



**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*

DAN BARTMAN, *SENIOR PLANNER*

ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

**Case #:** PB 2012-05

**Date:** March 29, 2012

**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

---

**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

---

**Site:** 149-153 Broadway

**Applicant Name:** Trustees of the College Avenue Methodist Church of Somerville

**Applicant Address:** 149 Broadway, Somerville MA 02145

**Property Owner Name:** Trustees of the College Avenue Methodist Church of Somerville

**Property Owner Address:** 149 Broadway, Somerville MA 02145

**Agent Name:** Adam Dash, Esq.

**Agent Address:** 48 Grove St, Suite 304, Somerville, MA 02144

**Alderman:** William Roche

Legal Notice: Applicant/Owner Trustees of the College Avenue Methodist Church of Somerville seeks a Special Permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5 to alter the structure and install signage for a by-right religious institution.

Zoning District/Ward: CCD 45 / 1

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit

Date of Application: March 6, 2012

Dates of Public Hearing: Planning Board April 5, 2012

---

**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The property is a one-story building that spans two parcels deep along Broadway in East Somerville. The building covers the majority of the lot and there is no landscaping or parking on-site. The Mudflat Pottery School was the last use of the building. The current owners will use the building as a church. There are currently 25 congregants with the church. The church was previously located at 14 Chapel Street and temporarily moved to the Unity Church of God at 6 William St. The services will be held on Sunday mornings and there will be events on other days as is typical for a church.



**CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143**  
**(617) 625-6600 EXT. 2500 • TTY: (617) 666-0001 • FAX: (617) 625-0722**

[www.somervillema.gov](http://www.somervillema.gov)



2. Proposal: The proposal includes altering the front façade of the building, closing up the rear windows with brick veneer, closing up vents on the right side of the building, and changing the location of existing skylights.

The façade of the building will be substantially altered from its current state. The front wall will primarily be an aluminum storefront system. The top portion of the building will be simulated stone panels with church signage located on the stone panels. The signage will consist of individual letters affixed to the panels. There will be a translucent polycarbonate and aluminum canopy over the door and brushed aluminum can light fixtures along the length of the building. The front wall of the structure is currently angled towards the front door and the proposal includes flattening it out and setting it back from the sidewalk. This change to the front wall will not change the square footage of the building. Also, the basement of the building will remain unfinished.



149-153 Broadway: (top left) existing front façade, (top right) close up of front façade, (bottom left) rear of building visible from Minnesota Ave, (bottom right) side of the building visible from Wisconsin Ave.



3. Nature of Application: The property is located in the Corridor Commercial District 45 (CCD 45). Alterations to an existing or approved façade other than a one-for-one replacement require a special permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5 with findings giving consideration to the Design Guidelines of SZO §6.1.22.H.

The use of the property is a protected use and therefore a by-right use under State Law and the local SZO §7.13.J – Protected Use Cluster.

No additional parking is required because the floor area of this non-residential use is not increasing from the previous use.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding neighborhood is primarily commercial establishments along Broadway and residential behind the site. The direct abutters to the property are residential and a restaurant.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The façade alterations will greatly improve the appearance of the building that currently has metal bars across it. Filling in windows that are on property lines abutting residential properties will likely be seen by the neighbors as beneficial because it will increase the privacy of their yards. The Applicants stated that the work to the windows can be conducted without removing or disturbing the fence that a neighbor has installed along the rear property line. View of the sides and rear of the building are very limited from the public right of way and therefore filling in the windows will not alter the appearance of the building greatly for passersby.

6. Green Building Practices: A new HVAC equipment will be installed that is more fuel efficient than the last system.

7. Comments:

*Fire Prevention:* Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

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

*Wiring Inspector:* The plans do not include electrical information. The Applicants will need to apply for a electrical demo permit and submit electrical drawings when applying for building permit. The service at the site has several existing violations.

## **II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1 & §6.1.22.D.5):**

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."

The proposal complies with the development standards in the CCD.

1. **Penthouse and Mechanical Equipment.** The HVAC unit will be located on the middle of the roof so that it is not visible from the ground.
2. **Service Areas and Loading Spaces.** There are no loading docks on the building and none will be added. There will be a trash room located in the building.
3. **Pedestrian Oriented Requirement.** The building has been designed to promote pedestrian activity. The entrance to the space will be directly from the Broadway sidewalk. Also, the removal of the

metal bars across the front wall and replacement of the storefront window systems along the front façade will create interest for pedestrians.

