



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2011-62

Date: January 12, 2012

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

UPDATED PLANNING STAFF REPORT¹

Site: 39-43 Elmwood Street / 40 Cameron Avenue

Applicant Name: GFC Development Inc.

Applicant Address: P.O. Box 261, Weston, MA 02493

Property Owner Name: Sadler Realty Trust

Property Owner Address: 1648 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138

Agent Name: Richard G. Di Girolamo, Esq.

Agent Address: 424 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02145

Alderman: Robert Trane

Legal Notice: Applicant GFC Development Inc. and owner Sadler Realty Trust, seek Special Permits with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.2 and §7.3 and Special Permits under SZO §4.4.1 and §9.13.b to alter a nonconforming structure and modify parking design standards to construct three buildings with nine total dwelling units and associated parking. RB zone. Ward 7.

Zoning District/Ward: RB Zone / Ward 7

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permits with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.2 and §7.3 and Special Permits under SZO §4.4.1 and §9.13.b

Date of Application: March 24, 2011

Date of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – **November 30, 2011**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The project site consists of two lots, one on Elmwood Street (with addresses 39 and 41-43) and one on Cameron Avenue (address number 40). The lot on Elmwood Street is 10,000 square feet and the lot on Cameron Avenue is 4,111 square feet for a total site area of 14,111 square feet.

¹ Updated through January 12, 2012 to reflect the changes since the last Staff Report that was issued on November 23, 2011. Additions made to the Staff Report are highlighted by being underlined and text that was removed is crossed out.



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The lots are located near the intersection of Malvern Avenue and Cameron Avenue between Holland Street in Somerville and Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge. The project site runs from the Elmwood Street side and connects through the block to the Cameron Avenue side of the property. The site has 100 feet of frontage on Elmwood Street and 42 feet of frontage on Cameron Avenue. There is an existing single-story cement block building on the property which was formerly used as a parking garage for 50 cars but was most recently used as a business making and distributing educational materials (a light industrial use). The existing cement block building takes up much of the project site with 8,465 square feet of usable space and has building frontage on both Elmwood Street and Cameron Avenue. There is also a single-family dwelling on the property with an address of 39 Elmwood Street. This building has 1,355 square feet of usable space and is 2½ stories high not including the basement level, with a gable roof.

2. Proposal: The Applicant is proposing to retain and renovate the existing single-family structure and substantially alter the existing single-story cement block building to create nine total dwelling units with 15 off-street parking spaces at the site. The alterations to the existing single-story cement block building would allow for the creation of two additional dwelling units behind the existing single-family structure, four dwelling units on west side of the property on Elmwood Street, and two new units in the building on Cameron Avenue. There would be an interior courtyard parking area for 11 parking spaces that would have access off of Elmwood Street. The four spaces in front of the four unit building are proposed to be compact parking spaces. Two sets of tandem parking spaces would be provided as well, one off of Elmwood Street and the second off of Cameron Avenue. The existing curb cut on Elmwood Street that would provide access to the interior parking area would be widened to 18 feet to accommodate for emergency vehicle access and two-way traffic. This would necessitate the removal of one street tree on Elmwood Street that is currently severely lifting the sidewalk in front of the site. The existing curb cut in front of the garage door to the cement block building on Elmwood Street would be closed and this would add on-street parking space to the neighborhood. The curb cut on Cameron Avenue would be narrowed from approximately 20 feet to 10 feet to allow for the construction of the two unit building, while still providing a driveway for two tandem parking spaces.

The setbacks of the existing cement block building would be maintained and to accommodate for the new dwellings units construction would go up an additional two stories, but no higher than 35 feet in any place. In the four unit building, the exterior wall would remain in place but the dwelling units on the ends would be pushed back towards the interior of the lot. This would create small, semi-private garden areas for each of the units. Glass block openings in the exterior wall would allow additional sunlight to penetrate down into these garden areas. The first floor of each of these four units would have a kitchen, dining area, living room, and half bathroom. The second floor of each unit would contain two bedrooms (including the master bedroom) and two full bathrooms. The third floor of each unit would contain a flex room and access to a private roof deck, each of approximately 200 square feet in size. The net square footage of the two larger units in this portion of the building would be 1,425 square feet and 1,371 square feet for the two smaller units. The streetscape would be livened along Elmwood Street through the addition of first floor windows to the façade and the third floor balcony that faces the street.

