



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

PLANNING DIVISION

STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*

LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*

ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

Case #: ZBA 2011-61

Date: September 15, 2011

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Applicant and Property Owner Name: Kelly Liu

Applicant and Property Owner Address: 79 Hoitt Road, Belmont, MA 02478

Alderman: Maryann Heuston

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner Kelly Liu seeks a special permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to construct dormers on an existing two-family residence. RB zone. Ward 2.¹

Zoning District/Ward: RB Zone / Ward 2

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1

Date of Application: August 9, 2011

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – **September 21, 2011**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 3,412 square foot lot with two-family residence situated on it near the intersection of Marion Street and Adrian Street. The structure has 2,108 square feet of habitable space. The residence is 2½ stories with a gable roof, not including the basement level.

2. Proposal: The Applicant had received a building permit to construct a full bathroom on the third floor of the dwelling. Upon a preliminary inspection at the site, it was determined that the stairway leading up to the third floor needed to be brought into compliance with regard to the proper head room. To achieve this, the Applicant is proposing to construct a 15 foot long shed dormer on the left side of the existing two-family structure. The dormer would contain three windows that are 3 1/3 feet tall spaced across the façade of the dormer. The dormer would come directly off the peak of the roof at a 16 degree angle and leave only a small portion of the roof surface between the bottom of the dormer and the edge of

¹ Please note that the legal advertisement above is what was originally noticed for this case. Since that time, the Applicant has scaled their project back and is now only proposing one dormer on the left (west) side of the structure.



the roof. There would be a 5 foot length of roof surface from the side of the dormer to the front of the structure and a 14 foot length from the dormer to the rear of the structure. Internally, the shed dormer would allow for the proper head height in the stairwell and also allow for full doors to be installed for the two bedrooms on the third floor. Currently the top corner of each of the doors is cut off to accommodate for the slope of the roof.

3. Nature of Application: This is a residential property within a RB district. The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to the maximum ground coverage, landscaped area, and the front and left side yard setbacks. The existing left side yard setback nonconformity requires the Applicant to obtain a special permit under Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.4.1 to construct the proposed dormer. The Applicant is seeking a special permit to alter a nonconforming structure to construct a dormer on the left side of an existing two-family residence.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: This property is located in a RB district. The structures in the surrounding neighborhood consist predominantly of a mixture of two-, and three-family dwellings, with some single- and multi-family structures in the area, all of which are between 2½ and 3 stories. Lincoln Park sits just to the north off of Lincoln Parkway.

5. Impacts of Proposal: Large shed dormers can greatly alter the appearance of 2½ story houses which make up much of the fabric of the City. The Applicant was originally proposing to construct shed dormers on both sides of the existing structure. After conversations with Planning Staff it was determined that the Applicant could meet the space requirements inside the existing structure with just one 15 foot long shed dormer on the left side of the existing structure. The structure's roof is 34 feet long from front to back and therefore the proposed dormer would take up 44% of the roof length. The dormer itself will be 7.5 feet high with 3 windows on its façade. The shed style dormer coming off the peak of the roof will allow for the necessary head room in the stairwell and will still allow for there to be some pitch to the roof of the dormer. The proposed dormer design, while not entirely preferable to Planning Staff, will not substantially alter the look and design of the existing structure as the important essential massing will be retained. The proposed dormer will look out onto the roof of the property directly adjacent to the west. As there are no windows on the third story of the neighboring structure, no privacy concerns should arise from this project. Additionally, because of the close proximity of the dwellings along Adrian Street, any additional shadow that may be cast from the new dormer would not greatly impact the neighbors in the surrounding area. Therefore, minimal impacts to the abutters and the surrounding neighborhood are anticipated from the proposed project.

6. Green Building Practices: None indicated.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Has been contacted and their comments are reflected in the conditions below.

Ward Alderman: Alderman Heuston has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Historic Preservation: Please see the attached memorandum from Preservation Planner Kristi Chase.



Existing Conditions

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1, 5.1):

In order to grant a special permit, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.1.4 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.1.4 in detail.

1. Information Supplied: The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.1.2 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project with respect to the required Special Permits.
2. Compliance with Standards: The Applicant must comply "with such criteria or standards as may be set forth in this Ordinance which refer to the granting of the requested special permit."

In considering a special permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff find that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The proposed dormer design, while not entirely preferable to Planning Staff, will not substantially alter the look and design of the existing structure as the important essential massing will be retained. The proposed dormer will look out onto the roof of the property directly adjacent to the west. As there are no windows on the third story of the neighboring structure, no privacy concerns should arise from this project. Additionally, because of the close proximity of the dwellings along Adrian Street, any additional shadow that may be cast from the new dormer would not greatly impact the neighbors in the surrounding area.

