



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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**Case #:** ZBA 2010-70  
**Date:** April 21, 2011  
**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site: 71 Linwood Street**

**Applicant Name:** Herb Chambers I-93, Inc. d/b/a Chambers Motorcars  
**Applicant Address:** 259 McGrath Highway Somerville, MA 02145  
**Property Owner Name:** NSTAR Electric Company  
**Property Owner Address:** One Nstar Way Westwood, MA 02090  
**Agent Name:** Richard Di Girolamo  
**Agent Address:** 429 Broadway Somerville, MA 02145  
**Alderman:** Maryann M. Heuston

Legal Notice: Applicant Herb Chambers Motorcars and Owner NSTAR Electric Company, seeks a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §5.2.1 to use the existing structure for an automobile repair facility (SZO §7.11.5.b and/or §7.11.6.b).

Zoning District/Ward: Industrial A (IA) / Ward 2

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §5.2.1

Date of Application: 10/22/2010

Date(s) of Public Meeting/Hearing: Planning Board **12/2/10** • Zoning Board of Appeals **12/15/10**

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: 71 Linwood Street is a 28,589 square foot lot with an office/ light industrial space building of 18,848 square feet.

2. Proposal: The building has previously been utilized by NSTAR electric company. Herb Chambers Motorcars would like to convert this use to an auto repair facility. Repairs and improvements will be performed here for used vehicles to prepare the vehicles for resale or to be sent to auction. The space may also be used to repair customer vehicles during peak times and during the



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construction at the main facility at McGrath Highway. But, at no time will customers be at the facility. Vehicles to be repaired will be delivered to and from the facility by Herb Chambers Motorcars employees.

3. Nature of Application: Because this facility is establishing an automotive repair use greater than 5,000 square feet, the change in use requires a special permit with site plan review, per SZO §5.2.1.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: This area is zoned as Industrial A. The surrounding area contains other uses such as light industry, motor vehicle uses, accessory land for commercial uses, and warehouse space. This facility is approximately a tenth of a mile from the Herb Chambers headquarters at 259 McGrath Highway, and would compliment their business there.

5. Impacts of Proposal: Most of the building construction will be internal to outfit the structure with car lifts (9 to 10) and the electrical capacity/components necessary to perform the repairs on the vehicles. Exterior construction will be limited because site access and access into the building is already sufficient with two overhead garage doors already in place at the southern corner of the building. The Applicant has submitted a site plan that displays an improved parking layout at the site, along with some landscaping to help improve the greenspace at the site as well as provide some separation between the sidewalk on Poplar Street and the parking area.

6. Green Building Practices: None indicated.

7. Comments:

*Fire Prevention*: Deputy Chief William Lee stated that “71 Linwood Street needs final approval for fire protection systems.”

*Ward Alderman*: Alderman Heuston has been notified but has provided no comments at this time.

*Engineering*: Have been notified and are awaiting comments.

*Traffic & Parking*: Have been notified and are awaiting comments.

*Lights & Lines*: Have been notified and are awaiting comments.

*Wire Inspection*: Have been notified and are awaiting comments.

*Conservation Commission*: Have been notified and are awaiting comments.

*Transportation and Infrastructure*: Arn Franzen, Director of Parks and Open Space stated the following: As we discussed, it is my recommendation that the property owner at 71 Linwood Street be required to create and maintain a substantial green planted edge between the edge of sidewalk and the paved area around their building, and that this space be planted with an appropriate species of tree. The edge of the planted space should be raised, and constructed in a manner that the planted material is protected from vehicular traffic and snow plows. Granite curbing similar to that used for street curbing is recommended, but precast concrete curbing would suffice.

Dimensions should be a minimum of 10-12 inches higher than the surrounding surface and three feet wide at the inside. Planter length should be continuous along the property but could be broken into sections

with a minimum 6 foot inside linear dimension. Note that the minimum tree well in the City is 3 feet by 5 feet, but trees in raised planters may need additional root space if they are to survive.

Spacing between trees should be 8 to 10 feet apart depending upon the final layout and the tree species selected. Lower planting of shrubs and groundcovers could be considered in addition to trees, but establishing new tree plantings should be the priority.



