



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

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Case #: ZBA 2008-56

Date: November 24, 2008

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING BOARD REPORT

Site: 15-17 Beacon Street

Applicant Name: Ralph Schloming

Applicant Address: 102-R Inman Street, Somerville, MA 02139

Property Owner Name: same

Property Owner Address: same

Alderman: Heuston

Legal Notice: The applicant seeks Special Permit approval under SZO §7.11.11.14.b for the conversion of four (4) existing parking spaces into car-sharing spaces.

Zoning District/Ward: RC / 2

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO§7.11.11.14.b

Date of Application: October 22, 2008

Date(s) of Public Hearing: [PB: November 20, 2008 / ZBA: December 3, 2008]

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

Dear ZBA members:

At its regular meeting on November 20, 2008 the Planning Board heard the above-referenced application. Based on materials submitted by the Applicant and the Staff recommendation, the Board voted (5-0), with Kevin Prior and James Kirylo absent, to recommend **conditional approval** of the requested **Special Permit**.

In conducting its analysis, the Planning Board found:

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is an approximately 7,500 s.f. lot on which sits a six unit, three-story wood frame structure. The structure is located near the front lot line which creates a large rear yard approximately 60' wide by 60' deep. There is also a parking easement on the adjacent property (11 Beacon Street) of approximately 6' which creates a 66' wide rear yard for parking. The rear yard is almost entirely paved and is marked for 12 parking spaces. There is an access easement with the adjacent structure for a shared driveway which is 15' in width.

2. Proposal: The Applicant is proposing to legalize four existing parking spaces that are currently being leased by Zipcar.

3. Nature of Application: Under SZO §7.11.11.14.b, conversion of four (4) or more existing parking spaces into car-share parking spaces requires a Special Permit.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The property is located in a Residence C (RC) zone. The immediate neighborhood is mix of residential types and commercial uses.

5. Parking: The six (6) units within the structure are one and two bedroom units, requiring 1.5 spaces per unit (nine (9) total) under SZO §9.5. Twelve (12) spaces are provided on the lot, therefore, three (3) of the proposed car-share spaces are surplus and not required by the SZO. The existing spaces are legally non-conforming with respect to size, ranging from 8.5' to 9' feet wide by 16' deep, whereas the SZO requires 9' by 18'. In addition, the maneuvering aisle between the parallel rows of cars is 18' wide instead of the 20' minimum size requirement of the SZO. The existing 16' width of the driveway does not meet SZO requirements of 18' under the SZO.

6. Green Building Practices: Car-sharing services provide easy access to vehicles and have been shown to reduce car ownership.

7. Comments:

Alderman Heuston: Alderman Heuston has been contacted and has not provided comments.

Traffic and Parking: Terry Smith stated that he would support the proposal if the required space was not currently being used by inhabitants of the building. (The Board notes that four (4) car-share cars are currently parked in the lot and that the occupant of unit #3 has stated that he does not own a car)

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

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

1. Information Supplied: The Board 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 total number of spaces required for this structure is nine (9). The Board finds that twelve (12) spaces are provided on the lot and that the approval of the proposed four (4) car-sharing spaces would convert only one (1) required space to car-share space. The Board finds that since these cars will be available to residents of the building that the proposal will comply with SZO requirements.

The Board finds that the car-share vehicles would provide an attractive transportation alternative to the inhabitants of the property and may serve as a substitute for private vehicle ownership. John Crooks, location coordinator at Zipcar, has stated that, "many members choose to either sell their own car or stop a purchasing decision once they join Zipcar, and estimates are that for every active Zipcar there are 15-20 fewer individually owned cars on the road". Several of the inhabitants of 15-17 Beacon Street either are members currently, or are thinking about becoming members. The Board finds that the location of four (4) car-share vehicles on this property will counteract any negative effect that the loss of a single required space has on the inhabitants of the property or the neighborhood. In addition, there is MBTA bus service along Beacon Street with stops near this property, which also provides a transportation alternative to vehicle ownership.

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 Board finds that the proposal **is consistent** with the purposes set forth in Article 1 of the Zoning Ordinance, and with those purposes established for the Residence C (RC) zoning district in which the property is located, namely "(t)o establish and preserve a district for multi-family residential and other compatible uses which are of particular use and convenience to the residents of such districts." The Board finds that car-sharing services in general reduce traffic congestion in the streets, increase the amenities of the municipality and work to protect the natural environment.

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 Board finds that the proposal **is compatible** with the site and area. The use of four parking spaces in the rear yard would change from dweller parking to car-share vehicle parking. The Board finds that this action would have minimal affects on the character of the area and holds the potential to reduce car ownership and the need for parking in the neighborhood.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §7.11.11.14.b

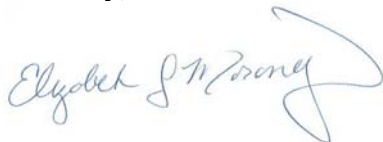
Based on the above findings, the Planning Board recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**.

