



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2012-70
Date: August 30, 2012
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 373 Washington Street

Applicants Names: Maren Kravitz and Heidi Brown
Applicants Address: 691A Somerville Avenue, Somerville, MA 02145
Property Owner Names: Leroy and Katherine Parece
Property Owner Address: 16 Puritan Road, Arlington, MA 02476
Alderman: Maryann Heuston

Legal Notice: Applicants Maren Kravitz and Heidi Brown and Owners Leroy and Katherine Parece, seek a Special Permit under SZO §4.5.1 to change a nonconforming use (an automotive repair shop) to another nonconforming use in order to open fitness studio with personal and small group training (SZO §7.11.6.3.a). RB zone. Ward 2.

Zoning District/Ward: RB Zone / Ward 2

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.5.1

Date of Application: August 7, 2012

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – **September 5, 2012**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is an 8,225 square foot lot with a former automotive repair building on it at the corner of Washington Street and Dane Street. The 5,700 gross square foot, single story brick building situated on the lot has two distinct sections. The front portion of the building is approximately 10 feet in height and the rear portion, where the three garage bays are located, is approximately 15 feet in height. Both sections of the building have a flat roof. The entire length of the property's frontage along Dane Street is one long curb cut.



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2. Proposal: The Applicant is proposing to convert the former automotive repair shop into a fitness studio with personal and small group training. The Applicant's business, The Training Room, is currently located in Wilson Square and they are looking to expand the size of their current operation. This building provides the Applicant with that opportunity. On the exterior, the existing front windows will be replaced with eight over eight or six over six style double hung windows that would be the same size as the existing window openings. The three large garage doors that face Dane Street would be replaced with garage doors that consist of entirely window panels to let in substantial natural light. The business's proposed signage would be located on the façade along Washington Street above the front door and windows and will most likely be made of metal. Eleven off-street parking spaces would be provided off of Dane Street, which will still leave room for new landscaping at the corner of Washington Street and Dane Street, as well as against the building. Bicycle parking would be provided on the right side of the building and the one trash and one recycling container would be located at the back of the building.

Inside the building, the front portion would remain as an office and also be used for the entry area, shop area, and as a small exercise space. The middle portion of the building would be converted into Studio Area # 1 and the three garage bays at the back of the structure would be converted into the main exercise floor for the business. The two existing bathrooms would be retained in the central portion of the building and the basement would continue to be used for storage and utility purposes.

3. Nature of Application: The property is located within a RB district where both automotive repair shops and commercial health/exercise facilities are not permitted uses. It has been determined that the automotive repair shop has retained its nonconforming status and is therefore an existing use at the property. Under Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.5.1, an Applicant can seek permission from the Special Permit Grant Authority, in this case the Zoning Board of Appeals, to change from one nonconforming use (an automotive repair shop) to another nonconforming use (a commercial health/exercise facility) via a Special Permit.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The property is located in a RB district in the residential neighborhood southwest of Union Square. While the surrounding neighborhood is predominantly residential, it does have a mixture of uses with commercial and retail uses along Washington Street and Beacon Street. The residential side streets consist of single-, two-, and three-family dwellings. The majority of the structures are 2½ story gable roofed buildings and three story, flat roofed, triple deckers.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed fitness studio with personal and small group training would not be more detrimental to the surrounding neighborhood than the last use at the property (an automotive repair shop). The proposal will take a noxious and potentially environmentally hazardous use out of the surrounding residential neighborhood and replace it with a much more residentially compatible use. Therefore, there shall be minimal, if any, negative impacts or disruption to the surrounding neighborhood. Construction and renovation of the building to outfit the space for the fitness center will primarily occur on the interior of the building. The new use will be providing all of the required parking, 11 spaces, on-site via the curb cut along Dane Street. The new windows and glass garage doors will help to create a more pedestrian friendly streetscape along both Washington Street and Dane Street. Additionally, the proposal will be adding landscaping to a site which is currently almost entirely paved or covered with a building. All classes for the building will occur inside the space and should not be disruptive to the surrounding neighborhood as they have not had one noise complaint in the three years they have been located in Wilson Square. Ultimately, the proposal will take a currently vacant former automotive repair shop property, clean it up, and implement a commercial use that is very compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood.

