



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

*PLANNING DIVISION*

**PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS**

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DANA LEWINTER, ALT.

**Case #:** ZBA 2011-17

**Date:** March 3, 2011

**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION**

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**Site:** 16 Butler Dr / 100 Temple St – St. Polycarp's Village

**Applicant Name:** Somerville Community Corp, Courtney Koslow

**Applicant Address:** 337 Somerville Ave, Somerville MA 02143

**Property Owner Name:** The St. Polycarp Redevelopment LLC

**Property Owner Address:** The St. Polycarp Redevelopment c/o Somerville Community Corp,  
337 Somerville Ave, Somerville MA 02143

**Alderman:** Walter Pero

Legal Notice: Applicant, Somerville Community Corporation, & Owner, St. Polycarp Redevelopment, LLC, seek a revision to Special Permit ZBA 2007-03 (SZO §5.3.8). The revision is to modify the site and building design for Phase 3 of the development consisting of 31 residential units. The Applicant & Owner also seek a variance from providing approx 15 parking spaces.<sup>1</sup>

Zoning District/Ward: NB / 4

Zoning Approval Sought: Revision to Special Permit (SZO §5.3.8) and Variance (§5.5)

Date of Application: February 9, 2011

Dates of Public Meeting • Hearing: Planning Board 3/3/11 • Zoning Board of Appeals 3/16/11

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Dear ZBA members:

At its regular meeting on March 3, 2011 the Planning Board heard the above-referenced application. Based on materials submitted by the Applicant and the Staff recommendation, the Board voted 5-0 (Elizabeth Moroney recused herself) to recommend **conditional approval** of the requested **Variance**.

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<sup>1</sup> The Planning Board is not required to make a recommendation on the revision to the SPSR; however, a description of the design changes is included in this report so that the Planning Board would have a comprehensive view of the proposal.



In conducting its analysis, the Planning Board found:

## **I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The 3.5 acre property is located in the Winter Hill neighborhood and bordered by Mystic Avenue, Temple Street, Memorial Road, and the Mystic View Apartments (Somerville Housing Authority). The property was formerly occupied by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, and used by the Saint Polycarp Parish until 1999 for religious and educational purposes. In 2007 the Zoning Board of Appeals issued a special permit with site plan review for the site to be developed into a mixed-use village with 84 affordable rental units and 6,000 square feet of commercial space. There are several buildings on the site; the church and rectory will remain and the school, convent, and library/garage will be demolished. The Somerville Community Corporation recently completed the first of three phases of new construction on the site. Phase I included 24 units of affordable rental housing units and 6000 square feet of ground floor commercial space. Ground floor tenants now include Just-A-Start, Central Convenience, and Avalon Dental. Phase II is anticipated to begin in Spring 2011, which includes 29 affordable rental housing units, a community room and a playground.

### *Permit History:*

In March 2007, the Applicant received a Special Permit with Site Plan Review to redevelop the Saint Polycarp Parish. The approval included the demolition of four of six existing buildings and the construction of a mixed-use village in two phases. The ZBA granted the Applicant a revision in April 2008 (2007-03-R0308) to add 3 parking spaces and locate the parking for 100 Temple Street on a separate lot at 8 Butler Drive. The ZBA granted another revision in June 2009 (2007-03-R0409) to establish a sub-phasing plan for the 60 residential units in Phase II and to modify building dimensions, elevations, parking layout, and landscaped areas. The most recent revision was in August 2010, was to modify the elevations and materials of buildings in Phase II.

2. Proposal: The proposal includes a parking variance for the third and final phase of development (Case #ZBA 2011-17). The Applicants will also be applying to the Zoning Board of Appeals to revise the SPSR including modifications to the site plan and elevations (Case # ZBA 2007-03-R4 (2/2011)).

### *Parking*

The change to the number of parking spaces proposed reflects the actual car ownership of the residents at the site that live in the Phase I building and at similar sites. There will be 75 parking spaces onsite for the 53 residential units that are part of Phase I and II, including the 20% reduction received because the units are affordable and the 3 spaces that are shared with the commercial tenants. The prior approval was to build an additional 44 parking spaces for the 31 units in Phase III. The total number of parking spaces for the 84 units was 106 spaces. Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) analyzed the car ownership of their residents in two of their larger low- and moderate- income rental properties with off-street parking. Saint Polycarps Village Phase I and the Linden Street redevelopment have an average car ownership of less than 0.7 cars per unit. The approved ratio of parking at Saint Polycarps is twice this figure. The current proposal is to provide 30 spaces for the 31 units in phase III or a ratio of 0.96 spaces per unit. Based on the data from other locations, the demand for this phase will be for 22 parking spaces. The attached table provides more detailed parking calculations for the entire site. The residential parking spaces on the site will be available to tenants regardless of the building that they live in. The ratio of parking spaces to the number of residential units for the site is 1.2 (102 parking spaces / 84 units).

