



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

PLANNING BOARD

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Case #: ZBA2008-34

Site: 27 College Avenue

Date: July 18, 2008

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Applicant Name: MetroPCS Massachusetts LLC

Applicant Address: 285 Billerica Road, Chelmsford, MA 01824

Property Owner Name: Somerville Housing Authority

Property Owner Address: 30 Memorial Road, Somerville, MA

Alderman: Gewirtz

Legal Notice: The applicant seeks Special Permit Approval under SZO §7.11.15.3 for the installation of a wireless communications facility.

Zoning District/Ward: CBD / 6

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO§7.11.15.3

Date of Application: June 11, 2008

Date(s) of Meetings/Public Hearing: (PB: July 17, 2008 / ZBA: July 23, 2008)

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

Dear ZBA members:

At its regular meeting on July 17, 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 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 property is a 15,634 s.f. parcel located within a Central Business District (CBD). The property is a corner lot located at the intersection of College Avenue and Winslow Street.

The Ciampa Manor is a Somerville Housing Authority development located on the site. The building is a six (6) story, 53 feet high, brick structure.

2. Proposal: The applicant, MetroPCS, is proposing to install wireless communications equipment, including six (6) façade-mounted panel-style antennas, one (1) GPS antenna, rooftop mounted equipment cabinets within an en existing rooftop shelter and associated cabling and equipment.

The existing rooftop shelter is a decommissioned AT&T shelter which will also serve as the mount for the façade-mounted antennas. This shelter is 13 feet high and at no point is closer than 14 feet from the building edge.

3. Nature of Application: Under SZO §7.11.15.3 establishment of a wireless communications facility requires a Special Permit approval.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The property is located approximately 250' from the center of Davis Square. The surrounding area has a wide variety of uses including residential of all types, commercial, office and institutional. Direct abutters include the West Somerville Baptist Church and several retail and office spaces.

5. Impacts on Abutting Properties: The façade mounted antennas would be visible from abutting properties.

6. Green Building Practices: None indicated.

7. Parking: Additional parking would not be required.

6. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Deputy Chief Steve Keenan has reviewed the application and stated, "The proposed installation of a wireless communications facility would require a code compliant fire alarm and /or fire suppression system per NFPA codes, etc".

Alderman: Alderman Gewirtz has been contacted and has not yet provided comments

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO§7.11.15.3):

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

1. Information Supplied: The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.1.2 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project with respect to the required Special Permits.

2. Compliance with Standards: The Applicant must comply "with such criteria or standards as may be set forth in this Ordinance which refer to the granting of the requested special permit."

The Applicant seeks a special permit under §7.11.15.3 of the SZO which requires the applicant to follow guidelines and procedures set forth in Article 14 for the, "regulation of wireless telecommunications facilities so as to allow and encourage such uses in the City with minimal harm to the public health, safety, and general welfare."

The Board finds that the proposal would not be substantially more detrimental to the area than the existing structure and minimal harm would be imposed upon the health, safety and welfare of the surrounding neighborhood. The Board finds that the only visible change to the building would be the additional antennas and that the structure of building would be unaltered. Electrical Engineer and Radio Frequency Specialist, M. Sohail Usmani, stated in a letter to the ZBA that the, "proposed facility complies with all applicable Federal and State standards, including those regarding radio-frequency emissions."

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 Central Business District (CBD) in which the property is located, namely, "(t)o preserve and enhance central business areas for retail, business services, housing, and office uses and to promote a strong pedestrian character and scale in those areas." The addition of the antennas and associated equipment will neither negatively affect commercial uses, nor the pedestrian character in the area.

The Board finds that the proposal **is consistent** with the purposes set forth in Article 14 of the Zoning Ordinance, to:

- a) *Protect residential areas and land uses from potential adverse impacts of towers and antennas;*
- b) *Encourage the location of telecommunications facilities in non-residential areas;*
- c) *Minimize the total number of towers and antennas throughout the community;*
- d) *Strongly encourage the joint use of new and existing tower sites as a primary option rather than construction of additional single-use towers;*
- e) *Encourage users of towers and antennas to locate them in areas where the adverse impact on the community is minimal;*
- f) *Encourage users of towers and antennas to configure them in ways that minimize the adverse visual impact of the towers and antennas through careful design, siting, landscape screening, and innovative camouflaging techniques;*
- g) *Enhance the ability of the providers of telecommunications services to provide such services to the community quickly, effectively, and efficiently;*
- h) *Consider the public health and safety of communications facilities; and*

- i) *Avoid potential damage to adjacent properties from tower and antenna failure through sound engineering and careful siting of structures.*

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 the project to be compatible with the surrounding area and land uses. The proposed antenna additions keep with the current built context in the area. The surrounding area is relatively flat and the rooftop antenna components will be painted to match the building, as well as set back from the edge of the building. The existing rooftop shelter is 13' in height and at no point is closer than 14' from the building's edge. From College Avenue the shelter is set back 21' and from Winslow the set back is 25', which will limit the visual impact of the exterior antennas.

