



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2011-23
Date: April 20, 2011
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 22-24 Hudson Street

Applicant Name: Derick Snare

Applicant Address: 158 Central Street, Somerville, MA 02145

Property Owner Name: Thomas and Evelyn Battinelli

Property Owner Address: 22-24 Hudson Street, Somerville, MA 02145

Alderman: Sean O'Donovan

Legal Notice: Applicant, Derick Snare and owners, Thomas and Evelyn Battinelli, seek a special permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a dormer on an existing three-family residence. RA zone.

Zoning District/Ward: RA / Ward 5

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit SZO §4.4.1

Date of Application: March 22, 2011

Dates of Public Meeting • Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals **4/20/11**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 3,761 square foot lot on which is an approximately 6,047 gross square foot (3,977 net square feet) three-family house. The house is a 2½ story structure according to the Assessor's Office, and would be considered 2½ stories for zoning purposes, but the Applicant and owner have indicated that the structure consists of three full stories with an attic space. The structure has a gambrel roof with a bay on the west side and two dormers on the east side (left side as you face the front) of the structure, one with a gable roof and the other with a shed.

2. Proposal: The proposal is to expand the gable dormer on the left (east) side of the dwelling that is approximately 13 feet long. The Applicant would like to expand this dormer 8½ feet towards the front of the structure, which would make the dormer a total of 21½ feet long. This length, combined



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with the length of the existing smaller shed dormer on that side of the structure, would total just less than 50% the length of the roof on that side, which is the maximum percentage allowed in an RA district. A dormer beyond this size would reclassify the house as a three-story house, and no more than 2.5 stories are allowed in the RA district. The dormer would sit three feet in from the edge of the roof line. As part of the dormer expansion, the Applicant is proposing to remove the gable roof on the dormer and install a shed style roof across the entire dormer. The dormer will provide headroom for a study to be created in the expanded space, allowing for the owners to move their current office space out of one of their children's bedrooms. There are currently two large windows on the dormer and the Applicant is proposing to add an additional two windows of the same size on the expanded portion of the dormer, as well as a smaller window on the side of the dormer that faces the street.



West Side of 22-24 Hudson Street



East Side of 22-24 Hudson Street



Dormer on Left is the Proposed Dormer to be Expanded



View from Hudson Street

3. Nature of Application: The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to several dimensional requirements, including lot area, lot area per dwelling unit, floor area ratio, building height, and front and side yard setbacks. The proposed dormer will affect the nonconforming side yard setback and floor area ratio. The nonconforming side yard is approximately 2 feet and the minimum required for this house in this district would be 7 feet 2 inches with the reduction allowed for narrow lots. The floor area ratio will increase slightly with the new square footage that will be accessible space. The current floor area ratio is 1.06, which is already greater than the minimum in the district of 0.75. These existing nonconformities require the Applicant to obtain a special permit under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO). The house would still be considered a 2½ story structure because the combined length of the dormers on the east side of the structure would be less than 50% of the length of the structure.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding neighborhood is comprised of single- and two-family homes with similar massing, along with some three-family homes as well. The majority of the homes have gable roofs with either a shed or gable style dormer.



Oblique Aerial Image of the Hudson Street Neighborhood (22-24 Hudson Street is Marked in the Center)

5. Impacts of Proposal: As proposed, the shed style dormer (Proposed A, drawings 3 and 4) would be quite large and will be a prominent projection that makes the roof seem heavy. Additionally, with the shed dormer design, a substantial portion of siding would be visible, especially from the street as is somewhat evident in drawing 3. This would also give the front elevation of the structure an unbalanced look as is evident in the same drawing. Large shed dormers are not prevalent in this area and its design is important for the appearance of the structure, as well as being a model for other dormers that may be built in this area. Dormers are intended to be small elements that increase the living space in the half story and not extensions of the roof to make a full third story or give the appearance of a full third story. Despite this shed dormer being designed to keep the project at 2.5 stories, the proposed design creates a greater impact than many dormers at 50% of a roof line, and is therefore not contextual, and may be considered to be inconsistent with the intent of the ordinance. This is the reason that the Planning Staff seeks to discourage shed dormers in these circumstances.

While the Applicant applied for a shed dormer, and would prefer that this dormer be approved, the Staff prefers the alternative proposed design: a hipped gable dormer. The hipped gable style dormer (Proposed B, drawings 5 and 6) has elements that are much more preferable in the design of a dormer. A hipped

gable design would have less overall siding visible, especially when viewed from the street, and create more roof area giving the dormer the appearance that it is subordinate to the roof. Furthermore, the hipped gable style would give the existing roof and the front elevation of the structure a much more balanced look as is evident in drawing 5. This particular style of dormer is also much more in harmony with the bay on the opposite side of the structure than a shed style design. The hipped gable style dormer is more in context, and therefore is not inconsistent with the SZO.

