



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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CHARLOTTE LEIS, *PLANNING INTERN*

**Case #:** ZBA 2018-127  
**Date:** January 9, 2019  
**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 36 Elm Street

**Applicant / Owner Name:** Highland Elm Street LLC  
**Applicant / Owner Address:** 100 Winchester Street, Medford, MA 02155  
**Agent Name:** Sean T. O'Donovan, Esq.  
**Agent Address:** 741 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02144  
**Alderman:** Mark Niedergang

Legal Notice: Applicant / Owner, Highland Elm Street LLC, seek a special permit under SZO §4.4.1 to alter a nonconforming structure by constructing an addition greater than 25% of the existing gross floor area (GFA), which will add two residential units to the site. A special permit under SZO §9.13 is also required for parking relief. RB Zone. Ward 5.

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – January 9, 2018

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property consists of one parcel totaling 6,075 square feet and contains a 2.5 story, gable end, three-bedroom single family dwelling. The original structure appears to have been added onto in the rear. The site also contains a one car driveway with a large backyard.

2. Proposal:

3. Green Building Practices:



4. Comments:

*Ward Alderman:* Aldermen Niedergang. has been informed of this proposal and has yet to comment as of the publication of this report.

**II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1 and §9.13):**

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."*

*Article 4: Nonconforming Uses and Structures*

The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to the dimensional requirements of lot area, front yard setback, and right side yard setback. None of the nonconforming dimensional requirements will be affected by the proposal.

Section 4.4.1 states that *“Alteration, reconstruction, extension or structural change to a nonconforming one- or two-family structure not affecting the nonconforming aspect of the one- or two-family structure and where the alteration, reconstruction, extension, or structural change will comply with all current dimensional requirements of the zoning ordinance, and provided any such alteration, reconstruction, extension or structural change does not increase the Gross Floor Area of the dwelling by more than twenty-five percent (25%).”*

The total increase in gross floor area (GFA) will be greater than 25%. The existing GFA is 3,204 s.f and the proposal is to add 5,421 s.f that will increase the GFA to 6,625 s.f, or 169% of the existing structure.

In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, the Board finds the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The proposal will allow for an addition that meets dimensional requirements. The proposal has been designed with setbacks that minimally impact the neighbors and the requirements for lot area per dwelling unit, ground coverage, landscaped area, pervious area, floor area ratio (FAR), building height, front yard, rear yard, and left side yard setbacks, and street frontage will continue to be conforming to the requirements of the SZO.

*Article 9: Off-Street Parking and Loading*

	<i>Existing</i>		<i>Proposed</i>	
Unit #1	3 BR	2 spaces	3 BR	2 spaces
Unit #2	--	--	3 BR	2 spaces
Unit #3	--	--	3 BR	2 spaces
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 spaces</b>		<b>6 spaces</b>	

The site currently provides only one parking space for the single family dwelling. Therefore, the site is nonconforming with respect to the number of required off-street parking spaces. For sites with a nonconforming number of parking spaces, SZO 9.4.2 only requires a proposal to provide the number of required spaces for what is being added to the site. The proposal is to add two dwelling units, which will increase the number of required parking spaces to six. The proposal is to provide two additional spaces on the site rather than the four additional spaces required. SZO §9.13 allows for sites with nonconforming parking to apply for a Special Permit to modify parking requirements if the total number of spaces is six or fewer. Relief is being requested from providing the additional two required parking spaces.

In considering a special permit under §9.13 of the SZO “the SPGA may grant such a special permit only when consistent with the purposes set forth in Section 9.1, and upon reaching the findings and determinations set forth in Section 5.1.4”. The Board finds that granting the requested Special Permit is consistent with the purposes of SZO §9.1 and will not cause detriment to increased traffic volumes, traffic congestion of queuing of vehicles, changes in the type of traffic, change in traffic patterns and access to the site, reduction in on-street parking, or unsafe conflicts of motor vehicles and pedestrian traffic.

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 promote 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 lessen congestion in the streets; to protect health; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to avoid undue concentration of population; 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 RB district, 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.”

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."*

*Surrounding Neighborhood:* The subject property is located on the southern side of Elm Street on the block between Mossland Street and Somerville Avenue. Nearby land uses include single, two-, three-, multi-family residences, and commercial uses such as real estate offices, a gas station, and a retail plaza.

*Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility):* The proposal will maintain and restore the existing structure and construct an addition in the rear. Earlier editions of the plan included a more massive and taller addition in the rear. The latest proposal includes an addition that is the same height of the existing structure. The proposal will use the footprint of the small addition in the rear to serve as a bridge from the existing structure to the the new building mass in the rear where two townhouse style units will be constructed in the rear. This proposal helps maintain the character of the existing building and helps to visually break up the massing.

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

<i>SomerVision Summary</i>	<i>Existing</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<i>Dwelling Units:</i>	1	3

**III. RECOMMENDATION**

**Special Permit under §4.4.1 and §9.13**

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 construction of a rear addition to add two dwelling units to the site. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.									
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>September 19, 2018</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>November 25, 2018</td> <td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (A-000, A-001, A-100, A-101, A-100.1, A-102, A-103, A-104, A-201, A-202, and A-203)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>August 24, 2018</td> <td>Existing conditions plan</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	September 19, 2018	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	November 25, 2018	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (A-000, A-001, A-100, A-101, A-100.1, A-102, A-103, A-104, A-201, A-202, and A-203)	August 24, 2018	Existing conditions plan
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August 24, 2018	Existing conditions plan											
Any changes to the approved site plan or elevations/use that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.												
<b>Pre-Construction</b>												
2	The Applicant must contact the Engineering Department to obtain a street address prior to a building permit being issued.	BP	Eng.									
3	The Applicant shall complete the Site Plan Review Checklist and supply the information to the Engineering Office. The plans must comply with the City’s Stormwater Management Policy.	BP	Eng.									

4	The Applicant must contact the Engineering Department to coordinate the timeline for cutting or opening the street and/or sidewalk for utility connections or other construction. There is a moratorium on opening streets from November 1st to April 1st and there is a list of streets that have additional opening restrictions.	BP	Eng	
5	The applicant must comply with the Policy for new connections to and modifications to existing connections to the municipal sewer and drainage system stormwater management and infiltration/inflow mitigation. The Applicant shall work with Engineering to meet this condition and provide the required fees/mitigation.	BP	Eng.	
<b>Construction Impacts</b>				
6	The applicant shall post the name and phone number of the general contractor at the site entrance where it is visible to people passing by.	During Construction	Plng.	
7	The Applicant shall at their 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.	CO	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	
<b>Design</b>				
9	Applicant shall provide final material samples for siding, trim, windows, and to Planning Staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of a building permit.	BP	Plng.	
<b>Site</b>				
10	Landscaping shall be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards;	Perpetual	Plng. / ISD	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>				
11	Gas and electric meters shall not be on the front of the structure. Gas and electric meters may be located on the side of the structure but shall be screened from the street by a hardy, staff approved evergreen planting. Utilities shall not be located adjacent to windows and shall not impact any parking, landscaping, or egress. The provisions of this condition may be waived by staff if the applicant submits a letter from the utility, signed by a utility representative, on utility letterhead, indicating that there is no feasible alternative to placing meters in violation of this condition.	CO	ISD	
12	Electrical conduits on the exterior facades of buildings shall be painted to match the wall material to which they are attached. Conduits are not allowed on the front of any structure.	CO	Plng.	

13	Garbage and recycling locations shall be clearly indicated on site plans. Storage areas shall be inside of the structure or shall be fully screened from view from both the public way and abutters by an appropriate material reviewed and approved by staff. The location shall not impact any parking, landscaping, or egress.	BP	Plng.	
14	Granting of the applied for use or alteration does not include the provision for short term rental uses, such as AirBnB, VRBO, or the like. Separate approvals are needed for the aforementioned uses.	Ongoing	ISD / Plng.	
15	The Applicant, its successors and/or assigns, shall be responsible for maintenance of both the building and all on-site amenities, including landscaping, fencing, lighting, parking areas and storm water systems, ensuring they are clean, well kept and in good and safe working order.	Cont.	ISD	
<b>Public Safety</b>				
16	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP	
17	To the extent possible, all exterior lighting must be confined to the subject property, cast light downward and must not intrude, interfere or spill onto neighboring properties.	CO	Plng.	
<b>Final Sign-Off</b>				
18	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.	

