



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

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FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

**Case #:** 2008-24  
**Site:** 44 Park Street  
**Date:** July 15, 2008  
**Recommendation:** Pending PB meeting

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Applicant Name:** Park Street Housing Associates, LLC  
**Applicant Address:** 15 Ward Street, Somerville MA 02143  
**Property Owner Name:** Park Street Housing Associates, LLC  
**Property Owner Address:** 15 Ward Street, Somerville MA 02143  
**Agent Name:** Nicholas A. Iannuzzi, Jr.  
**Agent Address:** 160 Gould Street – Suite 320, Needham, MA  
**Alderman:** Heuston

Legal Notice: The Applicant seeks a Special Permit with Site Plan Review for 89 dwelling units, and variances for parking, minimum lot area per dwelling unit, and number of stories (4 proposed).

Zoning District/Ward: Residence C / 2

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.11.1.c, Variances under SZO § 8.5.b, 8.5.f, 9.5.1.b

Date of Application: May 15, 2008

Date(s) of Public Hearing: ZBA: June 18, 2008

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

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**I. ORGANIZATION OF REPORT**

The present report includes the following sections:

- Description of the property
- Description of the proposal
- Nature of application
- Impacts of development
- Responses to concerns of staff and abutters

- Items under discussion
- Next steps

Following the initial public meeting and additional technical review by City Staff, a supplementary report will be provided, which will include the following additional information:

- Supplements or updates to the above-listed categories of information
- City Staff and other agency comments
- Findings required under the Somerville Zoning Ordinance
- Recommendation for Board vote, including recommended conditions

## II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The property is a 43,211 square foot lot on which sits a 10,832 square foot one-story metal warehouse. The building was previously used as an industrial warehouse but is currently vacant. The open space on the site is covered with a mix of overgrown vegetation, gravel, and dirt. There are three significant shade trees around the perimeter of the property. The northern edge of the property abuts an MBTA commuter rail track. There is an approximately 7-foot chain link fence along the tracks which continues to the front yard along Park Street. The parcel is rectangular except for the southwestern edge, which has a triangular shape.

The eastern edge abuts a 40-foot private way that the Applicant shares access to with other abutters. The right-of-way is not functioning as evidenced by a fence and vegetation blocking the way from the public road. Also, the Ames Envelop building has been constructed on the opposite side of the railroad tracks that was an extension of the private way many years ago thereby eliminating the likelihood that the private way would ever be extended across the tracks.



*44 Park Street – Front Elevation (left), Rear Yard (right), Aerial View (below)*



2. Proposal: The proposal is to construct 89 one-bedroom units of affordable senior housing. Senior housing includes ages 55 and over. All of the units would be fully handicap accessible. The existing structure would be demolished with misting and wetting for dust control. The proposed building would be forty feet high and four stories. There would be 27 surface parking spaces. The Applicant anticipates competing for a request for proposal with the Somerville Housing Authority which would manage the building should the Applicant be successful in the RFP process. Onsite medical care for residents would be provided by the Cambridge Health Alliance or the Visiting Nurse Association. The proposal also includes a sundries shop, hair salon, doctor's office and community room.

<b>DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS</b>	<b>Existing</b>	<b>SZO</b>	<b>Project</b>
Minimum lot size	43,211 sf	7,500 sf	43,211 sf
Minimum lot area/per dwelling unit 10 or more units (s.f.)	NA	1,000 sf 831 sf with affordable housing bonus	483 sf
Maximum ground coverage (%)	25%	70%	40%
Landscaped area, minimum percent of lot	NA	25%	40% (34% w/o landscaping on Properzi Way)
Floor area ratio (FAR)	0.48	2.0	1.35
Maximum height, stories/feet*	1 / ~20 ft	3 / 40 ft	4 / 40 ft
Front Yard Setback	30 ft	15 ft	15 ft
Side Yard Setback (Left/Right/Sum)	5 ft / 29 ft (34 ft)	13.3 ft (sum of both=30 ft)	13.3 ft / 43 ft (sum = 56.3 ft)
Rear Yard Setback	164 ft	20 ft	20 ft
Street Frontage	100 ft	50 ft	100 ft

3. Nature of Application: In a Residence C District seven or more dwelling units are allowed by Special Permit with Site Plan Review under §7.11.1.c. Variances are required under SZO § 8.5.b (minimum lot area per dwelling unit), 8.5.f (height in stories), and 9.5.1 (number of parking spaces).

