



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
PLANNING BOARD  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

**MEMBERS**

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LINDA BOHAN  
MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ. (ALT.)

**Case #:** ZBA2008-38  
**Site:** 259 McGrath Highway  
**Date:** August 14, 2008  
**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING BOARD REPORT**

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**Applicant Name:** The Herb Chambers Companies  
**Applicant Address:** 259 McGrath Highway, Somerville, MA  
**Property Owner Name:** same  
**Property Owner Address:** same  
**Agent Name:** Salvatore Sachetta  
**Alderman:** Heuston

Legal Notice: The applicant seeks Special Permit with Site Plan Review approval under SZO §7.11.11.1 to expand the existing auto dealership corporate offices with a second floor addition and to make façade alterations.

Zoning District/Ward: IA / 2

Zoning Approval Sought: SPSR under SZO §7.11.11.1

Date of Application: July 14, 2008

Date(s) of Meeting/Hearing: [Planning Board: August 7, 2008 / ZBA: August 20, 2008]

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

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Dear ZBA members:

At its regular meeting on August 7, 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 Joseph Favaloro 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 site is located in southeastern Somerville on a triangular piece of land formed by the intersection of McGrath Highway and Linwood Street. The subject property is the combination of four lots with a combined area of 98,881 s.f. and is zoned Industrial A (IA). The existing structure on the site has

single-story, two-story, four-story and six-story sections. The existing building contains 114,034 n.s.f of floor area. The Herb Chambers Company has two brand franchises and corporate offices at the site.

2. Proposal: The Herb Chambers Company is proposing to construct a 6,614 g.s.f (5,358 n.s.f) second story addition on the southwestern portion of the property above the existing single-story structure which serves as the "Smart Center". The proposed addition would be an extension of the second floor of the adjacent building section. The addition would have a slight overhang of the structure below. The height of the structure with the proposed addition would be increased to 34' and would be 4' greater in height than the existing two-story structure that adjoins it to the left/north. The addition would allow Herb Chambers to expand their corporate offices and eventually add 16 new employees.

Façade alterations are proposed for the existing two-story 50' by 50' concrete and brick section of the building to the left of the proposed addition, in the area currently used as the entrance for the Mercedes dealership. The Mercedes-Benz Company wishes the applicant to incorporate signature "Autohaus" façade elements to the building. Alterations to the façade would add new I-beam and exposed roof structures, change the entryway, add blue aluminum columns, and incorporate additional new signage. These alterations would affect the south and west sides of the building section.

3. Nature of Application: Since the dealership facilities are larger than 5,000 s.f. the applicant is required to apply for a Special Permit with Site Plan Review (SPSR) under §7.11.11.1.b of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO). The structure has previously received a certificate of occupancy under earlier SPSR approvals; therefore no revision of the earlier decision is allowed. The applicant must submit full plans of the entire site and building elevations before a SPGA decision if they wish to update and consolidate the conditions of prior permits under the present SPSR.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The area surrounding the site is zoned for both industrial and business uses. McGrath Highway acts as a major barrier to the built environment to the west of the property. Other uses in the area are industrial in nature including a UHaul facility and a waste transfer station. This building is a signature building due to it's location and prominence as drivers enter Somerville from Cambridge.

5. Impacts on Abutting Properties: Impacts on abutting private properties would be minimal due to the location of the elevated McGrath Highway. Impacts on those driving McGrath Highway would be visual in nature. The Board has concerns about the "autohaus" design but not the second floor addition. The applicant will be meeting with the Somerville Design Review Committee to better understand any design issues that could be associated with this project.

6. Green Building Practices: The applicant will incorporate insulated windows, rigid board insulation, new HVAC units with night and weekend settings, automatic faucet shut-offs, and low VOC interior finishes. No demolition or removal of soil is proposed.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Deputy Chief Steve Keenan reviewed the proposal and stated that the second floor addition would require that fire detection/alarm protection and sprinkler system protection be extended to the addition and that the systems must be code compliant.

Design Review Committee: ***NOTE: The DRC met to review this proposal on August 14, after the Planning Board's meeting. The Planning Board delegated resolution of certain design elements to staff, in collaboration with the DRC. Planning Staff have modified the relevant condition (#6) in***

*order to reflect the DRC recommendation, and the Planning Board's original condition is included in a footnote; also, two new conditions have been added (#7 and #8).*

The DRC reviewed the proposal and expressed concern that the "Autohaus"-themed façade changes did not properly integrate with the existing structure. The Autohaus features are essentially glass and steel construction, whereas the existing structure is masonry construction. The DRC expressed concern that there were too many themes that did not blend well, and opined that the design could be improved by either of two approaches: 1) the masonry and Autohaus features might be better integrated with each other, and extended over the existing showroom area as well as into the new second floor; or 2) the Autohaus element and the existing masonry design should be clearly distinct and independent of one another. Because this was not yet resolved, they did not recommend approval of the Autohaus façade changes.

