



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2012-32

Date: May 10, 2012

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 187 Willow Avenue

Applicant Name: Daniel and Molly Doble

Applicant Address: 187 Willow Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144

Property Owner Name: Daniel and Molly Doble

Property Owner Address: 187 Willow Avenue, Somerville, MA 02144

Alderman: Rebekah L. Gewirtz

Legal Notice: Applicants and Owners, Daniel and Molly Doble, seek a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 to alter a nonconforming structure to remove a staircase and construct an addition at the rear of the structure.

Zoning District/Ward: RA / Ward 6

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1

Date of Application: April 17, 2012

Dates of Public Meeting • Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – **May 16, 2012**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a single-family dwelling on a 3,360 square foot lot located near the corner of Willow Avenue and Foskett Street near Powder House Square. The property has 2,014 square feet of living space and exceeds the minimum landscape requirement. The building is 2½ stories in height with a gable that faces onto the street and a large dormer located on the left side. The property is located within a Residence A district and abuts similar residential properties on either side.

There has been no prior relief given to the subject property.



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2. Proposal: Owners and Applicants, Daniel and Molly Doble, seek to alter a single-family dwelling by removing a rear staircase and deck to construct a two-story addition in the same location. The rear façade of the property contains an enclosed stairwell, added to the building at a later date, and a wooden deck that is approximately 15 feet long by 10 feet wide. The Applicants would like to demolish these two features and, in the same location, construct a two-story addition with a third floor roof deck.

The proposed addition will add 6 feet of length to the existing structure, but because the existing deck will be removed, the rear yard setback of the structure will actually increase from 17 feet 6 inches to 23 feet 6 inches. The addition will include a two-story bay, similar to those located on the front and right side elevations of the building. The addition will extend into the rear yard where the current rear staircase is now and this added six feet will extend the entire width of the rear façade. However, as the staircase is only 3'-6" in width, the added length to the building will expand slightly more than two feet beyond the current rear staircase. This extra square footage will give space for a new mudroom, pantry, and eating area on the first floor, while the additional space on the second floor will create a walk-in closet and more bedroom space.

The new addition will include a two-story bay that would be consistent with the existing bays on the front and right side elevations. The first story portion would be bowed while the second story portion would be square. The Applicants propose to maintain the decorative wood work that is located at the bottom corners of the square bay as well as the dentil work located between the first and second story which surrounds the house on all four sides. The roof of the second story would become a roof deck that is accessible by a door centered directly under the gable. The deck will be 13'-2" in length by 11'-7" in width and have 42 inch high railings on three sides. The Applicants plan to use footings left over from the demolition of the staircase and cellar entry; therefore, the deck and railings above the two-story bay are not able to be centered on the façade.

The new addition will incorporate several new windows, most of which are located within the two-story bay. The first story bay will have two windows each on the left side and in the center of the bay. The center bay windows will be three feet wide while the left side bay windows will be 2.5 feet wide. French doors, five feet in width, will be placed on the right side of the bay and open onto a new deck that is five feet wide by three feet long with stairs that lead down the right side of the building. The stairs will extend slightly past the right side elevation of the house; however, they will not be visible behind the two-story bay located on this side elevation. Another door, opening onto the deck from a new mudroom, will be located to the right of the French doors. The adjacent right corner will have one window installed next to the mudroom door and two more will be located on the right side. The second story of the addition will have two windows in the center of the square bay with one more in both the right and left sides of the bay. There will also be one window located to the right of the bay, which is above the mudroom, and on the right side elevation near the two-story bay. There will be no windows added to the attic space.

The new addition would also modify the bulkhead stairs which currently have less than five feet of headroom, making reasonable use of the cellar stairs difficult. Modifications to the bulkhead include moving the entrance six feet toward the rear of the property and adding a new concrete slab at grade to raise the elevation of the exit six inches. Lattice will then be placed at the foundation level around the bay and under the new deck and stairs.

3. Nature of Application: The structure is nonconforming due to the nature of the front and left side yards as well as the minimum lot requirement for an RA district. Under Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.4.1 alterations that impact the nonconforming aspect of single-family dwellings may only occur after obtaining a Special Permit. Moving the bulkhead six feet toward the rear of the property triggers this Special Permit request as the location of the bulkhead will be within the left side yard setback. This

setback changes from 5'-4" to 6'-6" at the rear corner of the building. This modification violates the left side yard setback by 1.5 feet.



Left: 187 Willow Avenue, front and left side façade.

Right: 187 Willow Avenue, front and right side façade. Note the square bay above the bowed bay with the corner detailing as well as the decorative dentil trim details between floors.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The subject property is located within a Residence A district near Powder House Square. The building is located in a predominantly single-family neighborhood with a moderate level of density. While similar residential properties abut on either side, the dwelling is also near the Benjamin G. Brown School at 201 Willow Avenue.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed modifications and expansion of the building will not be detrimental to the structure.

The two-story rear addition will greatly enhance the rear façade of the dwelling as the design is consistent with other character-defining features. Currently, the focus of the rear façade is an enclosed staircase that is clearly not original to the building. The new addition will visually enhance the rear façade with a new two-story bay that is consistent with those on the front and right side elevations. The design of the addition also maintains the trim and dentil work located between the first and second stories on all four sides, which are presently interrupted by the enclosed staircase.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicants plan to install solar panels on the roof to implement the use of solar electricity.