The Applicant is seeking a variance to allow 484 square feet of lot area per dwelling unit. Under §8.5.b, the requirement for projects of ten or more units in the RC district is 1,000 square feet per dwelling unit. SZO §13.5 allows for an increase in the number of units if the number of affordable units is over 12.5%, with a maximum increase of 20% over the number of units permissible under Article 8. The permitted number of units based on lot area would be 43, or 52 with the affordable housing bonus. (This project would reach the maximum incentive allowed because all of the units would be affordable.)

The height and stories allowed in this district under §8.5.f are 40 foot height and three stories. The Applicant is seeking a variance to provide an additional story while conforming to the allowed height as measured in feet.

The parking requirement under §9.5.1.b is 0.75 parking spaces per senior citizen housing unit, although 0.40 spaces per unit may be provided with Special Permit approval. This regulation translates to 67 spaces, or 36 spaces allowable with a special permit. The Applicant is seeking a variance to provide 27 parking spaces.

4. Senior Housing: There is a critical need for housing options for seniors in Somerville. There are currently approximately 800 people on the Somerville Housing Authority's waiting list for senior housing. The City's HUD 5- Year Consolidated Plan documents this need, particularly in this area of the City.


In the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) recently released Metro Future, a regional plan, and one of its goals is that "the region's seniors will have more housing choices and opportunities to downsize while staying in their own community". The plan states that the region's population over 65 years old will grow by 83% over the next thirty years, resulting in an increase of 455,000 people in this age group. Metro Future is calling for the production of 83,000 units in multifamily buildings near existing commercial areas and transit. An increase in small units in convenient locations will mean that fewer seniors will spend a large portion of their budget on housing, heating and transportation and move out of the region where they have social ties.

44 Park Street would offer handicapped accessible units that are in a convenient location. The site is located near existing commercial areas and within 0.2 miles of two bus routes and within 0.5 miles of four bus routes. Porter Square is an 1.3 miles or 7 minutes by bus. The proposal includes a sundries shop, hair salon, doctor's office and community room.


The Coalition for Senior Housing of Massachusetts conducted a study in 2007 to determine the impacts of services on seniors' ability to age in place. There were four key factors that determined if seniors could remain in a home as opposed to entering a nursing home: access to health care at home, in-house meals or the delivery of meals (Meals on Wheels), social activity through safe and comfortable communal spaces, and mobility through exercise and transportation. The study also found that home care is perceived as preferable to nursing home care because it is cost-effective and enhances the quality of life. The proposal at 44 Park Street would provide access to medical care at home, the opportunity for seniors to socialize in outdoor seating or in a community room, and mobility through the measured walking path and bus access. No food would be provided unless a resident coordinated with Meals on Wheels.

5. Affordable Housing: 44 Park Street would offer small units (approximately 600 square feet) that would be handicapped accessible and affordable in perpetuity (by deed restriction). Smaller units are

generally more affordable. The lot area per dwelling unit proposed is in the middle of the range of figures for other senior affordable housing developments in the City.

Lot Area per Dwelling Unit of Senior Affordable Housing Developments in Somerville				
	Address	Lot Size	# of Units	Lot Area / Dwelling Unit
Mystic View	422 Mystic Ave	39,177 sf	215 units	182 sf/du
Properzi Manor	13-25 Warren Ave	25,009 sf	110 units	227 sf/du
Ciampa Manor	27 College Ave	15,634 sf	53 units	294 sf/du
Weston Manor	15 Weston Ave	23,612 sf	80 units	295 sf/du
Bryant Manor	75 Myrtle St	49,000 sf	134 units	365 sf/du
Highland Garden	114 Highland Ave	20,282 sf	42 units	482 sf/du
 <b>Proposal</b>	<b>44 Park St</b>	<b>43,211 sf</b>	<b>89 units</b>	<b>486 sf/du</b>
Brady Towers	252 Medford St	50,351 sf	84 units	599 sf/du
Hagan Manor	268 Washington St	21,543 sf	24 units	897sf/du
Conwell Capen	405 Alewife Brook Parkway	85,082 sf	95 units	896 sf/du
Capen Court	1-16 Capen Court	88,150 sf	95 units	927 sf/du
Clarendon Hill	North St/Powderhouse Blvd./Alewife Brook Parkway	24,0084 sf	216 units	1,111 sf/du

**6. Traffic and Parking:** The Applicant provided information on parking at four senior citizen housing developments in the City to determine the adequacy of the proposed parking at 44 Park Street. The parking survey consisted of an inventory of parking spaces and occupancy at 7am or 9am, noon and 4pm or 5pm on a Friday, Saturday and Monday. For more details please see the report in the case file.

