



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2012-60
Date: August 10, 2012
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 252 Medford Street

Applicant Name: T-Mobile Northeast, LLC
Applicant Address: 15 Commerce Way, Suite B, Norton, MA 02766
Property Owner Name: Somerville Housing Authority
Property Owner Address: 30 Memorial Road, Somerville, MA 02145
Agent Name: Jackie Slaga
Agent Address: 95 Indian Trail, Saunderstown, RI 02874
Alderman: Thomas Taylor

Legal Notice: Applicant, T-Mobile Northeast, LLC, and Owner, Somerville Housing Authority, seek a Special Permit under SZO §7.11.15.3 and SZO §14 for the installation of wireless communications equipment consisting of the replacement of six existing antennas and the installation of one new equipment cabinet as well as related equipment and cables. BB zone.

Zoning District/Ward: BB zone / Ward 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit (SZO §7.11.15.3 and SZO §14)

Date of Application: July 12, 2012

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – Wednesday, August 15, 2012

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** The property is a 50,351 square foot parcel located within a Business B (BB) zone. The property is located at the intersection of McGrath Highway, Medford Street, and Highland Avenue. The property contains 84 residential units known as Brady Towers, which is controlled by the Somerville Housing Authority and provides housing for the elderly. The building is a nine story, 90 foot tall, brick structure with three penthouses that extend above the roof. The largest penthouse, 15 feet in



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height, is at least ten feet from the edge of the building in all directions. Two six foot tall penthouses are located at both the eastern and western edge of the building.

The existing facility consists of five façade mounted antennas, one antenna mounted to a rooftop railing, and two equipment cabinets located adjacent to the center penthouse. Different wireless companies have received Special Permits in the past for the installation of wireless equipment on the rooftop of this building, such as Fibertower in 2008, Omnipoint in 2000 and 2001, and AT&T in 2000. A number of antennas by other wireless companies continue to exist on this rooftop.

2. Proposal: The Applicant is proposing to replace six existing antennas, relocate one of these six antennas from a rooftop railing to the western façade of the building, and install one additional equipment cabinet in the center of the roof. One antenna currently exists on the north end of the western façade and another is proposed to be relocated from a railing to the south end of the western façade. This antenna is being relocated due to the railing being insufficient to accommodate the new antenna. Two antennas are located on the southern façade of the western penthouse, and two more antennas are located on the northern façade of the eastern penthouse. The equipment cabinet will be installed adjacent to the existing cabinets that are located in the center of the roof, next to the center penthouse. This new equipment cabinet will have a smaller footprint than the existing cabinets. All antennas will be painted to match the brick color of the building. The facility will continue to be unmanned and will generate 1-2 monthly vehicular trips. The upgrade to this facility is part of a nationwide effort to modernize the Applicant's network, which will improve coverage, call quality, data speed, increase capacity and enhance E-911 capacity, and reduce the overall carbon footprint of this wireless facility.

3. Nature of Application: Under SZO §7.11.15.3, establishment of a wireless communications facility, which includes the relocation of wireless equipment, requires a Special Permit.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding neighborhood includes a variety of uses but the area is predominantly residential with a number of building types including two- and three-family dwellings as well as multi-unit apartment buildings. The subject property is also adjacent to McGrath Highway and MBTA commuter rail tracks are located to the east.

5. Impacts of Proposal: All six antennas will be visible from nearby properties. Particularly visible is the antenna mounted on the north end of the western façade and the antenna proposed to be relocated from the railing to the south end of the western façade. The other four antennas are less visible due to their locations on the south façade of the western penthouse and the north façade of the eastern penthouse. The updates to these antennas will strengthen the Applicant's 4G network.

6. Green Building Practices: No green building practices have been indicated by the Applicant. However, the six replacement antennas will reduce the overall carbon footprint of the T-Mobile wireless facility.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

Ward Alderman: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

Lights and Lines: Has been notified but has not yet provided comments.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1 and §14):

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."

The Applicant seeks a Special Permit under SZO §7.11.15.3 of the SZO which requires the Applicant to follow guidelines and procedures as set forth in Article 14 for the "regulation of wireless telecommunications facilities so as to allow and encourage such uses in the City with minimal harm to the public health, safety, and general welfare."

