



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2010-82
Date: February 17, 2011
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 11 Williams Court

Applicant and Property Owner Name: Garrison and Emi Fewell
Applicant and Property Owner Address: 11 Williams Court, Somerville, MA 02143
Architect Name: Shane Lois
Architect Address: One Billings Road, Quincy, MA 02171
Alderman: Sean O'Donovan

Legal Notice: Applicants and owners, Garrison and Emi Fewell, seek a special permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to raise the roof approximately two feet and construct a dormer on an existing two-family residence. RB zone.

Zoning District/Ward: RB Zone / Ward 5
Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1
Date of Application: December 28, 2010
Dates of Public Meeting • Hearing: Planning Board **2/17/11** • Zoning Board of Appeals **3/2/11**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a two-family dwelling on a 2,535 square foot lot situated near the intersection of Williams Court and Porter Street. The structure is 2.5 stories with a gable roof, not including the basement level.
2. Proposal: The Applicant is proposing to raise the roof of the structure approximately two feet to install two shed dormers, one on each side of the roof. The dormer on the west side of the building is proposed to be situated at the center of the structure and the east side dormer is proposed towards the front of the structure. No windows are proposed on the dormer on the west side because the existing structure is only 1.7 feet from the property line on this side. Four windows are proposed for



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the dormer on the east side of the building. The installation of the dormers will achieve two things. First, the dormer on the west side will allow for the necessary headroom to install a new, code compliant stairwell on the west side of the structure providing safer access to the third floor. Second, the dormers will allow for the creation of a full bathroom, closet and enhanced living space within the top story. The applicant is also proposing to remove one window on the ground floor and two on the second floor on the west side of the structure.

Upon completion of the entire building renovation, this structure will be converted from two-family dwelling to a single-family dwelling.

This application is a result of significant modification from an initial proposal that has more impacts on the design of the structure and the neighborhood. The Applicant has worked extensively with Staff going through several different possible designs solutions to alter the project to reach an outcome that could meet the needs of the applicant while meeting the required special permit findings.

3. Nature of Application: The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to several dimensional requirements including minimum lot size, front yard setback, side yard setback, rear yard setback, and minimum frontage.

The proposed roof raising and the dormer on the west side of the building would affect the nonconforming left side yard, which is approximately 1.7 feet from the property line. The minimum setback required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) is 7 feet 1 inch for a 2.5 story structure (reduced from 8 feet because it is a narrow lot). The existing nonconformity requires the Applicant to obtain a special permit under §4.4.1 of the SZO. The proposed dormer on the east side of the structure would be by right. However, because the length of that dormer is greater than 50 percent the length of that portion of roof, the house will no longer be considered a 2.5 story structure, but instead will become a 3 story building, although 3 stories are allowed in the RB district.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The structures in the surrounding neighborhood consist mainly of two-family dwellings between 2 and 3 stories with primarily gable roofs and shed style dormers. The other structures in the area are single- and three-family dwellings between 2 and 3 stories. Homes are typically of wooden construction.

5. Green Building Practices: None indicated.

6. Comments:

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

Ward Alderman: Alderman Sean O'Donovan has been contacted but has not provided comments.

Historic Preservation: Please see the attached memorandum from Historic Preservation Planner Kristi Chase regarding the project.



Existing Conditions

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.
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 finds that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The dormer on the west side of the structure is not expected to impact the dwelling adjacent to the nonconforming side yard. The dormer on this side will only be 12 feet 4 inches wide, will contain no windows, and will not greatly impact the light upon or views from the adjacent residence at 11 Linden Circle. Additionally, while Staff would prefer to see more than one window retained on the west side of the home, the proposed design would not be more detrimental to the neighborhood because the space between the homes of 11 Williams Court and 11 Linden Circle is only approximately five feet. The dormer proposed for the east side of the home will not be detrimental to the neighborhood either as it is over 17 feet away from the adjacent property line and contains four windows that are proportional to the existing windows on that side of the structure. Furthermore, the additional two feet the roof will be raised will not render the structure inconsistent with the other buildings on the street.

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 promoting "the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants of the City of Somerville; to provide for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to provide adequate light and air; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City."

The existing structure is a pre-existing nonconforming structure that is consistent with the purpose of the RB district. The RB district is designed 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 project will maintain the gable roof that currently exists on the structure which is consistent with the vast majority of the buildings in the neighborhood. The shed dormers, while not a form typically recommended by Staff, is a dormer type that is found on most structures in the area and is compatible with the neighborhood. The additional two feet the roof line will be raised will not render the structure inconsistent with other buildings on the street. The adjacent home at 11 Linden Court is taller than the existing structure, and this structure is therefore not a part of a group of homes with similar roof heights. Therefore, this higher roof will not be detrimental to the character of the neighborhood.

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.

No adverse impacts are anticipated from this project. The structure will be converted from a two-family dwelling to a single-family dwelling and will continue to be used for residential purposes. The proposed project will be providing the third floor of the structure with a bathroom and additional headroom.

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 to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to raise the roof approximately two feet and construct a dormer on an existing two-family residence. 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>(December 28, 2010)</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>December 22, 2008 (February 17, 2011)</td><td>Plot Plan</td></tr><tr><td>February 4, 2011 (February 17, 2011)</td><td>Floor Plans (A-1.1b)</td></tr><tr><td>February 10, 2011 (February 17, 2011)</td><td>Elevations (A-1.2b)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(December 28, 2010)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	December 22, 2008 (February 17, 2011)	Plot Plan	February 4, 2011 (February 17, 2011)	Floor Plans (A-1.1b)	February 10, 2011 (February 17, 2011)	Elevations (A-1.2b)
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February 10, 2011 (February 17, 2011)	Elevations (A-1.2b)													
Any changes to the approved plans and elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive ZBA approval.														
2	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau’s requirements.	CO	FP											
3	Siding, roofing, and materials of the dormers and the vertical addition shall match that of the existing structure. The applicant will retain and reinstall (or replicate if necessary) the decorative roof brackets on the front gable.	CO	Plng.											
4	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.	Final sign off	Plng.											



11 Williams Court

To: Planning Division
From: Kristi Chase, Preservation Planner, and
Brandon Wilson, Executive Director
RE: Staff Recommendations 2/1/11

HPC 11.14 – 11 Williams Court, *circa* 1855-1860

Applicants: Garrison & Emi Fewell

Historic and Architectural Significance

This side-hall entry vernacular Italianate style building has never been fully surveyed. An initial survey form from 1980 by Carole Zellie states that the buildings on Williams Court were constructed between 1855 and 1860. The building form also notes that the houses are uniform in style and shape. The 1874 Hopkins map shows that all 8 buildings on Williams Court were owned by a Mrs. Baker.



Existing Conditions

These properties have evolved to reflect changes in ownership and ways of living over time, giving each house an individuality that they didn't have initially. 11 Williams Court retains its front entry hood, some of its bracketing at the eave returns and on the bay window. Unfortunately, vinyl siding and replacement windows have eliminated some of the details that this house would have had.

Recommendations

As long as the houses retain the pattern of similar window and door openings, the height of the houses, and the pitch of the gable-ends consistent, the placement of the dormers on 11 Williams Court is unlikely to adversely impact the rhythm of the street provided the dormers are not too large and too forward on the roof. The blinding of the windows on the 'left' elevation will not be particularly visible. Historically, however, blinded windows might retain or be given casing filled either by clapboard or closed shutters for the sake of symmetry, even when no window opening was intended.