



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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PLANNING DIVISION

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Case #: ZBA 2011-56

Date: July 28, 2011

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 27 Oxford Street

Applicant and Property Owner Name: Georg Lauer

Applicant and Property Owner Address: 17 Linden Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143

Agent Name: Ben Dryer

Agent Address: 11 Olive Square, Somerville, MA 02143

Alderman: Tom Taylor

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, Georg Lauer, seeks a special permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to reduce the rear of the structure to one story, construct an approximately 500 gross square foot addition in the rear, and alter window openings on the façades of an existing single-family residence. RA zone. Ward 3.

Zoning District/Ward: RA Zone / Ward 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1

Date of Application: July 5, 2011

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals **8/3/11**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 9,416 square foot lot with a single-family residence situated on it near the intersection of Oxford Street and School Street. The structure currently has 1,640 square feet of habitable space and is 2 stories high, not including the basement level, with a gable roof.
2. Proposal: The Applicant would like to make substantial renovations to the residence at 27 Oxford Street. As part of these renovations, the Applicant is proposing to reduce the rear portion of the structure to one story, add on to the rear of the structure towards the center of the lot, and alter the fenestration on the façades of the existing structure. The front door of the dwelling would be moved around to the right side and three new windows on the front would replace the existing picture and double-



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hung windows. The right side of the existing structure would also have new, larger windows installed along with the new entryway and associated entrance steps. The left side would continue to only have one window but it would now be located on the second story towards the front of the structure. The existing structure would also be re-sided with untreated cedar boards that will weather the color silver to replace the existing asbestos shingles and plywood. The rear addition would consist of metal siding, large windows, six skylights, and a wood deck cover by a large overhang. Most of this proposed addition would be as-of-right construction. Furthermore, as part of the overall project, an existing old wood shed, koi pond, and concrete patio in the rear of the property would all be demolished and the large amount of asphalt on the property would be removed and turned into green space.

These renovations will facilitate interior changes to the existing structure which will entirely rework the existing layout of the dwelling. The central portion of the first floor will become the entry area for the dwelling with stairs to the second floor and will also include the master bedroom with a large bathroom. The new addition in the rear would be one large area containing the living room, dining room, and kitchen for the dwelling. A small mudroom would extend off of the addition 8 feet deeper into the lot than the existing structure and a patio with a roof would extend off the east end of the addition. The second story would be renovated to allow for a bathroom, a second bedroom, and an office/third bedroom for the dwelling. The property will remain a two story, owner-occupied, single-family residential use which is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. The total net square footage of the structure will only increase by 20 square feet from 1,640 to 1,660.

3. Nature of Application: This is a residential property within a RA district. The structure is currently nonconforming with respect to the minimum front yard and left side yard setbacks. The existing setback nonconformities require the Applicant to obtain a special permit under Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.4.1 to reduce the rear of the structure to one story, construct an approximately 500 gross square foot addition in the rear, and alter window openings on the façades of the existing single-family residence.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: This property is located in a RA district. The surrounding area is comprised of a mixture of single-, two-, three-, and multi-family homes between 2 and 3 stories with a few taller buildings as high as 8 stories along Highland Avenue.

5. Impacts of Proposal: There shall be minimal impacts to the surrounding neighborhood as the proposed addition would not appear to be detrimental to the immediate abutters or the surrounding area. The Applicant is only extending the existing footprint of the structure 8 feet deeper into the lot within the required left side yard setback. At the same time, the Applicant is reducing the rear portion of the structure from two stories to one, which would allow additional sunlight to fall on the neighbor's property at 29 Oxford Street. The addition to the existing structure will extend inward towards the center of the large lot and windows will be retained or added on the visually prominent portions of the dwelling. As part of the project, the Applicant will also be removing the concrete patio and all pavement on the site to turn these areas into green space. The area required for the necessary two parking spaces will consist of pervious pavers which will contribute to stormwater percolation on the property. Additionally, the curb cut for the property will be relocated to the right of the existing structure and the number of on-street parking spaces will remain the same. Minimal disruption to the neighborhood or the streetscape due to construction activities is anticipated. The property is quite large and should help act as a buffer to the properties in the surrounding area. A dumpster will be located on site intermittently during construction to handle the disposal of solid waste from the project. While the proposed design moves the existing front door around to the right side of the structure, the property will still retain a very inviting feeling from the streetscape with the proposed fenestration on the front façade and the walkway from the new front door

leading to the sidewalk. The property will remain a two story, owner-occupied, single-family residential use which is consistent with the surrounding neighborhood.

