



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

*PLANNING DIVISION*

**STAFF**

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*

LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*

DAN BARTMAN, *SENIOR PLANNER*

ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

**Case #:** ZBA 2012-29

**Date:** April 26, 2012

**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

---

**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

---

**Site: One Westwood Road**

**Applicant Name:** Barbara Mangum, President Somerville Museum

**Applicant Address:** 9 Josephine Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144

**Property Owner Name:** Somerville Historical Society

**Property Owner Address:** One Westwood Road, Somerville, MA 02143

**Agent Name:** Richard Graf

**Agent Address:** 11 Franklin Avenue, Chelsea, MA 02150

**Alderman:** Thomas F. Taylor, Ward 3

Legal Notice: Applicant, Barbara Mangum, President of the Somerville Museum, seeks a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 to alter a nonconforming structure. Alterations include the enlargement of an existing porch and the installation of an ADA compliant wheelchair lift.

Zoning District/Ward: RA / 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit §4.4.1

Date of Application: April 3, 2012

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – **May 2, 2012**

---

**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property, the Somerville Museum, is an institutional building on a 4,554 square foot lot on the corner of Westwood Road and Central Street. The property has 4,712 square feet of living space and is surrounded by a number of street trees. The building is 2½ stories in height with a gable roof and pediment that faces Central Street. Another smaller pediment is also situated above the current entrance on Westwood Road. The building is located in a Residence A district and abuts other residential properties on all sides. Prior zoning relief was granted to this property in 1927 for the construction of the current building that houses the Somerville Museum.

Deleted: ¶  
¶



CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143  
(617) 625-6600 EXT. 2500 • TTY: (617) 666-0001 • FAX: (617) 625-0722

[www.somervillema.gov](http://www.somervillema.gov)



This c. 1925 institutional structure is designated historic at both the local and national level, and is part of the Westwood Road Local Historic District. Historic designation at the local level requires the Applicant to submit an application to the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission and receive a Certificate before any work begins. Historic designation at the national level, in this instance, identifies the property as worthy of preservation according to Federal government standards. The building retains a high degree of historic integrity due to the architectural design (including the front stairs, doors and foyer of the main entry which were salvaged from the City's original public library), workmanship, and association with the Somerville Historical Society. This site is also the geographic center of Somerville; this location was chosen specifically to house the first community constructed cultural facility in the City.

2. Proposal: Applicant, Barbara Mangum, Somerville Museum President, proposes to alter this nonconforming structure by enlarging the porch along Westwood Road to install an ADA compliant wheelchair lift. Upon the installation of the wheelchair lift, the Somerville Museum will become compliant with ADA regulations and be able to better serve the public. The proposal intends to incorporate as much of the existing porch structure as possible by building on and around the porch. The construction of a handicap accessible lift will be included within the new entry porch. The new portico will also help guide interested members of the public to the Westwood Road entrance, which is not the original main entrance, but is currently the only public access to the building.

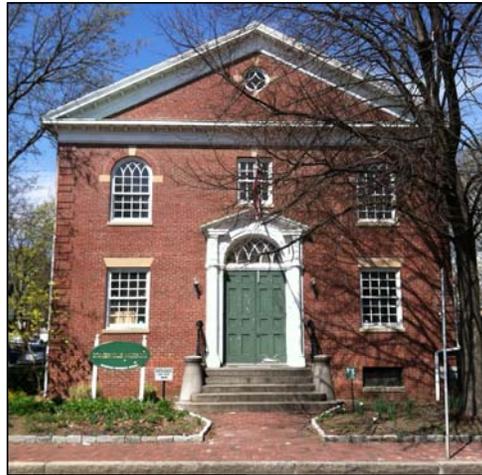
Deleted: fit  
Deleted: a

The existing porch, a concrete slab, is approximately 8 feet in length by 6'-8" in width by 3'-6" in height and flush with the interior of the building. Stairs lead up the right side of the porch along the building to the side entry, which is currently used as the main entry into the Museum.

The proposed new portico would be 18 feet in length. Approximately 5 feet would be added to each end of the current concrete slab while the current width (6'-8") would be retained. The new portico is designed in the Classical Revival style, which is consistent with the style of the Museum and characteristic of other designated historic homes on Westwood Road. Four Doric columns, 9'-6" in height and 10" in diameter, will be positioned below a built up cornice with a flat roof. The cornice is proposed to extend 6 inches into the airspace over the sidewalk and 14 feet above the sidewalk. The Applicant will need to seek approval from the Board of Aldermen to allow the cornice to extend 6 inches into the airspace. Two columns will be located at either end of the portico while two more columns will be positioned to accentuate the Westwood Road entry door. The spacing between columns will be inconsistent as there will be 7'-10" between the columns that emphasize the entry door while only 4'-6" between the two middle columns and those at either end of the portico. Iron railings will be located between the columns and along the new 5 foot wide concrete stair.

The base of the new portico will be encased in a brick veneer that is consistent with the masonry exterior of the building. The Applicant plans to remove the stucco that is currently visible on the porch base and replace it with a brick veneer that is approximately 4" wide. A new concrete slab will hang slightly over the base of the portico. The entire project will remain within 7' of the building, which is within the boundaries of the property.

An ADA code compliant wheelchair lift will be installed on the left end of the new portico addition. The lift will be 4'-7" in length by 4'-7" in width and completely covered by the roof of the new portico. A banner, approximately 5 feet in length, will hang between the two left side columns to provide weather protection for the handicap lift. Both the roof and the banner are solutions that enable the Museum to become compliant with the ADA regulation that requires wheelchair lifts to be protected from weather.



