire to increase the value or income potential of the property;
 - (3) the variance will not:
 - (i) be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity; or
 - (ii) substantially diminish and impair property values in the neighborhood;
 - (4) the variance is in harmony with the purpose and intent of this Code;
 - (5) the variance is not precluded by and will not adversely affect:
 - (i) any Urban Renewal Plan;
 - (ii) the City's Comprehensive Master Plan; or
 - (iii) any Historical and Architectural Preservation District; and
 - (6) the variance will not otherwise:
 - (i) be detrimental to or endanger the public health, safety, or welfare; or
 - (ii) be in any way contrary to the public interest

Staff finds that the property meets the standards outlined in § 5-308. The site is an end-of-row unit with a third door that faces the side of the property, an as-built condition not commonly found on other structures in row or within the neighborhood. This peculiar condition makes the property more suitable for two dwelling units than other properties within the neighborhood with a similar lot area.

The condition is original to the structure and not the result of any action by the current owner. The requested relief is not exclusively to increase the property's value or income potential. The variance will not negatively impact nearby properties, the character of the neighborhood, or the public welfare, and is consistent with the intent of the Zoning Code. For these reasons, staff supports the granting of the variance.

Equity: The proposed conversion of 15 East West Street supports equity goals by reactivating a vacant property. Located in Federal Hill, the project adds two rental units to a high demand area, increasing the choices available to renters. While market rate, the additional units expand housing choice and align with the South Baltimore Gateway Master Plan, which calls for more diverse and affordable housing types. Reusing the existing structure also preserves neighborhood character while allowing for these new housing options.

Notification: Notification was given via the required posting on the property.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chris Ryer
Director