6. Green Building Practices: The existing building will be renovated to a high standard of energy efficiency. As part of the project, the lot will become almost entirely landscaped except for the living structure and the small two-car parking area along Oxford Street, where pervious pavers will be used. Additionally, a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) consultant has been retained for the project.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Have been notified and are awaiting comments.

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

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



Existing Conditions



Existing Conditions

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

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.

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 maintaining “the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to adequately protect the natural environment; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to encourage housing for persons of all income levels.”

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the district (6.1.1. RA - Residence Districts), which is, “To establish and preserve quiet neighborhoods of one- and two-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.”

The project is compatible with the characteristics of the surrounding area. The Applicant is proposing to reduce the rear portion of the structure to one story, add on to the rear of the dwelling towards the center of the lot, and alter the fenestration on the façades of the existing structure. Most of the proposed addition would be as-of-right construction. The renovations to the existing dwelling and the addition will either add or retain windows on the visually prominent portions of the building. As part of the project, the Applicant will also be removing the concrete patio and all pavement on the site to turn these areas into additional green space. The area required for the necessary two parking spaces will consist of pervious pavers which will also contribute to stormwater percolation on the property. The Applicant is only extending the existing footprint of the structure 8 feet deeper into the lot within the required left side yard setback. While the proposed design moves the existing front door around to the right side of the structure, the property will still retain a very inviting feeling from the streetscape with the proposed fenestration on the front façade and the walkway from the new front door which leads the sidewalk. It should also be noted that the walk from the front door to the sidewalk will be through a garden area and not through a parking area, which is a much more appealing experience. Furthermore, even though the proposed design is quite modern, which differs from the structures in the surrounding area, much of the addition can actually be constructed as-of-right. This design of the structure retains building’s basic form, faces the street with a gable end, and provides interest and contrast to the site. The addition is also setback from the streetscape and is so different in its nature from the existing building that someone could not mistake this portion of the structure as being part of the original form of the dwelling. The property will remain a two story, owner-occupied, single-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.

No adverse environmental impacts are anticipated from this project. No new noise, glare, smoke, vibration, nor emissions of noxious materials nor pollution of water ways or ground water are anticipated as part of the proposal. The Applicant will also be removing the concrete patio and all pavement on the site to turn these areas into green space. The area required for the necessary two parking spaces will consist of pervious pavers which will also contribute to stormwater percolation on the property. The structure will remain a two story, single-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 reduce the rear of the structure to one story, construct an approximately 500 gross square foot addition in the rear, and alter window openings on the façades of an existing single-family residence. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/Plng.		
	Date (Stamp Date)				Submission
	(July 5, 2011)				Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office
	August 2, 2011 (July 15, 2011)				Plot Plan – Existing Conditions
	July 14, 2011 (July 15, 2011)				Plot Plan – Proposed
	July 15, 2011 (July 15, 2011)				Existing and Proposed Site Plans – L0.0 and L0.1
	July 15, 2011 (July 15, 2011)				Floor Plans and Elevations – A1.1, A2.1, and A2.2
	July 15, 2011 (July 15, 2011)				Perspectives and Elevations (Color)
	Any changes to the approved site plans or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.				
2	The Applicant shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau’s requirements.	CO	FP		

3	The Applicant will be required to demonstrate that the project meets the current City of Somerville stormwater policy. Utility, grading, and drainage plans must be submitted to the Engineering Department for review and approval.	BP	Eng.	
4	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	
5	The pavers for the parking area shall be pervious.	CO	Plng.	
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.	