Existing Conditions





Existing Conditions

## **II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT with SITE PLAN REVIEW (SZO §5.2):**

In order to grant a special permit with site plan review, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.2.5 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.2.5 in detail.

1. Information Supplied: The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.2.3 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project.
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 with site plan review.”

In considering a special permit under § 4.5 of the SZO, Staff find that the use proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing use.

3. Purpose of District: The Applicant has to ensure that the project "is consistent with the intent of the specific zoning district as specified in Article 6”.

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district, 6.1.8. IA - Industrial Districts which is, “To establish and preserve areas for industrial and related uses which are not incompatible with commercial uses; uses which are most appropriately located as neighbors of industrial uses including living and studio space for artists; and uses which are necessary to service the immediate needs of industrial establishments in those areas, and accessory uses to industrial uses such as day care centers, cafeterias, health facilities, and the like.”

4. Site and Area Compatibility: The Applicant has to ensure that the project “(i)s designed in a manner that is compatible with the existing natural features of the site and is compatible with the characteristics of the surrounding area, and that the scale, massing and detailing of the buildings are compatible with those prevalent in the surrounding area”.

The Applicant is only proposing to perform interior renovations of the existing building which would maintain the compatibility of the existing building with those in the surrounding area. The site modifications with regard to parking and landscaping will be an improvement to what is currently on the site.

5. Functional Design: The project must meet “accepted standards and criteria for the functional design of facilities, structures, and site construction.”

Staff finds that, with the proposed conditions, the site would meet standards for a functional design. A proposed condition is that the Applicant complete site design improvements which would include the installation of three handicap access points at the intersection of Linwood Street and Poplar Street as there are currently no accessible access points to cross the street at that intersection.

6. Impact on Public Systems: The project will “not create adverse impacts on the public services and facilities serving the development, such as the sanitary sewer system, the storm drainage system, the public water supply, the recreational system, the street system for vehicular traffic, and the sidewalks and footpaths for pedestrian traffic.”

The renovated structure will not have an adverse impact on the public services and facilities serving the development. There are already public utilities serving the subject property and there will be no need to increase their capacity to serve the new use. The proposal will improve the existing sidewalk and footpaths for pedestrian traffic and as well as improve the pedestrian traffic pattern in the area.

7. Environmental Impacts: “The proposed use, structure or activity will not constitute an adverse impact on the surrounding area resulting from: 1) excessive noise, level of illumination, glare, dust, smoke, or vibration which are higher than levels now experienced from uses permitted in the surrounding area; 2) emission of noxious or hazardous materials or substances; 3) pollution of water ways or ground water; or 4) transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception.”

The proposed use of the site is consistent with industrial uses that are already occurring in the surrounding area. Staff is concerned that the long-term plans for redevelopment of the area will require this building to remain in an area where other lots may be improved for more pedestrian-oriented purposes, but feels that the proposed exterior redesign will ensure that the site can operate for this use with minimal impacts on higher-value development that may occur in the area in the long-term after arrival of the green line.

8. Consistency with Purposes: “Is consistent with: 1) the purposes of this Ordinance, particularly those set forth in Article 1 and Article 5; and 2) the purposes, provisions, and specific objectives applicable to the requested special permit with site plan review which may be set forth elsewhere in this Ordinance, such as, but not limited to, those at the beginning of the various sections.”

The proposal is consistent with the general purposes of the Ordinance as set forth under §1.2, which includes, but is not limited to promoting “the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants of the City of Somerville; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to adequately protect the natural environment; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City.”

9. Preservation of Landform and Open Space: The Applicant has to ensure that “the existing land form is preserved in its natural state, insofar as practicable, by minimizing grading and the erosion or stripping of steep slopes, and by maintaining man-made features that enhance the land form, such as stone walls, with minimal alteration or disruption. In addition, all open spaces should be designed and planted to enhance the attractiveness of the neighborhood. Whenever possible, the development parcel should be laid out so that some of the landscaped areas are visible to the neighborhood.”

There is currently minimal landscaping on the site along the Linwood Street side of the property but the rest of the entire site is paved or covered by the existing structure. The Applicant has submitted a site plan

that would improve the parking organization at the site and minimally increase the amount of landscaping on the site. Staff is recommending an updated landscaping plan that would improve the proposed landscaping area. As is noted in the comments from the Transportation and Infrastructure Department, a minimum planting bed width of three feet is recommended to maintain the vegetation that is proposed to be planted there for the long term.