Results of Parking Study					
	Address	Units	Parking Spaces	Spaces/Unit	Spaces Used (% of total)
Brady Towers	252 Medford St	84	32	0.38	18 (57%)
 <b>Proposal</b>	<b>44 Park St</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>0.30</b>	
Highland Garden	114 Highland Ave	42	11	0.26	6 (54%)
Weston Manor	15 Weston Ave	80	21	0.26	14 (69%)
Properzi Manor	13-25 Warren Ave	110	26	0.24	23 (87%)
<i>Average</i>		<i>79</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>0.28</i>	<i>(67%)</i>

The Design Consults, Inc. (DCI) report stated "...[t]he results of the parking survey indicate that the average utilization (occupancy) for the four sites was 67%. This indicates that the surveyed sites provide adequate parking. This has been accomplished by providing an average of 0.24-0.38 spaces per unit or an average of 0.29 spaces/unit. Based upon our parking utilization survey, it is DCI's opinion that the proposed parking supply at 44 Park Street is more than adequate."

The Applicant's traffic study utilized trip rates from the Institute of Transportation Engineers Trip Generation Manual. The results are a total of 330 trips (in and out of the site) daily, with 17 occurring during peak hours in the morning and 23 during peak hours in the evening. The anticipated number of trips is lower than these figures because the senior adult housing figure for detached housing was used

which is a more conservative figure than that for attached housing. Design Consultants, Inc. stated that in a previous study that they conducted for a 56-unit residential condominium proposal at this site, the trip generation was higher, with 398 trips per day, 33 during peak morning hours and 38 during peak evening hours. 89 senior housing units are projected to create less traffic than 56 typical residential units.

As mitigation for the additional traffic that the development will bring to the neighborhood, the Applicant is proposing to construct a four-foot wide median for Park Street from the railroad tracks to the site's main entrance in order to improve safety at the City's only at-grade railroad crossing. The median would have a four-foot reveal to allow emergency vehicles to cross and enter the emergency access entrance south of the railroad. A grass and paver area would be constructed to discourage vehicles from using the emergency access and an "Emergency Vehicles Only" sign would be installed.

The initial proposal had an entrance from Properzi Way onto the site. In the revised proposal this area would only be used as an exit for emergency vehicles. The Applicants are proposing structural soil (reinforced turf) in this area instead of asphalt so that it would be usable green space and pervious to water.

7. Surrounding Neighborhood: The buildings in the area range in height from 25 feet to 40 feet. There is a new 40', four-story multi-family building across Park Street. The neighborhood to the north is comprised of a mix of factory, business and residential uses. Conway Playground is also located north of the site. To the south, east and west are mostly residential neighborhoods with one- and two-family homes.

Park Street provides one lane of traffic in each direction and has sidewalks on both sides of the street. Parking is allowed on both sides south of the site. During peak travel times traffic can back up to the extent that cars extend to the railroad tracks. There are warning gates and lights at the crossing. The Applicant's submission from their transportation engineer describes "six train crossings from 7-9 AM and 7 crossings from 4-6PM. The crossing gates are down for 50-60 seconds, and vehicles queues clear quickly after the gates are raised." The surrounding residential streets are narrow and typically provide parking on one side. The Traffic Engineer also stated that the Park Street and Somerville Avenue intersection will be upgraded with new channelization and new traffic signals as part of the Somerville Avenue reconstruction project, and that the intersection of Park Street and Beacon Street will be reconstructed as part of the Beacon Street reconstruction project.

8. Landscaping/Screening: The transformer and dumpster would be screened with fencing and plantings.

9. Signage: Signage with the address of the property is proposed in the front yard.

10. Waste Disposal/Recycling: A waste control management company would maintain the residential waste disposal and recycling.

11. Green Building Practices: The building would be prefabricated modular housing, which can reduce material waste and improve manufacturing and construction efficiencies. The building would be sided with Nichiha fiber cement siding which is made of recycled post-consumer and post-industrial waste. The heating and cooling equipment would be high efficiency. The Applicant is researching techniques for using rainwater for irrigation.

