



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2018-143
Date: February 6, 2019
Recommendation: None at this time

DRAFT PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 56 Roland Street

Applicant Name: CPC-T Innerbelt, LLC c/o Criterion Development Partners
Applicant Address: 1601 Trapelo Road, Suite 174, Waltham, MA 02451
Property Owner Name: Paradigm Direct Roland, LLC c/o Paradigm Properties, LLC
Property Owner Address: 93 Summer Street, Boston, MA 02210
Agent Name: Anthony Galluccio, Esq.
Agent Address: 1498 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
City Councilor: Matthew McLaughlin

Legal Notice: Applicant, CPC-T Innerbelt, LLC c/o Criterion Development Partners, and Owner, Paradigm Direct Roland, LLC c/o Kevin McCall, seeks a special permit with site plan review per SZO §7.11.10.5.b to establish a hotel use in a BB district. Parking relief is also being sought under Article 9 of the SZO. Multiple variances are being sought for landscaped area, floor area ratio (FAR), maximum height, minimum front yard, and minimum rear yard. The proposed project is to construct a six-story 120-room extended stay hotel. BB Zone. Ward 1.

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – February 6, 2019

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is located at the southeast corner of Washington Street and Inner Belt Road. It consists of a parcel of land totaling 21,734 square feet of land area. The parcel consists of a portion of a 139-space surface parking lot that supports buildings owned by Paradigm Direct Roland LLC ("Paradigm") in



both the cities of Somerville and Boston. The parking lot is fairly flat and fully paved with landscaping along the street line. The parking lot is bisected by a 20-foot wide sewer easement benefitting the Massachusetts Water Resource Association.

Previous environmental studies conducted on the site reveal a history of soil contamination that are likely caused by previous uses that included oil storage and manufacturing. There is an Activity and Use Limitation (AUL) on the site permits commercial, retail, and industrial uses.

The site received approval from the Planning Board in November of 2018 to create this new lot, the adjacent right of way to extend Roland Street, and a 69,199 square foot buildable lot opposite the extension of Roland Street.

2. Proposal: The proposal is to construct a six-story 120-room extended stay hotel. The Hotel will provide limited amenity space for guests on the ground level and will not include a full service restaurant, bar, nor function space. Other aspects of the proposal include outdoor patios and a guest drop-off area. A shared parking garage is proposed to be developed adjacent to the site that will provide spaces for adjacent uses, including this proposed hotel.

3. Green Building Practices: At a minimum, the project includes: high efficiency heating and cooling systems, high efficiency hot water heating, low flow fixtures in all of the guest rooms and public spaces, high reflective and potentially vegetated roofs to reduce heat effects as well as efficient wall assemblies and Low-E windows to reduce energy consumption. Lastly, based on the projects location we will take advantage of the existing public transportation and infrastructure.

4. Comments:

Engineering: The Engineering Department has reviewed the project and has a major concern about building atop an existing municipal drain line. The Applicant is working with the Engineering Department on relocating the drain line in a way that doesn't alter the footprint of the building.

Traffic & Parking: The Applicant has submitted a Traffic Impact and Access Study (TIAS) that was reviewed by the OSPCD Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Division.

Trip Generation: The Applicant estimates that approximately 68 new vehicle trips will be generated in the AM peak hour, and approximately 65 new vehicle trips will be generated in the PM peak hour. The Applicant used a conservative 32% transit share for the residential use and an 8% transit share for the hotel use. These levels are consistent with existing transit use in the area, and do not take into account any added transit use due to the Green Line Extension project.

Traffic Operations Analysis: The Applicant notes that some Level of Service (LOS) scores are reduced due to project-generated traffic, the level of delay is generally not significantly affected on any approach. The T&I division generally agrees with this analysis. However, the Washington Street at New Washington Street intersection (along with Washington Street at Tufts Street/Knowlton Street) needs to be reanalyzed as a signalized intersection coordinated with the Washington Street/Inner Belt Road intersection.

