



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*
LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*
DAN BARTMAN, *SENIOR PLANNER*
AMIE HAYES, *PLANNER*
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

Case #: PB 2013-03
Date: March 28, 2013
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 84 & 90 Washington St (Cobble Hill Apartments)

Applicant Name: Cobble Hill Apartment Company

Applicant Address: 150 Mount Vernon St, Suite 520, Boston, MA 02125

Property Owner Name: same

Agent Name: Richard G. Di Girolamo, Esq.

Agent Address: 424 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02145

Alderman: Maureen Cuff-Bastardi

Legal Notice: Applicant/Owner Cobble Hill Apartment Company seek a Site Plan Approval for a subdivision under SZO §5.4 to divide a 437,090 sf lot into two lots of 173,748 sf and 263,371 sf for a future development proposal for 159 residential units and approx 13,200 sf of commercial space.

Zoning District/Ward: BB / 1

Zoning Approval Sought: Site Plan Approval under SZO §5.4

Date of Application: Feb 4, 2013

Dates of Public Hearing: Planning Board Mar 21, 2013

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 437,090 square foot parcel. The Cobble Hill Apartments are located on the property, which consist of four multi-story building for senior housing and a one-story commercial strip mall. There are two residential buildings of 64,400 square feet, two residential buildings of 31,162 square feet and the commercial building is 12,555 square feet. There is a large landscaped court yard in the middle of the residential buildings and ample parking onsite.



2. Proposal: The proposal is to subdivide the lot in two lots of 173,748 square feet and 263,371 square feet. The subdivision of land would allow for the redevelopment of the one-story commercial strip mall on the site as part of a future application before the Zoning Board of Appeals. The proposed redevelopment will include demolition of the existing one-story structure and construction a building with 159 residential units and approximately 13,217 square feet of commercial space on the ground floor. The existing senior housing complex on the 263,371 square foot lot would continue to operate as it does today.

3. Nature of Application: In order to subdivide the lot, the Applicant requires Site Plan Approval under SZO §5.4 and §8.8. A subdivision that only creates one new lot is classified as a minor project under SZO §5.4.5 and the rules and regulations pertaining to site plan approval; however, due to the large size of the parcels and development potential on this site, it will go before the full Board at a public hearing for a vote.

If the land is subdivided the parcels would continue to meet the dimensional requirements for the Business B (BB) district in §8.5. The table contains the required dimensions, the dimensions of the parcels if they are subdivided, and the dimensions of the proposed redevelopment site that will require a Special Permit with Site Plan Review and Variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Dimension	Required	Parcel – Cobble Hill Apts	Parcel – Existing Commercial Structure	Parcel – Proposed Redevelopment
Min Lot Size	None	263,371 (6.0 acres)	173,748 (3.9 acres)	173,748 (3.9 acres)
Lot Area per Dwelling Unit	1000 sf	1181	No residential	1092 sf
Max Ground Coverage	80%	15.8%	+/- 7.2%	+/- 17.4%
Min Landscaped Area	10%		+/- 60.0%	+/- 32.2%
Floor Area Ratio	2.0	0.72	+/- 0.07	+/- 0.95
Height	50 feet	6 stories	+/- 15 ft	+/- 69 ft *
Setbacks	Front – 15 Rear – 20 ft for 6-story building Side – NA	Front –32ft Rear –85.8ft Side –20ft	Front +/-32 ft to Washington St / +/-29 ft to New Washington St Rear –NA Side +/-144 ft	Front +/-15 ft to Washington St / +/- 28.4 ft to New Washington St Rear –NA Rear –NA Side +/-39.2 ft
Frontage	None	528.24 ft on Washington 296.27 on New Washington	596.42	596.42 on Washington St 1001.47 on New Washington
# Parking Spaces	Dependent on use		57	306 required / 179 proposed with an addition 55 possible with land banking *

* Variance will be required from the Zoning Board of Appeals to develop as proposed; however, if a variance is not obtained, the subdivided site has sufficient lot area and frontage to allow for another proposal.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The surrounding neighborhood holds a mix of uses and structures. To the north is a residential neighborhood with two- and three-story houses and some auto-oriented uses along Washington Street. To the south are industrial uses and rail road tracks that separate Cobble Hill from the Inner Belt area. The future Green Line Station at Washington Street will be a located one block west of the site. Directly to the east are the Holiday Inn Hotel and other commercial and industrial uses.



5. Impacts of Proposal: The subdivision of land will allow for the redevelopment of a portion of the site that is currently underutilized. It is not likely that the Cobble Hill Apartments will be redeveloped in the near future and therefore separating the land that will redevelop with a substantially different use is reasonable. The City is currently working on a neighborhood plan for the Inner Belt area. The plan is scheduled to be complete in June of 2013. One early recommendation separates the block as proposed in this subdivision to create a street through this very large block. The subdivision is consistent with this plan.

The one-story commercial building is a small building on a large lot and it is surrounded by surface parking which is a suburban in form. A new building and redesigned site has the potential to frame the street to create a pedestrian friendly block that provides usable open space, landscaping and parking in an efficient way. Additionally, a redeveloped site has the potential to increase the supply of housing in the City near the future Green Line Station at Washington Street and the existing Sullivan Square Orange Line Station, while continuing to provide commercial space that will serve the neighborhood.

6. Green Building Practices: None listed on the application form.

II. FINDINGS FOR SITE PLAN APPROVAL (SZO §5.4):

In order to grant a site plan approval, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.4.4 and 5.4.6 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.4.4 and 5.4.6 in detail.