The existing single-family structure would essentially remain the same with the exception of a dormer that would be added to the left side of the structure. This would allow for additional space in the third floor flex room which would increase the net square footage of the dwelling up to 1,541 square feet. At the rear of this dwelling would be two newly constructed dwelling units. The ground floor of these units would be used for parking and the living space would be situated above on the second and third floors. The second floor would be one unit and the third floor would be a second unit. Both units would contain a kitchen, dining area, living room, two bedrooms and two bathrooms but the second floor unit would be slightly larger with 1,395 net square feet compared to the third floor unit's 1,384 net square feet. Both

units could be accessed through the stairwell between the two units and the existing single-family dwelling or via a second stairwell on the east side of the property next to the two tandem parking spaces off of Elmwood Street.

In the two unit building off of Cameron Avenue, the units would be intertwined with one another. Each unit would be two stories but the back unit would have no living space on the first floor and the front unit would have no living space on the third floor. The front unit would have a small semi-private patio space along Cameron Avenue along with a kitchen, living room, den, bedroom with a full bathroom, and an additional half bathroom all on the first floor. The second floor would contain the master bedroom with a full bathroom and the third floor would provide access to private roof deck space. The front unit would contain 1,410 square feet of living space. The back unit could be accessed off of Cameron Avenue or from the rear through the interior parking area. The first floor of living space for the back unit would contain a kitchen, dining area, living room, the master bedroom with a full bathroom, and an additional half bathroom. The second floor of living space for the rear unit would contain a second bedroom, a full bathroom, a flex room, and access to private roof deck space. The back unit would have 1,568 square feet of usable space. Again, window openings and the third floor roof deck space would help to create a more interactive streetscape along Cameron Avenue.

The exterior of the all the buildings would consist of exposure clapboard (both 4 inch and 8 inch), stained wood siding, painted metal siding, and painted panel siding on the façade. Openings in the block wall would be created to provide for a more inviting feeling around the property and in many places wood lattice would be mounted to the exterior of the wall. Planter boxes would also be implemented for all roof deck spaces to increase landscaping at the site, which, overall, would be increasing greatly to 26% from the nonconforming 2% that currently exists at the site.

3. Nature of Application:

Background

The Applicant filed for a demolition permit in February of 2011 to remove the existing single-family dwelling at 39 Elmwood Street. As part of this process the Historic Preservation Commission determined the building at 39 Elmwood Street to be preferably preserved and wanted to see the structure incorporated into the overall design of the project. To help design a proposal that OSPCD Staff would support, the Applicant's project team met several times with Planning Staff, Preservation Planner Kristi Chase, and at least one member of the Historic Preservation Commission in March and April of 2011. After this series of meetings, the project team took their proposed design and set up two neighborhood meetings in June of 2011 with Ward 7 Alderman Robert Trane to get feedback from the community. Both of these meetings were well attended with over 35 members of the neighborhood present. The project team listened to and consider ideas about the project regarding building design, parking layout, drainage, and landscaping, among other issues. After these community meetings the project team redesigned their project and went before the Design Review Committee on two separate occasions, once in July and once in September. The comments from the Design Review Committee are listed below. After each trip to the Design Review Committee, the project team made further adjustments to the design of the project to create the proposal that is currently before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Dimensions

The existing cement block structure at the property is currently nonconforming with respect to the front, rear, and side yard setbacks. These existing setback nonconformities require the Applicant to obtain a Special Permit under Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.4.1 to alter the nonconforming structure. The lot area per dwelling unit would be 1,568 square feet and the minimum required is 1,500 square feet in the RB district. The ground coverage would be decreased from a nonconforming 65% to a conforming 49% as the maximum allowed in the district is 50%. Landscaping at the site is also currently

nonconforming at 2% but the proposal will greatly increase this percentage to 26%, just above the minimum requirement of 25% in RB districts. The proposed building envelope is also conforming to the RB District as the floor area ratio (FAR) is 1.0 and the maximum allowed is 1.0, the height of the structures is 35 feet and the maximum allowed is 40 feet. The minimum required frontage in the RB district is 50 feet. While the street frontage on Elmwood Street more than complies with this requirement at 100 feet, the Cameron Avenue frontage of the property is nonconforming at 42 feet.

Use

The project requires a Special Permit with Site Plan Review (§5.2) under §7.2 to allow more than one principal structure on a lot in an RB district and also under §7.3 to allow more than three dwellings on a lot in the RB district which is permitted when 12.5% but no less than one affordable unit is provided for on-site as defined by §2.2.4 and §13.

