



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

JULIE BRADY
JIM KIRYLO
TANYA PAGLIA
MATTHEW RICE
FRANK VALDES

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, January 12, 2012**, at **6:30 p.m.** in the Central Library, 1st Floor Conference Room, 79 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

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

15 Park Place (Case # ZBA 2011-96)

Review of project before it goes before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicants and Owners, Vladimir and Aleksandra Pezel, seek a Special Permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 in order to convert a garage into a 2½ story single-family dwelling.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: January 18, 2011

This was the first time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. The lot currently has a five car garage on it and the Applicant is proposing to turn it into a single-family dwelling. The project would add a ½ story to the existing structure, improve and increase the landscaping around the site, and make the structure as energy efficient as possible.

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

- Can you please describe the deck a little more? Is it attached to the existing structure? – (r) The deck will actually be floating separate from the house with the intention of not puncturing the air seal around the building. It will be structurally separate from the house.
- Will you be reusing the foundation of the existing building that is there? – (r) We will be using the existing slab that is there but we may have to add some extra footings. On the back side of the structure we will have to build a small retaining wall.



- What has been the feedback from the two closest, abutting neighbors? – (r) We have not heard from the direct abutters but they were invited to our neighborhood meeting.
- What is the setback on the back side of the project from the building to the next door neighbor's building? – (r) 20 feet.
- Can you elaborate a little bit on what the energy efficiencies are for this structure? – (r) The passive house really focuses on the passive solar energy efficient elements. There will likely be some solar hot water on the roof and the windows are strategically placed to let in as much sunlight as possible as well as the heat. There will also be an energy efficient electric heat pump, thick, 18" insulated walls, and triple pane windows.
- Can you please elaborate on the design elements on the outside of the building? Especially the corner details with the fiber cement? – (r) It is meant to be a modern take off of the clapboards. The proportions will stay within the context of the surrounding neighborhood. As far as the corner details, we have woven it in the past so that it steps up as a weave in the corner. We can look at doing straight up corner boards as well, but the weave pattern usually works very well. The great thing with Hardiboard is that you don't have to worry about rotting.
- How are you treating the runoff water from the roof? – (r) There will be a gutter, primarily on the north façade, to ensure the runoff does not drop into the driveway. There will also be a dry well underground and we are planning a rain catchment system.
- Have you talked to the next door neighbor about retaining the ivy wall that currently faces their property? – (r) We have talked about maintaining the privacy by creating some type of metal pulled wire system, but we would like to put up a new wall and see if the ivy will grow up it.
- The garage seems to take up a big portion of the façade of the house. Did you try reworking that differently? – (r) The garage is actually shielded by some of the trees on the site and it is not directly facing the street. Much of the view of the garage is actually blocked by the tight turn at the corner of the street and the orientation of the deck helps to draw the attention away from the garages.
- Is there any fencing envisioned for the perimeter of the site? – (r) There currently is not.
- What would be the color of the metal roof? – (r) A deep red. A barn-like color.

Having glass on the garage doors would be a nice element of the design.

It seems that just a few more of the details need to be refined, clarified, and be made more descriptive as far as what you are doing with them. This is especially true with the water retention system and the possible locations of the solar panels.

We would like to see the project again and some of the actual materials and colors that will be used before construction begins. Even showing us some photographs of previous projects to provide some elaboration of the details would be helpful for the Committee to see.

The Committee also encouraged the Applicant to identify specific proposed planting materials.

1-2 Village Terrace (Case # ZBA 2011-77)

Review of project before it goes before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicant and Owner Douglas Beaudet seeks a Special Permit to construct approximately five dwelling units in two structures with associated parking. RC zone. Ward 2.



SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals
Hearing Date: TBD

This was the first time the project had been presented to the Design Review Committee. The subject property consists of an existing 6,000 square foot lot with two single-family dwellings on it. The development team went before the Historic Preservation Commission and 1 Village Terrace was deemed to be preferably preserved, but the single-family at 2 Village Terrace could be demolished. The Applicant is proposing to retain 1 Village Terrace as a single-family dwelling and to build a new structure at 2 Village Terrace that contains four dwelling units. The development team was directed to take a look at some townhouse style units and in this proposal there would be a single pedestrian access point that would provide access to all of the units. The entrances to the units in the rear structure would be in the back while the front would contain all of the garage doors for the project.

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

- Why was 1 Village Terrace deemed to be preferably preserved but not 2 Village Terrace? – (r) 1 Village Terrace was more historically significant and had not been chopped up as much as 2 Village Terrace.
- So there are no eyes on the garages? – (r) Correct, the bridge, an embankment, and trees all screen the views of the garages.
- Do the top units have cathedral ceilings? – (r) We have not discussed that yet.

The project layout seems very complicated. The entrance to the site is the driveway and it leads you into a vehicular oriented area, while the rear patio areas are semi-private. We have concerns about the sense of orientation of the building as to ‘where do I arrive?’ and ‘where do I go?’. The project has a feeling that you are arriving at the back of the complex. Please take a look at mitigating the feeling that you are arriving at a back alley as the entry drive is very narrow. There may be a way to create more space in the entry/patio/arrival area by perhaps pushing the building back towards the rail tracks at the rear of the property. This would help to create a more formal entry/arrival area between the new structure and the structure that will be preserved.

Perhaps the driveway could be treated more as a patio or pedestrian area, as opposed to a driveway/vehicular environment. This could be achieved through the use of planters, different pavers, or stamped concrete in the driveway, but there are items that can be used to make the space more inviting to pedestrians.