SCC has had an agreement with the church to provide parking onsite since the start of the project. Six parking spaces by the curb cut on Memorial Road will be designated as church parking as well as the parking along Butler Drive. These spaces are not required by zoning because the Church use and parking

is not changing. For practical purposes the church needs parking on site and spaces have been designated for it.

### *Building Layout*

The residential units were originally designed to be condominiums but the financing and housing demand has changed and the units will now be rentals. The layouts have been modified to account for this change. The units were originally larger, two-story units built over two-story units or flats, which is a less efficient and most cost prohibitive layout than the current proposal.

The original site plan for phase III included three buildings around a courtyard. The proposal consolidates the buildings to one L-shaped three-story building with partially exposed underground parking in the back due to the site grading. The proposed building will comply with the dimensional requirements in the NB zoning district and the number of units proposed will not change. The majority of the building will be a double-loaded corridor with some duplex units and flats on Memorial Road. The change to the building layout allows for the installation of an elevator that will provide people who are physical handicapped access to most of the units. Also, it is easier to maintain and secure a single double loaded corridor building. The change to the site plan increases the amount of open space on the site in a landscaped area in front of the building and provides space for more parking under the building. There will be less at grade parking reducing the amount of asphalt on the site and decreasing the heat island effect, pollution and rainwater runoff.

### *Building Design*

The elevations have been modified to reflect the new site plan. The façade facing Memorial Road will have a more residential appearance than the previously approved elevations. The façade will be broken up by bays with fiber cement panels, 5 inch and 8 inch fiber cement lap siding, a central door with a transparent aluminum storefront system above it and a roof that is more articulated than the previous approval. The Butler Road and Somerville Housing Authority elevations will have balconies off of some of the units. The final details of the elevations are being finalized. The Applicants presented the design to the Design Review Committee on February 24, 2011. Recommendations from the meeting can be found in the Comments section below. The details will be finalized before the Zoning Board of Appeals hearing.

### *Site Layout*

Changes to the site plan also include widening Butler Drive from 12 feet to 15 feet and increasing the radius of the cul-de-sac to allow for ample room for two-way traffic.

3. Nature of Application: The variance request (SZO §5.5) is from parking requirements as required under §9.5 and §9.13.

The Applicant will also be applying to the Zoning Board of Appeals to make revisions to the SPSR to modify the site plan and elevations of the building. The Applicant seeks a revision to the permit under SZO §5.3.8, which states: "Revisions that are not *de minimis* shall be subject to the full notice and hearing provisions of §5.3.2 of this Ordinance, but shall not be subject to review by additional boards, departments, city agencies or commissions except as requested by the SPGA or upon the recommendation of the Planning Director. Applicable findings shall be made in accordance with the type of permit(s) being revised." The Planning Board is not required to make a recommendation on this aspect of the application; however, the design changes are included in this report so that the Planning Board would have a comprehensive view of the proposal.

4. Impacts of Proposal: The reduced number of parking spaces is not anticipated to have negative impacts considering that data from similar develops show that the 30 spaces that will be building will not

be full utilized. Building too much parking will have negative consequences of a large area of asphalt that is impervious to rain water and not providing a benefit to the residents. Reducing the number of parking spaces provides an opportunity to increase the contiguous landscaped area in front of the building. Also, the change to the site plan pulls many of the parking spaces under the building so that they will only be visible from the eastern side of the building along the driveway out of the property.

5. Green Building Practices: Reducing the number of parking spaces that will go unutilized will improve the efficiency of the site. A landscaped pervious surface will reduce the rainwater runoff and provide a usable space for outdoor activity. The new buildings at Saint Polycarp Village will include many green building practices. The new building in Phase I is Energy Star rated and received LEED-NC Silver certification under the US Green building Council's LEED rating system. The building features a green roof and solar panels for electricity and hot water. Phase II has been awarded green building funding through the Enterprise Foundation's Green Communities program and will be following the Green Communities standards for green building. Phase III will also be designed to Enterprise Green Communities standards as well.

6. Comments:

*Traffic & Parking:* Traffic and Parking has reviewed the parking figures submitted thus far and has requested a memo from a transportation engineer to verify the information. The Applicants will be submitting this memo prior to the Zoning Board of Appeals hearing.

*Historic Preservation:* The Commission thought that the building should fit in better with the original context of the site. Materials such as a stone façade could help. An arched doorway might tie the building to the church. The east elevation could be broken with more articulation. Solar panels could be used to give more interest to the roof. Safety and privacy requirements were also mentioned.

Recent black and white photos of the school, library and convent have also been reviewed for submittal to the Massachusetts Historical Commission as part of a Memoranda of Agreement prior to the demolition of the buildings noted below determined significant by the MHC but not by the SHPC on 3/21/06 (HPC 06.18).

