



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: 2008-11
Site: 81 School Street
Date: April 3, 2008
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Applicant Name: Jose and Olga Jorge
Applicant Address: 81 School Street, Somerville MA 02143
Property Owner Name: Jose and Olga Jorge
Property Owner Address: 81 School Street, Somerville MA 02143
Agent: Bob Walsh
Alderman: Taylor

Legal Notice: (Applicant/Owner: Jose and Olga Jorge; Agent: Bob Walsh) The Applicants seek a special permit §4.4.1 to reconstruct an existing porch and build a room above the porch.

Zoning District/Ward: Residence A / 3
Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1
Date of Application: March 11, 2008
Date(s) of Public Hearing: ZBA: April 16, 2008
Date of Decision: N/A
Vote: N/A

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The property is a two-family dwelling on a 5650 square foot lot. The structure is wood framed with vinyl siding. It is approximately 1700 square feet and is 32 feet in height.

2. Proposal: The proposal is to tear down the existing front porch and replace it with a two-story porch, with the top enclosed for a sunroom. The new porch would measure 7.7' deep by 18.8' wide, extending two feet beyond the current porch into the front yard.

3. Nature of Application: The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to dimensional requirements. These existing nonconformities require the Applicant to obtain special permits under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO). Section 4.4.1 states that "[l]awfully existing one- and two-family dwellings which are only used as residences, which are nonconforming with respect to dimensional requirements, may be enlarged, extended, renovated or altered by special permit granted by the SPGA in accordance with the procedures of Article 5."

The proposal would affect the nonconforming side yard setbacks because the porch extends into the required side yard by more than three feet. The minimum side yard setback is 8 feet, and the structure is 4'6" from the side lot line.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding neighborhood features homes of similar scale, as well as the Cummings School, which is located two lots away. Many nearby homes feature second-story front porches, some of which have been enclosed in manners unsympathetic to the structures' historic design.

5. Impacts on Abutting Properties: Aside from aesthetic impacts, the change would not be expected to impact abutters.

6. Green Building Practices: The application proposes blown-in cellulose insulation made from recycled newspapers.

7. Comments from Fire Prevention Bureau: "It is quite likely that the sunroom will also be used to sleep in at times. We would require that a smoke detector be placed inside and outside of the sunroom and that a carbon monoxide detector be installed within ten (10) feet of the sunroom."

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §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.

The Applicant has provided the required information.

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."

To the extent possible for a nonconforming structure, the proposal complies with the standards of the SZO and does not increase any nonconformity.

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."

As shown in the plans, the proposal is consistent with the purposes of the Ordinance, including "to conserve the value of land and structures", and would not change the use of the structure, which is consistent with the purposes of the RA district.

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."

As shown in the plans, the design is reasonably compatible with the remainder of the structure and the surrounding neighborhood. However, this finding is heavily dependent on a number of details shown in the plans, which must be adhered to in order for the design to be compatible with the existing and nearby unaltered structures.

Planning Staff typically do not recommend enclosure of porches, particularly those that are located above unenclosed porches. Careful attention must be paid to visual proportions of first floor members; materials and fenestration of the enclosed porch should lighten its appearance and make it appear as a special feature of the home, rather than a disproportionate extension of living space. The materials of fiberglass and PVC listed for the posts, columns, and railings should be changed to achieve this affect. If executed faithfully according to the submitted plans, the proposed porch would provide a model for other desired porch enclosures in the City.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §4.4.1

Based on the above findings, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**. Staff finds that this application complies with the requirements for granting a special permit as set forth under §5.1.4 and that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. Although the Planning Staff is recommending approval of the requested Special Permit, the following conditions should be added to the permits:

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes						
1	Approval is for replacement of a one-story open porch with a two-story porch, with the upstairs enclosed. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant and/or contractor:	BP/CO	ISD/Plng							
	<table><tr><th>Date</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>March 10, 2008</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>March 11, 2008</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (page numbers)</td></tr></table>				Date	Submission	March 10, 2008	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	March 11, 2008	Plans submitted to OSPCD (page numbers)
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Any changes to the approved elevations must receive prior ZBA approval.										
2	Approval is contingent on faithful execution of the submitted plans, including proportions of window trim, dimensions of first floor supporting members, and details of porch trim.	BP/CO	PLNG							
3	Color and materials of porch shall be coordinated with Planning Staff.	BP/CO	PLNG							
4	A smoke detector shall be installed inside and outside of the sunroom and a carbon monoxide detector shall be installed within ten (10) feet of the sunroom.	CO	FP							
5	The applicant shall develop a demolition plan in consultation with the City of Somerville Inspectional Services Department. Full compliance with proper demolition procedures shall be required, including timely advance notification to abutters of demolition date and timing, good rodent control measures (i.e. rodent baiting), minimization of dust, noise, odor, and debris outfall, and sensitivity to existing landscaping on adjacent sites.	Demolition Permitting	ISD							
6	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.	Prior to Final Sign Off	PLNG							