5. Review Criteria for Telecommunications Facilities

In addition to those standards outlined in Section 5.1 for the granting of special permits, the SPGA shall consider the following factors in determining whether to issue a special permit for a telecommunications facility:

- a) *Height of proposed facility:* The existing building has a 52' high roof top with a 1' parapet, which creates a 53' high roofline. The existing rooftop shelter is 13' tall as measured from the rooftop (12' above the roofline). The top of the existing shelter is 65' in height. The GPS antenna would extend 1' above the shelter and the six (6) 51.5" tall antennas would be mounted on the side of the shelter, near the top, but not extending above the existing shelter roof.
- b) *Proximity of facility to residential structures and residential zoning districts:* The building at 27 College Avenue is a residential structure in a Central Business District. The property is directly adjacent to a Residence A zoning district to the rear and within 145' of a Residence B zoning district across College Avenue. A two-family residential structure is located directly behind this property. The Board finds that wireless communications equipment is currently located on this structure and that approval of this application will allow the reuse of a previously decommissioned wireless equipment shelter.
- c) *Nature of uses on adjacent and nearby properties:* Surrounding properties are mixed use in nature and, the Board finds, compatible with the proposed use.
- d) *Surrounding topography and prominence of proposed facility:* The surrounding area is relatively flat and there is another building of comparable height less than 100' away across College Avenue which works to limit the prominence of the facility. Though the proposed rooftop antennas are visible from several vantage points, the proposal to match them to the color of the building will reduce their prominence from any public way.
- e) *Surrounding tree cover and foliage:* The surrounding area has several street trees that are significantly lower in height than the proposed antennas and will be unaffected by this proposal.

- f) *Design of tower, with particular reference to design characteristics that have the effect of reducing or eliminating visual obtrusiveness, as specified in Section 14.3:* Not applicable.
- g) *Location of tower, with particular reference to the existence of more suitable locations, as specified in Section 14.3:* Not applicable.
- h) *Proposed ingress and egress:* Ingress and egress to the site will be at the existing curb cut for the property and use existing parking and circulation patterns.
- i) *Distance from existing facilities:* (See figures B and C)
- j) *Availability of suitable existing towers, poles, other structures, or alternative technologies, as discussed in Section 14.5.2:* The attached report prepared by the applicant's professional radio frequency engineer indicates that this location was chosen by MetroPCS, "due to the existing use of the property for wireless communications use, the city's preference for use of city-owned properties for wireless communications sites, and the location and overall height of the property, which provides the opportunity for reasonable service coverage in this area of Somerville".

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under SZO §7.11.15.3

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

The Board finds that this application complies with the requirements for granting a special permit as set forth under §5.1.4 and Article 14.

