



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2010-02
Date: February 3, 2010
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 230 & 236 Highland Ave (Somerville Hospital)

Applicant Name: David Farmer, AIA

Applicant Address: Cambridge Health Alliance, 1493 Cambridge St, Cambridge, MA 02139

Property Owner Name: Somerville Hospital

Property Owner Address: 230 Highland Ave, Somerville, MA 02143

Agent Name: William Croteau, AIA

Agent Address: Perkins & Will, 55 Court St, Boston, MA 02108

Alderman: Thomas Taylor

Legal Notice: Applicant, David Farmer, AIA, & Owner, Somerville Hospital, seeks a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a 3,500± sf addition to the Medical Arts Building, a Special Permit under SZO § 4.5.1 & 4.5.3 to change and expand the non-conforming use to 45,000± sf of office (§7.11.7.1.c), and a Special Permit for modification of parking requirements for 6 parking spaces (§9.13).

Zoning District/Ward: RA / 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permits under SZO §4.4.1, 4.5.1, 4.5.3, 9.13

Date of Application: 1/12/10

Dates of Public Meeting • Hearing: Planning Board 2/4/10 • Zoning Board of Appeals 2/17/10

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The property, the Somerville Hospital, is a 2.29-acre site with four connected buildings of varying height. The buildings are labeled south, center, north, and the medical arts building.

The use of the South Building (at Crown and Tower St) is clinical and office space.



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The Center Building houses the Emergency Department on the main level with outpatient services and previously had patient units on the 5th and 6th floors and hospital support on the lower levels.

The North Building has a surgical suite and support areas on the third floor, which is the main level. The building formerly housed the adolescent psychiatric unit, cafeteria and kitchen on the 2nd floor and hospital support and mechanicals on the first floor.

The Medical Arts Building is an existing two story building for medical office space.

There are currently 100 occupants in the hospital but there were previously 350-400 employees at the site when the hospital was a 24 hour operation.

Prior Permits

There are no records of zoning approval for the initial construction of the hospital; however, there have been several special permits and a variance issued since 1989.

In 1989, the Somerville Hospital received a special permit for an expansion to allow for additional medical services. The permit included remodeling office space in the South Building, expanding physicians' office/examination space in the basement of the Medical Arts Building, and the addition of physicians' office space, a stair link and vestibule in the area adjacent to the Medical Arts Building. The expansion required a variance for eight parking spaces.

In 2002, the Hospital received a special permit to replace a cooling tower on the roof of the building and add screening around the tower.

In 2003, the Hospital received a special permit to add a new rooftop mechanical unit, an enclosed outdoor recreation area, a bicycle storage facility, an exterior canopy, and an additional window to the Hospital.

The building has also received special permits for wireless equipment on the roof.

2. Proposal: The proposal is to change the use of several of the floors of the hospital from inpatient

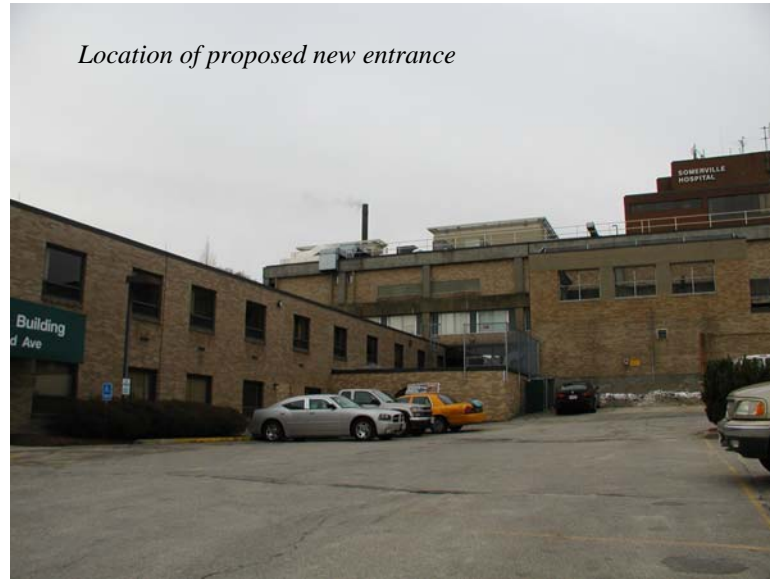


services to medical office. This change in use is part of Cambridge Health Alliances' (CHA) service reconfiguration plan. The vision for the Somerville Hospital is for an ambulatory medical center and health care administrative facility. The 24 hour emergency department would remain. Details of CHA's plan and Somerville campus redevelopment are attached in the CHA's addendum to the Somerville Planning Board Application sheet.

