



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

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

STAFF PRESENT

MADELEINE MASTERS, *PLANNING DIRECTOR*
LORI MASSA, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*

MEMBERS PRESENT

DEBORAH FENNICK
CHERYLYN RUANE

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, February 26, 2009, 7:00 p.m.** in the third floor conference room of City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA. A quorum of three members was not present; however, because the Committee was making recommendations and not taking a vote, the meeting proceeded.

The purpose of the meeting was to review and make recommendations on the following proposals:

377 Summer St: (Case #ZBA 2009-01) Applicant & Owner Christos Poutahidis seeks a Special Permit (SZO §7.11.1.c) to establish 6 dwelling units. The dwellings would be part of a mixed-use building with office and retail. The Applicant also seeks a Variance to provide 4 fewer parking spaces than are required (SZO §5.5). CBD zone. Ward 6.

The Agent and Architects introduced the proposed plans to the DRC (the plans had changed slightly from the ones issued on November 7, 2008 / SPCD stamp date January 30, 2009 to incorporate the transformer into the site plan). The original design intent for the building was to create a monumental building to complement the other monumental buildings nearby: Winter Hill Bank, Citizens Bank, and the Church of the Nazarene. After the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) review, the building became less monumental; there was a one-story portion with a step-back away from the street and the historic Rosebud Diner. The Architect still wanted to create a unique structure at this site because there is a unique structure on it currently - the historic Jenny Gas. The HPC was in support of the current plan and the Agent stated that the Davis Square Task Force also approved of it.

The residential units are intended to be rental. Each has a balcony to make the building active on all sides.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the architect's response is after the (r).

- The materials for the driveway – (r) concrete with embossing
- The inspiration for the roof – (r) The flat roof looked too monumental. The curved roof is similar to a mansard and distinguishes the residential portion of the building.



- Green design elements – (r) They are thinking of using geothermal energy but have not completed the design. There would be windows around the building to capture daylight.
- The orientation of the driveway – (r) The driveway needs a significant amount of run (~70 feet) to get to the underground parking level. Also, headroom is needed for spaces that will be underneath the driveway. This configuration fits the greatest number of parking spaces.

The DRC made the following comments and recommendations (underlined):

- There has been a good evolution of the building from the initial design. The building would have an appropriate scale along the lot line to connect with the rest of the retail in the Square.
- The building seems large as it goes up from the first story. The rounded roof may be the cause of the building feeling heavy or machine like. Maybe the metal roof should continue around sides. The DRC preferred the flat roof from the initial design. There could be taller buildings near this site in the future.
- The building does not have a distinguishable style. The Architect explained that the HPC did not want a contemporary design like 1 Davis Square. The DRC thought that the HPC may have been reacting to the first floor and weight of the building, which is now pushed to the Summer Street and Cutter Avenue corner.
- The Summer Street side of the building is too busy and disorganized. There appear to be many bands to the building. The base should be better connected to the upper stories. Make the railing on the third story more transparent to reduce the number of bands of the building and visually connect this balcony with the others on this elevation.
- The balconies work well with the scale of the building.
- They like the material choices.
- On the Cutter Avenue side of the building, continue the brick along the top floor to make this side less monumental. The design makes a gesture to the Citizens Bank building but this portion of the structure should be legible as residential.
- The planters are oriented well for southern exposure but need to be planted with appropriate vegetation to handle direct sunlight.
- Bring the brick wall down to the ground level on the Cutter Ave elevation in place of the solid screen so that the building would appear grounded and not on a post. Determine if the façade could also be brought down near the entrance to the garage so that it is not cantilevered.
- The area with the transformer and bike parking will feel more like a utilitarian area than landscaping.
- The plaza area on Summer Avenue would count toward landscaping because the definition includes non-living materials such as pavers, which are proposed for this space.



35 R Lexington Ave: The Applicant seeks a Special Permit to construct two one-family structures. RA zone. Ward 5.

The Agent and Architects introduced the proposed plans to the DRC (issue date October 14, 2008). An application for zoning approval has not yet been submitted to the OSPCD. The site was previously approved for two single-family dwellings within existing structures; however, the permit has expired. The revised plan has two distinct single-family homes; one utilizes an existing structure. They were designed as country houses in the City that have the same vocabulary. There is a thin stretch of City owned land between the bike path and this property that the Applicant would like to acquire and landscape. The driveway would be pea stone with pavers for the parking area. Stucco was chosen to cover the existing building because its brick is in poor condition.

The DRC made the following comments and recommendations (underlined):

- The public view in this case is from the bike path, not a roadway.
- The division of material on the façade of the existing building is unfortunate. Clad both stories with stucco and possibly raise the molding separating the floors. This would make the building truer to what it is and it would still relate to the new structure. Without having a distinction of the two levels, its scale may appear more similar to the new structure; although, they did not have a problem with the structures being different. The landscaping could unify the buildings.
- Make the window on the existing second story structure (west elevation) double hung to match the other windows.
- They liked the site plan – it was cohesive, had more landscaping that was better configured than the last plan and had a good relation to the bike path.
- They discussed the face of the building on the bike path. The Architect stated that due to the solar orientation, entrances on this side would be dark and there is not access to the path from this site.
- They also discussed fire truck access. The site plan was approved by the Fire Department in the last iteration and access would not change.
- The City owned land between the bike path and this site should be improved. It would have a beneficial impact for the path and the marketability of this development.