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 for the establishment of six (6) façade-mounted panel-style antennas, one (1) GPS antenna, rooftop mounted equipment cabinets within an en existing rooftop shelter and associated cabling and equipment. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant and/or contractor:	BP/CO	PLNG.							
	<table><tr><th>Date</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>June 11, 2008</td><td>Initial application, submitted to the City Clerk’s Office.</td></tr><tr><td>July 10, 2008</td><td>P.E. materials, plans, elevations and photograph renditions submitted to OSPCD</td></tr></table>				Date	Submission	June 11, 2008	Initial application, submitted to the City Clerk’s Office.	July 10, 2008	P.E. materials, plans, elevations and photograph renditions submitted to OSPCD
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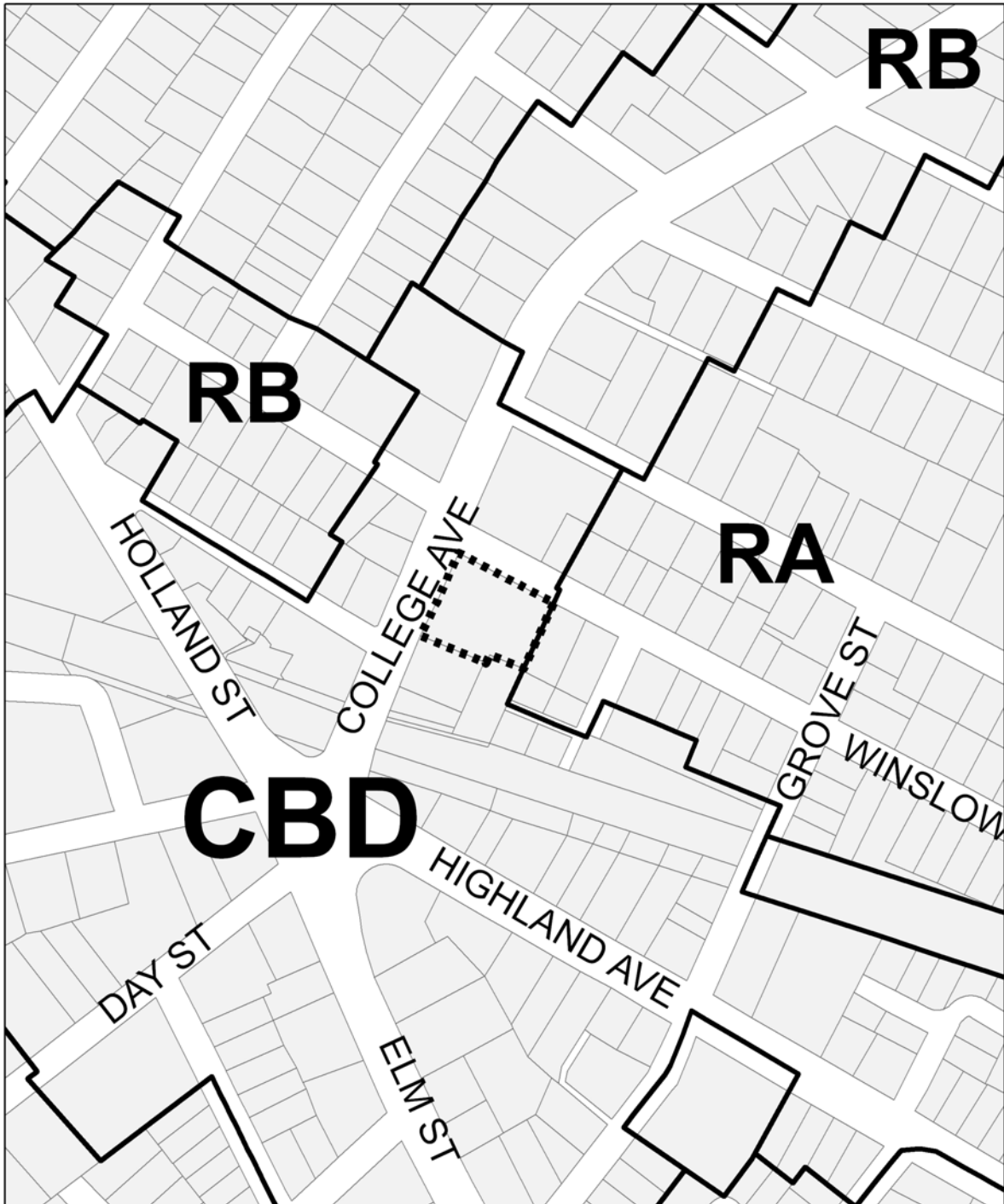
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	Any changes to the approved site plan, photograph renditions and/or elevations must receive ZBA approval.			
2	The Applicant shall drop the height of the façade-mounted panel antennas two feet from the top of the existing shelter to meet Article 14 guidelines.	CO	PLNG.	
3	<i>Compliance with Noise Control Ordinance.</i> Prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Use and Occupancy Permit for the installation of the wireless telecommunications facility, the Applicant shall submit to the Inspectional Services Department, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals, a sound level measurement certified as accurate by a professional acoustician and shall perform such sound level measurements six months after issuance of the certificate of occupancy, with subsequent sound level measurements annually on or before the anniversary date of the original six month measurement to document that all of the Applicant's installed equipment complies and continues to comply with the decibel level standards established by the City of Somerville, Noise Control Ordinance. The Applicant shall provide the results of such measurements and certify that the facility complies with the decibel level standards established by the City of Somerville, Noise Control Ordinance, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals.	CONT.	ISD	
4	<i>Compliance with Federal Communications Commission Guidelines for Human Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields.</i> To ensure compliance with the standards established by the Federal Communications Commission Office of Engineering and Technology ("FCC") in OET Bulletin 65 as adopted by Massachusetts Department of Public Health under 105 CMR 122.021, the Applicant shall perform measurements, within two (2) months of the date that the Applicant's wireless telecommunications facility commences operation and at intervals of twelve (12) months thereafter, to establish that the Applicant's wireless telecommunications facility complies and continues to comply with the FCC guidelines and applicable state regulations for human exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields for human exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields. The Applicant shall provide the results of such measurements with certification of compliance to the City of Somerville, Health Department, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals.	CONT.	BOH	
5	Any antenna that is not operated continuously for a period of twelve (12) months shall be considered abandoned, and the owner of such antenna shall remove the same within ninety (90) days of notice from the City of Somerville informing	CONT.	ISD	

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes
	the owner of such abandonment.			
6	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.	



Elizabeth Maroney
Acting Chairman

Cc: Applicant: MetroPCS Massachusetts LLC
Owner: Somerville Housing Authority



27 COLLEGE AVENUE