



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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VACANT, *PLANNER*

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FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

**Case #:** 2010-54

**Date:** October 21, 2010

**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 20 Thorndike Street

**Applicant and Property Owner Name:** 20 Thorndike St LLC

**Applicant and Property Owner Address:** 269 Upland Road Cambridge, MA 02140

**Agent Name:** Joseph P. Hanley, Esq.

**Agent Address:** 131 Oliver Street 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Boston, MA 02140

**Alderman:** Rebekah Gewirtz

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner 20 Thorndike St LLC seek a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 in order to modify an existing non-conforming structure, expanding the structure, and increasing the floor area.

Zoning District/Ward: RB/6

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit per §4.4.1 and §9.5.a

Date of Application:

Dates of Public Meeting • Hearing: Planning Board 10/21/2010 • Zoning Board of Appeals 11/3/2010

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: 20 Thorndike Street is a 3629 square foot lot. On the property is a 2.5 story, 2 unit structure, with approximately 2,072 square feet of living space. The lot size is non-conforming with the lot area requirement in the RB zoning district. The front and left yard setbacks are also non-conforming at 9 and 1.75 feet respectively.



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Neighborhood Context



20 Thorndike Street

2. Proposal: Applicant seeks to renovate and expand the existing structure to maintain its use as a residential building with two dwelling units. The current structure is in a dilapidated state and not in usable condition. The gross floor area of the footprint of the building would increase by 114 feet from 1332.48 square feet, to 1447.14 square feet, increasing ground coverage from 36.17% to 39.87%. The net floor area will increase to 3,596.90 square feet, increasing the FAR of .589 to .991. All of these figures are within the dimensional requirements of the zoning code for the Residence B district. The non-conforming front yard will be increased to 11.92 feet (still non-conforming to 15 feet) and right yard set back will be increased from 7.35 to 10 feet. The left yard set back will be maintained at 1.75 feet, and rear yard set back will be decreased from 30 to 20.38 feet.

The plans as submitted provide for 2 off street parking spots. The existing structure contained a two-bedroom unit and a four-bedroom unit, which had a parking requirement of 3.5, rounding to 4. The proposal is for two three bedroom units, which would have the same parking requirement of 4.

Both units would have similarly sized kitchen, dinning, living, and sitting rooms and 2½ baths. The third floor of the building would have enclosed living space on the front of the building, and an open roof deck at the back of the building, overlooking the abutting garage at Buena Vista Road and Holland Street.

3. Nature of Application: The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to several dimensional requirements, including minimum lot size, and side and front yard setbacks. Due to these existing nonconformities, the Applicant must obtain a special permit under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO). It would conform to all other dimensional restrictions as permitted in Residence B zones.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: Thorndike Street is in a medium density area consisting of single-, two- and three-family homes. A former factory (Comfort Pillow) that was converted to condominiums lies at the end of the street, near the intersection with Howard Street. The property is also very close to the Community Path, the commercial district along Holland Street and the heart of Davis Square. The property abuts the parking facility at Buena Vista Road and Holland Street at the rear of property.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed renovations to the property would greatly improve the current condition of the building at 20 Thorndike Street which is in a dilapidated state, and in need of repair. It could potentially have a positive effect on neighboring properties by significantly improving the visual impact of the property. It would not result in a significant increase in traffic, pollution, noise, odor, or glare. There is no reason to believe that the proposed structure would significantly impact water or sewer capacity. The design of the property is such that it would not alter the character of the neighborhood.

6. Green Building Practices: Applicant will pursue LEED for Homes certification as a "Green" building.

7. Comments:

*Fire Prevention:* Has been notified and has not yet responded

*Engineering:* Has been notified and has not yet responded.

*Traffic & Parking:* Has been notified and has provided the following comment:

The applicant seeks a special permit to renovate an existing 2.5 story residential building with two units at 20 Thorndike St. The applicant is seeking relief from 2 required off street parking spaces. Thorndike St is a residential neighborhood in the vicinity of Davis Square. Available parking spaces are scarce in this area. Traffic and Parking has conducted several site reviews of this location. Parking spaces at all time are limited. The lack of the 2 additional off street parking spaces required for this application would put a strain and higher demand on a limited resource i.e. parking spaces. Traffic mitigation would reduce this situation. It is recommended that the applicant gift to the City \$800.00 for the purpose of purchasing signs and for providing a public media campaign relative to mass transportation and alternate transportation modes in the Davis Square area. Provided the above is provided, Traffic and Parking has no objections to this application.