Sight Distance: The Applicant conducted a review of sight distance at the intersections of Inner Belt Road/Roland Street extension and at the proposed southerly Site driveway at Inner Belt Road. Sight distance was sufficient for all directions based on 30mph prevailing speeds along Inner Belt Road, with the exception of the southbound direction approaching Roland Street Extension, since the intersection of Washington Street/Inner Belt Road is less than 200 feet away.

The Applicant notes that speeds of vehicles turning onto Inner Belt Road will very likely be traveling at less than 30mph as they approach Roland Street Extension. T&I agrees with this assessment.

Parking Demand: The Applicant conducted a parking analysis for the Project site. As part of the project, a new 427-space parking garage will be constructed within the residential building at the south end of the site, and an additional 6 surface spaces will be provided at the hotel. While the total parking demand during each use's peak time exceeds the total parking supply, the peak time for the residential/hotel uses (10pm-6am) occurs during the period where the demand for parking at the existing Paradigm office use is least. The Applicant will continue an agreement to use some Paradigm office spaces. It should be noted that, under the current Zoning Code, 326 spaces are required for the 205 residential units, and about 100 spaces for the 120-key hotel use (depending on the number of peak-shift employees and the size of accessory uses), amounting for a total requirement of about 426 net new spaces. However, while the new Somerville Zoning Ordinance has not yet been enacted, the parking minimums for residential uses within ½ mile of transit will be eliminated.

The Applicant uses ITE Parking Generation, 4th Edition values for parking demand, with an adjustment to reflect a 51% residential automobile use as reported by the 2010 census, and a 92% auto use by hotel users. This reflects 2010 conditions, and does not take into account the East Somerville Green Line station being constructed less than ½ mile west of the Project site. It is reasonable to assume that residents will be attracted to this particular location due to its proximity to two MBTA stations, and that this may result in lower overall parking demand associated with the residential use at this particular project site.

While the Applicant's parking assessment is sound, T&I believes that the Project may be overbuilding parking, which can encourage automobile use and automobile ownership in the long run. The T&I division recommends a parking ratio that reflects that of the proposed, not yet adopted zoning ordinance. This equates to a parking requirement of 71 spaces minimum, and a maximum of 205 residential parking spaces:

- A minimum of zero, and a maximum of 205, spaces (maximum of one space per unit) for the 205-unit residential use;
- A minimum of 60 spaces (one space per 2 rooms) for the 120-key hotel use; and
- A minimum of 11 spaces (one space per 1,000 sf) for the 10,588 private club use.

The Applicant should be required to unbundle the price of parking from the price of residential rent and the price of a hotel stay to encourage alternate modes of transportation.

Sight Distance: The Applicant conducted a review of sight distance at the intersections of Inner Belt Road/Roland Street extension and at the proposed southerly Site driveway at Inner Belt Road. Sight distance was sufficient for all directions based on 30mph prevailing speeds along Inner Belt Road, with the exception of the southbound direction approaching Roland Street Extension, since the intersection of Washington Street/Inner Belt Road is less than 200 feet away. The Applicant notes that speeds of vehicles turning onto Inner Belt Road will very likely be traveling at less than 30mph as they approach Roland Street Extension. T&I agrees with this assessment.

The T&I Division believe that the Applicant conducted a thorough traffic, parking, and sight distance study for the proposed Project. However, T&I disagrees with some of the data collection and analysis methodology that the Applicant is working on correcting.

Wiring Inspection: The Chief Wire and Electrical Inspector has requested the Applicant to show the proposed location of electrical transformers.

Design Review Committee: The proposed project was reviewed by the DRC over the course of two meetings that occurred in October and December of 2018. Overall, the Design Review Committee (DRC) liked the project. At the first meeting the Committee recommended the following:

- a. Pedestrian Experience
 1. The ground floor plan turns its back on Washington Street. The Applicant should look at ways to enhance the pedestrian experience, particularly along Washington Street.
 2. The columns at the corner of Washington Street and Inner Belt Road don't create an arcade. They will just push people away from the entry at the corner.
 3. There should be an entrance off Washington St that is inviting and connects to the back parking area.
 4. Brand needs to adapt to the urban public realm.
- b. Materials
 1. EIFS is not an appropriate urban building material.
 2. There are too many materials in general that that are more appropriate for a suburban setting.
 3. The corner of the building along Washington Street toward Sullivan Square needs activation.
- c. Floor Plan
 1. The applicant should consider including a café that could benefit from all the foot traffic, and help bring added activity to the site.
 2. The Applicant should relocate the fitness center on the ground floor so that it is not along Washington Street.