Staff finds that minimal harm would be imposed upon the health, safety, and welfare of the surrounding neighborhood. T-Mobile Northeast, LLC is an FCC licensed company that is required to comply with all FCC rules governing construction requirements, technical standards, interference protection, power and height limitations, and radio frequency standards.

Review Criteria for Telecommunications Facilities SZO §14.5.1:

- a. *Height of proposed facility:* The building is a nine story, 90 foot tall, brick structure with three penthouses that extend above the roof. Five of the proposed new replacement antennas will be located on existing mounts which are located below the roofline of the penthouse or building façade to which they are mounted. The sixth replacement antenna is proposed to be relocated to the western façade of the building and will also remain below the roofline. To minimize visibility, all antennas will be painted to match the corresponding building or penthouse façade. The new equipment cabinet will be located next to the center penthouse and not visible from the ground below.
- b. *Proximity of facility to residential structures and residential zoning districts:* Brady Towers, 252 Medford Street, is an 84-unit residential building in a BB district. While other residential buildings do surround the subject parcel, replacing the existing equipment with upgraded technology will have less of an impact than installing all new equipment on a different structure.
- c. *Nature of uses on adjacent and nearby properties:* The site is located in a BB district where the surrounding properties are predominantly residential in nature. In upgrading the equipment and relocating one antenna to a façade that has four existing antennas, there will be a very minimal adverse effect on the residential nature of the surrounding area.
- d. *Surrounding topography and prominence of proposed facility:* Brady Towers is located on the east side of Prospect Hill and due to the height of the building it is a prominent structure in that area. However, as the antennas are less than five feet in height and their coloring will reflect the façade to which each is mounted, the visibility of the antennas will not increase. Additionally, the height of the building will minimize the visual impact of the antennas to lower structures and people at street level.

- e. *Surrounding tree cover and foliage:* Brady Towers is nine stories tall and rises above all trees in the surrounding area. Tree cover would not be an effective method for shielding this wireless facility, however, there is also no anticipated interference with regard to foliage.
 - f. *Design of tower, with particular reference to design characteristics that have the effect of reducing or eliminating visual obtrusiveness, as specified in Section 14.3:* The proposal is designed to be compatible with the surrounding area. Though the proposed rooftop antennas are visible from several vantage points, the proposal includes painting each antenna to match the brick color of the building, which will reduce their prominence from the public way. The antenna being relocated to the south end of the western façade will become more visible, however, there are currently four other antennas on this façade as well.
 - g. *Location of tower, considering more suitable locations:* T-Mobile has an existing wireless facility at this location and as Brady Towers is taller than any of the surrounding buildings in this immediate area.
 - h. *Proposed ingress and egress:* Ingress and egress to the site will continue to be through the existing curb cut located along Medford Street and the rooftop is accessible from a penthouse.
 - i. *Distance from existing facilities:* There are no T-Mobile wireless facilities in the immediate area, which is illustrated by the accompanying map.
 - j. *Availability of suitable existing towers, poles, other structures, or alternative technologies, as discussed in Section 14.5.2:* T-Mobile currently has equipment on this building and the six replacement antennas and new equipment cabinet will serve to reduce the overall carbon footprint of this wireless facility.
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; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to preserve and increase the amenities of the municipality."

The proposal, as conditioned, is also consistent with the purposes established for the Commercial Residential district, SZO § 6.1.7 BB, which is "[t]o establish and preserve general commercial and high density residential areas consisting of multi-family developments, shopping centers, commercial strips and automobile related establishments where customers reach individual businesses primarily by automobile."

Furthermore, Staff finds the proposal to be consistent with the purposes set forth in Article 14, as noted below.