*Design Review Committee:* The Committee had concerns regarding two of the façades for the proposed structure. The first concern was the left side in the Memorial Road Elevation, which seems awkward and confusing as the façade elements in this portion of the building have a strange relationship to one another. The second concern was regarding the left side of the structure in the SHA Elevation as the Committee felt the cladding of the garage and the fiber cement paneling were a strange transition. The DRC felt there are ways these façade areas could be improved. Additionally, if there is a way for the applicant to address the compactor/dumpster area that was put in place in Phase 1, this would be hugely helpful to the overall project as the Committee felt this is a large eyesore on the project site. The DRC also had an extensive discussion about the proposed depth of the balconies for the project. The current depth of the balconies is only three feet and there were concerns that the balconies at this depth would be entirely uninhabited or only be used for storage space. The Committee recommended that the applicant also think about what the balconies would be overlooking as part of factoring in whether or not they are appropriate for the project. If the balconies were removed, the DRC was comfortable with this, but if that was the case, the Committee would like to see some sort of articulation in the structure where they would have been located. This could be in the form of a design element, a Juliet balcony, an awning, or something of that nature. Furthermore, the Committee had concerns about the small slivers of landscaping around the building and their ability to sustain vegetation of any kind. The DRC suggested that the smaller planting beds might be connected and that the plantings themselves be larger. The Committee indicated they would like to see the planting pallet for the project once it has been developed. Lastly, the DRC stated

they would be interested in being involved with or knowing what color scheme will be for Phase 3 of the project.

*Fire Prevention:* Has been contacted but has not provided comments.

*Ward Alderman:* Has been contacted but has not provided comments.

*Engineering:* Has been contacted but has not provided comments.

### **III. FINDINGS FOR VARIANCE (SZO §5.5 & 9.5):**

In order to grant a variance the Board must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.5.3 of the SZO.

1. There are “special circumstances relating to soil conditions, shape or topography of land or structures which especially affect such land or structures but not affecting generally the zoning district in which it is located, causing substantial hardship, financial or otherwise.”

The site is surrounded by busy streets that complicate access to it. In addition there are existing structures on the land, some of which are historic, that will remain as part of the redevelopment of the land. Situating buildings, parking, and access points on the site becomes difficult and there is tension between designating areas for parking versus landscaping. Building parking in great excess of what has been shown will be the demand of the residents causes a financial hardship for building the spaces when resources could be allocated to other aspects of the site that would be utilized such as landscaping.

2. “The variance requested is the minimum variance that will grant reasonable relief to the owner, and is necessary for a reasonable use of the building or land.”

The Applicants have submitted data to support a variance for parking on the site. Traffic and Parking has requested a memo from a Traffic Engineer to verify this information. The Applicants are working to submit this memo; however, the Board finds that the current information is sufficient to proceed with the application for a recommendation to the Special Permit Granting Authority. The data submitted from car ownership of SCC residents in two of their larger low- and moderate- income rental properties with off-street parking indicate that only 22 spaces will be in demand for the 31 residential units in Phase III. The current application is to build 30 parking spaces. The parking variance will provide a reasonable relief to the owners so that they can utilize the land in a reasonable manner. The reconfigured site plan will allow for more landscaping in a contiguous usable front yard as opposed to unutilized parking spaces.

3. “The granting of the variance would be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of this Ordinance and would not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare.”

The reduced number of parking spaces is in harmony with the general purposes and intent of this Ordinance and would not be injurious to the neighborhood. In fact, building more parking than will be used at the site will have negative consequences of a large area of asphalt that is impervious to rain water and not providing a benefit to the residents. Reducing the number of parking spaces provides an opportunity to increase the contiguous landscaped area in front of the building. Also, the change to the site plan pulls many of the parking spaces under the building so that they will only be visible from the eastern side of the building along the driveway out of the property.

**IV. RECOMMENDATION****Variance under §5.5 & 9.5**

Based on the above findings and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Board recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **VARIANCE**.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes						
1	Approval is for the reduction in parking spaces for Phase III. The revisions to the Special Permit with Site Plan review will be brought before the Zoning Board of Appeals. 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>2/9/11</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr><tr><td>2/10/11 &amp; 2/11/11</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (L002: Parking layout/site plan, L100-104 floor plans, A200-201: elevations)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	2/9/11	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	2/10/11 & 2/11/11	Plans submitted to OSPCD (L002: Parking layout/site plan, L100-104 floor plans, A200-201: elevations)
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Any changes to the approved number of parking spaces must receive SPGA approval.										
2	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five working days in advance of a request for a final inspection by Inspectional Services 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.							

Sincerely,

Kevin Prior  
Chairman

Cc: Applicant: Somerville Community Corp, Courtney Koslow