The 5th and 6th floors of the Center Building and the 2nd floor of the North Building would change from inpatient units to non-medical office use. The

change in use is for approximately 44,984 net square feet (6th floor: 16,773 nsf, 5th floor: 17,732 nsf, 2nd floor: 10,479 nsf). The hours of operation would be from 7am to 7pm Monday through Friday.

The proposal also includes constructing a 3,607 gross square foot addition to the Medical Arts building. The addition would create a more visible, welcoming entrance to the hospital along Highland Ave. The first floor of the addition would contain a welcome desk, elevator, and exam rooms, and the second floor



Location of proposed new entrance

could contain two small conference rooms, bathrooms, mechanical equipment, and a hallway that connects to the rest of the hospital. The construction would include adding a canopy from the new entrance on Highland Ave to a few feet beyond the edge of the building to increase visibility of the entrance. Another change to the exterior would be adding panels to the corner of the Medical Arts building along Highland Ave and Tower Street. There would be a decorative element at the top of the panels. Normal hours of operation would be 7am to 8pm Monday through Friday and 8am to 5pm on Saturday.

Materials would be cement board with earth tone colors to compliment the existing tan brick.

Landscaping

There is minimal landscaping at the site. The addition would eliminate a shrub near the medical arts entrance and add landscaping around the new entrance for a small increase in the landscaped area by 0.22%.

Parking

The site is currently nonconforming with respect to parking requirements. There are 44 parking spaces in the Medical Arts Building lot and 9 parking spaces at the emergency department entrance. The addition would eliminate 5 spaces from the Medical Arts building parking lot. The Crown Street lot with 60 spaces is located across the street from the Hospital parcel and has been in use for at least twenty years. Additionally, the hospital has several off-site parking lots with a shuttle service. The hospital has use of a total of 836 spaces on and off site. A list of the off-site lots and number of parking spaces is attached with figures on the number of employees and patients that could use the spaces. The addition would require 6 additional parking spaces as detailed in the Nature of the Application section below.

3. Nature of Application: The existing structure is in the RA district where it is non-conforming with respect to rear and side yard setbacks, height, ground coverage, landscaping, and floor area ratio. The proposed addition would affect the ground coverage, landscaping, and floor area ratio. The ground coverage would increase from 57.6% to 58.6%. The maximum allowed by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) is 50%. The addition would increase the floor area ratio from 1.525 to 1.55; the maximum allowed in the district is 0.75. The landscaped area would increase slightly from 13% to

13.22%; the minimum required in the district is 25%. These existing nonconformities requires the Applicant to obtain a special permit under §4.4.1 of the SZO.

The hospital is also a nonconforming use under SZO §7.11.5.B.3.b and 44,984 net square feet would be changing to a nonconforming non-medical office §7.11.7.1.c. SZO §4.5.1 requires a special permit to change from one nonconforming use to another nonconforming use. SZO §4.5.3 requires a special permit to alter or expand a non-conforming use since 3,607 gross square foot would be added onto the Medical Arts Building.

Parking for the change in use: Under SZO §9.4, nonconformity with respect to parking requirements, if a change in use does not require more parking than the previous use, no additional parking is required. The 90 parking space requirement for the proposed office (medical/dental/veterinarian office, outpatient clinic) use is less than the 258 parking space requirement for the hospital use so no additional parking is required for the change in use. The parking calculations are as follows:

- The prior use of this space as a hospital required 258 parking spaces.
 - Center Building (floors 5&6): 88 beds (118 beds permitted)
 - North Building (floor 2): 20 beds
 - Total 108 beds & ~200 employees = 258 spaces
- The new non-medical office use would require 90 parking spaces (44,984 nsf / 500). One space is required for each 500 net square feet.