Somerville Museum, One Westwood Road  
Left: Westwood Road façade with existing entry porch  
Right: Central Street façade

3. Nature of Application: The structure is located within an RA district and is currently nonconforming with respect to several dimensional requirements including the front, rear, and side yard setbacks, and minimum lot size. The proposal alters the nonconforming side yard setback through the expansion of the existing porch. The existing nonconforming nature of the structure's side yard setback requires the Applicant to obtain a Special Permit under the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.4.1 to construct the proposed portico addition. The minimum side yard setback required by the SZO is 8 feet for a 2½ story structure. The subject property is nonconforming due to the 6.5 foot left side yard setback as well as the existing porch that extends 6.5 feet into the left side yard and abuts the sidewalk.

Deleted: ¶  
¶

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The subject property is located within the Spring Hill neighborhood which has a low- to medium residential density and is primarily comprised of single-, two-, and three-family homes. The subject property is also a part of the Westwood Road Local Historic District which is predominantly comprised of sizable single-family dwellings.

Deleted: and there is only XX feet of setback at the subject property

Formatted: Highlight

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed portico addition will not be detrimental to the institutional structure or the surrounding neighborhood. While the design of the portico addition will substantially alter the appearance of the Westwood Road façade, the new portico will allow better public access, through the addition of the wheelchair lift, and also help guide interested members of the public to the Westwood Road entrance. The Central Street entrance has not been used in a number of years and since it appears as the main entry, there is often confusion for those who are unfamiliar with the Museum. Enhancing the entry on Westwood Road with a Classical Revival style portico and a banner would also help alleviate confusion regarding access to the Museum.

Deleted:

This proposal also enables the Museum to become compliant with ADA regulations, which, in turn, allows the Museum to use previously secured funds for necessary building maintenance. Additionally, upon becoming compliant with current ADA regulations, the Museum will be eligible for other sources of funding that will enable the Museum to grow their membership and continue to maintain the building.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicant has chosen to incorporate as much of the existing porch structure as possible into the new portico design, which will reduce the overall amount of waste resulting from this project.

7. Comments:

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

*Ward Alderman*: Alderman Taylor commented via email to Staff on Wednesday, April 11, 2012 that he has been involved with the project and has written a letter of support.

*Historic Preservation*: The Applicant appeared before the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC) on March 20, 2012 with the above proposal. After review of the proposal, the SHPC voted unanimously (7-0) to grant a Certificate of Applicability to the Applicant. This Certificate enables the Museum to enlarge the Westwood Road porch, which includes the addition of a wheelchair lift that is partially screened from view, a new roof with painted wood entablature and Doric columns, and new stairs.

**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 portico addition will alter the Westwood Road façade; however, the design fits contextually into the Westwood Road neighborhood, the wheelchair lift allows handicap access to the Museum, and less confusion will be had by those who are not familiar with the Museum by enhancing the current entrance along Westwood Road.

**Deleted:** or 4.5  
**Deleted:** The portico addition to the Somerville Museum would not be more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure.

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 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; and to preserve and increase the amenities of the municipality."

| The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district §6.1.1. (RA – Residence Districts), which is, “To establish and preserve quiet neighborhoods of one- and two-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 addition of a portico to the Westwood Road façade of the Somerville Museum has been designed to be compatible with the built and unbuilt surrounding area. The portico addition has been designed in the Classical Revival style which compliments other buildings in the immediate surrounding neighborhood. The addition of a wheelchair lift within the portico addition is an appropriate solution for the Museum to become accessible to handicap persons and will not disrupt the streetscape or negatively affect the surrounding neighborhood or the historic structure.

### 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										
1	<p>Approval is to alter a nonconforming structure <u>under SZO §4.4.1</u>, including the enlargement of an existing porch and the installation of an ADA compliant wheelchair lift. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>(April 3, 2012)</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>December 23, 2011 (April 11, 2012)</td> <td>Plot plans submitted to OSPCD</td> </tr> <tr> <td>April 2, 2012 (April 11, 2012)</td> <td>Site Plans submitted to OSPCD (sheets 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, &amp; 6)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>April 2, 2012 (April 11, 2012)</td> <td>Site Plan Details submitted to OSPCD</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Any changes to the approved site plan that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.</p>	Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(April 3, 2012)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	December 23, 2011 (April 11, 2012)	Plot plans submitted to OSPCD	April 2, 2012 (April 11, 2012)	Site Plans submitted to OSPCD (sheets 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6)	April 2, 2012 (April 11, 2012)	Site Plan Details submitted to OSPCD	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.	
Date (Stamp Date)	Submission													
(April 3, 2012)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office													
December 23, 2011 (April 11, 2012)	Plot plans submitted to OSPCD													
April 2, 2012 (April 11, 2012)	Site Plans submitted to OSPCD (sheets 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6)													
April 2, 2012 (April 11, 2012)	Site Plan Details submitted to OSPCD													
2	<u>The Applicant shall seek and receive Board of Aldermen approval before constructing the cornice that will extend 6 inches into the airspace over the sidewalk.</u>	BP	Plng.											
3	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP											
4	The Applicant shall at his expense replace any existing equipment (including, but not limited to street sign poles, signs, 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											
5	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.											

Deleted: for a Special Permit

Deleted: 23 ... [1]

Deleted: 4

Deleted: 3

Deleted: 5

Deleted: 4

Deleted: 6

Deleted: 5



23	Approval is subject to the Applicant's and/or successor's right, title and interest in the property.	Cont.	Png.	Deed submitted & application formed signed
----	--	-------	------	--