Parking

The Applicant is proposing to provide 15 off-street parking spaces at the site which meets the required number of spaces in the SZO. However, the Applicant is proposing two sets of tandem parking spaces and four compact parking spaces in the interior parking area. Therefore, the Applicant is applying for a Special Permit under §9.13.b to modify parking and loading standards to allow for these four tandem parking spaces and the four compact spaces.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The project site is located within an RB District. The surrounding area is comprised of a mixture of single-, two-, and three-family homes, with a few multi-family dwellings as well, between 2½ and 3 stories. The project site is approximately 1,400 feet from Teele Square and 2,300 feet from the Davis Square Red Line stop.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The largest impact of the proposal would be the increase in the number of dwelling units at the site. Currently there is only one dwelling unit on-site and this would increase by eight dwelling units as a result of the proposal, which would include one affordable unit. As-of-right, five dwelling units could be developed at the site with two units being constructed on the Cameron Avenue property and two additional units (for a total of three units) on the Elmwood Street property.

The extensive alterations to the existing cement block structure would still maintain the existing setbacks at the property and no dimensional changes are being proposed in the area where the single-family dwelling is located. The proposed changes to the cement block structure along Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street will help to create a more interactive streetscape through the addition of window openings and balconies. The size and massing of the proposed new structures matches those in the surrounding neighborhood and the proposed step backs on buildings and location of the balconies respects the privacy of the immediate abutters to the project. The new construction at the property will bring the buildings up to 3 stories in height, 35 feet at their tallest point, which is consistent with the structures in the surrounding neighborhood. Therefore, there are no anticipated negative impacts from the dimensional aspects of the proposal. Additionally, the proposed entirely residential use would be an upgrade to the neighborhood from the most recent previous use at the property which was a business making and distributing educational materials (a light industrial use).

The traffic and parking situation resulting from the proposed use would most likely not negatively impact the area. The Applicant is providing all 15 of the required off-street parking spaces on-site. All requirements of §9 of the SZO are met with the exceptions of the tandem and compact parking spaces. The two proposed tandem parking spaces in the driveway off of Elmwood Street is the existing situation at the property and the driveway has clearly operated with tandem parking spaces in the past. In regard to the Applicant's proposal to have two tandem parking spaces accessed off of Cameron Avenue, while this

would be a change to the existing situation at the site, tandem parking spaces are a common occurrence at many of the other residences along Cameron Avenue, as well as on Elmwood Street. Concerns related to this proposed situation, such as having cars back out onto Cameron Avenue, are actually in line with what is already occurring at other residences on Cameron Avenue, as well as those on Elmwood Street, and in the surrounding neighborhood. Additionally, the Traffic Memorandum submitted by the Applicant and prepared by Design Consultants, Inc. (DCI) indicates that the tandem parking spaces proposed as part of the project on both Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street would not have a negative impact on traffic operations in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the proposed four compact spaces in the interior parking area would also not appear to be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing situation. These on-site parking spaces will make it extremely easy for residents of the project to park close to their homes and assist in getting additional cars off of Elmwood Street, which is a benefit to the entire neighborhood. The Traffic Memorandum submitted by the Applicant also indicates that these compact spaces would not create any negative impacts for the surrounding neighborhood or be inappropriate for the proposal.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicant has indicated that “in keeping with GFC’s construction practices, and as demonstrated in a number of recent and ongoing local projects, all construction will be approached on the basis of obtaining LEED certification, with Silver a minimum target.”

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Requested that an 18 foot wide driveway be installed to access the project site off of Elmwood Street. This has been included in the plans for the project.

Ward Alderman: Alderman Trane has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Historic Preservation: Please see the attached documents submitted by Preservation Planner Kristi Chase.

Traffic & Parking: ~~Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.~~ Stated the following in an email to Planning Staff on November 28, 2011:

“Designs Consultants, Inc a professional Transportation Firm has prepared a Parking Memorandum regarding the parking arrangements for the proposed development at 39-43 Elmwood St/40 Cameron Ave. This proposed development will consist of 9 residential condominium units. The development’s provisions of 15 parking spaces on site meet the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) requirements.

There will be three parking areas associated for this project. Access/egress to two parking areas will be from Elmwood St. Access/egress to the third parking area will be from Cameron Ave. This parking area will be a tandem parking space. Traffic and Parking has reservation concerning tandem parking spaces which require motorists to back out onto high volume pedestrian and vehicle streets such as Cameron Ave. The Parking Memorandum submitted by DCI, Inc addresses these concerns. This Parking Memorandum is a well prepared, thorough and professional document. The Parking Memorandum concludes that there are ‘clear sight distances and sufficient buffer widths...to allow for reasonably safe backing movements onto the street...the proposed access onto Cameron Ave is considered to be acceptable from a safety standpoint.’

