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Chinese developer proposes 55-foot, 19-unit building on Patsy's site in East Somerville

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A Chinese developer is looking to build a 55-foot-tall residential project on top of Patsy's Pastries in East Somerville, according to plans filed with the city.

At a Design Review Commission meeting Oct. 24, architects laid out plans for the 19-unit structure, which would have room for retail on the first floor. Both Patsy's location at 182 Broadway and the next door building at 176 Broadway would be torn down, architect Jai Singh of Khalsa Design told the commission, but Patsy's was "very interested" in occupying the retail area in the new building.

Both buildings are owned by Silvestro Ferrigno, who has an agreement to sell to the YIHE Group, according to attorney Richard DiGirolamo, who is representing YIHE. YIHE is based in Cambridge and is also planning a 56-unit residential building at the Lechmere Auto Wash on the Somerville/Cambridge line by the Twin City Plaza. Ferrigno could not be reached for comment.

The YIHE Group is a subsidiary of YIHE Real Estate, which is headquarted in Guangzhou, China, DiGirolamo said. According to their website, the firm was established in 1992 and "focuses on the development of large-scale luxury residential projects all over China." DiGirolamo said he's seeing more foreign investors in the area, although mainly in Cambridge as opposed to Somerville.

The site is mostly located in one of the city's controversial CCD55 zoning districts, which allows construction of mixed-use buildings up to 55 feet tall. It also does not require significant setbacks from the buildings next door, although houses in the rear of the site are in a different district and do require 10-foot setbacks.

Commission members were critical of the building's parking plan, which has three commercial space on the side of the property and 17 spaces for residents in the rear. Singh said his firm comsidered underground parking but that would be too difficult on the site. Members also wondered if the building's 19 units were too many. As currently planned, the second and third floor would each have six residential units, while the fourth floor would have four units and the fifth floor three. Unit sizes range from 663 square feet to 1,347 square feet.

Both candidates for Ward 1 Alderman, Elio LoRusso and Matt McLaughlin, had reservations about the project, especially how it would affect parking in the neighborhood. But both also wanted to see more details. LoRusso said he wanted to look at the building's footprint and how it fit the neighborhood.

"If it doesn't fit the neighborhood, it doesn't belong there," LoRusso said.

"I'd hate to see [Patsy's] get replaced by condos, which would be too symbolic for me to deal with," McLaughlin said. "Seeing a small business in the community get replaced by condos, I wouldn't appreciate it."

However, he wanted to hear other residents' thoughts on the proposal.

"I would want to ask the community how they felt about it," McLaughlin said. "I'd like to hear what other residents say, not just myself."

And both candidates agreed that the pastry store leaving would be a huge blow to the city.

"We'd hate to see Patsy's leave, they've been here 40 years," LoRusso said. "Everyone knows Patsy's."

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Bill Ritchotte Rank 826

I'm not sure why Matt and Elio are concerned about Patsy's, they would most likely occupy the retail space. This is exactly what Lower Broadway (LowBro) needs. Mixed use, people who will live and spend money in the neighborhood.

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