7. Comments:

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

Ward Alderman: Alderman Gewirtz has been contacted. In an email to Staff on Saturday, May 5, 2012, Alderman Gewirtz explains that she wants to make sure the neighbors are notified prior to construction. Staff clarified that only abutters are mailed a notice regarding the hearing. Alderman Gewirtz responded on Monday, May 7, 2012 that this was sufficient.

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. The proposed addition will visually enhance the rear façade of the building and, by continuing the existing style and design of the building, the addition will contextually fit into the surrounding neighborhood. Additionally, the proposed addition and modifications are all located at the rear of the building, so minimal changes will be visible from Willow Avenue.

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 secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to conserve the value of land and buildings; and to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City."

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 addition has been designed to be compatible with the built and unbuilt surrounding area. The two-story addition on the rear façade, to include a two-story bay and roof deck, will enhance the building and make it more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. While the rear staircase currently intrudes on the design of the façade, the style and design of the building will be maintained with the new addition.

III. RECOMMENDATION

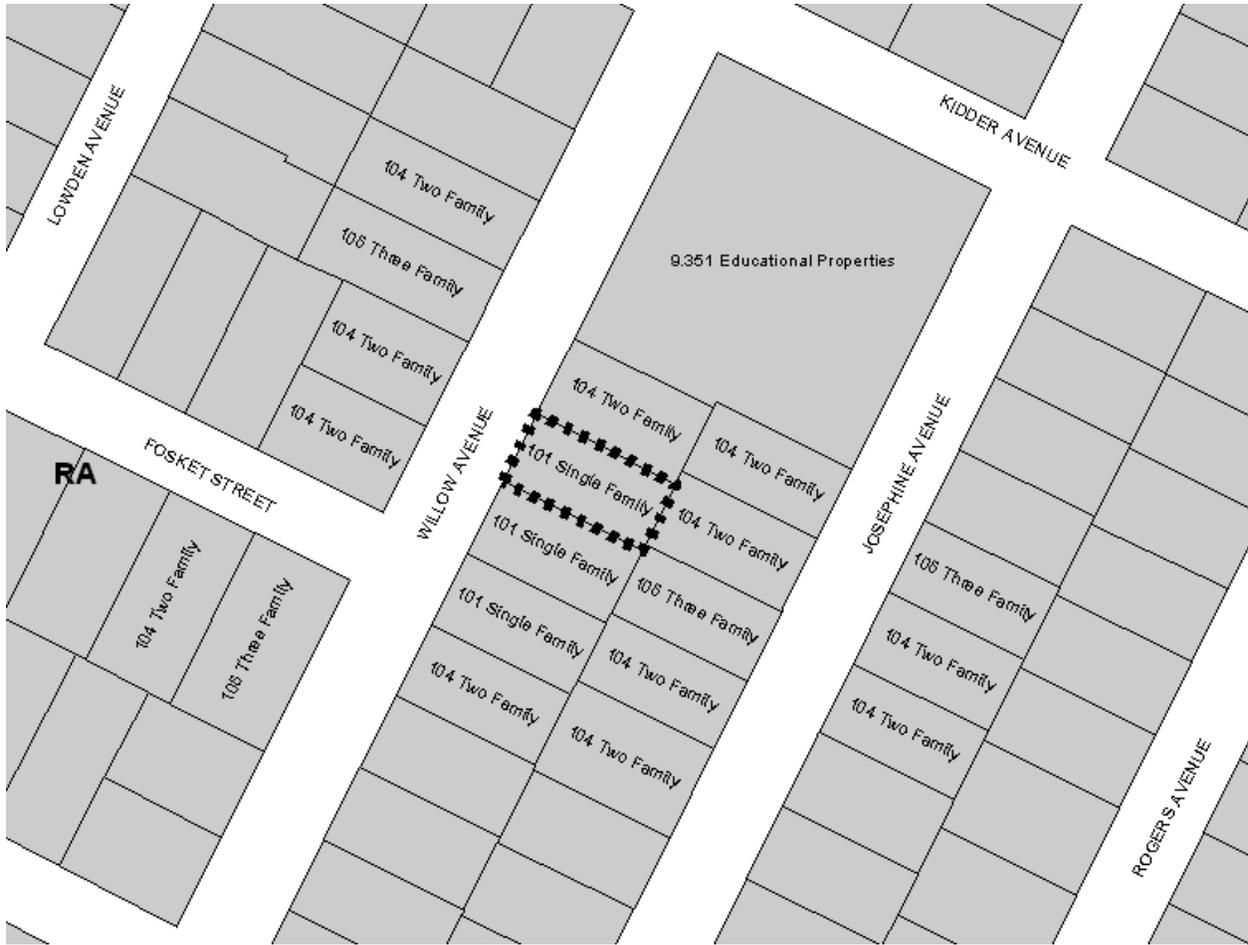
Special Permit under §4.4.1

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	Approval is for a Special Permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to remove a staircase and construct an addition at the rear of the structure. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/PIng.															
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Any changes to the approved site plan or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.																		
2	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP															
3	New siding type and color, roofing, trim, and materials of the addition shall match or be complimentary to the rest of the existing structure.	CO	PIng.															
4	New decorative trim between levels and architectural detailing of the bays shall match the existing trim.	CO	PIng.															

5	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.	
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187 Willow Avenue