Parking for the hospital: As an alternative way of calculating parking, the Applicant can compare the overall parking requirement of the site before and after the project. This calculation also accounts for the change in the third floor of the North Building where beds are no longer in use. The current parking requirement for all of the buildings in the Hospital campus is 606. The new parking requirement would be 394. (Note that the parking requirement in the 1988 file was for 585 parking spaces. The discrepancy is most likely due to calculating the mixed use nature of the hospital and the varying number of beds and employees since that approval.) The parking calculations for the entire site are as follows:

Current parking requirements:

- South Building - medical clinic use: 19,434 nsf (49 spaces)
- Center Building – medical clinical use: 31,768 nsf (79 spaces), emergency room (5945 nsf, 14 stretchers and 50 employees) (52 spaces), hospital (inpatient units) 88 beds (118 permitted)
- North Building – medical clinical use: 31,797 nsf (79 spaces), hospital (inpatient units) 26 beds (28 beds permitted)
 - Center and North inpatient unit parking: ~250 employees & 114 beds (302 spaces)
- Medical Arts Building – medical office: 17,895 nsf (45 spaces)
- Total = 606

New parking requirements:

- South Building - medical clinic use: 19,434 nsf (49 spaces)
- Center Building – medical clinical use: 31,768 nsf (79 spaces), administrative offices: 34,505 nsf (69 spaces), emergency room (5945 nsf, 14 stretchers and 50 employees) (52 spaces)
- North Building – medical clinical use: 31,797 nsf (79 spaces), administrative offices: 10,479 nsf (21 spaces)

- Medical Arts Building – medical clinic: 17,895 nsf (45 spaces)
Total = 394

The nonconforming parking section of the zoning ordinance does not apply to new square footage; therefore, the addition to the Medical Arts Building requires 6 parking spaces (2545 nsf / 400) which the Applicants are not able to provide onsite. However, under SZO §9.13a, parking requirements for nonconforming lots where the number of parking spaces is 6 or fewer may be modified by the SPGA.

The Applicants have a robust system for employees to park in satellite lots and patients to park close to the facility. The Medical Arts, Emergency Dept, and Crown St parking are designated for patients. Including the satellite lots the hospital has access to 836 parking spaces.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding area is mostly comprised of two- and three-family houses. There are some commercial uses along Highland Ave.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The change in use of the inpatient units to a non-medical office will shift the activity of the site from a 24 hour operation to daytime and early evening. The hospital controls parking onsite and at their offsite parking lots. Parking close to the hospital is for patients and requires a fee. There is a parking attendant at each lot. Employees park in dispersed lots and use a shuttle service to access the site. These measures should reduce impacts of on-street parking at the site.

The change will allow the hospital to utilize the space and provide jobs and vibrancy to the space that would otherwise be vacant.

The addition would create a more visible entrance to the building on Highland Ave. Currently the main entrance is at the emergency entrance on Tower Street. The new entrance would reduce some confusion about where to enter the building and keep some of the vehicles on Highland Ave, which is a main thoroughfare.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicants are striving to accomplish the following:
- Limit and reuse demolition and construction debris to recycle approximately 75% of the materials
 - Utilize new, energy efficient mechanical systems where feasible
 - Add energy efficient controls to existing mechanical systems
 - Use sustainable products where possible
 - Incorporate occupancy sensors on updated light systems
 - Utilize new, energy efficient lighting fixtures and controls

7. Comments:

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

Traffic & Parking: Traffic and Parking has no objections to this application.

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

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1, 4.4.1, 4.5.1, 4.5.3, 9.13):

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 and 4.5 of the SZO, Staff find that the alterations and use proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure and use. The alterations to the structure would create a more visible entrance to the building on Highland Ave. Currently the main entrance is at the emergency entrance on Tower Street. The new entrance and canopy along the walkway would reduce confusion about where to enter the building. It would also keep some of the vehicles on Highland Ave, which is a main thoroughfare, and off of the residential streets. The change to the façade materials at the corner of Highland and Tower Streets is intended to catch peoples' attention so that they do not drive by the nondescript building. The new entrance and façade materials would be modern but complimentary to the existing tan brick building.

The change in use will allow the hospital to utilize the space in a way that the health care industry now functions. The offices will provide jobs and vibrancy to the space that would otherwise be vacant.

