



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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**Case #:** ZBA 2019-57  
**Date:** August 7, 2019  
**Recommendation:** Conditional approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** 9 Clifton Street

**Applicant / Owner Name:** Sherri Noel Geldersma  
**Applicant / Owner Address:** 9 Clifton Street #1, Somerville, MA 02144  
**City Councilor:** Lance Davis

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, Sherri Noel Geldersma, seeks a special permit with site plan review (SPSR) under SZO §7.2 to construct a second principal structure on the lot and a special permit for parking under SZO §9.13. The existing structure will become one dwelling unit and the proposed structure will include one dwelling unit. RA Zone. Ward 6.

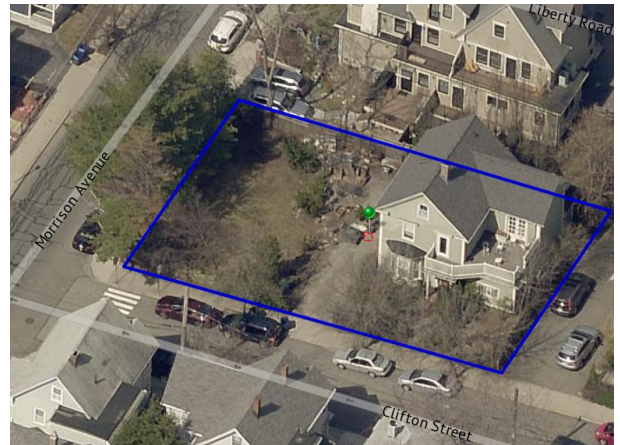
Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – August 7, 2019

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property is an approximately 5,992 s.f lot located at the intersection of Morrison Avenue and Clifton Street. The property is improved by a two and a half story two-family home, which is located on the northern half of the lot. The remainder of the lot is given over to landscaping, with a small lawn and a number of trees and shrubs located around the perimeter of the lawn.

In 2005 (Case 05.15), the ZBA denied a site plan approval application to subdivide the existing lot to relocate a historic single family dwelling from elsewhere in the City.



2. Proposal: The proposal is to construct a second principal structure on the lot in the open lawn area. The existing structure will be converted into a single family and the proposed structure will be a single family. The proposal includes the addition of one parking space between the two houses and a robust landscaping plan.

3. Green Building Practices: The application states that the project will include energy efficient heating and cooling, photovoltaic panels on the south facing roof, on demand hot water for cooking, washing clothes, and bathing. Rainwater will be collected and recycled to water the garden. Recycled and sustainable building materials will be supplied locally whenever possible.

4. Comments:

*City Councilor:* Councilor Davis has been informed of this proposal and requested a neighborhood meeting. The applicant hosted a neighborhood meeting on May 23<sup>rd</sup> with 13 neighbors and a Planner in attendance. There was general support for the proposal. A few asked about parking/curb cuts. The Applicant plans to keep the existing curb cut on Morrison and widen the existing driveway to add one additional spot, which is what the zoning requires. Another concern was the loss of trees. The Applicant, a landscape architect, identified a lot of the existing trees as dying and would need to remove them in a couple of years whether this proposal is approved or not. The proposed landscape plan would add a lot of new plantings including new trees along Morrison Ave.

**II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT with SITE PLAN REVIEW (SZO §7.2):**

In order to grant a special permit with site plan review, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.2.5 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.2.5 in detail.

1. Information Supplied:

The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.2.3 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project.

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 with site plan review.”*

*Article 7: Permitted Uses*

SZO §7.2 allows for more than one principal structure per lot in the RA zoning district by Special Permit with Site Plan Review granted from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

*Article 9: Off-Street Parking and Loading*

	<i>Existing</i>		<i>Proposed</i>	
Unit #1	2 BR	1.5 spaces	3 BR	2 spaces
Unit #2	4 BR	2 spaces	4 BR	2 spaces
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 spaces</b> (rounded up from 3.5)		<b>4 spaces</b>	

The site currently provides only one parking space for the two-family dwelling since tandem parking spaces only count as one space for zoning purposes. Therefore, the site is nonconforming with respect to the number of required off-street parking spaces as four are currently required. 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 will not increase the number of required parking spaces. **Therefore, the proposal conforms to the required number of parking spaces and a**

**special permit for parking relief is not required.**

3. Purpose of District: *The Applicant has to ensure that the project "is consistent with the intent of the specific zoning district as specified in Article 6".*

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 existing natural features of the site and is compatible with the characteristics of the surrounding area, and that the scale, massing and detailing of the buildings are compatible with those prevalent in the surrounding area".*

*Surrounding Neighborhood:* The subject property is located at the northwest intersection of Morrison Avenue and Clifton Street. This is a residential neighborhood with mostly 2.5 and three-story structures.

*Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility):*

Special Permit with Site Plan Review applications must meet the design guidelines under SZO §5.2.4. The design guidelines for residential districts are as follows:

*1. Buildings should be generally of the same size and proportions as those existing in the neighborhood. This shall apply in cases of multi-family development as well as one-, two-, and three-family units. For example, if relatively small two- and three-family structures are common in a neighborhood where multi-family development is proposed, the multi-family development should be physically broken into components that, from a design perspective, are housed in buildings of similar width, depth, and height as those typically found in the neighborhood.*

The proposed building is of a similar style, size, and proportion compared to the existing structure on the site and those in the surrounding neighborhood.