Although the Planning Board is recommending approval of the requested Special Permit, the following conditions should be added to the permits:

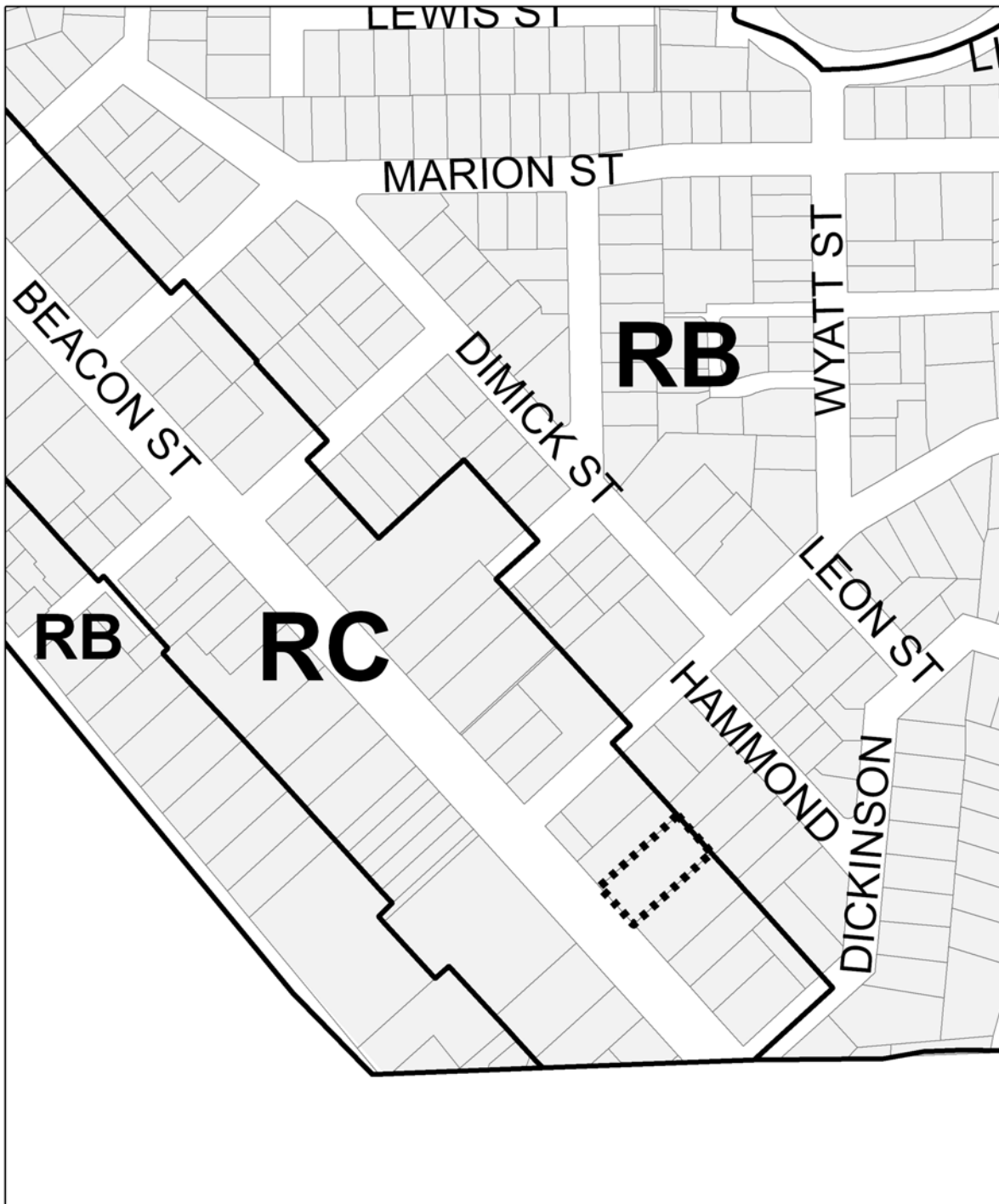
#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes
1	Approval is to convert four (4) existing parking spaces into car-sharing parking spaces. This approval is based	Building Permit	Plng.	

	<p>upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant and/or the Agent:</p> <table><tr><th>Date</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>October 22, 2008</td><td>Application materials submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>November 17, 2008</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD</td></tr></table> <p>Any changes to the approved plans that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.</p>	Date	Submission	October 22, 2008	Application materials submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	November 17, 2008	Plans submitted to OSPCD			
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October 22, 2008	Application materials submitted to the City Clerk’s Office									
November 17, 2008	Plans submitted to OSPCD									
2	<p>The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five working days in advance of a request for a final sign-off on the Special Permit to ensure the proposal was completed in accordance with the plans and information submitted and the conditions attached to this approval.</p>	CO	Plng. / ISD							

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Moroney
Acting Chair



15-17 BEACON STREET