



**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*  
DAN BARTMAN, *SENIOR PLANNER*

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

DEBORAH FENNICK  
JIM KIRYLO  
TANYA PAGLIA  
MATT RICE  
FRANK VALDES

**RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES**

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, March 22, 2012**, at **6:30 p.m.** in City Hall, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

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

**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 third time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. The Applicant took a look at trying to put the entrances to the structure on Tyler Street, but with the garages being underneath the building and the required 15 foot front yard setback here, there was just not enough room to locate the entrances there. However, Tyler Street will still be declared the “front” of the project and have the required front setback of 15 feet, but there will be no entrances on this side of the building. All four of the entrances to the units will be located on Tower Court and they will all have rear egresses out the back of the building to the parking area. Only units #3 and #4 will have direct access to the garage spaces. The building is now less complicated than the last rendition of the project. The floor levels of the proposed addition are different from the floor levels in the existing building because of the garage spaces underneath the addition. The Applicant will be investigating soil and drainage conditions at the property to see if they can install some pavers for the driveway and maneuvering area behind the building.

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

- So there are two lots that are actually being combined here? The existing structure sits on just one lot currently, but the addition would stretch over to include the adjacent lot? – (r) Yes, that is



correct. The adjacent lot has no structure on it right now and is currently overgrown with vegetation.

- How many units will the new addition contain? – (r) The existing structure is a two-family dwelling and this project will be adding two additional units to the site for a total of four units at the property.
- Is the existing structure going to be recladded with the same siding that will be on the new structure and if so, what will that material be? – (r) Yes, that is correct. The entire structure, the existing building and the proposed addition, will all be sided with new four inch and six inch clapboard and probably Hardiplank as well.
- The drawings are showing a craftsman style look for the windows and doors. Is this how the detailing will actually look? – (r) Yes, we are proposing the windows will be a two over one style, but we are open to changes and comments on these as well.
- Do you know what size trees you will be planting along the Tyler Street elevation? – (r) We are not totally sure but because there is a six foot fence along the side of the property that abuts the parking lot, we do want to install heaving landscaping on the Tyler Street elevation. There will also be trellises installed on this elevation of the building from the large trim board downward to encourage vegetation to grow on this elevation and we are thinking of using Princeton Elms for the trees on this side of the project.
- Can you please describe the fencing that you are proposing for the project? – (r) We are proposing a 30 inch high wood picket fence with granite posts on the front and side yards of the project. A six foot high wood fence would be located at the rear of the property.
- Can you please elaborate on the lattice work that will be affixed to the building? – (r) This would be wood trellis that would be attached directly to the structure with Virgins Bauer vines proposed to grow up the trellis.

There have been big improvements from the last two meetings and while the project does look massive on the site, it does seem to fit into the neighborhood. Removing the Tyler Street entrance and locating all of the main entrances off of Tower Court is an improvement to the overall design.

The large trees and landscaping along the Tyler Street elevation will be helpful because without the trees, the project will seem a bit massive on this elevation.

Overall, a nice job has been done incorporating the comments that the Committee has given to you at previous meetings. The Committee would like to see consistent materials, roofing, and windows across the entire structure when the project is completed so the building becomes one cohesive design.

The Committee would like to see pavers, perhaps even grass pavers, incorporated into the parking and maneuvering area behind the structure in the final product.

### **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:** April 4, 2012



This was the third time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. The handicap accessible ramp was turned into a wood structure, much the same way as the decks would be, using a trex decking and a wood frame. The main entryway to the building would now be wood as well. Lattice work has been implemented in voids below the stairs, ramp, and decks. The building was pushed back one foot off of the street front but there is still room for landscaping on the rear elevation of the structure. Doing this allowed the front entry of the design to be popped out to create a more defined entry effect. The roof above the entry was brought down and a dormer was created on the third level. On the side elevations the decks have been recessed and unified around the main dormer that is on each side of the building.

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

- What material is the railing going to be on the handicap ramp? – (r) That would be metal. It really has to be metal to hold up to the ramp requirements. By creating a big bollard and painting it a lighter color we are trying to create that edge to conceal the railing. The railings will be painted black to help them recede and the bollards will be painted white to help them project forward.
- Was the intent to try to match the post elements of the decks and the bollards of the ramp so that the bollards seem less out of place? – (r) Yes, that is correct.
- Have the horizontal windows been modified at all for the kitchen? – (r) The windows have been grouped together into more of a composition, whereas before they were more scattered. The dining room windows to the left and right have also been overemphasized by increasing their height and adding additional moldings. This creates a more abstract pattern around the center and then a more traditional pattern out at the ends.
- Is the main entrance set back at all from the two main structures on either side? – (r) The main entryway is actually projecting out one foot towards the street.
- In this proposed design, there would not be any canopy over the main entrance? – (r) Yes, that is correct.
- What is the material of the railings on the decks? – (r) They will be some type of carpentry type material such as wood or ASROC.
- Would the trim on the building be an Azek material? – (r) No, it will most likely be a PVC material.

