



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

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

STAFF PRESENT

ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

MEMBERS PRESENT

JULIE BRADY
DEBORAH FENNICK
TANYA PAGLIA
MATTHEW RICE
CHERYLYN RUANE
FRANK VALDES

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Tuesday, November 22, 2011**, at **6:30 p.m.** in the Visiting Nurse Association, Community Room, 3rd Floor, 259 Lowell Street, Somerville, MA.

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

343, 345, 349, and 351 Summer Street (Case #ZBA 2011-54)

Review of design changes that have been made to the project since the last DRC meeting as a part of the Zoning Board of Appeals process.

Description: Applicant, Strategic Capital Group, LLC and Owners George Dilboy VFW Post #529 and The Dakota Partners LLC, seek a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.3 and §7.11.1.c to establish a 29 unit residential use, a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under §7.11.11.10.b to establish a 15-space commercial parking lot, and a Special Permit under §9.13.b to modify parking design standards, in order to develop a new two to three story mixed-use building consisting of a VFW hall and 29 residential units as well as parking for commercial use and for on-site activities. CBD and RA zones. Ward 6.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Next Hearing Date: December 7, 2011

This was the third time the project had come before the Design Review Committee. The two previous occasions were in February and March of 2011. The Applicant was requested to return to the Design Review Committee because they had made substantial changes to the original project as part of some particular design requests from the Zoning Board of Appeals. In this latest design proposal the Applicant pulled the VFW Post portion of the building entirely out of the RA district and totally within the CBD district. As part of these changes, the VFW Post portion of the building had also been turned so that its main entrance now faced the parking area instead of Summer Street. The front entrance of the Post portion of the building would now open out towards the emergency MBTA shaft. The part of the VFW



Post portion of the building adjacent to the ramp down to the parking garage was also pulled back off of the Summer Street streetscape to provide better views of pedestrians for vehicles exiting the garage. The façade along Summer Street is now proposed to be a War Memorial paying tribute to the five branches of the military. Lighting would be projected down from the cornice to illuminate the War Memorial. Vines would be introduced along this façade as well that would grab hold of proposed trellis work on the War Memorial. A series of shallow 12” bays were implemented and a mansard roof treatment was also added along the rear façade of the residential portion of the building to break up the massing and to help the structure transition down to the buildings behind the project on Hawthorne Street. Additionally, a six foot high fence with a two foot high lattice topper and increased landscaping would be installed along the rear property line of the project site.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- Please speak to the process of how you re-massed the building to have the Post entrance open out onto the shaft site? – (r) We wanted to create a War Memorial to give back to the City and to give back to the streetscape. The programmatic needs of the Post portion of the building also necessitated this particular orientation of the building. The landscaped area is now the area leading up to the Post’s front door and will therefore garnish more attention and maintenance.
- Where will the granite be located on the War Memorial? – (r) The War Memorial will have granite plaques on its façade. We are not exactly sure yet how this will work or what this will look like. We will be working with the VFW Post on how to integrate this material into the façade.
- Will the granite panels attach directly to the Nichiha panels? – (r) We will probably stop the Nichiha panels and come up with a nice transition between the two materials.
- Is the upper level co-planar with the lower level? – (r) Yes, The upper level is co-planar and there is a substantial cornice line running across the top as well.
- Will the War Memorial have real brick accents? – (r) No, these areas would be a Nichiha brick.
- Are you saying that the windows above the main entrance will create a lot of noise or they will not be able to contain the noise inside the Post? – (r) Part of the concern is that there are residential neighbors directly across Summer Street so we are trying to reduce the exposure of the Post directly across the street. The landscaping in front of the main entrance and the residential portion of the building on the other two sides will minimize the amount of noise coming from the Post.
- What is the motivation behind the horizontal windows along the street? – (r) We thought it worked well geometrically with the area of the brick, the proportion of the brick, and the proportion of the stone.
- Is the surface parking just what is behind the landscaped area? – (r) There are two surface level parking areas, one exposed to the weather and one underneath the footprint of the building.
- How will trash be handled on the site? – (r) There will be a trash area on the first floor of the Post and the receptacles will be wheeled out to the garbage truck through the corridor area between the Post portion of the building and the residential portion of the building. There is also a trash compactor room in the underground parking garage. The garbage truck will back down the parking ramp to the underground garage and the dumpsters will be pulled up to the back of the truck to be emptied.

- Are you against putting the main entrance of the Post back onto the Summer Street façade other than reasons due to noise? – (r) The interior programmatic use of the building does not work well.

We, the Design Review Committee, have to be comfortable with the War Memorial façade if it never happens and we also need to have the right to review the final design of the façade if it does happen.

We would like to see shadow studies and perspectives of what this new design will look like and the impacts it will have on these components.

The idea of the War Memorial is a nice addition to the project but we are not sure if its location in the overall design, right up against the sidewalk along Summer Street, is an appropriate location.

Placing the War Memorial façade on the side of the building where the entrance to the Post is currently located would lend more prominence to the War Memorial and garnish the same amount, if not more, attention and maintenance to the landscaping around the shaft.

The façade on the Post portion of the building along Summer Street needs to be developed further. This façade needs to succeed both with and without the War Memorial on this façade.

Please take a look at the turf treatment that leads up to the shaft site. A grass-crete product may cook the soil in between the concrete and make it very difficult for grass to grow in this area. Other products that are completely under the grass, with a full stand of grass that sits on top of the product, may be better suited for this area.

Please take a look at the courtyard design element and the façade of the Post portion of the building that faces the courtyard. Can this design be reworked at all? Is it possible to have the main entrance to the Post portion of the building face Summer Street? What steps did the project team go through in determining that the entry to the Post portion of the building had to be located on the side of the building that faces the parking area?

Please take another look at the Summer Street elevation of the Post portion of the building and try to develop this design further. This façade seems like it was not entirely thought out. The Committee understands that this façade will be developed further once the Post members get involved and determine the details of what the War Memorial will look like, but any further advancement of the design of that façade would be helpful.

Please take a look at pushing the entire streetscape façade of the Post portion of the building back 2 feet and see what this would like. What would be the impact of this design modification? What would this modification do to the internal programming inside the building? Could the main entrance to the Post portion of the building be moved back to the Summer Street façade with the implementation of this 2 foot recess?

Please submit a digital color copy of the shadow study that is a small enough file size to be distributed to the Design Review Committee via email.