*2. Use of traditional and natural materials is strongly encouraged (e.g. wood clapboard, wood shingles, brick).*

Traditional materials will be used for the exterior of the building. The applicant is proposing cementitious lap siding. It is conditioned that final materials and colors are reviewed and approved by Planning Staff prior to the issuance of a building permit.

*3. Additions to existing structures should be consistent with the architecture of the existing structure in terms of window dimensions, roof lines etc.*

N/A

*4. Although additions should not clash with or be incompatible to the existing structure, it is acceptable and even desirable for the new construction to be distinguishable from the existing building, perhaps by maintenance of design elements of the original building that would otherwise be lost (e.g. false rakes, fasciae, and the like).*

The gable end, side gable, and window patterns that are expressed on the existing building will be part of the proposed structure.

*5. Where practical, new or infill building construction should share the same orientation to the street as is common in the neighborhood. When not contrary to any other zoning law, front and side yards should be of similar dimensions as those typical in the area.*

The proposed infill building will have the same orientation to Clifton Street than the existing building and other structures on this site of the street. The front yard setback of the proposed structure will be slightly closer to the street than the existing structure but will still conform to the zoning requirement.

*6. Driveways should be kept to minimal width (perhaps a maximum of twelve feet), and be designed so that no vehicle parked on the drive may straddle the public sidewalk in any way. Low barriers or plantings may be required to separate the parking area from the pedestrian space.*

The existing curb cut will remain and the driveway will be widened to fit two sets of tandem spaces between the two structures.

*7. Transformers, heating and cooling systems, antennas, and the like, should be located so they are not visible from the street or should be screened.*

A condition of approval is that any transformers, heating and cooling systems, antennas, and the like, should be located in a manner so that are not visible from the street or should be screened.

*8. Sites and buildings should comply with any guidelines set forth in Article 6 of this Ordinance for the specific base or overlay zoning district(s) the site is located within.*

N/A

5. **Functional Design:** *The project must meet “accepted standards and criteria for the functional design of facilities, structures, and site construction.”*

The project meets accepted standards and criteria for the functional design of facilities, structures, and site construction.

6. **Impact on Public Systems:** *The project will “not create adverse impacts on the public services and facilities serving the development, such as the sanitary sewer system, the storm drainage system, the public water supply, the recreational system, the street system for vehicular traffic, and the sidewalks and footpaths for pedestrian traffic.”*

The proposal is not expected to create adverse impacts on the public services and facilities serving the locus, such as the sanitary sewer system, the storm drainage system, the public water supply, the recreational system, the street system for vehicular traffic, and the sidewalks and footpaths for pedestrian traffic.

7. **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.”*

Except for regular construction activity, the proposal is not expected to create an adverse impact on the environment.

8. Consistency with Purposes: *“Is consistent with: 1) the purposes of this Ordinance, particularly those set forth in Article 1 and Article 5; and 2) the purposes, provisions, and specific objectives applicable to the requested special permit with site plan review which may be set forth elsewhere in this Ordinance, such as, but not limited to, those at the beginning of the various sections.”*

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 provide adequate light and air; to avoid undue concentration of population; 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.

9. Preservation of Landform and Open Space: *The Applicant has to ensure that “the existing land form is preserved in its natural state, insofar as practicable, by minimizing grading and the erosion or stripping of steep slopes, and by maintaining man-made features that enhance the land form, such as stone walls, with minimal alteration or disruption. In addition, all open spaces should be designed and planted to enhance the attractiveness of the neighborhood. Whenever possible, the development parcel should be laid out so that some of the landscaped areas are visible to the neighborhood.”*

The proposal will involve minimal grading and the existing land form will be maintained. The proposal will add an abundance of new plantings along three side of the proposed structure to help recreate the thick buffer of landscaping that existed on the site for many years. Overall, the proposal will enhance the attractiveness of the neighborhood.

10. Relation of Buildings to Environment: *The Applicant must ensure that “buildings are: 1) located harmoniously with the land form, vegetation and other natural features of the site; 2) compatible in scale, design and use with those buildings and designs which are visually related to the development site; 3) effectively located for solar and wind orientation for energy conservation; and 4) advantageously located for views from the building while minimizing the intrusion on views from other buildings.”*

The proposal is designed at a scale that is compatible with the use and design of other buildings in the neighborhood.

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

12. 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 with Site Plan Review under §7.2**

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 second principal structure. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	CO / BP	ISD/Plng.							
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>May 30, 2019</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July 30, 2019</td> <td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (T1-1, S1-1, S1-2, A1-1, A2-1, A1-2, A2-2, L1-1, and L1-2)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	May 30, 2019	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	July 30, 2019	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (T1-1, S1-1, S1-2, A1-1, A2-1, A1-2, A2-2, L1-1, and L1-2)
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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 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.	CO	Eng.							
5	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							
<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	
9	For the convenience of and respect for the neighborhood, during the construction phase, construction work shall not begin prior to 7:30am and shall finish no later than 5pm Monday through Friday. There shall be no construction or construction-related work performed on weekends or holidays.	During Construction	ISD	
<b>Design</b>				
10	Applicant shall provide final material samples for siding, trim, windows, and doors to Planning Staff for review and approval prior to construction.	BP	Plng.	
<b>Site</b>				
11	Landscaping should be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards;	Perpetual	Plng. / ISD	
12	The electric, telephone, cable TV and other such lines and equipment for the new structure shall be placed underground from the source or connection. The utilities plan shall be supplied to the Wiring Inspector before installation.	Installation of Utilities	Wiring Inspector	
<b>Miscellaneous</b>				
13	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	
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.	

