



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2018-160
Date: January 9, 2019
Recommendation: Conditional approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 47 Electric Avenue

Applicant / Owner Name: Nordau Ventures, LLC
Applicant / Owner Address: 5 Hersey Street, Somerville, MA 02143
Agent Name: Richard G. DiGirolamo, Esq.
Agent Address: 424 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02145
Alderman: Katjana Ballantyne

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, Nordau Ventures, LLC, seeks a special permit under SZO §4.4.1 to alter a nonconforming structure by increasing the nonconforming floor area ratio (FAR) by finishing the basement and a special permit under SZO §9.13 for parking relief. RA Zone. Ward 7.

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals - January 9, 2019

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property consists of one parcel totaling 3,546 square feet of land area and contains a 2.5 story gambrel three-family dwelling.
2. Proposal: The proposal is to add living space to the basement, construct required egress window wells, and rear stairs.
3. Green Building Practices: The application states that the proposal will not exceed the stretch code.
4. Comments:



Ward Alderman: Alderman Ballantyne does not oppose the proposal.

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 following dimensional requirements: number of dwelling units, lot area, lot area per dwelling unit, floor area ratio (FAR), front yard setback, and left side yard setback. The proposal will impact the nonconforming dimension of the FAR. The current dimension is 0.83, the proposal is 1.03, and the requirement in the district is 0.75. This alteration to a nonconforming 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 nonconforming structures other than one- and two-family dwellings may be enlarged, extended, renovated or altered only by special permit authorized by the SPGA in accordance with the procedures of Article 5. The SPGA must find that such extension, enlargement, renovation or alteration is not substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconforming building. In making the finding that the enlargement, extension, renovation or alteration will not be substantially more detrimental, the SPGA may consider, without limitation, impacts upon the following: traffic volumes, traffic congestion, adequacy of municipal water supply and sewer capacity, noise, odor, scale, on-street parking, shading, visual effects and neighborhood character.”

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 proposal has been designed with setbacks that minimally impact the neighbors and the requirements for ground coverage, landscaped area, pervious area, building height, rear yard setback, and right yard setback will continue to be conforming to the requirements of the SZO.

Article 9: Off-Street Parking and Loading

	Existing		Proposed	
Unit #1	2 BR	1.5 spaces	4 BR	2 spaces
Unit #2	3 BR	2 spaces	3 BR	2 spaces
Unit #3	2 BR	1.5 spaces	2 BR	1.5 spaces
Total	5 spaces		6 spaces (rounded up from 5.5)	

The site currently provides one parking space for the three-family dwelling. The proposal is to add bedrooms to Unit #1, which will increase the number of required parking spaces by one. Therefore the site will require six spaces. The proposal is to continue providing one parking space. 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 one parking space.

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 lessen congestion in the streets; to protect health; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to provide adequate light and air; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to adequately protect the natural environment; 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 RA district, 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."*

Surrounding Neighborhood: The property is located on the north side of Electric Avenue between the block of Packard Avenue and Mason Street. The surrounding neighborhood is predominantly residential, with a mix of one- and two-family homes.

Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility): Finishing the basement will not an impact on the design or the compatibility of the built and unbuilt surrounding area.

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.

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 creating of living space in the basement. 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>November 1, 2018</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>December 13, 2018</td> <td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (A000, EX100, EX101, EX200, EX201, A100, A200, and A201)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	November 1, 2018	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	December 13, 2018	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (A000, EX100, EX101, EX200, EX201, A100, A200, and A201)
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Any changes to the approved elevations/use) that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.										
Pre-Construction										
2	The proposed basement finished floor elevation shall not be less than is 1 foot above the Seasonal High Ground Water elevation. The seasonal high ground water elevation shall be determined by a Massachusetts certified soil evaluator and stated on a signed soil test pit log.	BP	Eng.							
Construction Impacts										
3	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.							
4	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							
Design										
5	Applicant shall provide final material samples for siding, trim, windows, and doors to Planning Staff for review and approval prior to the issuance of a building permit.	BP	Plng.							
Site										
6	Landscaping shall be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards;	Perpetual	Plng. / ISD							
Miscellaneous										

7	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.	
8	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	
Public Safety				
9	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP	
10	Per Somerville fire safety regulations, grills, barbecues, chimineas and the like are NOT permitted on decks or porches.	Perpetual	FP/ISD	
11	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.	
Final Sign-Off				
12	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.	

