



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*
SARAH LEWIS, *SENIOR PLANNER*
SARAH WHITE, *PLANNER & PRESERVATION PLANNER*
ALEX MELLO, *PLANNER*
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

Case #: ZBA 2016-149
Date: February 15, 2017

Recommendation: Unable to recommend at this time

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 110 Josephine Avenue

Applicant Name: Genevieve Walsh
Applicant Address: 110 Josephine Avenue,
Somerville, MA 02144
Owner Name: Glen Nuckolls & Genevieve
Walsh
Owner Address: 22 Wesley Park, Somerville,
MA 02143
Alderman: Mark Niedergang



Legal Notice: Applicant, Genevieve Walsh, and Applicants, Glen Nuckolls & Genevieve Walsh, seek Special Permits under §4.4.1 of the SZO to increase the FAR by finishing the basement and Article 9 for parking relief. RA zone. Ward 5

Dates of Public Hearings: February 15, 2017

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. **Subject Property:** The subject property is a two-family, 2 ³/₄ -story, gable-fronted residential structure on an undersized (3,360 sq. ft.) lot in the RA zone. The property currently contains 3,388 square feet of living area. The application states that the existing structure is a Philadelphia style 2-family. The existing basement area appears to have a washer/dryer, a sink, and perhaps storage. The floor-to ceiling height of the basement is 6 feet 7 inches. The property also contains a rear deck and garage. According to the Assessor's site, there are 5 bedrooms contained in the

property. The allowable FAR in the RA zone is 1.0. The FAR is considered non-conforming with an existing FAR of 1.01.

2. **Proposal:** The Applicants propose to renovate the basement and divide its use between the two units. Unit 1's basement space will consist of a bedroom, full bath, living area and laundry. Unit 2's basement space will contain living area and a full bath. Mechanicals for both units will also be located in the renovated basement. The Applicants propose to increase the non-conforming FAR from 1.01 to 1.32.

3. **Green Building Practices:**

None listed on the application.

4. **Comments:**

Ward Alderman: Will be provided a copy of this report.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1 & Article 9):

In order to grant a special permit, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §4.4.1 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §4.4.1 in detail.

1. **Information Supplied:**

Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant with regard to how the basement area will generally be outfitted conforms to the requirements of §4.4.1 of the SZO.

However, overall, complete information regarding the location and number of current bedrooms is missing. Proposed plans labelling all bedrooms and other rooms are lacking. In addition, an enlarged window in the new, Unit 1 proposed basement area does not show the size or location of a window well necessary for emergency exit. The location of this window well needs to be sited on the plot plan along with its location within the setback. Staff is unable to determine the/if parking relief is needed under Article 9 of the SZO due to the lack of bedroom count information.

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."*

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."

Staff finds that finishing the basement, *in general*, will not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing conditions on the property. Given that the existing and proposed bedroom counts remain unknown, however, Staff is unable to determine the project's impacts on the surrounding neighborhood, particular with regard to traffic and parking.

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."*

Staff finds that finishing the basement, in general, is consistent with the purposes of the RA district which is to "...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."*

In considering a special permit under §4.4.1 of the SZO, Staff finds that the proposed changes triggering the special permit to finish the basement are largely contained within the existing structure itself with the exception of updated windows, an enlarged window opening in Unit 1's basement bedroom and, eventually, a window well outside of this window. Finishing a basement is a reasonable accommodation to allow a property owner in order for them to gain further usable living space.

Due to the the lack of known and proposed bedroom counts, Staff is unable to determine if parking relief is needed and, if it is, what the impact of that relief would be on the site and the surrounding neighborhood.

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

The proposal will not add to the existing stock of affordable housing.

6. SomerVision:

The proposal will improve an existing property and maintain a two-family use within the RA district.

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 recommends *is UNABLE TO RECOMMEND* the requested **SPECIAL PERMITS** at this time due to insufficient information.

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.

Once adequate information has been submitted in order to complete a full assessment of the project proposal, conditions for this project will be determined and submitted by Staff to the ZBA.