



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2015-83

Date: 11/04/2015

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 96 Cross Street

Applicant Name: Conness LLC

Applicant Address: 24 Joseph Street, #3 Somerville, MA 02143

Owner Name: Conness LLC

Owner Address: 24 Joseph Street, #3 Somerville, MA 02143

Agent Name: Adam Dash

Agent Address: 48 Grove Street, Suite 304, Somerville, MA 02144

Alderman: Matthew McLaughlin

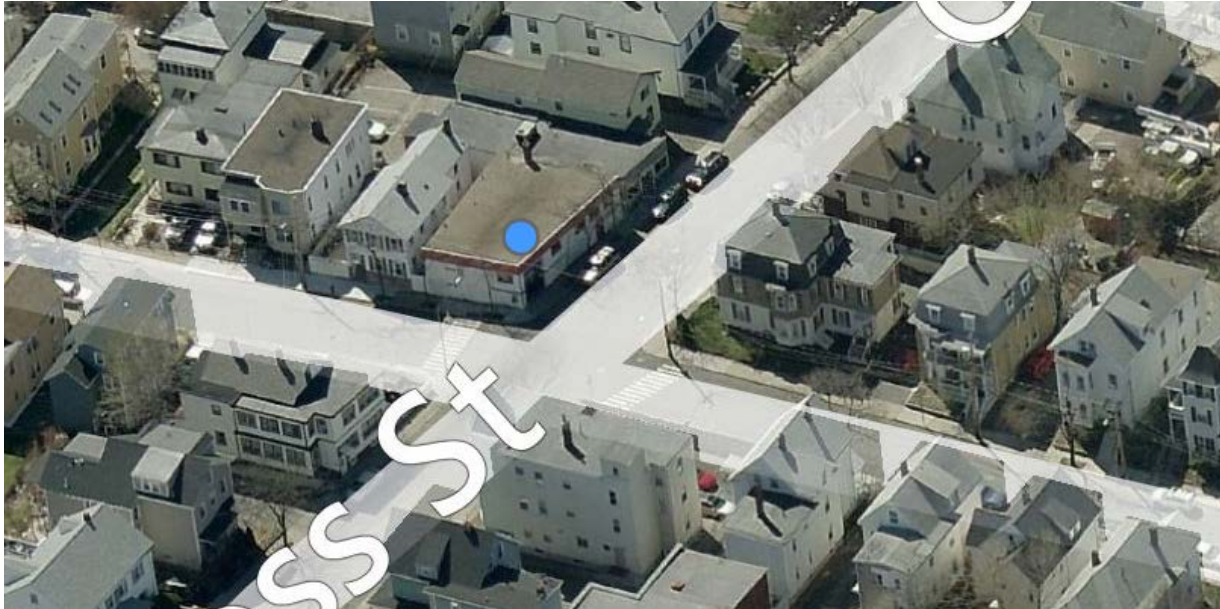
Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, Conness LLC, seek a special permit to modify a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1, by adding a single family addition on top of an existing garage, and adding a retail/office space to the garage. A special permit for parking relief for one space under SZO §9.1 is also required. RB Zone. Ward 1.

Dates of (initial) Public Hearing: October 21st, 2015

*The October 21st staff report was updated on October 28th to reflect the following changes: The proposal was updated to address concerns raised by the community and staff. Changes include filling in all openings on the façade of the existing structure that border the abutting property at 58 Flint Street, adding an opening in the façade along Flint Street to be filled with a green screen, adding a window along Flint Street, relocating the door to the rear courtyard from the garage to the entry foyer, and using frosted glass on the lower portions of windows facing 58 Flint Street in the proposed addition. Updates since the October 21st staff report are underlined and deletions are ~~struck~~.

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The 1,887sf lot currently houses a one-story brick and concrete block structure previously used as an auto glass repair shop. The existing structure occupied almost the entire site at 1,763sf, and is built on the lot line except for a 2.5' setback on the east side which comprises one half of a common passageway shared with 58 Flint Street. The property is currently nonconforming with respect to use and dimensional requirements of the RB Zone.



2. Proposal: The proposed project adds a two story addition on the roof of the existing garage to function as a single family residence. One full-size and one compact parking are provided in the existing garage which utilize the existing garage entry. A 500sf office/retail area is also added to the existing structure on the ground floor. The proposed addition is accessed via a new stairway located within the existing garage. Several openings are added to the façade and roof of the existing structure to create small courtyard spaces which help to provide permeable surface area and outdoor amenities for inhabitants. A roof deck is also provided on the roof of the existing structure, accessible from the first level of the proposed addition. Both the roof deck and the courtyard spaces are screened from view with green-screen structures that will provide a surface for vines to grow on. The proposal would repaint the existing structure in white, and the primary facades of the addition would be stained cedar.