- a) *Protect residential areas and land uses from potential adverse impacts of towers and antennas;*
- b) *Encourage the location of telecommunications facilities in non-residential areas;*

- c) *Minimize the total number of towers and antennas throughout the community;*
- d) *Strongly encourage the joint use of new and existing tower sites as a primary option rather than construction of additional single-use towers;*
- e) *Encourage users of towers and antennas to locate them in areas where the adverse impact on the community is minimal;*
- f) *Encourage users of towers and antennas to configure them in ways that minimize the adverse visual impact of the towers and antennas through careful design, siting, landscape screening, and innovative camouflaging techniques;*
- g) *Enhance the ability of the providers of telecommunications services to provide such services to the community quickly, effectively, and efficiently;*
- h) *Consider the public health and safety of communications facilities;*
- i) *Avoid potential damage to adjacent properties from tower and antenna failure through sound engineering and careful siting of structures.*

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 proposal would not be more detrimental to the area than the existing structure.

The project is determined by Staff to be compatible with the surrounding area and land uses. The proposed replacement antennas are in keeping with the current built environment as five antennas are not proposed to move, while one proposed relocated antenna will move to the south end of the western façade, near four other wireless antennas. There are no buildings taller than Brady Towers in the immediate area to be impacted by the proposed antennas. The antennas and mounting components will be conditioned to match the façade of the building to reduce visibility. While another equipment cabinet will be installed near the center of the roof top, there will be no visible impact from the ground below. Additional antennas, which belong to other wireless companies, are also located on this rooftop; however, the replacement antennas, in an effort to upgrade and reduce the carbon footprint, will have a minimal visual impact.

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.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under SZO §7.11.15.3 and §14

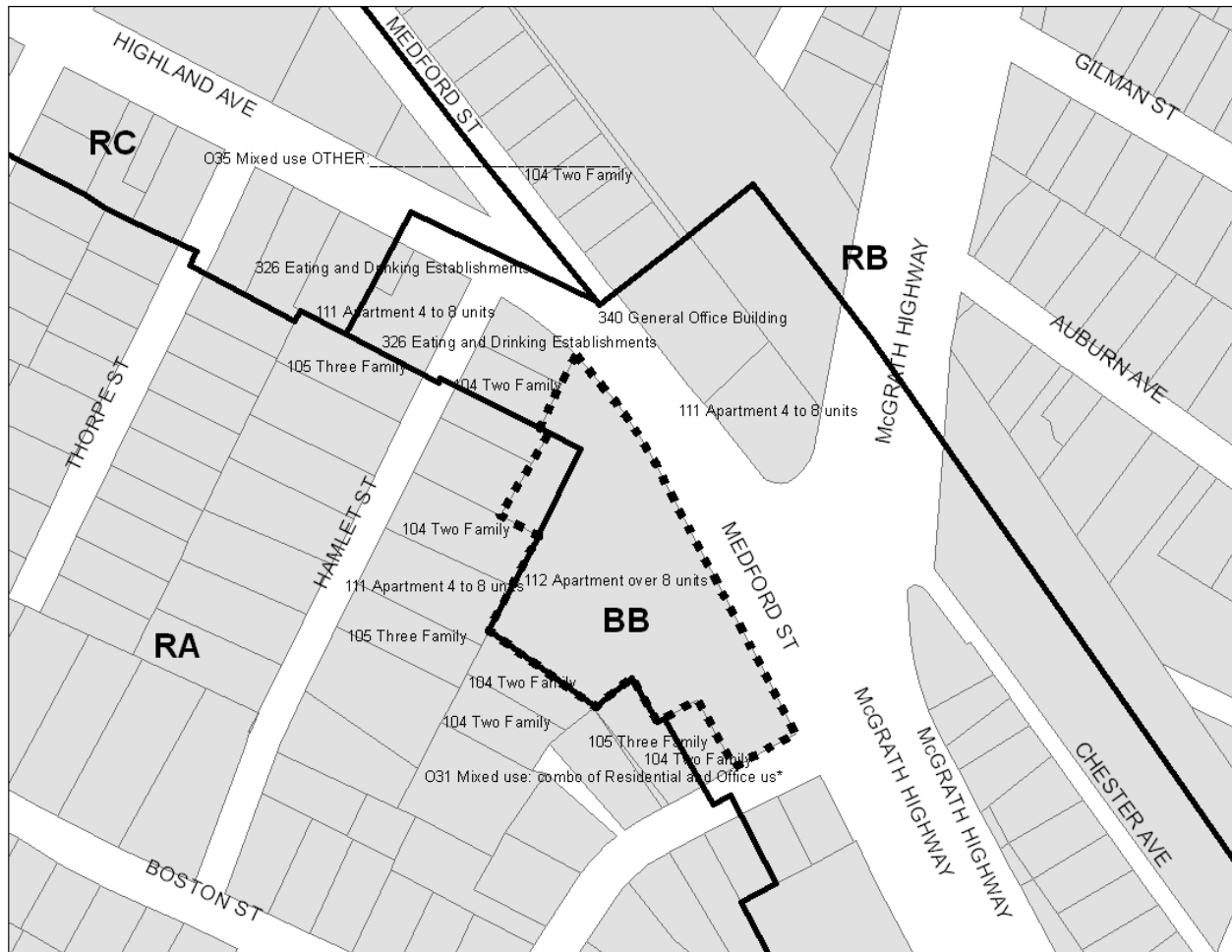
Based on the materials submitted by the Applicant, the above findings and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**.

