



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

STAFF

CHRISTOPHER DI IORIO, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*
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FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

Case #: ZBA 2009-31
Date: July 24, 2009
Recommendation: Unable to recommend
shed dormer / Conditional approval gable
dormers

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 74 Cedar Street

Applicant Name: Gregory Carleton

Applicant Address: 74 Cedar Street, Somerville MA 02143

Property Owner Name: same

Agent Name: Derick Snare

Agent Address: 158 Central St, Somerville MA 02145

Alderman: O'Donovan

Legal Notice: The Applicant & Owner seeks a special permit under §4.4.1 to expand a nonconforming two-family residential structure by constructing a shed dormer and two gable dormers on the sides of the house to create a third story.

Zoning District/Ward: Residence B / 5

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under §5.1 and §4.4.1

Date of Application: July 13, 2009

Date(s) of Public Meeting/Hearing: Planning Board: 8/6/09 / ZBA: 8/19/09

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a two-family dwelling on a 3072 square foot lot. The structure is 2 ½ stories and there is a one- and two-story addition in the rear of the house. There is approximately one foot between the subject house and the house to the left (southwest).

2. Proposal: The proposal is to construct two gable dormers on the right side of the house (northeast) to add headroom for two bedrooms. The proposal also includes constructing a shed dormer on the left side of the house (southwest) for a bathroom and closet. The Applicant submitted a letter explaining his family's need for the use of the third story.

Since the length of the shed dormer would be just over sixty percent of the roof's length, the half story would be considered a third story. The collective length of the gable dormers would also be sixty percent of the roof's length. The siding of the dormers would match that of the house.



3. Nature of Application: The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to several dimensional requirements, including minimum lot size, front, rear and side yard setbacks, and street frontage.

The proposed dormers would affect the nonconforming side yards, which are 3.3 feet and 9.6 feet. The minimum required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) is 8 feet for a 2 ½ story structure and 10 feet for a 3 story structure. The existing nonconformity requires the Applicant to obtain a special permit under §4.4.1 of the SZO. Three stories are allowed in the Residence B district.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding area is comprised of single-, two- and three-family homes. A few of the 2 ½ story structures have small shed dormers with steep pitches.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The addition of the shed dormer significantly alters the roofline of the southwest side of the house. The dormer would be more than fifty percent of the length of the roof and extend over an existing projection of the house. The dormer would reach the roof ridge to the main wall of the house making it appear massive. The windows would not account for a significant portion of the dormer's wall face and they would not be symmetrical with the lower floors due to the interior configuration. The positive characteristics of the dormer are that the slope is fairly steep and the siding would match the siding on the house.

There is less than two feet between the subject property and the adjacent house. Since the abutting house does not have a dormer, staff do not anticipate privacy concerns; however, there would be a negative visual impact to adding a dormer to one and not the other of these similar houses that are so close to each other.

The design of the gable dormers on the northeast side has less of an impact on the primary roofline of the house. The gable dormers appear secondary to the predominant gable roof and ridge height. Also, the roof shingles cover much of the dormer which causes them to better blend in with the roof. The dormers

would be centered symmetrically on the roof and align with the bay window and existing windows below them. Windows would account for a significant portion of the dormer's front wall face, which improves the look of dormers.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicants listed foam insulation for maximum insulation and low flow toilets as the green building practices that they will utilize.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: "... [T]he fire alarm system will have to be brought up to the requirements for new construction."

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

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1 & §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 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."

In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff find that the shed dormer proposed would be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The shed dormer would be over fifty percent of the roof's length making the structure three stories. Details can be found in findings three and four below.

In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff find that the gable dormers proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The gable dormers would be over fifty percent of the roof's length making the structure three stories; however, the design as described in finding four addresses these concerns.

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."

One purpose of the Ordinance is to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; this particularly applies to this proposal. The shed dormer would change the character of the traditional 2 ½ story gable structure. These structures are prevalent in this neighborhood and the City. This house is not designated as a Local Historic District but it contributes to the architectural fabric of the City. Staff find that the special permit for the shed dormer would not be consistent with the general purpose and intent of the Ordinance.

Staff find that the design and placement of the gable dormers do not alter the character of the 2 ½ story gable structure and would be consistent with the purposes of the Ordinance.

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 shed dormer was not designed in a manner that is compatible with the built surrounding area. It would be on the less public side of the house, although, it would extend over the existing portion of the house that projects into the required side yard setback. It would start at the roof ridge and would extend to the building's main wall making it appear less like a dormer and more like the extension of the third story. The windows are not placed symmetrically because of the interior configuration of the space and would not account for a significant portion of the dormer's main wall. There are a few feet between the subject property and the adjacent house. Since the abutting house does not have a dormer staff do not anticipate privacy concerns; however, there would be a negative visual impact to adding a dormer to one and not the other of these identical houses that are so close to each other. The positive elements of the dormer are that it would be 8.75 feet from the front edge of the house and its pitch of the dormer would be fairly steep.

The gable dormers would be centered symmetrically on the roof and align with the bay window and existing windows below them. The dormers would start below the roof ridge and would be set back slightly from the building's main wall making them appear secondary to the predominant gable roof and ridge height. Also, the roof shingles cover much of the dormer which causes them to better blend in with the roof. Windows would account for a significant portion of the dormer's front wall face, which improves the look of dormers.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §4.4.1

Based on the above findings and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Staff is **UNABLE TO RECOMMEND APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT** for the shed dormer along the southwest façade.

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

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes								
1	Approval is for the construction of two 9.3'± gable dormers. 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>July 13, 2009</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr><tr><td>Aug 20, 2008 (July 30, 2009)</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (plot plan)</td></tr><tr><td>TBD</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD removing the shed dormer and revising the floor and roof plans (floor and roof plans, elevations, sections)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	July 13, 2009	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	Aug 20, 2008 (July 30, 2009)	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (plot plan)	TBD	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD removing the shed dormer and revising the floor and roof plans (floor and roof plans, elevations, sections)
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Any changes to the approved plans that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.												
2	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP									
3	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.									