27 Oxford Street



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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

To: Planning Division
From: Kristi Chase, Preservation Planner
Date: July 21, 2011
Re: HPC 11.71 – 27 Oxford Street

Staff has reviewed the proposed plans to alter the house at 27 Oxford Street. It has never been surveyed and not much is known about it. Quick map and directory research indicates that the house was constructed before 1869 when it was owned by P. Merrick Harwood. Harwood is noted as living on Oxford Street in the 1869 Somerville, Arlington and Belmont Directory. He worked as a clerk at 26 Bromfield Street in Boston.

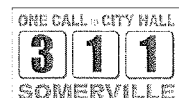


The house still sits on the lot shown in the 1874 Hopkins Map. Most of the north side of Oxford Street had houses and are shown to have had similarly sized lots. The building retains its massing and form but appears to be much altered through the removal of such details as the door and window enframements. The asbestos shingle siding also detracts from its origins as a workers house from the middle of the 19th century. While the building is not designated as a local historic district and does not fall under the Commission purview, the guidelines used for new construction may be generally applied. Many of the houses on Oxford Street retain a strong Victorian era aesthetic. For example, the house directly across the street from number 27 received the Commission's Director's Award for the owner's long-term commitment to retain and maintain her house. HPC Staff believes that following the HPC guidelines for additions and new construction would enhance the character of the neighborhood.

The proposed alterations to the building retain the original massing and form along the street edge but radically change the openings from a fairly symmetrically balanced pattern to a modern asymmetric pattern very different from the rest of the neighborhood. "Facade proportions (ratio of width to height) should be similar to those of surrounding buildings to create or



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complement streetscapes and views with the area ... Door and window height-to-width ratios should be similar to those in neighboring structures. The pattern established by the relationship of window or door openings and the surrounding wall area should respect the neighboring structures. "The percentage of glass to wall should approximate that of neighboring structures." The proposed materials and style of installation also contrast with the other houses on the street. The flat roof of the rear addition has no counterpart in the rest of the neighborhood. "Roof forms should follow predominant styles of adjacent buildings."

See next page for relevant portions of the Historic Districts Ordinance and Guidelines.

SOMERVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT ORDINANCE:

(6/a) In the case of new construction or additions to existing buildings or structures, the Commission shall *consider the appropriateness of the size and shape of the building or structure both in relation to the land area upon which the building or structure is situated and to buildings and structures in the vicinity*, and the Commission may in appropriate cases impose dimensional and set back requirements in addition to those required by applicable ordinance or by-law.

The Commission shall not make any recommendation or requirement except for *the purpose of preventing developments incongruous to the historic aspects or the architectural characteristics of the surroundings and of the historic district*.

HPC Guidelines for Additions and Infill Construction

A. Size, Shape and Proportion

New building facades should be designed to look appropriate to, and compatible with, adjacent buildings. If there are no immediately adjacent structures, the applicant should look to nearby structures and blocks.

1. Building height should be similar to nearby buildings, respecting the predominant heights of existing houses or commercial structures.
2. Facade proportions (ratio of width to height) should be similar to those of surrounding buildings to create or complement streetscapes and views with the area.
3. Roof forms should follow predominant styles of adjacent buildings.
4. Utility connections should be placed to minimize visibility from the street.

B. Materials.

1. Materials should be compatible with those used in adjacent structures or, when there are no immediately adjacent structures, buildings within the surrounding area. Exterior surfaces should be painted or otherwise finished in a similarly compatible manner.
2. Materials of foundation walls should be compatible with those of nearby buildings. If use of matching materials is impractical, substitutions that are not obtrusive should be used.

C. Details

1. Infill design can be approached with non-historic designs using simple neutral elements which will fit better with the character of the neighborhood. New designs generally should not copy existing structures, but must be consistent with the character, style and scale of those structures.
2. Door and window height-to width ratios should be similar to those in neighboring structures. The pattern established by the relationship of window or door openings and the surrounding wall area should respect the neighboring structures. The percentage of glass to wall should approximate that of neighboring structures.
3. Facade elements which can help give a new structure a historically appearance include:

Window hoods and lintels;	Friezes;
Entrances with porches and balustrades;	Gables;
Cornice lines with architectural detailing;	Columns and pilasters; and
Brick work with quoins, corbels, and other details;	Chimneys

Any such detail elements must be consistent with the design of the structure. Adding details typical of one historic period may be inconsistent with a structure typical of the style of another period.