In both of the proposed design options, a double window would be added to the portion of the dormer that is being expanded. An additional window is being proposed in shed dormer design on the side of the dormer that faces the street. These windows on the proposed dormer expansion, in both designs, help to add interest to the dormer. Being of the same style window as those on the first and second floors of the structure also helps to relate the new windows to those on the rest of the dwelling. The houses adjacent to the subject property on the side the dormer is proposed for construction are separated by a driveway and all dwellings currently have numerous windows that face each other, so privacy is not a major concern.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicant stated that the dormer will have improved insulation when construction is complete.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

Ward Alderman: Alderman O'Donovan has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

Historic Preservation: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1 & 5.1):

In order to grant a special permit, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.1.4 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.1.4 in detail.

1. Information Supplied: The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.1.2 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project with respect to the required special permit.

2. Compliance with Standards: The Applicant must comply "with such criteria or standards as may be set forth in this Ordinance which refer to the granting of the requested special permit."

In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff find that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure as conditioned. The dwelling will continue to be considered a 2½ story structure by the Assessor's Office because the dormer's length is less than 50% of the length of the structure. Privacy is not a concern as there are already several windows on this side of the dwelling facing the neighboring structures at 18 and 20 Waldo Street, which also have multiple windows on the rear of their structures which face 22-24 Hudson Street.

3. Consistency with Purposes: The Applicant has to ensure that the project "is consistent with (1) the general purposes of this Ordinance as set forth in Article 1, and (2) the purposes, provisions, and specific objectives applicable to the requested special permit which may be set forth elsewhere in this Ordinance, such as, but not limited to, those purposes at the beginning of the various Articles."

One purpose of the ordinance is to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; this particularly applies to this proposal. This house is not designated as a Local Historic District but it contributes to the architectural fabric of the City. The proposal would be consistent with the purpose of the district as an alteration to the three-family dwelling. However, the shed style dormer is discouraged because they can greatly alter the appearance of the structure in a negative manner. While shed dormers provide greater headroom within the structure, they do not always respect the architectural character of the original structure, and they provide a significant visible profile from the front façade that makes the dormer overpower the house. The shed style dormer option (Proposed A) as shown in drawings 3 and 4, will change the character of the traditional 2½ story gambrel appearance of the structure. Planning Staff would much rather see the hipped gable dormer style illustrated (Proposed B) in drawings 5 and 6. This is a more preferable design than the creation of a 21½ foot large shed dormer. This would not be consistent with the dormers in the surrounding area because of its large size. While there are dormers on many of the structures in the surrounding area, these are predominantly small in stature. The owners have stated concerns regarding the cost of construction for a hipped gable dormer and the amount of snow that would be pushed onto their driveway from the design of the hipped gable dormer as reasons why they would prefer to construct a shed style dormer. The Applicant has also submitted additional materials and images from the surrounding area to support their case to construct a shed style dormer.

Staff finds that either the shed or hipped gable dormer design proposal, as conditioned, **is consistent** with the purposes established for the RA district in which the property is located, namely “to establish and preserve quiet neighborhoods of one- and two-family homes, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such districts.” Staff finds that this dormer expansion, whether it be a hipped gable or shed style design, as conditioned, will not negatively impact the local neighborhood uses in the area.

4. Site and Area Compatibility: The Applicant has to ensure that the project “(i)s designed in a manner that is compatible with the characteristics of the built and unbuilt surrounding area, including land uses.”

There are dormers on many of the homes in the neighborhood that surround the subject property, both of shed and gable dormer style. However, many of the shed style dormers in the area are not as large as the one proposed in drawings 3 and 4 (Proposed A). A shed dormer on this home in this location is not compatible with the design of this house. The original dormer was therefore designed with an articulated roof line that should be retained in any new dormer design.

Planning Staff has included conditions attached to the special permit that would dictate whether the dormer be designed in a shed style (Condition #2) or as a hipped gable style (Condition #3). Planning Staff has left the decision as to which dormer design should be implemented to the Zoning Board of Appeals. As stated above, Staff would prefer to see the hipped gable dormer design implemented, as opposed to the shed style design. If the Board chooses to accept Staff’s recommendation and desires the hipped gable style dormer as drawn in “Proposed B”, drawings 5 and 6, the Board should eliminate Condition #2 as part of the decision. However, if the Board prefers the shed style design for the dormer as shown in “Proposed A”, drawings 3 and 4, they should eliminate Condition #3 from the list of conditions.