10. Relation of Buildings to Environment: The Applicant must ensure that “buildings are: 1) located harmoniously with the land form, vegetation and other natural features of the site; 2) compatible in scale, design and use with those buildings and designs which are visually related to the development site; 3) effectively located for solar and wind orientation for energy conservation; and 4) advantageously located for views from the building while minimizing the intrusion on views from other buildings.”

The Applicant is proposing no external changes to the existing structure with regard to height, form, or scale.

11. Stormwater Drainage: The Applicant must demonstrate that “special attention has been given to proper site surface drainage so that removal of surface waters will not adversely affect neighboring properties or the public storm drainage system. Storm water shall be removed from all roofs, canopies, and powered area, and routed through a well-engineered system designed with appropriate storm water management techniques. Skimming devices, oil, and grease traps, and similar facilities at the collection or discharge points for paved surface runoff should be used, to retain oils, greases, and particles. Surface water on all paved areas shall be collected and/or routed so that it will not obstruct the flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic and will not create puddles in the paved area. In larger developments, where practical, the routing of runoff through sheet flow, swales or other means increasing filtration and percolation is strongly encouraged, as is use of retention or detention ponds. In instances of below grade parking (such as garages) or low lying areas prone to flooding, installation of pumps or other devices to prevent backflow through drains or catch basins may be required.”

The Applicant is not proposing to make any changes with regard to site surface drainage or the removal of surface water. The Applicant has submitted a site plan that displays an improved parking layout at the site and along with a small increase in the landscape area.

12. Historic or Architectural Significance: The project must be designed “with respect to Somerville’s heritage, any action detrimental to historic structures and their architectural elements shall be discouraged insofar as is practicable, whether those structures exist on the development parcel or on adjacent properties. If there is any removal, substantial alteration or other action detrimental to buildings of historic or architectural significance, these should be minimized and new uses or the erection of new buildings should be compatible with the buildings or places of historic or architectural significance on the development parcel or on adjacent properties.”

The existing structure is not of historical significance and interior renovation of the structure will not be a detriment to the neighborhood.

13. Enhancement of Appearance: The Applicant must demonstrate that “the natural character and appearance of the City is enhanced. Awareness of the existence of a development, particularly a non residential development or a higher density residential development, should be minimized by screening views of the development from nearby streets, residential neighborhoods of City property by the effective use of existing land forms, or alteration thereto, such as berms, and by existing vegetation or supplemental planting.”



The current state of the site is not appealing with a disorganized parking arrangement at the site creating an unsafe and unclear pedestrian environment. The Applicant has submitted a site plan that should mitigate this unorganized vehicular environment. The small landscaped area is a start to limiting vehicular access directly onto Poplar Street, but Staff would prefer to see a stronger separation between the pedestrian area along Poplar Street and the parking area for 71 Linwood Street. Staff would also like to see the landscaped area increased in width to at least three feet to help sustain the vegetation planted there for the long term.

14. Lighting: With respect to lighting, the Applicant must ensure that “all exterior spaces and interior public and semi-public spaces shall be adequately lit and designed as much as possible to allow for surveillance by neighbors and passersby.”

Lighting at the site is currently adequate with seven exterior flood lights situated on three sides of the building to enhance the street light pole that sits at the corner of Poplar and Chestnut Streets.

15. Emergency Access: The Applicant must ensure that “there is easy access to buildings, and the grounds adjoining them, for operations by fire, police, medical and other emergency personnel and equipment.”

The structure on the site has two pedestrian access points, one on the Linwood Street side and the other which on the Poplar Street side, which is handicap accessible. Staff has not received any comments or concerns from Fire Prevention at this time.

16. Location of Access: The Applicant must ensure that “the location of intersections of access drives with the City arterial or collector streets minimizes traffic congestion.”

Access to the site will be from the existing access points at the corners of Linwood and Poplar Streets and Poplar and Chestnut Streets, as well as the existing access off of Linwood Street in the south corner of the site. All of these site access points have existing curb cuts.

17. Utility Service: The Applicant must ensure that “electric, telephone, cable TV and other such lines and equipment are placed underground from the source or connection, or are effectively screened from public view.”