*Ward Alderman:* Has been notified and has not provided comments at this time.

## **II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1.4):**

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 §4.4.1 of the SZO, Staff find that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure.

In considering the parking requirements under §9.5.a, having less than the required minimum parking spaces will not be substantially detrimental to the availability of off-street parking given the proximity of the property to the Davis Square business district, and MBTA station. The comments and proposed condition from Traffic and Parking will help to address impacts of the limited on-site parking.

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 the following: providing for and maintaining the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City and conserving the value of land and buildings.

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district, RB - Residence B, which is, "To establish and preserve medium density neighborhoods of one-, two- and three-family homes, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such districts".

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 style of the house would remain consistent with other structures on the street. The applicant is removing a front porch. Planning Staff recommend working with the applicant to design an appropriate front portico to address the impacts of this change to the front façade.

5. Adverse environmental impacts: The proposed use, structure or activity will not constitute an adverse impact on the surrounding area resulting from: 1) excessive noise, level of illumination, glare, dust, smoke, or vibration which are higher than levels now experienced from uses permitted in the surrounding area; 2) emission of noxious or hazardous materials or substances; 3) pollution of water ways or ground water; or 4) transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception.

6. Vehicular and pedestrian circulation: The circulation patterns for motor vehicles and pedestrians which would result from the use or structure will not result in conditions that create traffic congestion or the potential for traffic accidents on the site or in the surrounding area. The site is near transit and adequately served by the Community Path and subway. The undersized driveway will not provide unnecessary limitations on the project.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

#### Special Permit under §4.4.1

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 renovation of two unit family structure, with the addition of 114 square feet of living space. 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>9/14/2010 (9/14/2010)</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr><tr><td>3/20/10</td><td>Landscape Plan submitted to OSPCD</td></tr><tr><td>3/20/10</td><td>Layout and elevation submitted to OSPCD (1 through 4 of 4)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	9/14/2010 (9/14/2010)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	3/20/10	Landscape Plan submitted to OSPCD	3/20/10	Layout and elevation submitted to OSPCD (1 through 4 of 4)
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Any changes to the approved site plan or elevations at are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.												
2	There shall be a minimum of one tree for each 1,000 sf of required landscaped area under SZO §10.3.	CO	Plng.									
3	Landscaping must be planted and maintained according to National Nurseryman's Standards, and in accordance with SZO §10.2.2 and §10.6.2.	CO	Plng.									
4	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP									
5	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									
6	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									
7	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									

8	To the extent possible, all exterior lighting must be confined to the subject property, cast light downward and must not intrude, interfere or spill onto neighboring properties.	CO	Plng.	
9	The applicant shall provide notice of intent to strictly comply with applicable State and Federal regulations regarding air quality including without limitation continuous dust control during demolition and construction.	CO	Plng/OSE	
10	Notification must be made, within the time period required under applicable regulations, to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) if there is any release of oil, hazardous materials, or regulated hazardous substances at the site. The City's OSE office, Fire Department and the Board of Health shall also be notified.	CO	OSE/FP/BOH	
11	The Applicant shall use cedar clapboard siding, and wood or metal clad windows. Siding and window materials and colors shall be submitted to Planning Staff for review and approval.	BP	Plng.	
12	The Applicant shall apply for LEED certification for the structure.	CO	Plng.	
13	The Applicant shall expand the front door portico to include a front porch. If possible, this should be a porch across the full length of the building that is at least five feet deep. Applicant shall provide updated plans showing final porch design to Planning Staff for review and approval.	BP	Plng.	
14	The Applicant shall relocate the center window on each floor of the front elevation to be in the center of the front wall. Applicant shall provide updated plans showing final window design to Planning Staff.	BP	Plng.	
15	The Applicant shall provide \$800.00 for the purpose of purchasing signs and for providing a public media campaign relative to mass transportation and alternate transportation modes in the Davis Square area.	CO	T&P	
16	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.	



**20 Thorndike Street**