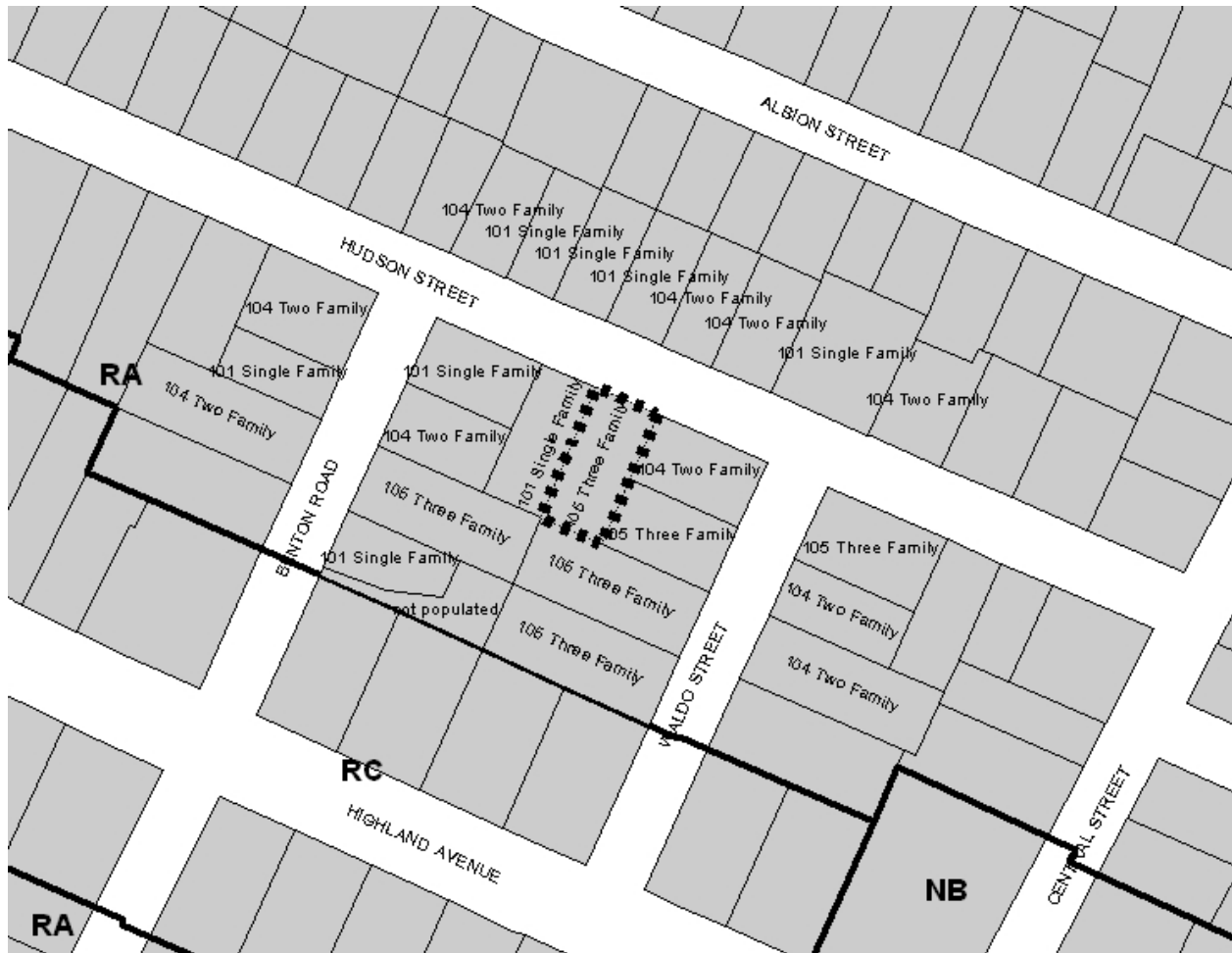
III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §4.4.1 & 5.1

Based on the above findings and subject to the conditions below, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**.

The recommendation is based upon a technical analysis by Planning Staff of the application material based upon the required findings of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and is based only upon information submitted prior to the public hearing. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations, findings and/or conditions based upon additional information provided to the Planning Staff during the public hearing process.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes						
1	Approval is to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a dormer on an existing three-family residence. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	Plng.							
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>(March 22, 2011)</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>March 25, 2011 with a revision date of April 6 (April 7, 2011)</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan and front & side elevations)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(March 22, 2011)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	March 25, 2011 with a revision date of April 6 (April 7, 2011)	Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan and front & side elevations)
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March 25, 2011 with a revision date of April 6 (April 7, 2011)	Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan and front & side elevations)									
Any changes to the approved elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.										
2	The Applicant and Owner shall use drawing number 3 entitled “Floor Plan (partial) & Front Elevation – Proposed ‘A’” and drawing number 4 entitled “Side Elevation – Proposed ‘A’” (both stamped by OSPCD on April 7, 2011) for the design of the shed dormer.	Zoning Board of Appeals Hearing	Plng.							
3	The Applicant and Owner shall use drawing number 5 entitled “Floor Plan (partial) & Front Elevation – Proposed ‘B’” and drawing number 6 entitled “Side Elevation – Proposed ‘B’” (both stamped by OSPCD on April 7, 2011) for the design of the hipped gable dormer.	Zoning Board of Appeals Hearing	Plng.							
4	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau’s requirements.	CO	FP							
5	The roofing, siding and trim on the subject dormer shall match that of the existing structure.	Final sign off	Plng.							
6	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five working days in advance of a request for a final inspection by Inspectional Services to ensure the proposal was constructed in accordance with the plans and information submitted and the conditions attached to this approval.	Final sign off	Plng.							



22-24 Hudson Street