The Applicant is not proposing to install any new utilities at the subject property.

18. Prevention of Adverse Impacts: The Applicant must demonstrate that “provisions have been made to prevent or minimize any detrimental effect on adjoining premises, and the general neighborhood, including, (1) minimizing any adverse impact from new hard surface ground cover, or machinery which emits heat, vapor, light or fumes; and (2) preventing adverse impacts to light, air and noise, wind and temperature levels in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development;”

The proposed use will not include machinery which emits heat, vapor, light or fumes in excess of what is already occurring in the area. The light, air and noise impacts will be typical of the other industrial uses currently in the neighborhood. There is currently minimal landscaping on the site along the Linwood Street side of the property. The Applicant is proposing to install a small, one foot wide landscaping area between the existing parking area and the sidewalk along Poplar Street. Staff would prefer to see this landscaping area increased to at least three feet in width to sustain vegetation in this proposed landscaping area for the long term.

19. Signage: The Applicant must ensure that “the size, location, design, color, texture, lighting and materials of all permanent signs and outdoor advertising structures or features shall reflect the scale and character of the proposed buildings.”

The Applicant is not proposing any signage or advertising for the structure.

20. Screening of Service Facilities: The Applicant must ensure that “exposed transformers and other machinery, storage, service and truck loading areas, dumpsters, utility buildings, and similar structures shall be effectively screened by plantings or other screening methods so that they are not directly visible from either the proposed development or the surrounding properties.”

The existing dumpster on site is located in the screened-in area on northeast side of the site. Currently there is an exposed transformer box on the Poplar Street side of the site situated against the existing structure. No changes to the trash collection areas or transformers are proposed.

21. Screening of Parking: The Applicant has submitted a site plan that displays an improved parking layout at the site, including the proposed striping of 11 parking spaces including one handicap accessible space. None of this parking is proposed to be screened but the parking in this area has not been screened in the past.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

#### Special Permit with Site Plan Review under §5.2

Based on the above findings and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT with SITE PLAN REVIEW**.