The bollards on the handicap ramp and the posts on the decks could have the same cap (or no cap) so that they match one another and tie together. The ramp and the space between the bollards of the ramp need to be made integral to the rest of the design of the building.

The dormer above the main entryway may be trying to do too much in that small space, seems like an odd proportion, and it may be just as successful to keep the pitched roof in that area heading back to the valley between the two roof peaks. Removing this dormer entirely would be preferable, but perhaps a skylight could be implemented here.

The change in the material and color from the upper portion of the front façade to the lower portion is too much and it would be preferable if the color of this area could be simplified. Further, the white color and/or material could be brought into the side projections to bring additional uniformity to the design.



The mullions in the windows feel very foreign and it seems odd that there are three different window types in this design. It would be preferable to divide the rectangular windows into two square windows to have all the project's windows be the same style and operation.

The porches on the sides of the building still feel like they are just added on to the structure and not integrated into the design. The Committee would like to see the construction of the decks be more consistent with the architecture of the entire building. The railings of the porches do not permit much privacy on the decks and it would be preferable to have some type of solid screening for these railings.

It would be beneficial to carry the landscaping of the project around to the Cedar Street/Warwick Street corner, specifically adding a large, substantial tree at this corner would be helpful to screen the decks somewhat.

The address numbering on the front of the building seems very prominent and it would be preferable if this was scaled down to be a smaller font size.

The Committee had asked at a previous DRC meeting for the Applicant to not use lattice underneath the base of the decks. A low solid piece of material, something that is more refined such as vertical gap boards, would work better here to fill in the space between the decking and the ground. This treatment should also be applied to the vertical gaps between the main entry ramp and stairs for consistency.

The Committee would like to see a condition added to the Special Permit that the Applicant be required to come back to the Committee with material samples for review and comment before a building permit is issued for the project. It is requested to be noted in that condition that the Applicant present material samples prior to procurement so that the Committee's input can be incorporated without the burden of the input being cost prohibitive. It is noted that the request for material samples was made during the second time the Applicant came before the Committee, and the Applicant was non-responsive to this request at the time of the third meeting.

### **57 Pitman Street**

Secondary review of project before it goes before the Zoning Board of Appeals.

**Description:** Applicant and Owner Pitman Property Group, LLC, seeks a Special Permit under SZO §7.11.1.c to establish a five unit residential use and associated parking. BA zone. Ward 3.

**SPGA:** Zoning Board of Appeals

**Hearing Date:** April 4, 2012

This was the second time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. The existing project site consists of a two-story concrete building that is used as a garage and there is a large rock outcropping and stone wall at the back of the property. The project had previously been presented as a four story, seven unit building and it was felt that this was a little tight for this size of a site. The project now being proposed is a three story, five unit building with the driveway on the side of the lot as opposed to through the building (as was originally proposed). The building has been pulled closer to the street, right up to the front property line. There will be granite planters along the front of the building, vegetation around the proposed transformer site, a feature strip of landscaping along the driveway, and a dumpster and snow removal area in the back with snow tolerant plants. The design of this project is attempting to relate to the one that was approved down the street. Each unit would have a roof deck and the head houses that access these spaces would be fairly transparent to help protect the views from the buildings on Belmont Terrace.



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

- Is there a sidewalk being proposed as part of this project? – (r) No, there would be no sidewalk. The building would be right up against the public right-of-way.
- Are those existing stone walls? – (r) Yes, the entire back of the site is an existing stone wall.
- Will there be condensers on the roof? – (r) Yes, there will be five condensers on the roof for sure and perhaps up to seven as two of the units might require two condensers. The condensers would be located towards the back of the roof just off the edges of the decks. There is really no place for the condensers on the ground with the tightness of the site.

The entries off the street to each unit seem too tight to be credible as entries and eliminating the piers between the doors would help to make these entries less tight.

Implementing pavers, perhaps even pervious ones, along the northern edge of the driveway would be preferable as it would improve the view of what you can see from the roof decks, and perhaps it would even help drainage at the site.

With regard to the heavy, ornate cornice along the top of the building, it seems strange that the exact same depth and weight is being used on the towers as the area between them. Toning down this area between the towers would be beneficial to the look of the design.

Making the windows on right side of the third floor of the front elevation double loaded, as they are on the rest of the front of the building, would help to bring continuity to the design of the entire front elevation.

It would be preferable to locate the condensers on the roof in front of the penthouses (towards the street) and to have them screened to reduce their visibility.