Traffic and Parking will defer to the expertise of this professional Transportation Firm on this issue. Traffic and Parking has no objections to the application for 39-43 Elmwood St/Cameron Ave.”

Housing: Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Lights and Lines: Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments. Steve MacEachern indicated in a phone conversation with Planning Staff on December 15, 2011 that the Department of Public Works is comfortable with the removal of the street tree on Elmwood Street, however, the Applicant must install two additional street trees in the area.

Conservation Commission: Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments

Engineering: The comments submitted by the Engineering Department are reflected in the conditions below.

Wiring Inspector: Stated that underground utilities would be required for the project.

Design Review Committee: The Applicant's project team went before the Design Review Committee on two separate occasions. Below is a list of the comments that the committee made at each meeting.

July 28, 2011

The wall along Cameron Avenue seems a bit questionable as it blocks off the yard area of the dwelling unit from the street. We think it is good to respect the wall that was once there but at the same time preserving the wall in this location may not be in the best interest of the project.

The wall along Cameron Avenue could probably be modified, lowered, and/or trellised at the top to make it more inviting. Perhaps even punching some holes in the wall along the street to have the space be more semi-private.

This site is very close to mass transit and perhaps there could be less parking spaces on the site.

Green roofs should be considered for this project as they could do some very positive things in terms of costs for the project, insulation and stormwater drainage on the site.

The metal rails on the balconies may not serve the spaces that well and perhaps some type of a green buffer would work better in those locations.

We would like to see what an underground parking scenario would look like for the project. The site itself is setup well for that and this could also offer some storage space for each of the units above. This would also make courtyard an inhabitable courtyard and would add more greenspace to the project. Furthermore, an underground garage could potentially double the amount of cars that could be parked on the site compared to surface parking, and that would make the parking scenario for the project that much better. We would like to see the underground parking vetted as an idea.

The project has a lot of setbacks in it and as part of the presentation it would be helpful to have something else besides plans and elevations. Some type of perspective view would be very helpful to visualize the massing of the project.

The treatment of the exterior wall is an opportunity to right the wrongs of the past. This was an industrial building put in an residential neighborhood and there is no reason to retain the industrial quality of the wall moving forward. Please do not leave the wall in its current state, but instead, make it something to be proud of.

September 29, 2011

The infill panel where the garage door used to be along Elmwood Street is the biggest concern. A trellis, a recessed wall, or perhaps even the old garage door that was once there could be re-implemented. These types of elements would work much better in this space to liven up the façade than a simple, blank stucco block wall.

Thought needs to be given as to where the condenser units will be located in the project because this could have a large visual and sound impacts on the design.

With regard to the bracketing on the building, the triangular brackets seem to work better than the other brackets that are being shown.

Planning Staff should include a condition that will require the Applicant to come back to the DRC to allow for the committee to see and touch the actual proposed materials that and to also see what the old garage door looks like.



Existing Conditions on Elmwood Street



Existing Conditions on Elmwood Street



Existing Driveway on Elmwood Street



Existing Conditions on Cameron Avenue

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT with SITE PLAN REVIEW (SZO §5.2, §7.2, and §7.3):

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 §4.4 of the SZO, Staff finds that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The extensive alterations to the existing cement block structure would still maintain the existing setbacks at the property and no dimensional changes are being proposed in the area where the single-family dwelling is located. The proposed changes to the cement block structure along Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street will help to create a more interactive streetscape through the addition of window openings and balconies. The size and massing of the proposed new structures matches those in the surrounding neighborhood and the proposed step backs on buildings and location of the balconies respects the privacy of the immediate abutters to the project. The new construction at the property will bring the buildings up to 3 stories in height, 35 feet at its tallest point, which is consistent with the structures in the surrounding neighborhood. Therefore, there are no anticipated negative impacts from the dimensional aspects of the proposal.

Section §7.2 of the SZO states that to allow more than one principal structure on a lot in an RB district Special Permit with Site Plan Review approval is required. The same is true under §7.3 to allow more than three dwellings on a lot in an RB district. Additionally, more than three dwelling units on a lot is only permitted when 12.5% but no less than one affordable unit is provided for on-site as defined by §2.2.4 and §13. In all cases minimum lot size, minimum lot area per dwelling unit and other dimensional and parking requirements of Article 8 and Article 9 shall be met. For this project, one affordable unit will be provided on-site through an Affordable Housing Implementation Plan (AHIP) and the Applicant will also be paying into the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for the remaining fractional affordable unit as part of meeting the 12.5% requirement. The project complies with the lot area and lot area per dwelling unit requirements for the nine total units and is not increasing the existing nonconforming dimensional aspects at the property.