3. Consistency with Purposes: The Applicant has to ensure that the project "is consistent with (1) the general purposes of this Ordinance as set forth in Article 1, and (2) the purposes, provisions, and specific objectives applicable to the requested special permit which may be set forth elsewhere in this Ordinance, such as, but not limited to, those purposes at the beginning of the various Articles."

The proposal is consistent with the general purposes of the Ordinance as set forth under §1.2, which includes, but is not limited to promoting "the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants of the City of Somerville; to provide for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to provide adequate light and air; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to encourage housing for persons of all income levels."

The proposal is also consistent with the purpose of the district (6.1.2. RB - Residence Districts), which is, "To establish and preserve medium density neighborhoods of one-, two- and three-family homes, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such districts."

4. Site and Area Compatibility: The Applicant has to ensure that the project "(i)s designed in a manner that is compatible with the characteristics of the built and unbuilt surrounding area, including land uses."

Staff is generally concerned when larger shed dormers are proposed because they can greatly alter the appearance of 2½ story houses which make up much of the fabric of the City. The Applicant was originally proposing to construct shed dormers on both sides of the existing structure. After conversations with Planning Staff it was determined that the Applicant could meet the space requirements inside the existing structure with just one 15 foot long shed dormer on the left side of the existing structure. The dormer itself will be 7.5 feet high with 3 windows and will come directly off the peak of the roof. While Planning Staff would prefer to see a different style of dormer or to have the dormer stepped off of the roof peak, the required head height in the stairwell and structural concerns about a dormer that does not come directly off the peak of the roof dictated the design that is before the Board. Other dormer designs such as a gable or hipped dormer may not provide the necessary head room in the stairwell for building code or would be entirely out of context with the design of the existing structure because the necessary roof pitch on those dormer designs would be extremely shallow and this would not be in line with the pitch of the existing roof. There are other structures on Adrian Street and in the surrounding neighborhood that have both small and large shed dormers on them and this project fits into the context of the existing neighborhood. The property will remain a 2½ story, two-family residential use which is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood.

5. Adverse environmental impacts: The proposed use, structure or activity will not constitute an adverse impact on the surrounding area resulting from: 1) excessive noise, level of illumination, glare, dust, smoke, or vibration which are higher than levels now experienced from uses permitted in the surrounding area; 2) emission of noxious or hazardous materials or substances; 3) pollution of water ways or ground water; or 4) transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception.

The Applicant is proposing to construct a 15 foot long by 7.5 foot high shed dormer on the left side of the existing structure and there are no anticipated adverse environmental impacts from this proposal. No new noise, glare, smoke, vibration, nor emissions of noxious materials, nor pollution of water ways or ground water, nor transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception are anticipated as part of the proposal. The structure will remain a 2½ story, two-family dwelling and will continue to be used for residential purposes.

