



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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**Case #:** ZBA 2015-32

**Date:** July 9, 2015

**Recommendation:** Unable to Recommend

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 906-908 Broadway

**Applicant Name:** Siyuan He

**Applicant Address:** 32 St James Ave, Somerville, MA 02144

**Owner Name:** Siyuan He

**Owner Address:** 32 St James Ave, Somerville, MA 02144

**Alderman:** Rebekah Gewirtz

Legal Notice: Applicant & Owner, Siyuan He, seeks a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 to alter a nonconforming 2-family house to add an approximately 2,000 sf addition. RA zone. Ward 6.

Dates of Public Hearing: July 15, 2015

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 2,600 square foot two-family house on a 6,853 square foot lot. There is an existing curb cut on Billingham Street with a driveway for two cars.
2. Proposal: The proposal is to renovate the property and add a 2,164 square foot addition and keep the use as a two-family dwelling. The front porch on the Broadway side of the property would be removed and filled in with structure. The rest of the addition is essentially comprised of building another single-family house that is attached to the existing structure. The front entrances would be off of Billingham Street. The units would each have four bedrooms. A 12 foot curb cut is proposed along Broadway to provide two more parking spaces onsite for a total of 4 parking spaces.
3. Green Building Practices: The project is designed by a AIA, LEED AP architect. The site would have an infiltration system for environmental onsite stormwater collection. The building would have high



efficiency heating and cooling systems, a tankless hot water system, energy star lightbulbs, energy star kitchen appliances, energy efficient windows and the building will be fully insulated.



*Photo of 906-908 Broadway from the Broadway side of the property - submitted by the application.*

4. Comments:

*Fire Prevention:* Has not yet submitted comments.

*Wiring Inspection:* An exterior light and electrical receptacle is required for the first levels of the porches/decks and an electrical receptacle is required for second level. The utility plans shall be supplied to the Wiring Inspector before installation.

*Engineering:* The Applicant will be required to demonstrate that the updated project plans meet the current City of Somerville stormwater policy. Utility, grading, and drainage report and plans stamped by a registered PE in Massachusetts must be submitted to the Engineering Department for review and approval.

*Ward Alderman:* Has not yet submitted comments.

**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."*

The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to the following dimensional requirements: lot size and side yard setback. The Applicant has designated the yard on Billingham as the front yard for purposes of measuring setbacks.

The proposal will impact the nonconforming side yard dimension. The portion of the house that is 5 feet from the side lot line will change from a porch to a finished living space. This alteration, as well as the alteration to increase the nonconforming structure by more than 25% of the gross floor area of the original structure, requires the Applicant to obtain special permits under §4.4.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO).

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 find that the alterations proposed would be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The front porch of the house along Broadway would be removed and the house would turn its back to Broadway. This façade along the major thoroughfare would be boring and would not activate the street. The building or the site must be redesigned to address these concerns. Another portion of the building that should be redesigned is the bay proposed on the side of the house that is visible from Billingham Street. This bay appears tacked on because there are no supports under the bay and it is clad with panels where the rest of the house is clad with clapboards. A different siding was used to mask the off-set windows; however, the bay stands out from the rest of the house in an unsympathetic way.

Additionally, the basement has been designed as living space even though it is labeled as storage space. There is an entrance to the basement from Broadway and another entrance from the rear yard. The basement is designed with several rooms with doors. A future owners of this property will assume that the basement is living space and furnish and use it as such. Adding the square footage of all of the rooms designed in the basement would cause the floor area ratio to become nonconforming and a variance would be required to use the basement. This causes a difficult situation for the occupants of the units. The basement should be redesigned to only allow living space that would be under the allowable FAR and the remainder of the space should be finished in a way that it is clearly just for storage. The alternative is that the massing of the building needs to be made smaller.

The required parking is provided for the increase in bedrooms in the units. Staff have contacted DPW regarding the proposed curb cut to ensure that it meets the City standards before the ZBA approves a parking plan that may not be possible. Additional comments are forthcoming.

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 maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; however, the proposal not consistent with the purpose of preserving the historical and architectural resources of the City by removing a front porch and changing the main entry of the house to the side street.

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the RA district, which is, "[t]o 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."*

See finding 2 for the design and compatibility concerns regarding the proposal.

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

The units will be more expensive with a renovation and addition. The units are not restricted as affordable units and even without the expansion of the building the owner could increase the cost of the units.

8. 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.*

Planning Staff does NOT find that removing the front porch of the structure along Broadway and turning all of the entrances to the side street without making the Broadway side more interesting to pedestrian is compatible with the goal of enhancing the character of a main thoroughfare.

<u>SomerVision Summary</u>	<i>Existing</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<i>Dwelling Units:</i>	2	2
<i>Parking Spaces:</i>	2	4

### 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 is **UNABLE TO RECOMMEND APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT. Provided that the Applicant is able to address the design concerns outlined in the findings above, the staff report will be revise the report.**

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.

