



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

STAFF

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LORI MASSA, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*
FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

Case #: ZBA 2009-08
Date: March 30, 2009
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 27 Jackson Road

Applicant Name: John Keegan

Applicant Address: 35 Charlestown Street, Somerville, MA 02143

Property Owner Name: Walnut Street Center, Inc.

Alderman: Pero

Legal Notice: The Applicant seeks a special permit under §4.4.1 in order to construct a first floor addition and provide a group home for persons with disabilities. The ADA compliant residence will house five individuals.

Zoning District/Ward: Residence B / 4

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1

Date of Application: March 10, 2009

Date(s) of Meetings/Public Hearing: PB: April 2, 2009 / ZBA: April 15, 2009

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is two lots (Somerville Assessors MBL 71-D-27 and 71-D-28) that combined have a total square footage of 6,400. The property is 80' wide by 80' deep. There is an existing 2.5 story wood frame dwelling on the 71-D-27 lot with a footprint of 885sf with a one story cement garage in the rear yard. The 71-D-28 lot is currently vacant.

2. Proposal: The proposal is to renovate the existing structure and to construct an addition extending from the right side of the existing structure approximately 40' to within 10' of the side lot line of the combined lots. The addition proposed is a single story of 1,312 nsf that will be ADA compliant. The new structure would be a group home that features 5 bedrooms for individuals with developmental disabilities. The project is being proposed by the Walnut Street Center, Inc. who would maintain a 24 hour staff rotating in three shifts to assist the inhabitants.

3. **Nature of Application:** The proposal includes an as-of-right use conversion from a single family to a group residence. A group residence is considered a single-family dwelling by the Inspectional Services Department for the purposes of zoning analysis. Under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) this alteration would require a Special Permit because the gross floor area is being increased by more than 25%. The existing structure is 3,654 gsf and the addition proposed is 1,312 gsf, which is an increase of approximately 36%.

4. **Surrounding Neighborhood:** The surrounding neighborhood is predominantly residential, with a mix of single-, two-, and three-family homes of 2.5 stories. There is a newer townhouse development approximately 150' from the subject property that contains 32 units. Lots in the area are generally between 3000-4000 sf in area and almost all the lots are developed with homes. The neighborhood is a quiet area with narrow tree-lined streets.

5. **Green Building Practices:** Almost all building materials for the addition will be made from recycled materials and all new appliances and fixtures will be energy efficient including the new HVAC system.

7. **Comments:**

Alderman: Alderman Pero has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Fire Prevention: Deputy Chief Keenan has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Historic Preservation: HPC Staff notes that the proposed addition generally appears to meet the above guidelines and would be compatible with the neighborhood. However, the conceptual plans provided do not discuss materials. The original main house originally would have had wood shingle and clapboard siding instead of the current asbestos and vinyl. Staff would recommend the use of natural materials where possible, although cementitious materials such as "hardie-plank" are commonly used in new construction in historic districts because it blends well with older structures and retains paint well in a manner similar to asbestos shingle. The 6/1 and 9/1 sash proposed for the windows and bays reference the 6/2 sash in the main building. Because vinyl windows tend to fail in about 10-15 years and many other modern window styles are also not repairable and need to be replaced rather than mended, HPC Staff would recommend using wood double-hung windows due to their longevity with good quality storm windows such as the Harvey Tru-Chanel, which have a very low R value, be used if possible. The windows should not have low-E glass or if they do, the reflective qualities be minimized. The muntins or mullions should not be of the flat snap-in style because they tend to break and do not look anything like older windows.

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 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 Permit.

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."

In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff find that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The proposal conforms with all dimensional standards except lot size, though the lot is twice the size of most other lots in the area. The applicant has worked with Staff and generally addressed the concerns of Historic Preservation in their proposal by retaining and renovating the existing structure. Other recommendations alluded to in the Historic Preservation memo will be incorporated into the conditions of this report. Staff finds that the height of the new structure is appropriate as it is considerably lower than those of the surrounding structures. The design of the structure is appealing and complimentary to the existing structure with its use of bays and a gable roof that mimics the orientation and angle of the existing roof. Staff also finds that conditioned façade improvements to the original structure will improve the neighborhood and make the structure more historically accurate in appearance.

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."

Staff finds that the proposed as-of-right use would be beneficial to the city as facilities to serve the developmentally disabled are much needed. According to their website the Walnut Street Center, Inc. "is a nonprofit, human service agency that provides comprehensive support services to adults who have developmental disabilities and their families. The agency was founded in 1970 by parents who wanted supports for their children, and other adults who had similar needs, in their community." Staff finds that the residential use of this addition and the relatively low number of bedrooms proposed would make this project compatible with the surrounding character. Planning Staff finds that the well established non-profit organization and the facility staff would be capable of addressing any issues or concerns that may arise in the community.

Staff will also require a landscaping plan to be submitted to OSPCD that will screen and further improve the appearance of the site.

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."

Staff finds that the design of the building is consistent with the neighborhood. While the structure will be larger than other structures in the area, the combining of the two lots create a property twice as large as other properties on the street. The use of conditioned façade materials, the variety of façade depths and window styles create an appealing structure that is compatible with the character of the street. The residential nature of the structure is compatible with the residential uses in the neighborhood.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §4.4.1

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

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes						
1	Approval is for the construction of an approximately 1,312 nsf single-story addition. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	Plng.							
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>(3/10/09)</td><td>Initial application submitted to OSPCD</td></tr><tr><td>1/28/09(3/18/09)</td><td>Elevations/First Floor Site Plan</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(3/10/09)	Initial application submitted to OSPCD	1/28/09(3/18/09)	Elevations/First Floor Site Plan
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Any changes to the approved elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.										
2	A landscaping plan shall be submitted to OSPCD for approval showing any transformer and dumpster locations.	Building Permit	Plng.							
3	The Applicant shall legally combine all parcels comprising the development into a single parcel, and shall file copies of the consolidation plan with the City’s Planning and Assessing Departments.	Building Permit	Plng.							
4	A code compliant fire alarm system shall be installed.	CO	FP							
5	The applicant shall use natural or cementitious (hardi-plank) materials on the facades of both the existing and new construction.	CO	Hist.							
6	Muntins or mullions shall not be of the flat snap-in style.	CO	Hist.							
7	Applicant shall screen any dumpsters with fencing that blocks any view of the dumpster itself.	CO	Plng.							
8	Any transformers should be located as not to impact the historic building or landscaped area, and shall be fully screened.	Electrical permits & CO	ISD							
9	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							

10	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at 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.	Final sign off	Plng.	
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27 JACKSON ROAD