



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

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

STAFF PRESENT

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*
ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

MEMBERS PRESENT

DEBORAH FENNICK
JIM KIRYLO
TANYA PAGLIA
FRANK VALDES

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, January 26, 2012**, at **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:

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

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

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 29, 2012

This was the second time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. At the previous meeting the Applicant had been asked to refine the design of the mechanical equipment for the building, to take a look at centralizing the first floor front entrance, refine the design of the trellises on the roof, and to examine some of the materials that would be used on the lower level of the building and in the site's perimeter wall. The mechanical engineer that was brought on board suggested a system with independent mechanical units that would be located on the roof.

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

- Can you show us where the Hardipanel and Hardisiding will be used on the building? – (r) It will be located along the base of the building and this will also be screened with the landscaping that will be put in place. The brick retaining wall at the front of the site will also screen this material as well.



- Can you please take us through your trash service? – (r) The trash will be located in an enclosure that is located at the rear of the site. A dumpster will be located inside this enclosure which will be surrounded by a six foot high fence and managed privately.
- Are you proposing anything with regard to sustainability for the building? – (r) We have not gotten that far yet but we will have efficient mechanical systems. We have not gotten into the makeup of the walls and items of that nature.
- Will Unit #2 be a fully handicap accessible unit and if so, we think you will need to take a look at the space inside the bathrooms of that unit? – (r) Yes, this will be our fully handicap accessible unit and we will confirm that the space inside the bathrooms is code compliant.

We think that you may be precluding handicapped people from renting the units on the upper level floors. We recommend that you speak with the Architectural Access Board to ensure that you do not need a common elevator inside the building.

With respect to the two entrances in addition to the central entrance, the additional entrances may not need to be entrances. Removing one of these doors will not make a difference with regard to the symmetry of the building as there is enough already. Functionally you may need one of the extra doors, but if replacing the other second door with a window and landscaping provides a better street presence for the building, you should go for it.

181 Cedar Street (Case # ZBA 2012-05)

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

Description: Applicant and Owner 181 Cedar Street, LLC, seeks a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.3 to construct six dwelling units and a Variance under SZO §5.5 from the parking requirements of SZO §9.5 for relief from four required off-street parking spaces. RB zone. Ward 5.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: February 29, 2012

This was the first time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. The site is the former location of the Royal White retail store. The Applicant is proposing six residential units and six surface parking spaces located at the rear of the building, which is four spaces below what is required in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The Applicant is currently working on generating a parking and traffic study for the area with regard to the requested parking variance for the four spaces.

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

- What are you proposing for the materials of the trim and siding? – (r) The siding and trim are proposed to be Hardiboard.
- Is the awning over the entrance proposed to be metal? – (r) Yes, we are proposing a metal awning over the main entrance.
- What material is being proposed for the decks? – (r) Pressure treated wood.

We are not supportive of a metal awning over the main entrance and we encourage you revisit the design and material of this awning. Please also explore a different color for the awning as well. Currently the awning looks like an add-on to the elevation and the red color does not fit in well with the rest of the design for the project.



The design of the main entrance also seems to be a bit weak, too commercial, and could be revisited. In revisiting the architecture of the main entrance, you can strengthen the awning without making it a bold color. Less glass around the entry door and more glass for the windows above would be helpful in the overall design.

The decks on the side of the building feel like add-ons, fire escapes almost, and seem to be contrasting with the rest of the design of the building. The architecture and design of these decks needs to be thought through more and looked at again. More surface on the front and/or back of the decks to provide more privacy would be helpful. Please look at potentially using cedar for the decks or some other type of material that looks more finished.

The proportion between the top and the bottom is too equivalent and makes it feel out of scale. Please examine taking the taupe color material up to the underside of the third floor windows. The third story windows could even rest on the division to the lower level to capture them even more.

The horizontal windows on the building seem a bit utilitarian. Please take a look at redesigning them, especially those in the center portion of the building which will help to reinforce the main entry and give it more prominence. A bigger expression of light would be preferred.

Please take a look at refining the mechanical system setup for the building and working out the details of the trash system for the project as well. How many trash bins will there be, who will take them out, and how will the trash bins get up to the surface level are all questions that need to be clarified.

Please take a look at another design for the ramp and railing at the front of the building. The ramp is very inelegant, not designed, and feels like an add-on, just like the decks. A brick wall, a concrete wall, or some type of trellis could be implemented here to embrace this aspect of the project more.

Please take a look at adding bicycle parking to the project site as a practical matter because it is so close to the bike path.

Developing a landscape plan would be helpful to further refine the site layout with regard to the parking, bicycle parking, and the trash and mechanical system layouts.