There is a possibility that the structure could be less conspicuous by having a flat roof instead of a pitched roof.

There is something to be gained by trying to use some type of planting in entry area or something that is more generous in terms of recognizing the entryway. There is only about five feet of space between the two buildings and this gives the feeling as if you are only arriving at the single-family dwelling in front of the four unit building.

Please note that some of the piping may need to be thicker, more insulated, and more supported when the details of the design are refined.

The scale of the two buildings seems a bit awkward. Perhaps the Historic Preservation Commission would like to see a smaller scale building in this neighborhood. The Committee is concerned about the



relationship (or lack thereof) between the proposed building (2 Village Terrace) and the existing building (1 Village Terrace), which was identified by the Historic Commission in a specific manner and, consequently, has conditions attached to it. Part of the Committee's mission is to preserve the value of existing land and buildings and the Committee is concerned that this proposal fails to support that goal.

Being able to see the rough massing of the surrounding area would be helpful for the Committee to allow us to understand the context of the area better.

The continuous siding on the proposed structure is reinforcing the height of the building, so please take a close look at what kind of material you will be using and possibly look at something a bit more modern. Please look at using different materials on the top or bottom of the new structure to help mitigate the visual impact of its height.

143-145 Cedar Street & 5 Alpine Street (Case # ZBA 2012-02)

Review of project before it goes before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicant and Owner Aldar Realty Trust and Faulkner Brothers, Inc., seek a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.11.1.c to establish a 10 unit residential use and a Special Permit under SZO §9.13.b to modify parking design standards. BB zone. Ward 5.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: February 1, 2012

This was the first time the project had come before the Design Review Committee and the Applicant was looking to refine the design of the project before they began to move through the Zoning Board of Appeals process. The project would eliminate two old cinder block buildings and implement a 10 unit residential building that would wrap around a neighboring 6 unit building. The project is proposing eight sets of tandem parking spaces in garages and two surface parking spaces. The existing curb cuts on Cedar Street would be closed and all traffic into and out of the site would access Alpine Street. The building would be four stories transitioning down to three stories as it approaches the neighboring RB zone. The building would use HardiPanel and HardiPlank with AZEK trim on its exterior. There would be trellises on the top floor, the ground cover at the site would be reduced, and the greenspace at the site would be increased.

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

- Is there anything on the roof of the building? – (r) No, there is no mechanical equipment up there as everything will be accommodated for on the first floor where we have dedicated space. Half of the roof will be used for the decks for the upper level units.
- Is there an elevator for this building? I thought an elevator was required when you went above three stories? – (r) There is no elevator, only a three story staircase. An elevator is only required when you go above four stories in height.
- Can you point out the mechanical room and explain to us how the building is air conditioned? – (r) We have not explored all the details of this yet. We are thinking of having a central air conditioning system but we have not sat down with our mechanical engineer yet. We may have a couple of air conditioning units on the roof of the building, but if we do, we will set them back from the edge of the roof.
- Are any of the units studios? – (r) No, there will be eight two-bedroom units and two one-bedroom units.



- You said there will be less stormwater runoff but it seems like the building takes up more of the parcel. How is this possible? – (r) Much of the existing site is paved right now. The impermeable surface on the site will actually decrease and the landscaping will be increased as part of the project. We will also be dramatically reducing the amount of contaminants that are coming off of the site right now because so much of the site is currently paved.
- Have you thought about a green roof at all with the large flat roof you are proposing? – (r) No, we are not, but we do have decks and roof trellises and we are hoping that residents will put potted plants, planters, and the like out there.
- You are saying that the mechanical space will be located on the first floor but we do not see a dedicated space on the first floor for mechanical equipment. Can you explain this? – (r) I'm sorry, the basement is where we have the designated space for mechanical and electrical equipment, that is what we were referring to. There is also some additional substantial space on the first floor as well.
- Do you have any bike storage as part of the project? – (r) There is bike parking being proposed on the exterior of the building.
- What material is envisioned for the base material at the front of the building and the site walls that are surrounding the building? – (r) There will be PVC trim or PVC board there for both the base material and the walls.

Please take a look at a refined design and set up for the mechanical equipment for the building because when the details of this system get ironed out, this could greatly change the building massing and envelope. With a central air system you will have a very large chiller and if this has to be located outside of the building, it will greatly change the look of the structure.

The exaggerated cornices on the building seem a bit out of place and they seem to be counter to the modern aesthetic design of the building.

The trellises on the roof could be developed a bit more as their design is a bit ambiguous.

The front elevation of the building does not seem like a front and the idea of the two entrances seems redundant as you could probably centralize them. There does not seem to be a predominant front to the building with a sense of arrival or sense of frontage to the street. The front façade should have more hierarchy and prominence on Cedar Street.

We understand the use of the PVC and AZEK material at higher elevations of the building, but we question putting it down at the street front and on the lower portions of the building. A different material might work better at the lower levels of the structure and we recommend using brick for the perimeter site wall.

We are embracing the overall attitude of the project but the details need to be refined to clarify the bigger picture because this will affect the massing of the building. Specifically the front entryway and the main façade needs to be looked at again.

Using brick masonry on the front face of the wall at the base of the building and in the site wall may be desirable and advantageous to circle that entire environment with a constant material. The brick at the base of the building could potentially come up to the same datum as what the perimeter site wall is doing.