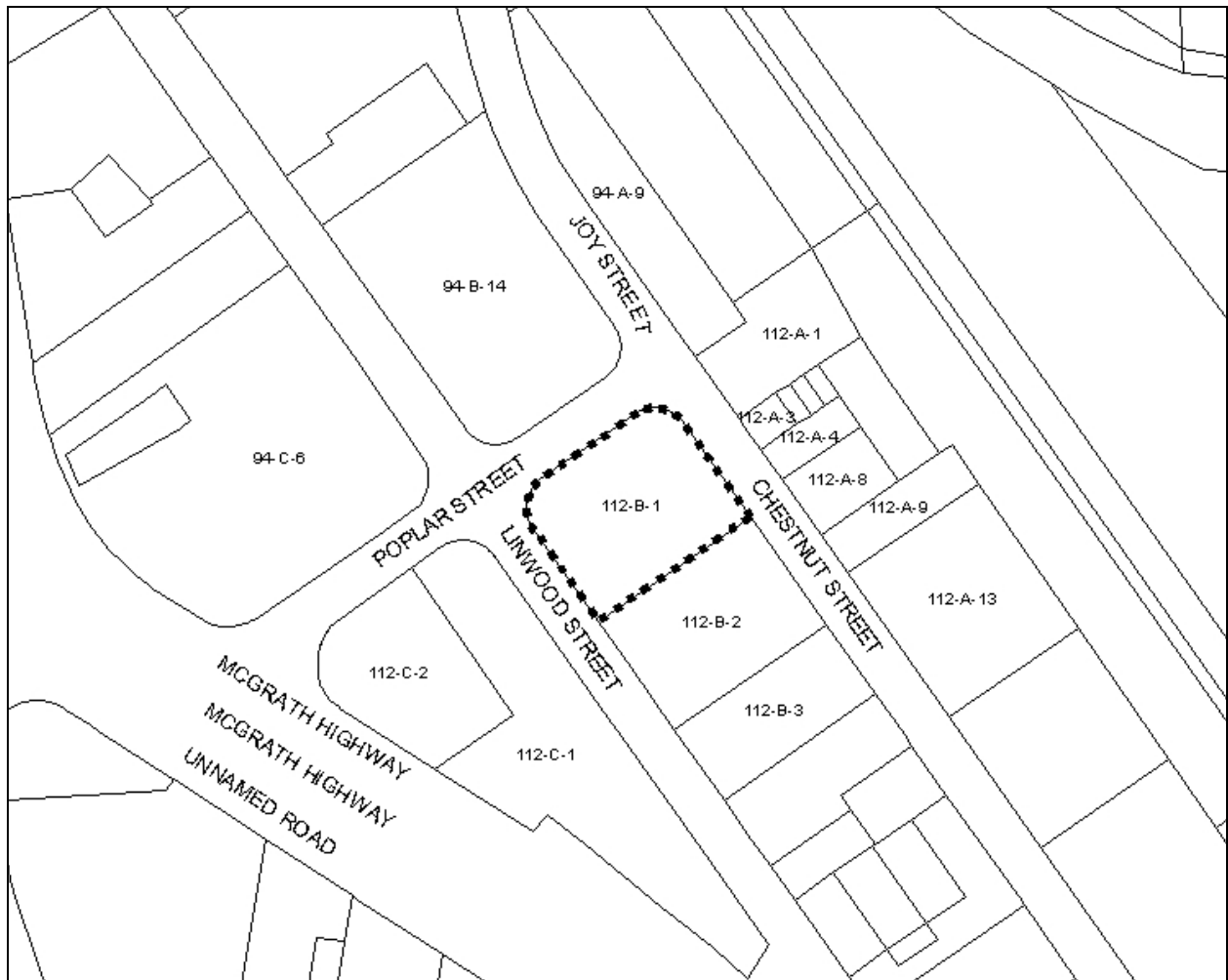
The recommendation is based upon a technical analysis by Planning Staff of the application material based upon the required findings of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and is based only upon information submitted prior to the public hearing. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations, 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 for the use change of a building to an auto repair and storage in excess of 5,000 sq. ft. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	CO / BP	Plng.								
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>October 22, 2010</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>January 5, 2010 (April 13, 2011)</td><td>Proposed On-Site Parking Plan</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	October 22, 2010	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	January 5, 2010 (April 13, 2011)	Proposed On-Site Parking Plan	
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Any changes to the approved site plan or use that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.											



2	The property shall get final approval for fire protection systems.	CO	FP	
3	The special permit for this use shall be issued only to the applicant, Herb Chambers Motorcars, and shall not be transferrable. The special permit shall expire when Herb Chambers Motorcars is no longer using the space for the purpose intended in the application. Any future user seeking to secure this use will need to apply to extend the special permit.	Cont.	PIng./ISD	
4	All new sidewalks will be installed by the Applicant in accordance with the specifications of the Highway Superintendent. Specifically, all driveway aprons shall be concrete; the applicant shall complete all sidewalk and parking layout improvements as shown on the plan provided.	CO	PIng.	
5	The Applicant shall furnish to the City three handicap accessible pads at the corner of Linwood Street and Poplar Street. One on the Applicant's side of the street, the second across Linwood Street, and the third across Poplar Street.	CO	T&P	
6	Applicant will screen the dumpster on the property with fencing that blocks it from view.	CO	PIng.	
7	The Applicant, its successors and/or assigns, shall be responsible for maintenance of both the building and all on-site amenities, including landscaping, fencing, lighting, parking areas and storm water systems, ensuring they are clean, well kept and in good and safe working order.	Cont.	ISD	
8	Applicant shall submit a landscape plan showing a planting strip along Poplar Street that is at least three (3) feet wide and submit it to Planning Staff for approval before construction can commence.	Cont.	PIng.	
9	The Applicant shall at his expense replace any existing equipment (including, but not limited to street sign poles, signs, traffic signal poles, traffic signal equipment, wheel chair ramps, granite curbing, etc) and the entire sidewalk immediately abutting the subject property if damaged as a result of construction activity. All new sidewalks and driveways must be constructed to DPW standard.	CO	DPW	
10	All construction materials and equipment must be stored onsite. If occupancy of the street layout is required, such occupancy must be in conformance with the requirements of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and the prior approval of the Traffic and Parking Department must be obtained.	During Construction	T&P	

11	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.	
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**71 Linwood Street**