6. Green Building Practices: None indicated.

7. Comments:

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

Ward Alderman: Alderman Heuston indicated to Planning Staff in an email on Thursday, August 30, 2012 that “this sounds like a nice transition of the use.”

Wiring Inspector: Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.



Existing Conditions



II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.5.1, §5.1):

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 Permit.

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 §4.5.1 of the SZO, Staff find that the proposed use would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the former use of the property as an automotive repair shop. The proposal will take a noxious and potentially environmentally hazardous use out of the surrounding residential neighborhood and replace it with a much more residentially compatible use. The proposal will clean up the existing unkempt vacant property, add landscaping, and replace windows and doors that will make the existing structure more residential in nature and more interactive with the pedestrian streetscape.

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 protect health; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to preserve and increase the amenities of the municipality."

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district (6.1.2. RB - Residence Districts), 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." While the proposed use is not a residential one, the use is compatible with and convenient to the residents of the surrounding area as it provides a physical fitness business to the neighborhood.

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 proposed fitness studio with personal and small group training would not be more detrimental to the surrounding neighborhood than the last use at the property. The proposal will take a noxious and potentially environmentally hazardous use out of the surrounding residential neighborhood and replace it with a much more residentially compatible use. Therefore, there shall be minimal, if any, negative impacts or disruption to the surrounding neighborhood. The new use will be providing all of the required parking, 11 spaces, on-site via the curb cut along Dane Street. The new windows and glass garage doors will give the building a more residential feel and help to create a more pedestrian friendly streetscape along both Washington Street and Dane Street. All classes for the building will occur inside the space and should not be disruptive to the surrounding neighborhood as they have not had one noise complaint in the three years they have been located in Wilson Square. Ultimately, the proposal will take a currently

vacant former automotive repair shop property, clean it up, and implement a commercial use that is very compatible with the surrounding residential 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 environmental impacts are anticipated as part of this proposal. No new noise, glare, dust, smoke, vibration, nor emissions of noxious materials nor pollution of water ways or ground water nor transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception are anticipated as part of the project. The proposal will take a noxious and potentially environmentally hazardous use out of the surrounding residential neighborhood and replace it with a much more residentially compatible use.

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 new proposed use will be providing all required parking, 11 spaces, on-site via the wide existing curb cut along Dane Street. The 11 spaces will be arranged side by side and be situated between the building and the sidewalk. While it is not ideal to have cars backing out onto Dane Street, this is the existing situation at the property currently. The large expanse of the Dane Street curb cut will make it easier for cars to back out of these spaces as their views will not be blocked by vehicles parked along the street as is the case with many residential driveways in the City. Additionally, it is not anticipated that all 11 spaces will be used at all times because the fitness class sizes are limited to approximately 6 people and it is also anticipated that a fair number of clients will bike to and from the premises.