At the second meeting the Applicant proposed changes that included a revised ground floor plan to increase transparency and connectivity and improvements to the façade at the street level to enhance the pedestrian experience. The DRC supported the material pallet changes and thought that industrial materials sit nicely with the surrounding area. The DRC believe that the relationship between the two buildings was nice and that they felt more comfortable within the context. The treatment to Washington Street was a significant improvement. Lastly, they thought that the arcade element helps the two parts of the building come together.

City Councilor: Councilor McLaughlin held a neighborhood meeting that was well attended. The meeting was to discuss the hotel proposal and the proposed mixed-use building across the extension of Roland Street. Some of the topics that community stakeholders brought up were: solar panels, green roofs, LEED Certification, air quality, open space contribution, expected parking demand, shuttle busses to the T, bicycle parking, family-sized units, length of construction, sidewalk widths, and public bike racks.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT with SITE PLAN REVIEW (SZO §7.11.10.5.b):

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.”*

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 BB district, which is, “to establish and preserve general commercial and high density residential areas consisting of multi-family developments, shopping centers, commercial strips and automobile related establishments where customers reach individual businesses primarily by automobile.”

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:

Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility):

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

1. *Maintain a strong building presence along the primary street edge, continuing the established streetwall across the front of the site so as to retain the streetscape continuity; however, yards and setbacks as required by Article 8 shall be maintained.*
2. *Differentiate building entrances from the rest of the primary street elevation, preferably by recessing the entry from the plane of the streetwall or by some other articulation of the elevation at the entrance.*
3. *Make use of the typical bay widths, rhythms and dimensions prevalent in buildings adjacent to the site, especially in new construction or substantial redevelopment.*
4. *Clearly define these bay widths, rhythms and dimensions, making them understandable through material patterns, articulations and modulations of the facades, mullion design and treatment, etc.*
5. *Provide roof types and slopes similar to those of existing buildings in the area.*

6. *Use materials and colors consistent with those dominant in the area or, in the case of a rehabilitation or addition, consistent with the architectural style and period of the existing building. Use of brick masonry is encouraged, but not considered mandatory.*
 7. *When parking lots are provided between buildings, abutting the primary street and breaking the streetwall, provide a strong design element to continue the streetwall definition across the site, such as a low brick wall, iron works or railing, trees, etc.*
 8. *Locate transformers, heating and cooling systems, antennae, and the like, so they are not visible from the street; this may be accomplished, for example, by placing them behind the building, within enclosures, behind screening, etc.*
 9. *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.*
5. **Functional Design:** *The project must meet “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.”*
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.”*
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

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.”*

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.”*

11. Stormwater Drainage: *The Applicant must demonstrate that “special attention has been given to proper site surface drainage so that removal of surface waters will not adversely affect neighboring properties or the public storm drainage system. Storm water shall be removed from all roofs, canopies, and powered area, and routed through a well-engineered system designed with appropriate storm water management techniques. Skimming devices, oil, and grease traps, and similar facilities at the collection or discharge points for paved surface runoff should be used, to retain oils, greases, and particles. Surface water on all paved areas shall be collected and/or routed so that it will not obstruct the flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic and will not create puddles in the paved area. In larger developments, where practical, the routing of runoff through sheet flow, swales or other means increasing filtration and percolation is strongly encouraged, as is use of retention or detention ponds. In instances of below grade parking (such as garages) or low lying areas prone to flooding, installation of pumps or other devices to prevent backflow through drains or catch basins may be required.”*