3. Green Building Practices: None listed in application.

4. Comments:

Ward Alderman: At the previous hearing, Alderman McLaughlin stated that he did not think this was a bad project, but proposed that the project be continued to November 4th in order to provide additional time for the applicant to address the concerns of the Abutter at 58 Flint Street.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1, §4.5, §9.13):

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 Permits.

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."*

The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to the following use: motor vehicle related sales and service in an RB zone; and the following dimensional requirements: minimum lot size, maximum ground coverage, landscaped area, pervious area, and all setback requirements.

The proposal will impact the following nonconforming use: motor vehicle related sales and service, replacing that nonconforming use with an office/retail space; Changing one nonconforming use to another nonconforming use requires the Applicant to obtain special permits under §4.5 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO).

Section 4.5 states that "A nonconforming use may be changed to another nonconforming use only by special permit authorized by the SPGA in accordance with the procedures of Article 5, provided that the SPGA finds that such change is not substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconforming use. In judging detriment, the SPGA may consider, without limitation, impacts upon the following: traffic volumes, traffic congestion, type of traffic, change in traffic patterns and access to the site, adequacy of municipal water supply and sewer capacity, noise, odor, glare, scale, on-street parking, shading, visual effects and neighborhood character. Any change from a nonconforming nonresidential use to a nonconforming residential use under this section shall also be subject to Article 7, § 7.3."

The proposal will alter the nonconforming structure by adding and removing openings in the existing walls and roof, and adding two additional stories. The alteration of a nonconforming structure requires the Applicant to obtain special permits under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO).

Section 4.4.1 states that "lawfully existing nonconforming structures other than one- and two-family dwellings may be enlarged, extended, renovated or altered only by special permit authorized by the SPGA in accordance with the procedures of Article 5. The SPGA must find that such extension, enlargement, renovation or alteration is not substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconforming building. In making the finding that the enlargement, extension, renovation or alteration will not be substantially more detrimental, the SPGA may consider, without limitation, impacts upon the following: traffic volumes, traffic congestion, adequacy of municipal water supply and sewer capacity, noise, odor, scale, on-street parking, shading, visual effects and neighborhood character."

In considering a special permit under §4.4 or 4.5 of the SZO, Staff find that the alterations and use proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure and use. In fact, the proposed change in use and structural alterations will provide a much needed upgrade to the existing structure, and help to improve the visual character of the neighborhood through new materials, finishes, visible landscape features, and a small retail/office space at ground level. Furthermore, the owner and architect have chosen to go the route of adaptive reuse, which helps to maintain some of the existing neighborhood character, and will result in a less-disruptive construction process and finished product. The proposal has been designed with setbacks that minimally impact the neighbors and the existing street wall of Flint and Cross Streets.

The design improves the condition at the ground level of the site by activating the façade with greenery and a new space for a small business. The addition on the second and third levels is respectful of both the neighbor at 58 Flint street (by stepping back and staggering lines of sight), and also works to transition between the street walls of Flint and Cross Streets by holding the edge and incorporating transitional architectural elements. The owner and architect held a public meeting to engage neighbors in an open dialogue about any potential concerns, and have made a good faith effort to address these concerns.

While the proposal provides the required 2 spaces of parking relief for the addition of a single family residence, it requires one space of parking relief for the office/retail space.

SZO §9.13 allows for sites with nonconforming parking to apply for a Special Permit to modify parking requirements if the total number of spaces is less than six. In considering a special permit under §9.13 of the SZO the Applicant must be able to demonstrate that granting the requested special permit would not cause detriment to the surrounding neighborhood through any of the criteria as set forth under SZO §9.13, which are as follows:

- 1) increase in traffic volumes;
- 2) increased traffic congestion or queuing of vehicles;
- 3) change in the type(s) of traffic;
- 4) change in traffic patterns and access to the site;
- 5) reduction in on-street parking;
- 6) unsafe conflict of motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

The addition of a small office/retail space would likely be less-detrimental with respect to the previous use of the site as an autoglass repair shop, and would not increase traffic volumes, congestion or queuing of vehicles, traffic patterns or access, would not reduce on street parking, and would not create unsafe conflict of motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic. The proposed use would reduce the overall amount of traffic as the occupants will use public transportation and or bicycles on a regular basis and the ground floor office/retail will attract local pedestrian traffic. The type and frequency of traffic will change, due to eliminating the automotive use and creating a residential building with a small office/retail component. The generated traffic would be more appropriate to a residential context this mix of uses will encourage pedestrian activity.

