



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

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

STAFF PRESENT

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*
LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*
ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

MEMBERS PRESENT

DEBORAH FENNICK
JAMES KIRYLO
MATTHEW RICE
CHERYLYN RUANE

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, July 28, 2011, 6:30 p.m.** in City Hall, 3rd Floor Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was to review and make recommendations on the following proposals:

65 Beacon Street (Case #ZBA 2011-06)

Review of plans and materials for the new front façade.

This case had come before the Committee previously but the Applicant returned to get approval of the final design of the front façade and the materials that will be used there as part of allowing Planning Staff to be able to sign off on the project to allow the Applicants to apply for their building permit.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- Are the columns intended to just be PVC sewer pipe? – (r) Yes, that is correct.
- Is there any material that would be a little bit more finished than the PVC pipe that would work for the columns? (r) We just wanted a straight shaft and a lot of other material options are curved or clavicle. This was the best option for that look and it will look and feel the same as some of the more expensive material options.
- What is the diameter of the columns? – (r) They will be a 12 inch diameter.
- How will the paint stick to the columns? (r) We will be using acrylic paint
- How will the paint stick to the columns? (r) We just wanted a straight shaft and a lot of other material options are curved or clavicle.

The Committee would like to see square, built out, azek columns instead of round, PVC pipe columns on the front façade.



39-43 Elmwood Street / 40 Cameron Avenue (Case #ZBA 2011-31)

Review of the design to alter an existing structure to construct nine dwelling units before the case goes to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicant GFC Development Inc. and owner Sadler Realty Trust, seek a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.2, §7.3, §4.4.1, and §9.13.b to alter a nonconforming structure to construct three structures for nine total dwelling units with associated parking. RB zone. Ward 7.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: Anticipated to be August 17, 2011

This was the first time the project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant is proposing to take a vacant commercial property with a concrete block garage and an existing single-family dwelling that faces Elmwood Street, on a total of 14,411 square feet, and create 9 residential units on the site. The existing single-family structure would be preserved and the garage building would be altered to create a four unit residence on the south side of the property and two additional units that would attach to the rear of the existing single-family dwelling. Further, a separate two-family structure would be created from the remaining portion of the garage that would be located on the Cameron Avenue side of the site. All 15 required parking spaces for the residences would be provided on site.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- What is the proposed finish for the front of the residential structures? – (r) We were hoping to do stucco on the front.
- Are any of the buildings occupied now? – (r) The existing residential structure is being occupied as a single-family dwelling and the commercial structure is vacant.
- Did you investigate underground parking as an option during any part of the design process? – (r) We did not look at it in great detail because of the narrowness of the site. To do underground parking it would entail a massing all of the residential units along Elmwood Street and we did not want to do that because we felt it would be overpowering to Elmwood Street.
- What is the percentage of greenspace now on the site? – (r) There is no greenspace at all on the site currently and we are proposing 16% of greenspace as part of the project.
- Are the patios and courtyard areas pervious? – (r) Yes.
- Is there any way to open up the wall along the property boundary so the space is not so enclosed? – (r) We could certainly do that and we are open to it but at this time we are working with the neighbors to have them define what they want these walls to look like and their design is still in flux.

The wall along Cameron Avenue seems a bit questionable as it blocks off the yard area of the dwelling unit from the street. We think it is good to respect the wall that was once there but at the same time preserving the wall in this location may not be in the best interest of the project.

The wall along Cameron Avenue could probably be modified, lowered, and/or trellised at the top to make it more inviting. Perhaps even punching some holes in the wall along the street to have the space be more semi-private.

This site is very close to mass transit and perhaps there could be less parking spaces on the site.



Green roofs should be considered for this project as they could do some very positive things in terms of costs for the project, insulation and stormwater drainage on the site.

The metal rails on the balconies may not serve the spaces that well and perhaps some type of a green buffer would work better in those locations.

We would like to see what an underground parking scenario would look like for the project. The site itself is setup well for that and this could also offer some storage space for each of the units above. This would also make courtyard an inhabitable courtyard and would add more greenspace to the project. Furthermore, an underground garage could potentially double the amount of cars that could be parked on the site compared to surface parking, and that would make the parking scenario for the project that much better. We would like to see the underground parking vetted as an idea.

The project has a lot of setbacks in it and as part of the presentation it would be helpful to have something else besides plans and elevations. Some type of perspective view would be very helpful to visualize the massing of the project.

The treatment of the exterior wall is an opportunity to right the wrongs of the past. This was an industrial building put in an residential neighborhood and there is no reason to retain the industrial quality of the wall moving forward. Please do not leave the wall in its current state, but instead, make it something to be proud of.

Assembly Square PUD – Blocks 1 and 4

Description: Applicant Avalon Bay's proposal to construct two mixed-use building in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. ASMD zone. Ward 1.