4. Lighting. The proposal includes four lighting fixtures along the front wall of the building that will illuminate the sidewalk and be pedestrian-oriented in character.
  5. Transition to Abutting Residential District. The rear of the building abuts a Residence A zoning district and the building is located on the property line. The building is nonconforming because it is not setback 20 feet from the district line. The building is not proposed to change; however, the windows along the side and rear property lines will be filled in which should increase the privacy of the abutting residential properties.
  6. Parking Design. There is no parking on the site and no parking is proposed.
  7. Payment in Lieu of Parking. Payment in lieu of parking is not applicable to this application. Since the square footage of the building is not increasing, no additional parking beyond that which exists onsite is required.
  8. Credit for Provisions of Land for Public Infrastructure. Not applicable.
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 providing for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City and the purpose of the CCD by promoting an active mix of uses with structures that complement the historic structures in the area.

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."

The sign design complies with the design guideline for signage in the CCD (§6.1.22.H).

1. The building completes the streetwall and will continue to complete the street wall after the proposed renovations.
2. The height of the one-story structure will not change. The change to the orientation of the front main wall will be compatible with the storefront appearance of many commercial properties along Broadway.
3. The height of the building is one-story. The project design is not proposing to alter the height of the existing structure and therefore a transition to residential or historically designated properties is not applicable.
4. The Applicant will be maintaining the existing width of the building, which is approximately 40 feet. The front of the façade will be recessed creating some varied architecture from the abutting properties. The proposed storefront system would meet the guideline which states that there should be 75% transparent material on the ground floor. The windows will provide views into a lounge area and should

not be blocked by interior storage, displays, or signage. The guideline limits windows from being blocked by more than 30%.

5. The proposed building materials, including aluminum storefront, simulated stone panels, brick and translucent polycarbonate and aluminum for the canopy, will be high quality, durable and aesthetically appropriate. The variety of materials will create an interesting façade. The existing brick façade is in disrepair and although Staff would encourage the restoration of the brick, the proposed materials are appropriate for the area and will not be covering a façade with great detailing.
  6. A sample of the masonry veneer proposed to infill the windows should be reviewed and approved by Planning Staff to ensure that it will be a quality material that will be complementary to the existing brick.
  7. The proposed signage design respects the building's context by placing the name of the church in the middle of the signage band that the simulated stone panels create, which is at the same height as the abutting restaurant's signage. The awning will bring prominence to the entrance and respect the building's context in terms of its scale, design and materials. The sign is legible and does not have excessive wording. The sign will be lit by the aluminum can light fixtures on the façade that will not be excessive in nature.
  8. The façade was designed to be pedestrian-oriented with a storefront system and a lounge area at the front of the church so that it is an inviting space. This is an unusual form for a church and it is commendable and meets the guideline for pedestrian-oriented uses on the ground floor in this district.
- 9./10. Artist Live/Work Spaces and residential unit size do not relate to this proposal.
11. The Applicant will be essentially increasing the sidewalk by almost four feet by reorienting the front façade of the building.

**III. RECOMMENDATION**

**Special Permit under §5.1 & §6.1.22.D.5**

Based on the materials submitted by the Applicant, 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	<p>Approval is for the alteration of the structure and installation of signage for a by-right religious institution. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Mar 6, 2012</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mar 5, 2012</td> <td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (A1.0 basement floor plan, A1.1 main floor plan, A1.3 proposed roof plan, A2.0 &amp; A2.1 elevations, D1.0, D1.1, D1.3, D2.0 demo plans, C1.0 site plan)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Any changes to the approved site plan or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.</p>	Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	Mar 6, 2012	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	Mar 5, 2012	Plans submitted to OSPCD (A1.0 basement floor plan, A1.1 main floor plan, A1.3 proposed roof plan, A2.0 & A2.1 elevations, D1.0, D1.1, D1.3, D2.0 demo plans, C1.0 site plan)	BP/CO	ISD/PIng.	
Date (Stamp Date)	Submission									
Mar 6, 2012	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office									
Mar 5, 2012	Plans submitted to OSPCD (A1.0 basement floor plan, A1.1 main floor plan, A1.3 proposed roof plan, A2.0 & A2.1 elevations, D1.0, D1.1, D1.3, D2.0 demo plans, C1.0 site plan)									
2	The Applicant shall provide a material sample of the brick veneer for Planning Staff review and approval to ensure that it is consistent with/complementary to the existing brick on the façade.	BP	PIng.							
3	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP							
4	The Applicants shall apply for an electrical demo permit and submit electrical drawings when applying for building permit.	BP	Wiring Inspector							

5	The Applicant shall at his expense replace any existing equipment (including, but not limited to street sign poles, signs, traffic signal poles, traffic signal equipment, wheel chair ramps, granite curbing, etc) and the entire sidewalk immediately abutting the subject property if damaged as a result of construction activity. All new sidewalks and driveways must be constructed to DPW standard.	CO	DPW	
6	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.	