The recommendation is based upon a technical analysis by Planning Staff of the application material based upon the required findings of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and is based only upon information submitted prior to the public hearing. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations, findings and/or conditions based upon additional information provided to the Planning Staff during the public hearing process.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes								
1	Approval is for a Special Permit for the installation of wireless communications equipment consisting of the replacement of six existing antennas and the installation of one new equipment cabinet as well as related equipment and cables. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.									
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>(July 3, 2012)</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr><tr><td>August 6, 2012 (August 10, 2012)</td><td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (T-1, Z-1, A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, and E-1)</td></tr><tr><td>(August 9, 2012)</td><td>Photograph simulations submitted to OSPCD (Sheets 1, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 6, 7, and 8)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(July 3, 2012)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	August 6, 2012 (August 10, 2012)	Plans submitted to OSPCD (T-1, Z-1, A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, and E-1)	(August 9, 2012)	Photograph simulations submitted to OSPCD (Sheets 1, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 6, 7, and 8)
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Any changes to the approved plans, photo simulations, and/or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.												
2	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP									

3	<i>Compliance with Noise Control Ordinance.</i> Prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Use and Occupancy Permit for the installation of the wireless telecommunications facility, the Applicant shall submit to the Inspectional Services Division, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals, a sound level measurement certified as accurate by a professional acoustician and shall perform such sound level measurements six months after issuance of the certificate of occupancy, with subsequent sound level measurements annually on or before the anniversary date of the original six month measurement to document that all of the Applicant's installed equipment complies and continues to comply with the decibel level standards established by the City of Somerville, Noise Control Ordinance. The Applicant shall provide the results of such measurements and certify that the facility complies with the decibel level standards established by the City of Somerville, Noise Control Ordinance, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals.	Continuous	ISD	
4	<i>Compliance with Federal Communications Commission Guidelines for Human Exposure to Electromagnetic Fields.</i> To ensure compliance with the standards established by the Federal Communications Commission Office of Engineering and Technology ("FCC") in OET Bulletin 65 as adopted by Massachusetts Department of Public Health under 105 CMR 122.021, the Applicant shall perform measurements, within two (2) months of the date that the Applicant's wireless telecommunications facility commences operation and at intervals of twelve (12) months thereafter, to establish that the Applicant's wireless telecommunications facility complies and continues to comply with the FCC guidelines and applicable state regulations for human exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields for human exposure to radio frequency electromagnetic fields. The Applicant shall provide the results of such measurements with certification of compliance to the City of Somerville Health Department, with a copy to the Zoning Board of Appeals.	Continuous	Health Dept.	
5	Any antenna that is not operated continuously for a period of twelve (12) months shall be considered abandoned, and the owner of such antenna shall remove the same within ninety (90) days of notice from the City of Somerville informing the owner of such abandonment.	Continuous	ISD	

6	The Applicant shall remove any of that carrier's unused or non-operating wireless equipment prior to installation.	BP	Plng.	
7	The Applicant shall at his/her 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.	Final Inspection	DPW	
8	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	
9	The Applicant shall camouflage the antennas, RRHs, equipment cabinets, mounting hardware, and other related equipment and fixtures by painting these items to match color of the façade to which they are affixed.	Final Sign Off	Plng.	
10	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.	



252 Medford Street