At the Applicant's suggestion that the Autohaus elements might be withdrawn from consideration to allow for further investigation of that design, the DRC stated that they would recommend approval of the second floor addition subject to two changes: 1) the storefront system for the entry door should be simplified, similar to the new second floor windows; and 2) the columns should be painted to match the dark grey of the Smart Car façade.

Comments from Aldermen: Ward Alderman Heuston has been contacted and has not yet provided comments.

8. Parking: A four story garage provides parking for the car dealerships as well as the employees. Customer parking is defined with signage and located on the south side of the lot and adjacent to McGrath Highway.

Under §9.5.12 of the SZO a minimum of 117 off-street parking spaces are required. The Applicant currently provides 254 off-street parking spaces and is not proposing any additional spaces.

## **II. Findings and Determinations for Special Permit with Site Plan Review**

In considering the requested special permits with site plan review the Board must consider and make findings and determinations as outlined in §5.2.5 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.2.5 in more detail.

1. Information Supplied: The Applicant must comply "with the information requirements in Section §5.2.3;" The information provided by the Applicant allows for a comprehensive review of the proposed development and is in general compliance with the requirements set forth under §5.2.3 of the SZO.
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". As conditioned, the proposal will comply with these standards.
3. Purpose of the 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 project site is located within an IA district. The IA district seeks 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 use 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."

The project is consistent the purpose of the IA zoning district. Motor vehicle sales and office space is a commercial use that would be compatible with the commercial and industrial uses in the area.

4. Site and Area Compatibility: The Applicant has to ensure that the project "Is 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."

Since the lot has previously been developed prior natural features have been significantly altered. The Board finds the existing building, with proposed addition, to be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood in terms of height, scale and massing. The building is in a highly visible location as drivers enter Somerville from Cambridge along McGrath Highway. The appearance of the existing building on the site will be altered, and while the new physical structure will be generally in character with the buildings in the vicinity, the Board believes the proposed façade design, particularly the "autohaus" design, could be improved. The Board has recommended and the applicant has agreed to meet with the Design Review Committee to explore façade options.

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

The project meets accepted standards and criteria for the functional design of facilities, structures, and site construction. Any necessary mitigation or minor design changes have been incorporated into the recommended conditions section of this report.

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 original SPSR application for the construction of the building received approvals from the City Engineer and a determination was made that no adverse impacts on public systems would result from the development. The Board finds that the proposed addition and the anticipated 16 additional employees would have a minimal impact on any public systems.

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."

Because of the nature of the proposed use no adverse environmental impacts are anticipated. The area surrounding the proposed facility includes a four lane highway and a waste transfer station which together produce pollution in the form of noxious fumes and noise. The Board finds that this facility would not contribute to the emissions that are now experienced in the area. During construction efforts will be made to mitigate dust and control air quality, and to minimize noise.

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."

As the required findings of Article 5 have been made, and the proposal satisfies the purposes of Article 1, including Purpose, Interpretation and Scope, and of Article 6, as already described, The Board finds the proposal to be consistent with the purposes of the SZO.

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 location for the new construction is in an area that will be highly visible from McGrath Highway as drivers enter the city from Cambridge. Due to this location the proposed addition and façade alteration should be visually appealing. The Board has concerns regarding the appearance of the façade and has requested the Somerville Design Review Committee to review and comment on the proposal.

14. 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 Fire Prevention Bureau has commented on the plans. No outstanding concerns have been communicated to the Planning Board.

15. 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 Board finds the signage to reflect the scale and character of the building. However, the Design Review Committee's review will address the signage and the potential for improvements.

### **III. RECOMMENDATION**

#### **Special Permit with Site Plan Review (SPSR) SZO §7.11.11.1.**

*With modifications*, the Board finds that this application complies with the requirements for granting a special permit as set forth under §5.2.5. Based on the above findings, the Planning Board recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the **SPECIAL PERMIT WITH SITE PLAN REVIEW**.

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

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes
1	<u>This approval incorporates, updates and replaces conditions of all prior zoning approvals except the ZBA variance (case # 1989-75) and (case #1993-26) for signage.</u>  Approval is to construct a 6,614 g.s.f second story addition. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans	BP/CO	ISD/PIng.	

	submitted by the Applicant and/or agent: <table><tr><th>Date</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>July 14, 2008</td><td>Initial application and plans submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>August 5, 2008</td><td>Plans and elevations for the second floor addition submitted to OSPCD <i>as modified by conditions #7 and #8.</i></td></tr></table> <p>Any changes to the approved site plan or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.</p>	Date	Submission	July 14, 2008	Initial application and plans submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	August 5, 2008	Plans and elevations for the second floor addition submitted to OSPCD <i>as modified by conditions #7 and #8.</i>			
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2	A code compliant fire alarm and suppression system shall be required.	BP/CO	FP							
3	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 of concrete subject to DPW approval.	CO	DPW							
4	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							
5	Any HVAC or other rooftop equipment shall be screened with materials that are visually similar to the façade.	CO	Plng.							
6	The applicant shall eliminate the proposed "Autohaus"-themed façade alterations from the plans.	Building Permit	ISD/ Plng.	Modified after PB meeting in response to DRC comments.						
7	The new columns shall be painted dark grey to match the “Smart Car” façade.	CO	Plng.	Added after PB meeting in response to DRC comments.						
8	The design of the storefront entry to the expanded office space shall be simplified, similar to the new second floor windows.	CO	Plng.							
9	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at	CO	Plng.							