12. Historic or Architectural Significance: *The project must be designed “with respect to Somerville’s heritage, any action detrimental to historic structures and their architectural elements shall be discouraged insofar as is practicable, whether those structures exist on the development parcel or on adjacent properties. If there is any removal, substantial alteration or other action detrimental to buildings of historic or architectural significance, these should be minimized and new uses or the erection of new buildings should be compatible with the buildings or places of historic or architectural significance on the development parcel or on adjacent properties.”*

13. Enhancement of Appearance: *The Applicant must demonstrate that “the natural character and appearance of the City is enhanced. Awareness of the existence of a development, particularly a non residential development or a higher density residential development, should be minimized by screening views of the development from nearby streets, residential neighborhoods of City property by the effective use of existing land forms, or alteration thereto, such as berms, and by existing vegetation or supplemental planting.”*

14. Lighting: *With respect to lighting, the Applicant must ensure that “all exterior spaces and interior public and semi-public spaces shall be adequately lit and designed as much as possible to allow for surveillance by neighbors and passersby.”*

15. Emergency Access: *The Applicant must ensure that “there is easy access to buildings, and the grounds adjoining them, for operations by fire, police, medical and other emergency personnel and equipment.”*

16. Location of Access: *The Applicant must ensure that “the location of intersections of access drives with the City arterial or collector streets minimizes traffic congestion.”*

17. Utility Service: *The Applicant must ensure that “electric, telephone, cable TV and other such lines and equipment are placed underground from the source or connection, or are effectively screened from public view.”*

18. Prevention of Adverse Impacts: *The Applicant must demonstrate that “provisions have been made to prevent or minimize any detrimental effect on adjoining premises, and the general neighborhood, including, (1) minimizing any adverse impact from new hard surface ground cover, or machinery which emits heat, vapor, light or fumes; and (2) preventing adverse impacts to light, air and noise, wind and temperature levels in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development.”*

19. Signage: *The Applicant must ensure that “the size, location, design, color, texture, lighting and materials of all permanent signs and outdoor advertising structures or features shall reflect the scale and character of the proposed buildings.”*

20. Screening of Service Facilities: *The Applicant must ensure that “exposed transformers and other machinery, storage, service and truck loading areas, dumpsters, utility buildings, and similar structures shall be effectively screened by plantings or other screening methods so that they are not directly visible from either the proposed development or the surrounding properties.”*

21. Screening of Parking:

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

22. 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.*

In addition to the above criteria and objectives listed above, the proposed development shall take into account, insofar as is practicable, any existing or proposed plans for the neighborhood which have been or may be adopted by the City of Somerville.

<i>SomerVision Summary</i>	<i>Existing</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<i>Dwelling Units:</i>		
<i>Affordable Units:</i>		
<i>Commercial Sq. Ft.:</i>		
<i>Estimated Employment:</i>		
<i>Parking Spaces:</i>		
<i>Publicly Accessible Open Space:</i>		

23. Impact on Affordable Housing: *In conjunction with its decision to grant or deny a special permit for a structure of four or more units of housing, the SPGA shall make a finding and determination as to how implementation of the project would increase, decrease, or leave unchanged the number of units of rental and home ownership housing that are affordable to households with low or moderate incomes, as defined by HUD, for different sized households and units.*

Explain measures taken to provide for, protect, or increase the affordability of housing units within the proposed structure; the degree of such affordability to households of low or moderate income, as defined by HUD; and the duration of legal assurances of such affordability.

III. FINDINGS FOR VARIANCE

A Variance (§5.5) is sought to **The Project requires dimensional variances under SZO 8.5 D -Landscaped Area; SZO 8.5 E -Floor Area Ratio; SZO 8.5 F -Maximum Height; SZO 8.5 G -Minimum Front Yard.**

In order to grant a variance the Board must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.5.3 of the SZO.