III. RECOMMENDATION

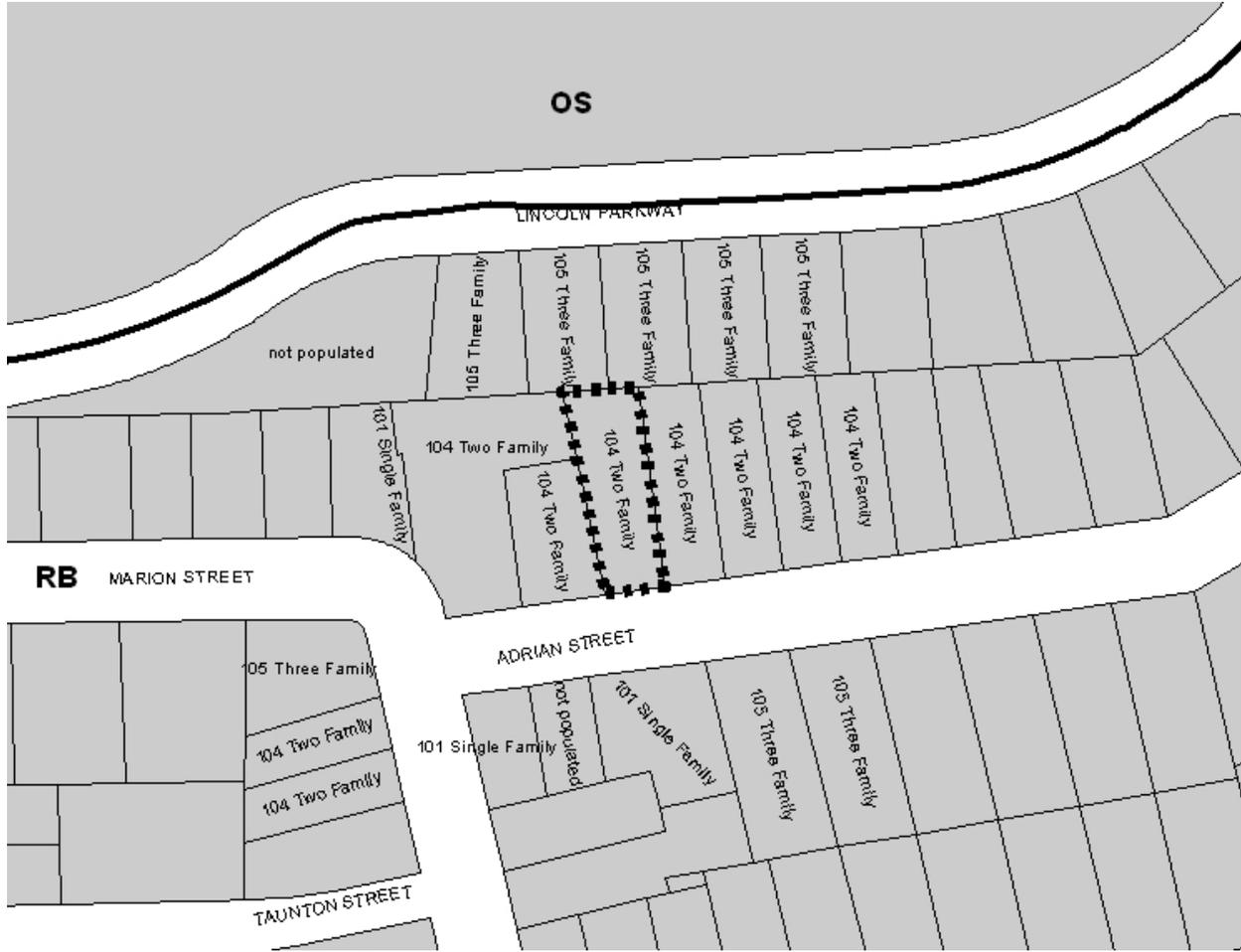
Special Permit under §4.4.1, 5.1

Based on the above findings and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**.

The recommendation is based upon a technical analysis by Planning Staff of the application material based upon the required findings of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and is based only upon information submitted prior to the public hearing. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations, findings and/or conditions based upon additional information provided to the Planning Staff during the public hearing process.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes										
1	Approval is to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a dormer on the left (west) side an existing two-family residence. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.											
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>(August 9, 2011)</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>August 16, 2011 (September 8, 2011)</td> <td>Plot Plan</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(September 8, 2011)</td> <td>Plans submitted with Application (Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(September 13, 2011)</td> <td>Section of Proposed Dormer</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(August 9, 2011)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	August 16, 2011 (September 8, 2011)	Plot Plan	(September 8, 2011)	Plans submitted with Application (Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations)	(September 13, 2011)	Section of Proposed Dormer
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(September 13, 2011)	Section of Proposed Dormer													
Any changes to the approved site plans, elevations, or use that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.														
2	The Applicant shall update the fire alarm system to be code compliant	CO	FP											
3	The Applicant shall submit window and trim detail samples to Planning Staff for review and approval.	BP	Plng.											
4	The Applicant shall submit an elevation drawing indicating the width and spacing of the proposed windows on the dormer for Planning Staff review and approval.	BP	Plng.											
5	New siding type and color, roofing, trim, and materials of the dormer shall match or be complimentary to the rest of the existing structure.	CO	Plng.											

6	All construction materials and equipment must be stored onsite. If occupancy of the street layout is required, such occupancy must be in conformance with the requirements of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and the prior approval of the Traffic and Parking Department must be obtained.	During Construction	T&P	
7	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five working days in advance of a request for a final inspection by Inspectional Services to ensure the proposal was constructed in accordance with the plans and information submitted and the conditions attached to this approval.	Final Sign Off	Plng.	



39 Adrian Street

To: Planning Division
From: Kristi Chase, Preservation Planner, and
Brandon Wilson, Executive Director
RE: Staff Recommendations for September 13, 2011

HPC 11.93 – 39 Adrian Street

Applicant: Kelly Liu

Historic and Architectural Significance

The house was constructed between 1884 and 1895 on the edge of what is now Lincoln Park, abutting land that once belonged to Daniel A. Sanborn. The house has little architectural detail remaining. The enclosed second floor porch appears to float above the entry. Vinyl siding makes it difficult to assess any architectural merit although the building retains a traditional gable end to the street, side hall entry plan configuration.



Recommendations

The proposed shed dormer will be located on the west side of the building. The important essentially massing will be retained. The dormer style is one that is familiar although neither of the abutting properties has a similar dormer. The design of the proposed dormer does not appear to be thoroughly thought out and the currently proposed fenestration is conceptual. Care should be taken to ensure that the details that still currently exist on the house are carried over onto the new addition.