	least five working days in advance of a request for a final sign-off on the building permit to ensure the proposal was constructed in accordance with the plans and information submitted and the conditions attached to this approval.			
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Sincerely,



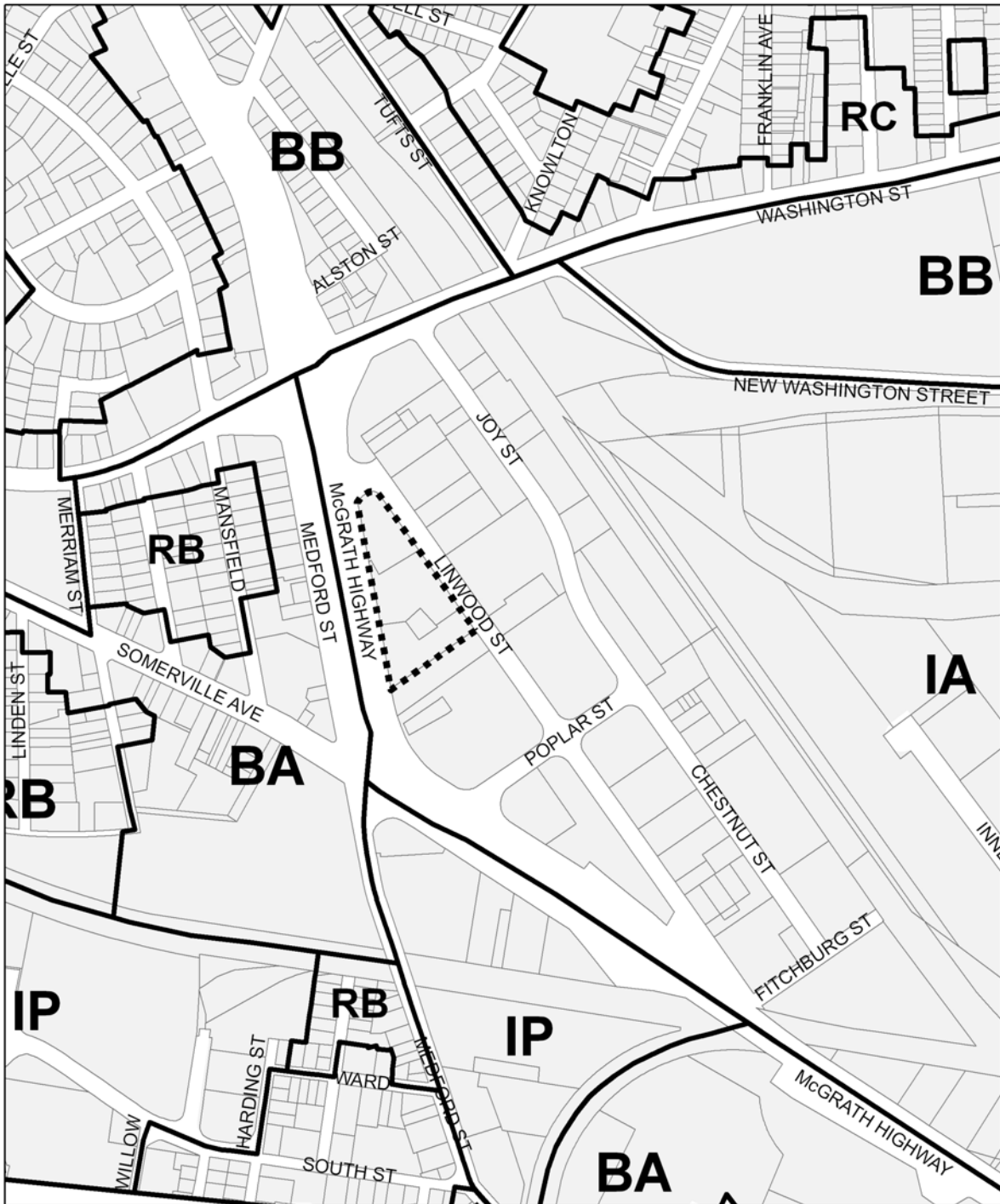
Kevin Prior  
Chairman

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<sup>1</sup> Condition approved by Planning Board pending DRC comments:

6	The applicant shall eliminate the façade alterations to the proposed "Autohaus" or work with Staff and the DRC to revise the design.	ZBA decision	Plng.	
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## 259 McGrath Highway