SPGA: Planning Board

Hearing Date: TBD

This was the first time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant is proposing to construct mixed-use buildings on Blocks 1 and 4 in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. The buildings would have commercial space on the ground level, residential units on the upper stories, and both buildings would contain off-street parking for the residential and commercial uses. These buildings would contain the first residential units in the Assembly Square PUD.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- What is the graphic on the corner of the garage in Block 1? – (r) It is a screen that can be changeable. It could belong to a tenant. The idea is to take what is a parking garage, give some life to it, and create a vertical element on that particular corner. It could be anything from perforated metal that has some kind of scrim on top of it or something that allows the ventilation of the garage but gives some retail energy to the block.

Block 1

The arches in the center of the elevation are so dissimilar that they seem to be an anomaly in the composition of the building. Some variation is nice but perhaps this area has gone too far astray in terms of how it weaves into the rest of the building fabric. Removing the arches may work better with a more orthogonal geometry. The differentiation of the corner elements is a bit more successful in this regard, but the arches seem a little out of place in that particular elevation. Based on the design guidelines and how



the overall block wants to feel, the Committee still encourages variation throughout the design, but this particular element needs some more evolution.

The design needs more architectural integrity and there could be more depth to each of the elevations. More light and shadow principles could be worked into the overall design. The DRC would like to see some detail drawings that could help convince them that this design makes sense as a total block. Perhaps the cornice could have a stutter to it that makes it grander.

The arches on the east elevation are a bit distracting but the material change is great. The south elevation feels more monolithic and heavier as there is less balance between the varieties of materials than in the other facades. Some of what is happening on the north elevation needs to inform what is happening on the west elevation.

At the southwest corner, there is a return on the tower that can be seen in the elevation but cannot be seen in the plan view. There needs to be more separateness on this corner so the tower sits proud.

More depth to the elevations, especially in the housing portions, would be helpful.

Variation in the way the materials of the project are brought together or the introduction of slight variations in the materials themselves and within the color palette of the materials would assist the design. Not that these items need to move too far away from what was presented, but some change here could be helpful to the design.

The sloping out of the canopy/trellis element could be articulated better. The geometry of the sloped roof should be investigated more. This side of the structure, being the north side, will always be in shadow and if there is anyway to get more natural light in there, that would be helpful. An open trellis as opposed to the glazed trellis might work better in this area.

Block 4

It would be preferable to see more of the façade elements come to the ground or close to the ground. The residential entry comes to the ground and it works well but the rest of the building feels like it is floating.

The intent was to create a differentiation from the other buildings and the design could push this idea a bit further. Right now this is a bit too subtle on the exterior of the structure and it does not read as that much more distinct from the building in Block 1. Push this theme of having two distinct, different buildings more.

The retail graphics of the east elevation, the one that faces the T, could be improved as this is a very important façade. The retail graphics make it feel like a throw away elevation. Perhaps having something that screens this façade from a more vertical approach would be more appropriate.

There is concern that there are not enough elements holding the design of the building together. The retail component does not have a datum that it stops at and the building appears too patchwork. There should be an effort to use particular materials to sew the building back together, but not make it more patchwork.

Adding balconies, deep recesses, and ganging windows together would help the overall design of the building.

The Committee is looking for a more holistic building but one that is more refined in terms of how it negotiates the parts and pieces.



133 Middlesex Avenue (Case #PB 2011-10)

Review of sample materials for the building at Assembly Square Block 10.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- Is this identical to what is being proposed for the building? – (r) I think this is not what we are proposing but instead is more of just a material sample.
- Is the building going to be a café? – (r) There will be restaurants there, yes. Probably two or three restaurants.

The sample looks a little bit more neoclassical than we were was imagining. There is something a little bit more angular, nautical, and industrial to the image in the plans than the material sample that is before us.

We have no problem with the material itself, but more so with the way the material is articulated. Any of the materials on the building are going to be faux, but the color finish on this sample could probably use a little bit of improvement. You can tell the material is plastic and this should not be the case.

57 Pitman Street

Preliminary review of 7 unit residential project with on site parking. BA zone. Ward 3.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: TBD

This was the first time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant is proposing 7 residential units and 12 associated parking spaces that are all accessed through a common entrance/exit off of Pitman Street. Four of the units will have rear decks and three of them will have roof decks. All of the units are being proposed as having two bedrooms.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- What are the materials that will be used in this project? – (r) The materials for the first three floors will be a cementitious clapboard and the vertical bays will be azek material. The fourth story will have shakes in the dormers.
- Is the wall that divides each of the entryways structurally necessary? – (r) The dividing walls are not necessary but they were put in place to personalize the front door to each unit.
- Are the doorways to each of the units too far back? Are they recessed too much into the massing of the structure? – (r) The doorways are recessed for two reasons. One is for safety because a pedestrian would be walking out of the entryway directly onto Pitman Street and we wanted to provide a transitional zone for residents and their guests. Secondly, there is a grade change 18 inches upward as you approach the entry of each unit and we wanted a gradual slope to this transition, which would include steps.

The arches on the first level over the entryways seem strange and have a cave-like appearance which makes them feel lower than they actually are. Those archways could probably be removed to provide a more inviting feeling to each entryway.



The articulations above the entries on the fourth story seem very busy and too much is going on there in terms of the vertical extension of the articulated bays. There may be too many design elements on the top story. It might be preferable to have the shed dormer be continuous instead of breaking it up with the side-by-side gable dormers.