With regard to parking, in considering a Special Permit under §9.13 of the SZO, Staff finds that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing parking situation. All requirements of §9 of the SZO are met with the exceptions of the tandem and compact parking spaces. The two proposed tandem parking spaces in the driveway off of Elmwood Street is the existing situation at the property and the driveway has clearly operated with tandem parking spaces in the past. In regard to the Applicant’s proposal to have two tandem parking spaces accessed off of Cameron Avenue, while this would be a change to the existing situation at the site, tandem parking spaces are a common occurrence at many of the other residences along Cameron Avenue, as well as Elmwood Street. Concerns related to this proposed situation, such as having cars back out onto Cameron Avenue, are actually in line with what is already occurring at other residences on Cameron Avenue, as well as those on Elmwood Street, and in the surrounding neighborhood. Additionally, the Traffic Memorandum submitted by the Applicant indicates that the tandem parking spaces proposed as part of the project, on both Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street, would not have a negative impact on traffic operations in the neighborhood. Furthermore, the proposed four compact spaces in the interior parking area would also not appear to be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing situation. These on-site parking spaces will make it extremely easy for residents of the project to park close to their homes and assist in getting additional cars off of Elmwood Street, which is a benefit to the entire neighborhood. The Traffic Memorandum submitted by the Applicant also indicates that these compact spaces would not create any negative impacts for the surrounding neighborhood or be inappropriate for the proposal.

3. Purpose of District: The project must be “consistent with the intent of the specific zoning district as specified in Article 6.”

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district (6.1.2. 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.” While this particular proposal is not just a one-, two-, or three-family residential structure, it is compatible with these types of uses. Even though there are not many four unit dwellings in the area, the project still meets the lot area per dwelling unit requirements for the zoning district and the makeup of each of the structures is not out of context with other buildings in the neighborhood.

4. Site and Area Compatibility: The project must be “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 buildings are compatible with those prevalent in the surrounding area.”

The project was designed to be compatible with the characteristics of the built environment and the existing land uses of the area. The form, massing, and height of the proposed buildings is very similar to those structures in the surrounding area. Most of the structures in the neighborhood are between 2½ and 3 stories in height and the proposed project is no more than 3 stories in height (35 feet) at the highest point. The extensive alterations to the existing cement block structure would still maintain the existing setbacks at the property and no dimensional changes are being proposed in the area where the single-family dwelling is located. The proposed changes to the cement block structure along Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street will help to create a more interactive streetscape through the addition of window openings and balconies. Furthermore, the proposed step backs on the buildings and location of the balconies respects the privacy of the immediate abutters to the project.

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

The site meets the accepted standards for a functional design. The new construction at the site will maintain the existing setbacks of the cement block building. The Applicant is not proposing to create any new curb cuts for the project and would continue to use the existing ones at the site, with a few exceptions. The curb cut off of Elmwood Street which provides access to the interior parking area will be expanded to accommodate Fire Prevention’s request to have the driveway be 18 feet wide for emergency vehicle access and Traffic and Parking’s request for two-way traffic out of this driveway. There is also an existing curb cut in front of the old garage door on Elmwood Street, but this curb cut would be closed as part of the proposal adding one on-street parking space to the neighborhood. Furthermore, the curb cut on Cameron Avenue would be narrowed from approximately 20 feet to 10 feet to allow for the construction of the two unit building, while still providing a driveway for two tandem parking spaces. The internal parking area for the project provides for seven full-size and four compact parking spaces, from all of which a user could turn around their vehicle and exit the project site in a forward direction. The Applicant is also proposing two sets of tandem parking spaces, one pair for the three unit building accessed from Elmwood Street and another pair for the two unit building accessed from Cameron Avenue. The Applicant will also need to confirm with the City Engineer that the grading and drainage system is acceptable, as conditioned.

