



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
TANYA PAGLIA
MATTHEW RICE
CHERILYN RUANE

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, September 29, 2011, 6:30 p.m.** in City Hall, 3rd Floor Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

Also in attendance were Planning Board members Michael A. Capuano, Esq. and Joseph Favaloro.

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

50 Middlesex Avenue

Review of building materials for the approximately six-story building for self-storage use, café or retail use, bicycle storage, community meeting space, and usable open space per the conditions of the awarded Special Permit. ASMD zone. Ward 1.

This project had already come before the DRC when it was going through the Planning Board approval process. The project was returning to get comments from the DRC, as well as the Planning Board (three members were in attendance for this DRC meeting), regarding the material samples for the lower levels of the building and the storefront design system, have a discussion of color options for the proposed materials, and get approval for the design of the lighting for the tower cornice.

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

- Are all of the material samples the same? – (r) They are similar but not exactly the same so there will be some variation so the look is not sterile and uniform. The materials will have slightly different textures and color tones.
- What are the dimensions of the panels? – (r) The narrowest panel is 2 feet wide and the widest is 3.5 feet. The panels will span from floor to floor.
- How are the textures distributed? – (r) There are three textures and two colors. There will be two colors in the bright silver and one texture in the smooth, on the gold.



- What is the height of the spandrel? – (r) The floor to floor height on the first floor is 12.5 feet and the floor to floor height above that is about 11 feet. The green band would be just under 6 feet in height.
- Did you look at other finishes for the building such as a ground face? – (r) There was so much going on with the metal that we wanted to keep the façade more low key. We wanted something more muted, more flat. I think the earthiness and the metal play together nicely and provide a nice contrast.

The banding in the original renderings was a bit more accentuated between the banding masonry units and the field. We had talked a lot previously about trying to minimize the monolithic look of the building. In looking at this color-value wise, we would like to see a wider range of color or color value on the building. Using more of the grayish brick would help the look of the building trend towards a more modern aesthetic which is what the design was trying to achieve originally.

The originally approved renderings had a lighter façade with darker bands and these renderings show a darker façade with lighter bands. The lighter façade with darker bands is preferable because it fits into the overall approach of the building better.

The goal of the this buildings as well as the other buildings in Assembly Square is to try to divest themselves from the existing buildings in the area and the mall structure which is primarily red brick. Having this self-storage building be a bit further from the red brick, with perhaps even lighter material colors, would help to achieve this.

There is some concern too that the silver brick would make the whole building look like it was constructed out of cinder block and this is not desirable.

With all the design materials that are integrated into the facades of this building, it will not be confused with what is already going on at Assembly Square. The concern is that at first glance, this structure might look like just another masonry building.

One of the biggest issues is the tower because it relates the most to the marketplace that exists there already. Trying to change the tower to the greatest extent possible will help to separate this building from the existing marketplace.

Consensus was reached to use a brick field, with red brick accent, with narrow bands, with small scale (four inch) material units.

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

Review of changes since the last DRC meeting where the Applicant presented.

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

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: Anticipated to be October 19, 2011

This was the second time the project had been presented to the DRC for review and the Applicant was responding to comments made by the DRC at their previous meeting. The site plan essentially remained the same as the Applicant would like to maintain a lot of the existing exterior wall. The site would contain



nine, two-bedroom units in three different structures. The 15 parking spaces required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance would all be provided on site and the landscaping on the site would be increased to around 17%. The Applicant has been working with the neighbors since the last DRC meeting and they have incorporated elements to help soften the look of the flat roof of the new structures. The Applicant thought about having a pitched roof similar to the existing structure but Historic Preservation asked them to create a clean break from the existing design. The new design does incorporate a lot of punched windows into the façade along Cameron Avenue, along with trellis work and planter boxes.

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

- Will there be walls with rails on all of the buildings? – (r) The buildings with two and three dwelling units will not have these because these buildings do not have habitable roof deck space. The building with four dwelling units is the only one that will have walls with rails. We did not want to enclose the entire roof deck with a knee-wall.
- Where will the condenser units be placed in this new design? – (r) The condenser units would either go on the ground or on the roof. If the units were to be situated on the roof the walls of the buildings would have to be raised to help hide the units and this would raise the height of the building which we are trying to avoid.

The infill panel where the garage door used to be along Elmwood Street is the biggest concern. A trellis, a recessed wall, or perhaps even the old garage door that was once there could be re-implemented. These types of elements would work much better in this space to liven up the façade than a simple, blank stucco block wall.

Thought needs to be given as to where the condenser units will be located in the project because this could have a large visual and sound impacts on the design.

With regard to the bracketing on the building, the triangular brackets seem to work better than the other brackets that are being shown.