1. *There are “special circumstances relating to soil conditions, shape or topography of land or structures which especially affect such land or structures but not affecting generally the zoning district in which it is located, causing substantial hardship, financial or otherwise.”*

Applicant’s response: The northerly portion of the Paradigm parking lot parcel, which will be the Project Site as a result of a subdivision of the Paradigm parking lot parcel, is bounded to the west by Inner Belt Road and to the east by the Somerville/Boston municipal boundary. These boundaries result in a lot depth of approximately 120 feet. A 20-foot wide sewer easement benefitting the MWRA bisects the parking lot parcel from east to west. Construction of a building over the easement is prohibited. As a result, the dimensions and size of the Site, constrained by the special circumstance of the no-build easement, creates a hardship because no economically viable structures that are consistent with the SomerVision Comprehensive Plan and the Somerville By Design Inner Belt/Brickbottom Plan can be developed that comply with specific requirements of SZO §8.5 D, SZO §8.5 E, SZO §8.5 F and SZO §8.5 G. Additionally the parking lot parcel is subject to an AUL as a result of subsurface soil contamination; this is a special circumstance that creates a hardship as to height, in particular, because of the inability to have basement levels.

The requested variances are necessary to construct an economically and operationally viable Hotel building offering an appropriate number of guest rooms, limited amenity space and small but efficient common and employee areas. The Hotel will not include a full service restaurant, bar or function space. The building footprint provides the most efficient layout for the interior ground floor uses and 5 additional floors are needed to provide sufficient floor area. As a result, the Project cannot meet requirements for minimum landscaped area, minimum front yard or maximum floor area ratio due to the special circumstance of how the Project Site’s physical constraints intersect with the design and programming requirements of the hotel use, thus creating an economic hardship if these requirements are not varied. With regard to landscaping design, the Project will increase the number of trees provided on-site as well as along the adjacent street lines. The Project exceeds the maximum building height because all 6 stories will be provided above-grade. Construction of a basement level is not economically feasible based on the cost of disposal of existing contaminated soils.

Staff’s response:

2. *“The variance requested is the minimum variance that will grant reasonable relief to the owner, and is necessary for a reasonable use of the building or land.”*

Applicant’s response: The requested dimensional variances constitute the minimum approval necessary to allow the Applicant to construct an economically and operationally viable Hotel building (which is a permitted use in the BB District) offering an appropriate number of guest rooms, limited amenity space

and small but efficient common and employee areas. The Hotel will not include a full-service restaurant, bar or function space. The building footprint provides the most efficient layout for the interior ground floor uses and 5 additional floors are needed to provide sufficient floor area. As a result, the Project cannot meet requirements for minimum landscaped area, minimum front yard or maximum floor area ratio due to the special circumstance of how the Project Site's physical constraints intersect with the design and programming requirements of the hotel use, thus creating an economic hardship if these requirements are not varied. With regard to landscaping design, the Project will increase the number of trees provided on-site as well as along the adjacent street lines. The Project exceeds the maximum building height to the minimal extent because all 6 stories will be provided above-grade. Construction of a basement level is not economically feasible based on the cost of disposal of existing contaminated soils.

Staff's response:

3. *"The granting of the variance would be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of this Ordinance and would not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare."*

Applicant's response: The Project, built in conformance with the requested variances, is compatible with the stated planning goals of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The Project is located in the BB - Commercial Residential District the purpose of which is "to establish and preserve general commercial and high density residential areas consisting of multi-family developments, shopping centers, commercial strips and automobile related establishments where customers reach individual businesses primarily by automobile". A Hotel is a permitted use in the BB District. Furthermore, the Project is consistent with the SomerVision Comprehensive Plan and the Somerville By Design Inner Belt and Brickbottom Plan. These plans call for transforming under-utilized land in the Inner Belt area into economic generators and creating new employment opportunities.

The development of the Project Site enables a public right-of-way to be constructed over an existing easement as a public benefit to improve existing traffic and pedestrian circulation and neighborhood connectivity. The existing surface parking lot at the Inner Belt gateway of Washington St and Inner Belt Rd will be replaced with a vibrant Project that will enhance the street wall along the adjacent roadway corridors and create a safe, inviting pedestrian environment. New sidewalks will be installed along the roadways adjacent to the Project Site and pedestrians will be separated from traffic by new canopy trees. Such infrastructure improvements are consistent with the goals stated in the recent Somerville planning studies.

Staff's response:

IV. RECOMMENDATION

NONE AT THIS TIME.

DRAFT