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 approval of the SPSR shall be contingent upon the City Engineer's determination that no adverse impacts on public systems will result from the proposed renovation. A similar amount of impact on the City's public systems can most likely be anticipated from the proposed use. Planning Staff has proposed conditions which require the submittal of utility, grading, and drainage plans to the City Engineering Department for review and approval before the project can begin construction. Curb cuts at the site would remain mostly the same and therefore this should not greatly impact the street system for vehicular traffic. As part of the project the Applicant will be widening one of the curb cuts on Elmwood Street to provide the required access into and out of the interior parking area. Additionally, the existing curb cut in front of the garage door on Elmwood Street will be closed, adding another on-street parking space to the neighborhood. The curb cut on Cameron Avenue will also be narrowed from approximately 20 feet to 10 feet to allow for the construction of the two unit building, while still providing a driveway for two tandem parking spaces. While this would be a change to the existing situation at the site, tandem parking spaces are a common practice at many of the other residences along Cameron Avenue. Concerns related to this proposed situation, such as having cars back out onto Cameron Avenue, are actually in line with what is already occurring at other residences on Cameron Avenue, as well as those on Elmwood Street, and in the surrounding neighborhood. Additionally, the Traffic Memorandum submitted by the Applicant indicates that the tandem spaces proposed as part of the project, on both Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street, would not have a negative impact on traffic operations in the neighborhood.

7. Environmental Impacts: The proposed use, structure or activity "will not create adverse environmental impacts, including those that may occur off the site, or such potential adverse impacts will be mitigated in connection with the proposed development, so that the development will be compatible with the surrounding area."

No adverse environmental impacts are anticipated from this project. No new noise, glare, smoke, vibration, nor emissions of noxious materials, nor pollution of water ways or ground water, nor transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception are anticipated as part of the proposal. The structures will be a two-, a three-, and a four-family dwelling between 2½ and 3 stories and will be used for residential purposes.

8. 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 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 purposes 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 provide for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; to lessen congestion in the streets; to protect health; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to avoid undue concentration of population; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to encourage housing for persons of all income levels."

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.”

The existing nonconforming setbacks of the cement block building at the site will remain the same and the proposed project will not disrupt the grading or existing land forms on the site. The proposed new construction does not include basements and therefore will not require major soil disruption. The existing concrete block walls at the perimeter of the project site will be retained and enhanced by having window openings created in them and having wooden lattice mounted to their exterior in certain locations. Landscaping at the site will also be greatly enhanced and increased from the existing nonconforming 2% to a conforming 26%. The project will require that one existing street tree be removed to create the required driveway width for the interior parking area, but Planning Staff has proposed a condition to help alleviate the removal of this tree which would require the Applicant to provide two street trees back to the city.

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 size and massing of the proposed new structures matches those in the surrounding neighborhood and the proposed step backs on buildings and location of the balconies respects the privacy of the immediate abutters to the project. The new construction at the property will bring the buildings up to 3 stories in height, 35 feet at its tallest point, which is consistent with the structures in the surrounding neighborhood. The proposed new construction does not include basements and therefore will not require major soil disruption at site which should allow for the topography at the site to remain essentially the same. Landscaping at the site will also be greatly enhanced and increased from the existing nonconforming 2% to a conforming 26%. The project will require that one existing street tree be removed to create the required driveway width for the interior parking area, but Planning Staff has proposed a condition to help alleviate the removal of this tree which would require the Applicant to provide two street trees back to the city.

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 paved 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.”

While additional review is required of a grading and drainage plan and a drainage report, any approval of the SPSR should be conditional upon the City Engineer’s approval of such plans and determination that no adverse impact will result to the drainage system from the project’s design. The conditions attached to this special permit reflect this.

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.”

Please see the attached documents from the Historic Preservation Commission. The commission determined that the single-family structure at 39 Elmwood Street be preferably preserved and the Applicant has complied with this determination. The design of the new buildings and the addition on the back of the preferably preserved structure respect the architectural integrity of the single-family structure that will be retained as part of the project.

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 proposed project will greatly improve the appearance of the structures which currently exist at the site. The Applicant’s proposal will take a currently abandoned single-story garage structure and substantially alter it to create eight new units of housing while at the same time preserving an architecturally significant single-family dwelling at 39 Elmwood Street. The proposed use for the site is much more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood than the last previous use of the building as a business making and distributing educational materials (a light industrial use). The proposal takes an unfriendly light industrial/garage building and turns it back over to the neighborhood as a residentially designed project that interacts with the streetscape. Landscaping at the site will be increased from 2% to a conforming 26% and the proposed dwelling units will help to create a more interactive streetscape along both Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street. Much of the off-street parking at the site will be well screened from the pedestrian right-of-way which in turn will improve the streetscape along both Elmwood Street and Cameron Avenue.

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.”

The lighting will be residential in nature and is conditioned to not interfere with neighboring properties.