Planning Staff should include a condition that will require the Applicant to come back to the DRC to allow for the committee to see and touch the actual proposed materials that and to also see what the old garage door looks like.

Assembly Square PUD – Block 3 (Case # PB 2011-16)

Review of changes since the last DRC meeting where the Applicant presented.

Description: Review of proposal to construct a mixed-use building including retail and a cinema in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. ASMD zone. Ward 1.

SPGA: Planning Board

Hearing Date: TBD

This was the second time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant stated that a lot of height is needed in this structure for the vertical egress within the building. There will be a variety of tenants in the first floor storefronts, additional commercial spaces on the second floor, and then the cineplex space will be above that. There was a strong attempt to avoid long expanses of façade that were blank and the idea was to have a series of boxes or geometric shapes that pull the whole building together. A formed or corrugated metal panel is proposed for the exterior of the upper floors where cinema space is located.



There are too many different types of volumes integrated into the building. Some of them work well and others do not.

Break up some of the “brick framing” for the retail on the ground floor and connect the retail level with the cinema above.

The trellis design proposed for the cinema terrace is foreign to the rest of the design. This outdoor space could add some interest to the building.

The north elevation could benefit from some of the detail that is starting to be introduced. The ribbon windows on this elevation seem completely foreign to the design and a fenestration that is more similar to that of the cinema would work better in this location.

The circular sign band that wraps the corner at “Main Street” and “C Street” needs to be more substantial in its mass and be taller or longer or both.

The metal panels need to be broken down to reduce the cinema mass.

The far right side of the “D Street” elevation feels like it is floating.

Making some of the garage wall solid would help to ground it.

The “D Street” elevation feels very heavy and monolithic. There may be opportunities to add windows strategically on this elevation to break it up.

A different material than brick on the lower half of the elevation may improve the appearance of the building and make it more contemporary.

16 Linden Avenue

Review of the design to add a separate 5 unit structure to a lot that already contains an existing three-family structure before the case goes to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicant is proposing to add a separate, 5 unit structure to a lot that currently contains an existing three-family dwelling which would allow for 8 total units on the site. RB zone. Ward 5.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: TBD

This was the first time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The lot contains an existing three-family dwelling and the Applicant is proposing to add five additional dwelling units to the site with a new townhouse-type structure. The driveway that will run between the two structures is proposed to be a permeable paver for its entire length, ending with a graded crushed stone parking area. The townhouse unit entrances would open out to the driveway and the backs of the units would have small outdoor patio spaces.

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



- Can cars pull in and out of their parking spaces with this driveway width? – (r) Yes, the parking area meets the dimensional requirements of the zoning ordinance. There will be a flush concrete curb along the townhouses to also help meet the dimensional requirements.
- Would the three-family structure be resided? – (r) Yes, the three-family dwelling currently has vinyl siding but we would pull that off and give it a fiber-cement panel most likely.
- How would a resident get to the trash/recycling area? How would someone get the barrels out of that area? – (r) You would have to go in between the parked cars, go around the cars, access the area through an unused parking space, or move your own car.
- How do you demarcate parking spots on a graded, crushed stone lot? – (r) There would be some type of demarcation at the front end of each parking space to denote each spot.
- Is it possible to move the proposed structure closer to the street? – (r) The project is as close as we could get to the street without the need for a dimensional variance.
- What was the decision process behind locating the two bay windows on the Linden Avenue side of the proposed structure? – (r) There is no entry on this side of the proposed structure and I was trying to get some articulation on this side of the building that brought that unit out to the front yard.
- Is there a patio space at the rear of the first floor unit of the three-family dwelling or is that just a rear entrance for all three of the units? – (r) Underneath the decks there is a parking space and then a rear entrance/exit to the stairway that provides access to all three of the units. There is no private outdoor space being proposed for the first floor unit in the three-family dwelling.
- Would the yards in the back of each of the townhouse units be fenced in? – (r) There would be a railing at the back edge of each of the patios, but there would be no fence dividing the space between each of the units.
- How wide are the brick pads by the doors? Is there room for a street tree or greenspace there? – (r) It is 3'6" and we would have to investigate the grading there but we can take a look at that to possibly incorporate some type of vegetative element there.

The HVAC compressors that are on center between the patios could be offset to one side to create a more contiguous greenspace behind each of the townhouse units.

The trash/recycling area could be rotated or broken it into two smaller banks to make the greenspace area where it is located more usable to the residents.

In the middle portion of the townhouse elevation the paneling seems a bit strange and a bit too foreign to the design of the building. A modern material that does not trend towards the Queen Anne look would work better here.

A unified single bay window along Linden Avenue would probably work better than trying to have two smaller bay windows in that spot on the proposed new structure.

It would help the view down the driveway between the two structures to incorporate some type of greenspace or vegetative elements.