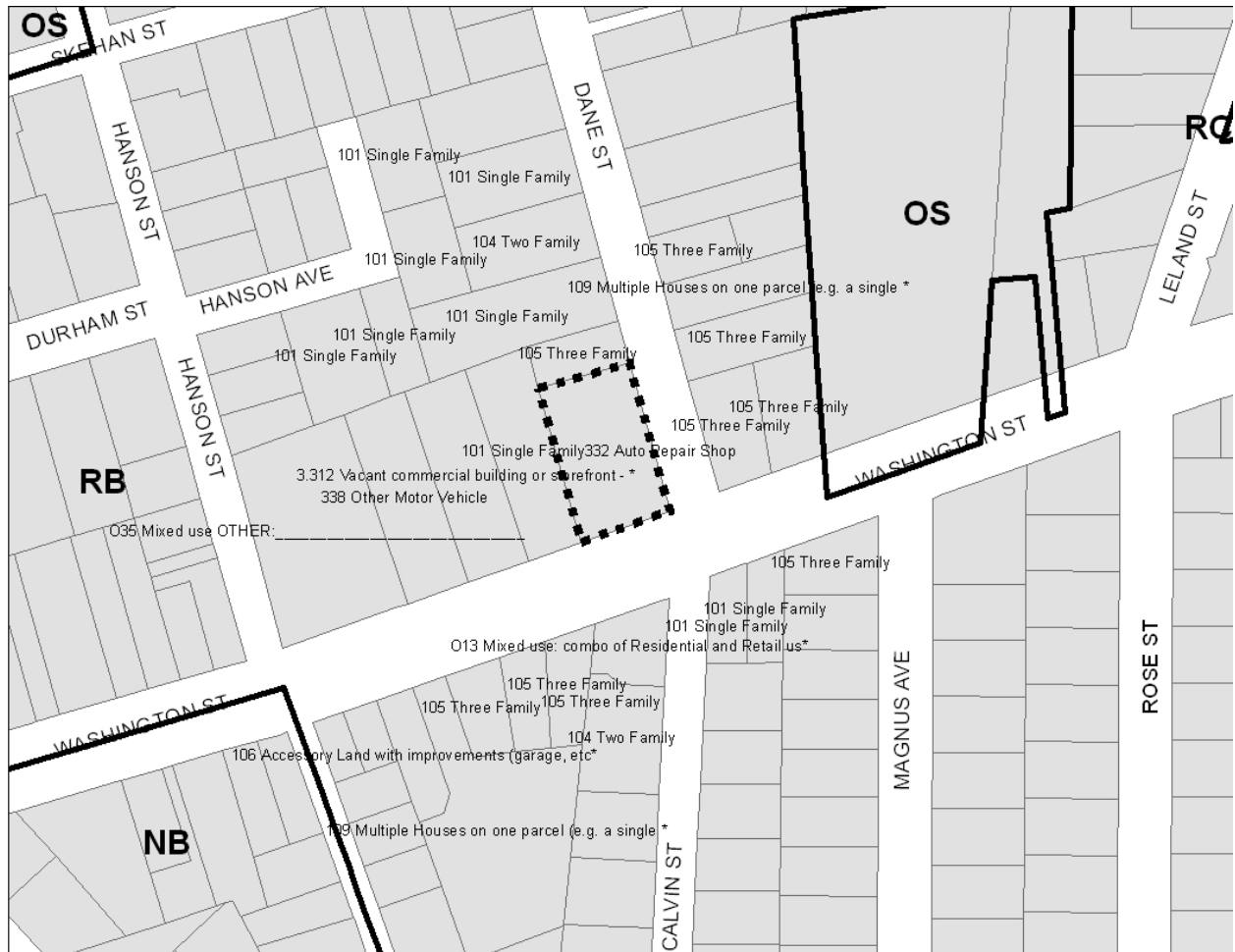
III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §4.5.1 and §5.1

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										
1	Approval is for the change of a nonconforming use (an automotive repair shop) to another nonconforming use in order to open fitness studio with personal and small group training (SZO §7.11.6.3.a) under SZO §4.5.1. 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>(August 7, 2012)</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>(August 30, 2012)</td><td>Existing Floor Plan</td></tr><tr><td>(August 30, 2012)</td><td>Proposed Interior Plan</td></tr><tr><td>(August 30, 2012)</td><td>Proposed Site Plan</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(August 7, 2012)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	(August 30, 2012)	Existing Floor Plan	(August 30, 2012)	Proposed Interior Plan	(August 30, 2012)	Proposed Site Plan
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(August 30, 2012)	Proposed Site Plan													
Any changes to the approved site plans, elevations, or use that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.														
2	The Applicant shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau’s requirements.	CO	FP											
3	All exterior lighting must be confined to the subject property or adjacent rights of way, cast light downward and must not intrude, interfere or spill onto neighboring properties.	CO	Plng.											
4	The Applicant or Owner shall install four (4) bicycle parking spaces on the property which can be satisfied with two (2) u-type bicycle racks.	CO	Plng.											
5	The Applicant or Owner shall install new garage doors that consist of at least 75% transparent material.	CO	Plng.											
6	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.											



373 Washington Street