



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2016-132

Date: January 4, 2017

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 55 Partridge Avenue

Applicant Name: Wei Zhang

Applicant Address: 25 Benvenue Street, Wellesley, MA 02482

Owner Name: Wei Zhang

Owner Address: 25 Benvenue Street, Wellesley, MA 02482

Alderman: Mark Niedergang

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, Wei Zhang, sees a Special Permit under SZO Section 4.4.1 to finish the basement and increase the FAR. RA zone. Ward 5.



Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – January 4, 2017

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** The subject property is a 2.8-story, 2-family residential structure in the RA district built on a 2,614 square foot lot.
2. **Proposal:** The Applicant proposes to finish the basement and create more head height therein by digging out the area.
3. **Green Building Practices:** Per the application: good insulation; high-efficiency HVAC system, use LED lighting, motion sensor wherever possible; use Energy Star labelled products.
4. **Comments:**

Ward Alderman: Mark Niedergang is aware of this project.



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 §4.4.1 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §4.4.1 in detail.

1. **Information Supplied:**

- Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §4.4.1 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 structure is currently non-conforming with regard to lot area, front yard setback, left side yard setback and rear yard setback. As proposed, the trigger for the Special Permit is the increase in Floor Area Ratio (FAR) that results from finishing the basement.
- Despite the increase in the number of bedrooms, no parking relief is needed. The parking calculation for results in the need for .5 (1/2) of a parking space of relief. Under such circumstances, no parking relief is needed.

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."

- In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff finds that the alterations proposed to this property would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than those contained within the existing structure. Finishing/upgrading a basement is a way of creating more livable space to a home with little to no impact on abutting properties since there is no change to the setbacks of the home.

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 secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to encourage housing for persons of all income levels.

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 surrounding neighborhood is a mix of residential uses including single-family, 2-family and 2-family conversions. The surrounding neighborhood contains numerous structures of 2 ½, 2 ½ + stories with similar massing.
- There are few to no impacts from the proposal. The most significant proposed modifications are to the interior of the structure. The proposed changes to the exterior of the residence will help improve the street presence of the property while providing the homeowners with a small amount of outdoor space on a lot with limited area for outdoor enjoyment.

5. **Housing Impact:** *Will not create adverse impacts on the stock of existing affordable housing.*

- The proposal will not impact the existing stock of affordable housing.

6. **SomerVision Plan:** *Complies with the applicable goals, policies and actions of the SomerVision plan, including the following, as appropriate: Preserve and enhance the character of Somerville's neighborhoods, transform key opportunity areas, preserve and expand an integrated, balanced mix of safe, affordable and environmentally sound rental and homeownership units for households of all sizes and types from diverse social and economic groups; and, make Somerville a regional employment center with a mix of diverse and high-quality jobs. The areas in the SomerVision map that are designated as enhance and transform should most significantly contribute towards the SomerVision goals that are outlined in the table below. The areas marked as conserve are not expected to greatly increase the figures in the table since these areas are not intended for large scale change.*

- The proposal will not contribute to the metrics of SomerVision but will allow the property owner to make some modifications to their home.


III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §4.4.1

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 |
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| 1 | Approval is to finish the basement, thereby increasing the FAR. | BP/CO | ISD/ Plng. | | | | | | | |
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| | <table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>October 31, 2016</td><td>Initial application submitted to Planning Office</td></tr><tr><td>December, 2016</td><td>Updated plans submitted to OSPCD</td></tr></table> | | | | Date (Stamp Date) | Submission | October 31, 2016 | Initial application submitted to Planning Office | December, 2016 | Updated plans submitted to OSPCD |
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| | October 31, 2016 | | | | Initial application submitted to Planning Office | | | | | |
| December, 2016 | Updated plans submitted to OSPCD | | | | | | | | | |
| ANY changes to the approved plans must first be submitted to the Planning Division to determine whether or not they are <i>de minimis</i> in nature or whether they require review by the SPGA. | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 2 | The Applicant and/or Owner shall meet all of the Fire Prevention Bureau’s requirements. | CO/Perpetual | FP | | | | | | | |
| 3 | The entire property is being overhauled. The landscaping of the property shall be upgraded. Landscaping plans shall be submitted to and approved by OSPCD Planning Staff prior to the installation of any landscaping. | CO | ISD/Plng | | | | | | | |
| 4 | The exterior of the building shall be clad in wood or cementitious siding. Wood, Azek or similar type siding shall be used for trim. No pressure-treated wood shall be used. No vinyl or aluminum siding shall be used. | CO/Perpetual | ISD/Plng | | | | | | | |
| 5 | The two windows in the front façade gable shall be retained in the exact size as currently extant on the property. | CO/Perpetual | ISD/Plng | | | | | | | |
| 6 | <div>The front façade of the building shall retain its pediment as currently extant on the building:</div> <div></div> | CO | ISD/Plng | | | | | | | |
| 7 | All details such as trim, fascia, brackets, scrolls, gable returns, window fenestration shall be retained. | CO/Perpetual | ISD/Plng | | | | | | | |
| 8 | Windows shall be two-over-two, with dark spacers, applied grids (no interior grids shall be permitted), with dark spacers, dark sash, and no reflective glass. | CO/Perpetual | ISD/Plng | | | | | | | |
| 9 | As per Somerville Fire Prevention requirements, no grills, chimineas, or similar apparatus shall be permitted on decks or porches. | CO/Perpetual | ISD/Plng/Fire Prevention | | | | | | | |

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|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|--|
| 10 | The existing dormers on the left and right elevations shall be retained | CO/Perpetual | ISD/Plng/Fire Prevention | |
| Final Sign-Off | | | | |
| 11 | <u>The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five (5) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection</u> 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 | ISD/Plng. | |