



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2011-15
Date: March 3, 2011
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 26 Hamilton Rd

Applicant Name: Matthew Barnes
Applicant Address: 26 Hamilton Rd, Somerville MA 02144
Property Owner Name: same
Alderman: Robert Trane

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, Matthew Barnes, seeks a special permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a dormer on an existing two-family residence.

Zoning District/Ward: RA / 7

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit SZO §4.4.1 & 5.1

Date of Application: February 3, 2011

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

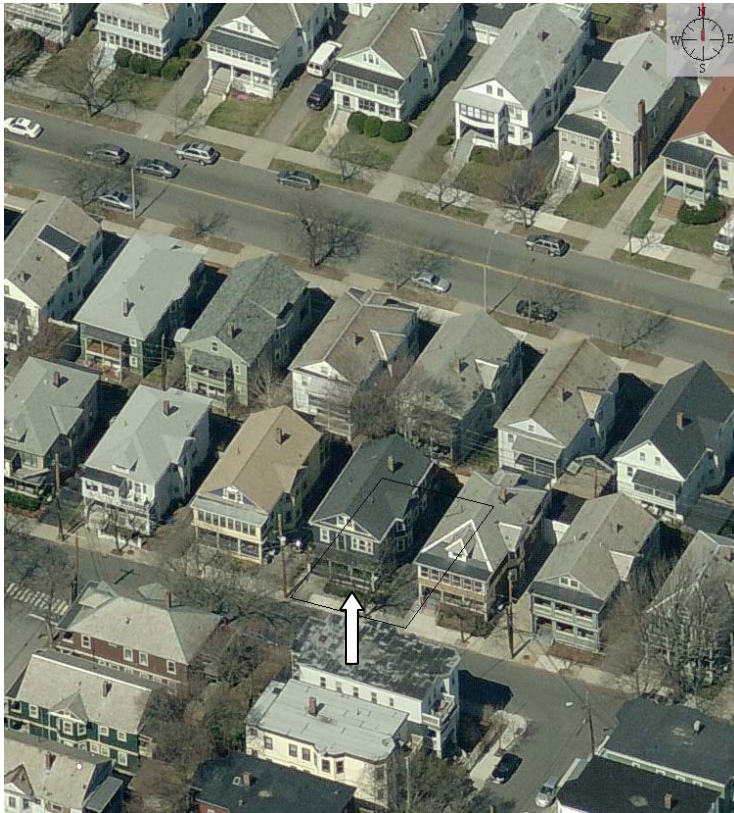
I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 3,225 sf lot on which is an approximately 3,000 sf two-family house. The house is 2 ½ story structure and there is a one-story garage attached to the rear of the house. There is a bay on the right (east) side of the house with a gable roof end above it.



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*26 Hamilton Road: Building on the right (above),
Center of image (left)*

2. Proposal: The proposal is to construct a shed dormer on the left (west) side of the house that is twenty-three feet in length, just less than 50% of the length of the roof. The dormer would sit 1 ft 5 in from the rear edge of the house. The dormer will provide headroom for a bedroom and bathroom on the half story. The remainder of the half-story will be

used as storage. There are four large windows proposed for the dormer and the wall of the bathroom will be located in the middle of one of the windows.

3. Nature of Application: The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to several dimensional requirements, including lot area, lot area per dwelling unit, landscaped area, floor area ratio, and front, rear and side yard setbacks. The proposed dormer will affect the nonconforming side yard setback and floor area ratio. The nonconforming side yard is 3 feet and the minimum in this district is 7 feet 5 inches with the reduction allowed for narrow lots. The floor area ratio will increase slightly with the new square feet that will be accessible space. The current floor area ratio is 0.88 and the minimum in the district is 0.75. These existing nonconformities require the Applicant to obtain a special permit under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO). The house is still considered to be a 2 ½ story structure because the length of the dormer is less than 50% of the length of the structure.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding neighborhood is comprised of two- and three-family homes of similar massing. The majority of the homes have gable or hipped roofs with a bay and a small gable end above it and no dormers. The dormers that do exist in the area are small. Three houses on the block of 26 houses have small, steep shed dormers above bays and at the corner of Russell Road and Hamilton Road there are two houses with three small shed dormers each.