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

Review of changes since the last DRC meeting where the Applicant presented. The Applicant has decided to make modifications to the design before presenting the project to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

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: February 15, 2012

This was the third time the project had come before the Design Review Committee and the Applicant wanted to present some design changes before going in front of the Zoning Board of Appeals. As part of the design revisions they had removed the concrete block wall on Elmwood Street where the existing garage door is located and implemented a much more residential façade. In addition, they moved the



façade one foot back from the streetscape and removed the portion of the block wall that enclosed the rear yard area to one of the units, which helped to open up the site lines down Elmwood Street.

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

- How will you handle stepping down the high wall on the south side of the project as it transitions to Elmwood Street? – (r) We will be stepping down the wall as it approaches Elmwood Street and we have added some openings in the wall as well. The direct neighbor on that side did not want us to pull the wall down entirely.
- Is the existing height of the block wall going to be retained? – (r) Yes, except for the portion that will be stepped down near the Elmwood Street streetscape.
- Will there be a screen or something that will help cap the end portion of the wall where it will stop? – (r) There will be some vegetation, shrubs, and heavy plantings in this area to create some privacy for this space for the unit owners.
- How will the trash be handled at the site? – (r) Each individual unit will be required to handle their own barrels. For Building 4, the barrels will be stored in the inlets and hallways between the structures. For Building 3, the barrels will be stored by the cars and in an open room that is slated for mechanical equipment. For Building 2 the trash barrels will be stored along the walkway back into the project or back around where the parked cars are located. The trash pickup will be public and therefore the barrels will be brought to Cameron Avenue and Elmwood Street for pick up (it was later deemed that for a project of this size, the trash pick up would actually be required to be done through a private service).
- Do the units have basements? – (r) None of the units have basements.
- How will the units be cooled/air conditioned? – (r) Each of the units will be mechanically zoned for the climate control. All of the condensers for the units will be located on the roof.
- Where will the hot water heater and the heating component for each unit be located? – (r) They are located in the flex space on the top floor of each unit. Condensing units will be located on the roof of each structure.
- Are you required to have a transformer for this project? – (r) Actually, if we go with a three phase service for this project, we will not need a transformer.
- Are you seeking LEED certification? – (r) We are, we are seeking silver or gold certification status.

Implementing some type of plantings, screening, or fencing would help to provide privacy and soften the end of the south wall as it meets Elmwood Street. Perhaps even moving this proposed screening back an additional two to three feet off of the streetscape would help to provide a more private space to the residents of the unit while still opening up the streetscape for the public.

Please give additional thought to the trash storage and pick up plan as well as to where the mechanical units, including condensers, will be located for the project.

Please also give additional thought to where the gas and electrical meters for the project will be located.



5 Tower Court

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

Description: Applicant seeks Special Permits under SZO §7.11.1.c and §4.4.1 to convert an existing two-family dwelling to a four-family dwelling with associated parking. RC zone. Ward 2.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: TBD

This was the second time the project had come before the Design Review Committee and the Applicant was looking for additional direction with regard to the design of the project before they applied for their necessary Special Permits. The existing structure is a two-family dwelling to which the Applicant would like to add two dwelling units to create a four-family structure at the corner of Tower Court and Tyler Street.

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

- Will you be retaining the entire existing building? – (r) Yes, the existing building will be incorporated into the new project design.
- Where are the egresses for Units #2, #3, and #4? – (r) The egresses for these units are all out the back of the structure to the proposed driveway and parking area.

The façade along Tower Court needs another window on the right side of the entrance to Unit #4 to provide symmetry on this façade.

The massing of the bays that are closer to the street on the Tower Court façade seem like they have a very awkward relationship with the rest of the building. Showing this façade in a 3D or perspective view would help to provide us a better understanding of this element of the design, which is a critical design component to the project.

The bay windows, or two-story cantilevers, on either side of the doors to Unit #3 and #4 are awkward. These bump outs need to be reworked or removed in some places to make the design work better. This bay element is not equivalent and needs to be reworked. The windows in this area need to come up higher on the façade.

The double roof line to the right of the entrances on Tower Court needs to be looked at again and reworked.

Perhaps the roof line connecting the new and old structure could be reworked to create more of a separation between the old and the new construction.

The stairs off of Tyler Street are really high and could be reworked. Perhaps a deck or landing could be worked in at the top of the stairs or into the design of the stairs at some point.

Please also take a look at potentially pulling up the grade along Tower Court to help some of the façade elements on this side of the structure.

It feels as if there is a lot of pavement at this site and some of the pavement in the driveway/parking area seems like it is not needed. Perhaps inverted grass pavers could be used in the permeable pavement areas indicated on the plans.



It would be helpful to have more fully developed plans the next time you come before the Committee, including floor plans and 3D drawings, to see how the organization, egress, and entry components of all four of the units work.

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

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

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 project was not heard at this meeting as the development team decided to meet with the Design Review Committee at a later date once they had refined their design further.