### **III. IMPACTS OF DEVELOPMENT/CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY ABUTTERS**

The Applicants, in concert with Alderman Maryann Heuston, held neighborhood meetings on February 25, 2008, and April 3, 2008. The following is a summary of neighbors' concerns addressed at this meeting and in written correspondence to Planning Staff and the Planning Board. All written correspondence has been forwarded to the Board. Neighbors expressed concerns about:

- Worsening the drainage issues in the area
- Worsening rush hour traffic between Somerville Avenue and the train tracks
- Traffic onto Properzi Way
- Impacts to limited on-street parking in the neighborhood
- Lack of sidewalks on Nevada and Village Streets
- The height of the building
- Lack of green space
- Impacts of concentrating subsidized housing

### **IV. RESPONSES TO CONCERNS OF STAFF AND ABUTTERS:**

Staff have been supportive of the creation of new units of affordable senior housing. The Applicant has been responsive to several staff and public concerns, as noted below. Following two neighborhood meetings and four meetings with staff of several OSPCD divisions and the Law Office, the Applicant has revised its proposal in the following ways:

Drainage: The proposed storm water management system consists of two water quality inlets (Stormceptor 450i), roof drains, and an area drain for collection, and infiltration chambers for storage and groundwater recharge. As required by City policy, there would be no drainage connections to the storm drain system. The City's Engineer has determined that this project will improve the poor drainage situation that exists in the area because there will be a dramatic decrease in the amount of runoff from the site.

Traffic: Please see above. The traffic study predicts 330 trips (in and out of the site) daily, with 17 occurring during peak hours in the morning and 23 during peak hours in the evening.

Access via Properzi Way: As noted above, the site plan has been modified to prohibit access to the site by non-emergency vehicles. The area that these vehicles would traverse in an emergency would be covered with structural soil (reinforced turf), allowing for its general use as open green space.

Parking: Because parking and landscaping must compete for space (since underground parking cannot be provided), Staff have recommended a reduced amount of parking, as reflected in the drawing illustrating 27 spaces (a ratio of .30 spaces per unit), in order to increase the amount of open space available to residents and to reduce the paved expanse of the property. The results of the parking study show that at similar developments with comparable parking number of parking spaces per unit, an average of 67 percent are utilized.

Height: The shadow studies show that nearby residences are almost never impacted by shadows from the building. The shadow study can be found on the City's website. The additional story fits within the maximum height. It allows for more units of affordable senior units which is a goal of many in the City and region.

Open Space: The Applicants have increased the amount of proposed open space from 27 percent to 40 percent.

Density: Density can be measured in terms of building mass (Floor Area Ratio or "FAR") and dwellings per acre (or lot area per dwelling unit). In terms of FAR, the structure would contain less area than is allowed under the SZO. Since the neighborhood meetings, the Applicants changed the plans by reducing the number of units from 98 to 89. With respect to the concentration of low- to mod- income population, Staff note that seniors typically create less noise and traffic than other age-groups, with parking use demonstrated in the previously mentioned parking provision and utilization study for similar developments.

Long-Term Affordability: Staff recognize that the proposal is unusual in that it is a private development of 100% affordable housing, whereas these are usually developed by non-profit corporations (usually with public subsidies). Nevertheless, the City would require legally binding assurances of perpetual affordability, which the Applicant has agreed to.

## **V. ITEMS UNDER DISCUSSION**

Planning Staff continue to work with the Applicant and other City departments in reviewing this application. Additional information will be supplied on several of the following matters:

Parking/Open Space: Staff recognize that a variance is needed for the proposed number of parking spaces. The revised parking number reflects OSPCD recommendation to provide landscaping in place of underutilized parking. Planning Staff are working with other City departments to finalize this issue.

Use of Private Way: The Applicant may acquire and subdivide a portion of the adjoining private right-of-way making this area part of their lot. This would increase the lot size, the lot area per dwelling unit, and the rear-yard setback. On the current plans the rear yard setback appears to be measured from the middle of private way; with acquisition of a portion of the right-of-way, the setback would then be greater than the required 20 feet from the lot line.

## **VI. NEXT STEPS**

Following the initial public meeting on July 17, 2008, staff will continue to conduct technical review of the proposal. A supplementary report will be provided at the next meeting of the Planning Board and will include the following information:

- Additional comments from the Planning Board meeting;
- Supplements or updates to the above-listed categories of information;
- City staff and other agency comments;
- Findings required under the Somerville Zoning Ordinance; and
- Recommendation for Board vote, including recommended conditions