1. *The Planning Board “shall approve a submission in the form submitted or with reasonable conditions pertaining to the purpose of this Section 5.4 unless the Planning Board finds that:*

1. *The submission is incomplete;*
2. *The imposition of reasonable conditions would not ensure that the project would conform to the standards and criteria set forth in Section 5.4.6; and*
3. *The project does not comply with other specifically applicable requirements of this Ordinance.”*

The Applicant has provided a complete application, reasonable conditions can be placed on the proposal to ensure that the project conforms to the standards and criteria set forth in Section 5.4.6, and the project complies with applicable requirements of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

2. *The development complies with all standards set forth for the overlay district in which it is located.*

The subject property is not located within an overlay district.

3. *“The development shall be integrated into the existing terrain and surrounding landscape. Building sites shall, to the extent feasible: minimize use of wetlands, steep slopes, floodplains, hilltops; preserve natural or historic features; maximize open space retention; preserve scenic views from publicly accessible locations; minimize tree, vegetation and soil removal, blasting and grade changes; screen objectionable features from neighboring properties and roadways.”*

There are no wetlands, floodplains or hilltops located onsite. The site is relatively flat. There are several, approximately 30, large trees that would be lost to the redevelopment of the site; however, approximately the same number of trees would be incorporated into the new site layout. Future development will be evaluated to determine if the plan has sufficient screening of objectionable features from neighboring properties and roadway.

4. *“The development shall be served with adequate water supply and sewage disposal systems. For structures to be served by sewage disposal systems, the applicant shall document the status of Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and/or other sewage permits.”*

The Applicant is working with Department of Public Works and the DEM to ensure that adequate water supply and sewage disposal systems are satisfactory to these departments. The Applicants will have to outline how the sanitary sewer requirements meet the stormwater policy when the application for the structure is before the Board.

5. *“The development shall incorporate measures that are adequate to prevent pollution of surface and groundwater, to minimize erosion and sedimentation, and to prevent changes in groundwater levels, increased rates of runoff and minimize potential for flooding. Drainage shall be designed so that groundwater recharge is maximized, and at the project boundaries the runoff shall not be increased in amount or velocity.”*

The proposed stormwater management plan complies with the City’s stormwater policy. A stormwater management report was submitted with the application and it states that the increase in impervious coverage will be offset by providing adequate detention and recharge through a subsurface infiltration system to match or reduce runoff rates and volumes to existing conditions.

6. *“To the extent feasible, development shall minimize demands placed on municipal services and infrastructure.”*

The subdivision should not place any unforeseen demand on municipal services and infrastructure. However, any future development of either lot will be subject to all applicable requirements.

7. *“The development shall provide for safe vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and to adjacent ways, including sidewalks, crosswalks and the like.”*

The proposed development of the site provides safe vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and to neighboring streets. The proposal includes moving a curb cut to a location that creates a private street between the two subject sites. This new street provides vehicular and pedestrian access through the site, which is a benefit since the lot is currently approximately 1130 feet or almost a quarter of a mile long.

8. *“Building design and landscaping shall be in harmony with the prevailing character and scale of buildings in the neighborhood through the use of appropriate building materials, screening, and other architectural techniques.”*

The proposed building will require variances and a Special Permit with Site Plan Review to be constructed and the character, scale building materials, screening and other architectural techniques will be evaluated at that time.

9. “Electric, telephone, cable TV and other such utilities shall be underground except where this cannot be accomplished because it is physically or environmentally infeasible, in which case such utilities shall be screened.”

Any future development of either lot will be subject to all applicable requirements and will be conditions to have underground electric, telephone, cable TV and other such utilities.

10. “Exposed storage areas, machinery, service areas, truck loading areas, utility buildings and structures and other unsightly uses shall be set back and/or screened to protect neighbors from objectionable features.”

The proposed building will require variances and a Special Permit with Site Plan Review to be constructed and if there is utility space that is deemed to be unsightly it will be evaluated at that time.

11. “To the extent feasible, proposed projects shall be designed in such a way as to minimize shadows on neighboring properties.”

Assessment of the shadow impact of the proposed building will be evaluated during the Special Permit with Site Plan Review and Variance process.

12. “There shall be no unreasonable glare onto public roads and other public ways into the night sky, or onto neighboring properties from lighting or reflection.”

Assessment of the glare onto public roads and other public ways into the night sky or neighboring properties from the proposed building or site will be evaluated during the Special Permit with Site Plan Review and Variance process.

13. “The site plan shall comply with all zoning requirements.”

No new zoning violations related to lot size, density, ground coverage, landscaped area, floor area ratio, setbacks, and frontage would be created by the proposed subdivision for either site. The proposed building would necessitate height and parking variances; however, the relief is not required because of the land area that will be created by the subdivision. The sites will be 3.9 and 6.0 acres, which are large for Somerville, and have extensive frontages which allows for substantial development. The proposed structure and uses conform to the early results of the neighborhood plan to have large-scale developments in this area and a street connection through the site. After subdivision, the existing structures continue to conform to the requirements for floor area ratio, ground coverage, landscaped area, and parking.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Site Plan Approval under §8.8 & 5.4

Based upon the application submitted and the above findings, the Planning Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the requested **SITE PLAN APPROVAL**.

Approval is based upon the Subdivision “Cobble Hill Apartments” Plan prepared by R.E. Cameron & Associates, Inc. dated January 31, 2013. The Applicant shall submit to the City of Somerville Assessing Department and Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development the certified copies of the recorded/registered documents.

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.