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.”

Emergency vehicles would have access to the buildings directly off of Elmwood Street and Cameron Avenue, as well as via the driveway off of Elmwood Street which has been designed wide enough to accommodate for emergency vehicles.

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.”

The Applicant is not proposing to create any new curb cuts for the project and would continue to use the existing ones for the proposal, with a few exceptions. The curb cut off of Elmwood Street which provides access to the interior parking area would have to be expanded to accommodate for Fire Prevention's request to have the driveway be 18 feet wide for emergency vehicle access. There is also an existing curb cut in front of the old garage door on Elmwood Street and this curb cut would be closed as part of the proposed project. Furthermore, the curb cut on Cameron Avenue would be narrowed from approximately 20 feet to 10 feet to allow for the construction of the two unit building while still providing a driveway for two tandem parking spaces. The internal parking area for the project provides for seven full-size and four compact parking spaces, from all of which a user could turn around their vehicle and exit the project site in a forward direction. The Applicant is proposing two sets of tandem parking spaces, one pair for the three unit building accessed from Elmwood Street and another pair for the two unit building accessed from Cameron Avenue. The Traffic Memorandum the Applicant submitted as part of their application indicates that these tandem spaces, in which someone would have to back into or out of from the street, would not have any noticeable effect on traffic operations along Elmwood Street or Cameron Avenue.

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 proposing to tie into the existing City services for electric, telephone and cable. Any new lines would be placed underground in accordance with the SZO and the policies of the Superintendent of Lights and Lines.

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 for the site is much more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood than the last previous use of the building as a business making and distributing educational materials (a light industrial use). Landscaping at the site will be increased from 2% to a conforming 26% and the proposed dwelling units will help to create a more interactive streetscape along both Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street. The proposed project takes an unfriendly light industrial/garage building and turns it back over to the neighborhood as a residentially designed project that interacts with the streetscape. The size and massing of the proposed new structures matches those in the surrounding neighborhood and the proposed step backs on the buildings and location of the balconies respects the privacy of the immediate abutters to the project. Minimal, if any, negative impacts are anticipated from the proposed project with regard to light, air, noise, or the emission of heat, vapor, or fumes.

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."

Due to the residential nature of the building, signage is not anticipated on the site. Any signage in the future would have to conform to the sign standards for residential districts.

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 Applicant is anticipating that trash bins will be located in the covered parking areas in the interior parking area of the project. For the four unit building, trash bins are anticipated to be located in corridors or around corners of the building. Staff has proposed a condition which requires that outdoor trash and recycling bins be stored in a location where they are screened from view by buildings, fencing, or vegetation. The same is true if transformers are to be located on the site. A condition has been proposed which requires that transformers be fully screened and located as to not impact the landscaped areas.

21. Screening of Parking:

The parking at the site will be well screened or be very similar to the existing conditions in the surrounding neighborhood. Eleven off-street parking spaces for the project will be located in an interior parking area which is well screened from the public right-of-way. All of the spaces would be tucked underneath or into indentations of the buildings. Two of the spaces would be visible directly from the end of the driveway looking into the interior parking area, but none of the other cars in this area would be visible from the streetscape. The remaining four off-street parking spaces for the project would be located in tandem driveway spaces off of Elmwood Street and Cameron Avenue. Many of the dwellings in the surrounding neighborhood have a similar off-street parking set up. These parking spaces will be screened by the dwellings on either side of them which will greatly help to reduce their visibility from an approaching view in either direction and should not greatly impact the streetscape. In fact, the tandem parking space driveway off of Elmwood Street is an existing situation at the project site.

III. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1, §4.4.1, and §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."

Please see item 2 in Section II for the compliance with standards finding which are the same for the Special Permit and the Special Permit with Site Plan Review.

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.”

Please see items 3 and 8 in Section II for the consistency with purposes finding which meet the finding for this item in the Special Permit.

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.”

Please see item 4 in Section II for the site and area compatibility finding which is the same for the Special Permit and the Special Permit with Site Plan Review.

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 from this project. No new noise, glare, smoke, vibration, nor emissions of noxious materials, nor pollution of water ways or ground water, nor transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception are anticipated as part of the proposal. The structures will be a two-, a three-, and a four-family dwelling between 2½ and 3 stories and will be used for residential purposes.