In considering a special permit under §9.13 of the SZO the Applicant must be able to demonstrate that granting the requested special permit would not cause detriment to the surrounding neighborhood through any of the criteria as set forth under SZO §9.13, which are as follows:

- 1) increase in traffic volumes;
- 2) increased traffic congestion or queuing of vehicles;
- 3) change in the type(s) of traffic;
- 4) change in traffic patterns and access to the site;
- 5) reduction in on-street parking;
- 6) unsafe conflict of motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

The request for the reduction of 6 parking spaces would not cause detriment to the surrounding neighborhood. The amount of occupiable space in the addition is very limited. The majority of the space is for a welcome desk, hallway space, two small conference rooms and bathrooms. The hospital controls parking onsite and at their offsite parking lots and has shown that there is sufficient parking for employees and patients. Parking close to the hospital is for patients and requires a fee. There is a parking attendant at each lot. Employees park in dispersed lots and use a shuttle service to access the site. These measures should reduce impacts of on-street parking at the site. The change in use also reduces the parking requirements for the site significantly. The project would not cause any significant change in traffic volumes, patterns, congestion or conflict.

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 proposal is consistent with the general purposes of the Ordinance as set forth under §1.2, which includes, but is not limited to providing for and maintaining the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City and protecting the health of the citizens. The hospital is not consistent with the one- and two-

family homes purpose of the RA district; however, it is already established and convenient for the people of Somerville.

In considering a special permit under §9.13 of the SZO the SPGA may grant such a special permit only when consistent with the purposes set forth in Section 9.1. Somerville Hospital's parking program is consistent with the purposes of Section 9.1. Employees park off-site where there is ample parking and are shuttled to the site. Patients are able to park close to the site and there are parking attendants and fees associated with parking to facilitate turnover of these spaces. The parking situation reduces hazards to pedestrians and protects the neighboring properties from an increase in the number of cars to the site.

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 new entrance and façade changes would be modern in design but they would be complimentary to the colors and materials of the Medical Arts Building. The entrance would be setback from the front of the building and surrounding residential properties; however, its height and the canopy along the walkway would accomplish the goal of making the entrance more visible. The height of the entrance would be within the allowable height for the district and as designed it would block view of the elevator penthouse and mechanical equipment.

III. RECOMMENDATION**Special Permit under §5.1, 4.4.1, 4.5.1, 4.5.3, 9.13**

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 construct a 3,500± sf addition to the Medical Arts Building, a change and expansion of a non-conforming use to 45,000± sf of office (§7.11.7.1.c), and modification of parking requirements for 6 parking spaces (§9.13). 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>Jan 12, 2010</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>Jan 11, 2010</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (site plan: G-010, floor plan: A-201, A-202, A-204, A-205, A-206)</td></tr><tr><td>Dec 30, 2009</td><td>Plans (east elevation)</td></tr><tr><td>Jan 25, 2010</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (elevations: A-30)</td></tr><tr><td>Jan 28, 2010</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (perspective)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	Jan 12, 2010	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	Jan 11, 2010	Plans submitted to OSPCD (site plan: G-010, floor plan: A-201, A-202, A-204, A-205, A-206)	Dec 30, 2009	Plans (east elevation)	Jan 25, 2010	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (elevations: A-30)	Jan 28, 2010	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (perspective)
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Any changes to the approved site plan, elevations or use that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.																
2	Landscaping should be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen’s Association Standards.	Perpetual	Plng. / ISD													
3	The Applicant/Owner shall supply a landscape plan of the area around the new entrance for Planning Staff approval.	Building Permit	Plng.													
4	The Applicant/Owner shall review the elevations with Planning Staff and provide material and color samples for the façade for Planning Staff approval.	Building Permit	Plng.													

5	All construction materials and equipment must be stored onsite. If occupancy of the street layout is required, such occupancy must be in conformance with the requirements of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and the prior approval of the Traffic and Parking Department must be obtained.	During Construction	T&P	
6	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP	
7	The Applicant shall at his expense replace any existing equipment (including, but not limited to street sign poles, signs, traffic signal poles, traffic signal equipment, wheel chair ramps, granite curbing, etc) and the entire sidewalk immediately abutting the subject property if damaged as a result of construction activity. All new sidewalks and driveways must be constructed to DPW standard.	CO	DPW	
8	The Applicant, its successors and/or assigns, shall be responsible for maintenance of both the building and all on-site amenities, including landscaping, fencing, lighting, parking areas and storm water systems, ensuring they are clean, well kept and in good and safe working order.	Cont.	ISD	
9	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.	

