



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

PLANNING DIVISION

**Memorandum**

To: Somerville Planning Board

From: Planning Staff

Date: May 18, 2010

**RE: SUBDIVISION OF 1 BENTON RD**

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This memo addresses questions from the Planning Board meeting of May 6, 2010 and questions that arose after the meeting. There were questions related to pedestrian and vehicular safety mitigation, closing of curb cuts, the impact of property values on the subdivision, and the applicable sections of the City's ordinances that relate to noise.

*Pedestrian and Vehicular Safety*

The Board discussed concerns related to pedestrian and vehicular safety as a result of the subdivision of the 1 Benton Road parcel. The Board was concerned about the number of vehicles entering and existing from the Summer Street driveway. The Board asked to have the City's Traffic and Parking Department (T&P) provide feedback regarding whether a vehicle activated warning sign would be an effective system to address their concern. The sign could be a loop detected (vehicle activated) flashing sign or similar pedestrian warning device that alerts pedestrians on the adjacent sidewalk of vehicles entering or exiting the driveway on Summer Street. Response from T&P was that this type of system would not be effective in addressing the pedestrian safety concern in this location. The device works well for parking garages but not for driveways.

Staff found three cases that the Special Permit Granting Authority approved in the past several years with a condition that a vehicle activated warning device be installed for garages. The locations were in a Neighborhood Business District, Residence A and Residence B districts (1188/1194 Broadway, 75 Cross Street, and 47 Whitman Street). If the Planning Board were to condition the device, the installation could require the approval of the Traffic and Parking Department. It would not require a special permit to be installed.

It should be noted that the vehicles utilizing the Summer Street driveway will be exiting in a forward direction which will provide the driver with greater visibility. At present, there are currently twenty-nine (29) driveways off of Summer Street on the subject property block, the adjacent two blocks on either side, and the opposite sides of the street from these blocks. In twenty-two (22) of these driveways cars back out onto the street.

T& P also provided comments on the traffic pattern related to Benton Road because this is the location where vehicles parking in two spaces would be backing out onto the street. T&P noted that the site plan could be reconfigured to allow vehicles to exit in a forward direction. Staff find, however, that this type of configuration would significantly increase the amount of pavement on the site and would require most of the front yard of the new structure to be paved.

The Board asked to have T&P and the Applicant's Traffic Consultants provide recommendations on mitigation measures to address their concerns. T&P finds it incumbent upon the Applicant's Traffic Consult to submit proposals for mitigation for City Staff to review. Planning staff have not yet received recommendations from the Applicant's Traffic Consultant. One idea that the consultant discussed at the meeting was limiting on-street parking at a distance from the driveway to improve visibility. The applicant should submit this and any other ideas for formal review.

### *Sections of Ordinances Related to Noise*

A question arose regarding the applicable sections of the Zoning and Noise Ordinance related to light and noise. The applicable sections are:

- Section 5.4. Site Plan Approval, 5.4.6. Site Plan Approval Standards and Criteria:
  - The development shall provide for safe vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and to adjacent ways, including sidewalks, cross-walks and the like (item 6)
  - There shall be no unreasonable glare onto public roads and other public ways into the night sky, or onto neighboring properties from lighting or reflection (item 11)
- The Noise Control Ordinance is attached

### *Curb Cut*

The Somerville Zoning Ordinance allows for one driveway curb cut per street line in RA and RB districts. This means that on a corner lot in these districts, two curb cuts are allowed – one per street line. The Department of Public Works issued a permit to construct the curb cut on Summer Street based on this standard.

An Alderman brought up an idea at the last meeting to condition the approval on closing the curb cut on Summer Street to address the Board's concern regarding pedestrian and vehicular safety. Closing the curb cut would eliminate the parking that is required for the existing 3 residential units at 1 Benton Rd and would make the site nonconforming relative to parking. Correcting this nonconformity would require the applicant to either apply for a special permit to have a shared driveway, and use the curb cut on Benton Road to access both lots, or apply for a second curb cut on Benton Rd once the lots are subdivided. The Applicant would have to show that the parking requirements could be provided for in one of these configurations. Significant adjustments to the site plan would be required in order to accomplish these changes and it is likely that any configuration that is proposed would require more paved areas than are required by the current proposed site plan.

Furthermore, the Planning Board would need to establish why the closing of a curb cut that is allowed under the City policy and would create a zoning violation upon subdividing the land would constitute a "reasonable" condition of the subdivision under the Site Plan Approval regulations.

### *Property Values*

Another concern discussed at the meeting was the impact that the subdivision would have on property values in this historic district. Planning staff found studies that commented on the value of buildings in

historic districts; however, staff have not found studies that address the impact of new construction on historic districts.