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 traffic and parking situation resulting from the proposed use would most likely not negatively impact the area. Eleven off-street parking spaces for the project will be located in an interior parking area which is well screened from the public right-of-way. All of the spaces would be tucked underneath or into indentations of the buildings. The remaining four off-street parking spaces for the project would be located in tandem driveway spaces off of Elmwood Street and Cameron Avenue. Many of the properties in the surrounding neighborhood have a similar off-street parking set up. In fact, the tandem parking space driveway off of Elmwood Street is an existing situation at the project site. Additionally, the Traffic Memorandum the Applicant submitted as part of their application indicates that the proposed tandem spaces, in which someone would have to back into or out of from the street, would not have any noticeable effect on traffic operations along Elmwood Street or Cameron Avenue. Furthermore, the proposed four compact spaces in the interior parking area would also not appear to be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing situation. These on-site parking spaces will make it extremely easy for residents of the project to park close to their homes and assist in getting additional cars off of Elmwood Street, which is a benefit to the entire neighborhood. The Traffic Memorandum submitted by the Applicant also indicates that these compact spaces would not create any negative impacts for the surrounding neighborhood or be inappropriate for the proposal.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit with Site Plan Review under §7.2 and §7.3 and Special Permit under §4.4.1 and §9.13

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** and **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 and modify parking design standards under SZO §4.4.1, §7.2, §7.3, and §9.13.b to construct nine total dwelling units and associated parking. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.											
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>(March 24, 2011)</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>November 14, 2011 (November 16, 2011)</td><td>Site Plan (S-3)</td></tr><tr><td>November 15, 2011 (November 16, 2011)</td><td>Existing and Proposed Site Plans and Elevations (S-1 – S-2, 1-1 – 1-2, 2-1 – 2-4, 3-1 – 3-4, and 4-1 – 4-7)</td></tr><tr><td>(November 16, 2011)</td><td>3- D Renderings (1-11)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(March 24, 2011)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	November 14, 2011 (November 16, 2011)	Site Plan (S-3)	November 15, 2011 (November 16, 2011)	Existing and Proposed Site Plans and Elevations (S-1 – S-2, 1-1 – 1-2, 2-1 – 2-4, 3-1 – 3-4, and 4-1 – 4-7)	(November 16, 2011)	3- D Renderings (1-11)
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Any changes to the approved plans or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.														
2	The Applicant shall submit a proposed grading and drainage plan, stamped by a registered PE in Massachusetts that demonstrates compliance with the City’s stormwater policy.	BP	Eng.											
3	The Applicant shall submit a proposed drainage report, stamped by a registered PE in Massachusetts that demonstrates compliance with the City’s stormwater policy.	BP	Eng.											
4	The Applicant shall submit a utility plan to the Engineering Department for review and approval.	BP	Eng.											
5	The Applicant shall present type and color building material samples to the Design Review Committee for comment and review, including a photograph of the proposed non-functioning garage door panel that will be installed on Elmwood Street, and to Planning Staff final approval.	BP	Plng.											
6	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau’s requirements.	CO	FP											

7	All construction materials and equipment must be stored on-site. 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	
8	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	
9	The Applicant, its successors and/or assigns, shall be responsible for maintenance of both the buildings 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.	Perpetual	ISD	
10	Landscaping should be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards.	Perpetual	Plng./ISD	
11	There shall be a minimum of one tree for each 1,000 square feet of required landscaped area under SZO §10.3. In this case, four (4) trees shall be provided for on site in accordance with SZO §10.6.2. If all four (4) trees cannot be located on the project site, the additional trees shall be provided in the form of street trees.	CO	Plng.	
12	The Applicant shall secure all required approvals from the Superintendent of Highways / Lights & Lines under applicable state and local laws for the removal of the street tree on Elmwood Street.	BP	DPW/ <u>Plng.</u>	
13	In coordination with the Superintendent of Highways / Lights & Lines the Applicant shall furnish to and install for the City two (2) new street trees <u>in the neighborhood of the project</u> to offset the street tree that will be removed on Elmwood Street.	CO	DPW	
14	Any transformers should be located as not to impact the landscaped area and shall be fully screened.	CO	Plng.	
15	Trash and recycling bins that are kept outside shall be screened by buildings, fencing, or vegetation that blocks any view of them.	Perpetual	ISD	
16	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.	Perpetual	ISD	

17	Written certification of the creation of affordable housing units, any fractional payment required, or alternative methods of compliance, must be obtained from the Housing Department before the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.	CO	Housing	
18	The Applicant shall agree to and sign an Affordable Housing Implementation Plan (AHIP) prior to the issuance of a Building Permit for the project.	BP	Housing	
19	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.	