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."*

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 provide for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; to lessen congestion in the streets; to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to avoid undue concentration of population; to facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; to adequately protect the natural environment; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; to encourage housing for persons of all income levels; and to preserve and increase the amenities of the municipality."

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district (6.1.2. RB - Residence Districts) which is, "To establish and preserve medium density neighborhoods of one-, two- and three-family homes, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such districts.

In considering a special permit under §9.13 of the SZO the SPGA may grant such a special permit only when consistent with the purposes set forth in Section 9.1. The proposal is consistent with the purposes of providing adequate places for storing motor vehicles off street, reducing hazards to pedestrians, protecting adjoining lots from nuisances and hazards, and promoting bicycle use.

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."*

The surrounding neighborhood is composed of a mix of residential and mixed-use structures with small office/retail space on the ground floor. The structures are of varied heights, ranging from one to three stories, and various styles and materials including, gabled, mansard and flat roofs, and shingle, clapboard and brick facades. The proposal is consistent both in material and use of the existing neighborhood, essentially converting the existing autoglass shop which is an anomaly, to a more compatible use which will provide an amenity to the neighborhood.

5. Adverse 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.*

No adverse environmental impacts are anticipated as a result of the proposal. Noise, illumination, glare, dust, smoke and vibration should actually be reduced with the removal of the existing automobile-related use. Emissions of noxious or hazardous materials are not proposed as part of the proposal and will certainly be an improvement over the existing use. Pollution of waterways or ground water will also be reduced as the design thoughtfully incorporates permeable areas where previously there were none. No signal interference is anticipated.

6. Vehicular and pedestrian circulation: *The circulation patterns for motor vehicles and pedestrians which would result from the use or structure will not result in conditions that create traffic congestion or the potential for traffic accidents on the site or in the surrounding area.*

The proposal will not be more detrimental in terms of vehicular or pedestrian circulation, and will likely improve the local conditions by encouraging pedestrian activity through incorporating a mix of uses.

7. Housing Impact: *Will not create adverse impacts on the stock of existing affordable housing.*

8. SomerVision Plan: *Complies with the applicable goals, policies and actions of the SomerVision plan, including the following, as appropriate: Preserve and enhance the character of Somerville's neighborhoods, transform key opportunity areas, preserve and expand an integrated, balanced mix of safe, affordable and environmentally sound rental and homeownership units for households of all sizes and types from diverse social and economic groups; and, make Somerville a regional employment center with a mix of diverse and high-quality jobs. The areas in the SomerVision map that are designated as enhance and transform should most significantly contribute towards the SomerVision goals that are outlined in the table below. The areas marked as conserve are not expected to greatly increase the figures in the table since these areas are not intended for large scale change.*

<u>SomerVision Summary</u>	<i>Existing</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<i>Dwelling Units:</i>	0	1
<i>Affordable Units:</i>	0	0
<i>Commercial Sq. Ft.:</i>	1750	500
<i>Estimated Employment:</i>	3	1
<i>Parking Spaces:</i>	0	2

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1, §4.5, §9.13:

Based on the materials submitted by the Applicant, the above findings and subject to the following conditions, 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										
	<p>Approval is for the alteration of a nonconforming structure, parking relief and change in nonconforming use. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>9/17/2015</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr> <tr> <td>9/29/2015</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (1-6)</td></tr> <tr> <td>10/08/2015</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (1-10)</td></tr> <tr> <td>10/27/2015</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (1-10)</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Any changes to the approved (site plan or elevations/use) that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.</p>	Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	9/17/2015	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	9/29/2015	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (1-6)	10/08/2015	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (1-10)	10/27/2015	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (1-10)	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.	
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Construction Impacts														
1	The applicant shall post the name and phone number of the general contractor at the site entrance where it is visible to people passing by.	During Construction	Plng.											
2	The Applicant shall at their 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											
3	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											
Design														
4	Applicant shall provide final material samples for siding, trim, windows, and doors to Planning Staff for review and approval prior to construction.	BP	Plng.											
5	An exterior light and electrical receptacle is required for the first (or all) level of the porch and an electrical receptacle is required for the second level (if there is no access to the ground).	Final sign off	Wiring Inspector											
Site														
6	Landscaping should be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards;	Perpetual	Plng. / ISD											
Miscellaneous														

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	
Public Safety				
8	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP	
9	To the extent possible, all exterior lighting must be confined to the subject property, cast light downward and must not intrude, interfere or spill onto neighboring properties.	CO	Plng.	
Signage				
10	a) Signage will be limited in size and location to that shown in the elevation diagrams and lighting after 10p.m. facing residential property will be turned down or off.	CO/Cont.	Plng.	
Final Sign-Off				
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.	