Small shed dormers at the corner of Hamilton Road and Russell Road.

5. Impacts of Proposal: As proposed the dormer is large and it will be a prominent projection that makes the roof seem heavy. Large shed dormers are not prevalent in this area and its design is important for the appearance of the proposed structure as well as being a model for others that may be built in this area with pristine rooflines and small side and rear lot lines. Dormers are intended to be small elements that increase the living space in the half story and not extensions of the roof to make a third story.

The dormer as proposed has several elements that could be redesigned to improve its appearance. The dormer should start below the ridge and back from the sidewall of the house to reduce its prominence. The dormer should have as steep a slope as possible. If the sink in the bathroom was relocated to be next to the door, the dormer would not have to have the full head height at the outermost portion of the dormer and it could have a more significant slope. Also, the eave should not be broken because doing so would further alter the original structure. The dormer has four large windows and although windows add interest to dormers, the proposed windows do not relate to the windows on the rest of the house in style or location. Additionally, the windows are placed such that the wall between the bedroom and the bathroom falls in the middle of a window.

The proposal has characteristics that make a dormer on this house viable with the recommended changes. The house adjacent to the subject property is separated from the subject house by a driveway and it does not have a dormer so privacy is not a concern. The proposed dormer is towards the back of the house where it will have less of a visual impact than it would if it was closer to the front of the house.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicant stated that the building has a tankless water heater and spray foam insulation.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

Ward Alderman: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1 & 5.1):

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 alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure as conditioned with design changes. The house will continue to be considered a 2 ½ story structure because the dormer's length is less than 50% of the length of the structure. Privacy is not a concern because the adjacent house does not have a dormer.

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 as proposed will change the character of the traditional 2 ½ story gable structure unless modifications are made to reduce the prominence of the dormer and fix the layout to not have a wall about the middle of a window and relocate a sink to allow for a steeper slope to the dormer. This house is not designated as a Local Historic District but it contributes to the architectural fabric of the City. The proposal would be consistent with the purpose of the district, as an alteration to the two-family house.

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."

If the following changes were made to the design of the dormer, it would be compatible with the characteristics of the design of the structure and the surrounding area. The following changes will make the dormer subordinate to the main roofline so that the dormer does not greatly alter the 2 ½ story structure.

- The front wall of the dormer should be set back at a minimum of 1 foot 6 inches from the main wall of the structure.
- The eave of the house should not be altered.
- The dormer should be set back at a minimum of 1 foot off of the ridgeline of the structure.
- The windows should account for a large portion of the dormer's front wall and should either be symmetrical or relate to the windows below. The wall between the bedroom and bathroom should not be visible in the middle of a window.
- The sink should be relocated to another part of the bathroom and the pitch of the dormer should be made as close to a 6:12 pitch as possible.

If these changes are not employed, the dormer will make the roof appear heavy and greatly alter the appearance of the nonconforming structure.

III. RECOMMENDATION**Special Permit under §4.4.1 & 5.1**

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 a 23-foot shed dormer. 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>Feb 3, 2011</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr><tr><td>(Mar 1, 2011)</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan & side elevation)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	Feb 3, 2011	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	(Mar 1, 2011)	Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan & side elevation)
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(Mar 1, 2011)	Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan & side elevation)									
Any changes to the approved elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.										
2	<p>The follow design changes shall be made to the plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The front wall of the dormer shall be set back at a minimum of 1 foot 6 inches from the main wall of the structure.▪ The eave of the house shall not be altered.▪ The dormer shall be set back at a minimum of 1 foot off of the ridgeline of the structure.▪ The windows shall account for a large portion of the dormer's front wall and shall either be symmetrical or relate to the windows below. The wall between the bedroom and bathroom should not be visible in the middle of a window.▪ The sink in the bathroom shall be relocated to all for a steeper pitch on the dormer as close to a 6:12 pitch as possible.	Zoning Board of Appeals Hearing	Plng.							
3	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP							
4	The siding and trim on the dormer shall match the house.	Final sign off	Plng.							
5	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.							

