



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STAFF PRESENT

LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*
ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

MEMBERS PRESENT

DEBORAH FENNICK
JIM KIRYLO
TANYA PAGLIA
MATTHEW RICE

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, July 19, 2012**, at **6:30 p.m.** in City Hall, 3rd Floor Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

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

129-129R Highland Avenue (Case ZBA # 2012-45)

Review of project design which proposes one principal structure with seven dwelling units and associated parking before the case goes to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicant Kenneth Lanzilli and Owner Angelli Realty Trust, seek a Special Permit with Site Plan Review under SZO §7.11.1.c to establish a seven (7) dwelling unit use, a Variance under SZO §5.5 for relief from the rear yard setback requirement under SZO §8.5.I, and a Special Permit to alter a nonconforming structure under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a rear addition with parking on an existing 2½ story four-family dwelling. RC zone. Ward 3.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: Anticipated to be August 1, 2012

This was the first time the project had been before the Design Review Committee. The project site consists of two parcels and there was widespread resistance from the neighborhood against developing the rear parcel. The rear parcel is located in an RA zone and the front parcel is located in an RC zone. The proposed project will now be entirely within the front parcel and the rear parcel will remain undeveloped. The Applicant is seeking a Variance for relief from the rear yard setback requirement, a Special Permit to alter the existing nonconforming structure, and a Special Permit with Site Plan Review to establish a 7 dwelling unit use at the site. There will be parking underneath the structure as the proposed rear addition will be elevated off of the ground. There will be three units in front and four in the back and the proposed use will require 12 total parking spaces. The existing house is in fairly good shape. It is not historic, but it does have some pedigree in town and most of the house is original.



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

- Will the front landscaping remain? – (r) A full landscape plan has not been done yet, but much of the existing character will remain.
- What is located on the adjacent property to the left of the subject property? – (r) A group home.
- Are the neighbors supportive of this proposal? – (r) They appear to now be supportive. They were against the original design with multiple town houses, but they are comfortable with this design leaving the rear parcel undeveloped. It will be beneficial to the neighborhood to restore the existing building and retain the rear lot.
- Will the screening fence be chain link? – (r) It will be wood stockade or lattice.
- Will the residents of 129 Highland Avenue have access to the rear lot? – (r) I do not think so. The deal has not been finalized. The Applicant will buy both lots and then sell the rear lot to the neighbors. He bought two lots with the intention of developing them both, but the neighbors would rather purchase the rear lot to keep it vacant.
- Where are the condensing units? – (r) On the left side of the structure. So the greenspace area is where the condensing units will be located.
- Will the brick foundation remain? – (r) Yes, that is correct.
- What is the scope of the renovations to the existing building? – (r) The existing building will be gutted and the exterior will be restored and brought up to code.
- The Commission feels that the overall design and massing is quite successful, but did you consider bringing some of the wall down to grade on the left side? – (r) A wall on that side would look like a fence because it has to be fairly porous for the parking garage for ventilation.
- What are you proposing for the siding? – (r) Clapboard in the rear and shingle on the front. That is a better strategy rather than having all the siding being uniform.
- What are the driveway materials? – (r) A paver material, such as a concrete unit paver.
- Does one of the units have the potential to be converted into an accessible unit? – (r) Yes. The development will try to accommodate a handicapped accessible unit if necessary.

Vehicular access to the garage looks very tight in terms of making the turn; it seems dangerous. The Commission recommends evaluating this point of access. The garage entrance corner will need to float and the column under the second floor kitchen has to be addressed somehow. The column either has to be shifted back or it has to be cantilevered to eliminate the column all together because there is no way to turn a car through there currently. Perhaps the kitchen could be cut back a bit to make parking easier.

It would be good to delineate the rear addition more as well. It might be good to acknowledge that on a grander scale, and perhaps put a gable and a dormer on the angled portion.

The left side of the building above the parking lot appears to be floating or hovering. The Commission recommends bringing some of that wall down to grade in order to ground that side of the building and shield the parking. Perhaps it would be possible to bring down everything except where the porches are, which would allow for parking ventilation but also for the building to be grounded.

The double fence is a bit odd. Using rod-iron fencing might work better to link the new construction into the existing building.

On one set of perspective plans, on the right side the rear addition sticks out a little bit farther and there is a fairly blank façade that looks a bit foreboding because there are no windows or openings. But in another plan it looks as if kitchen windows do exist there. The Commission wants to ensure that the kitchen windows show up in the final plans because that would address the issue and make that portion of the building seem more welcoming.

There may be an opportunity to make the trash enclosure something more than just a fenced object. Masonry on the siding could get at the feeling of the existing structure. It may be better to shield the trash enclosure a bit more and giving it a shed roof would make it look more like a building.

13 Clyde Street (Case ZBA # 2012-49)

Review of project design which proposes a 2½ story addition at the rear of an existing structure as part of an as-of-right conversion of a two-family dwelling to a three-family dwelling before the case goes to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Description: Applicant and Owner 13 Clyde Street, LLC, seeks a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 to construct a 2½ story addition on the rear of an existing nonconforming two-family dwelling as part of an as-of-right conversion of a two-family dwelling to a three-family dwelling. RB zone. Ward 5.

SPGA: Zoning Board of Appeals

Hearing Date: Anticipated to be August 1, 2012

Matthew Rice recused himself because he is an abutter within 300 feet.

The relevant portions of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance pertaining to this case include sections 7.2, 4.4.1, and 9.13.b. The case will need to be re-advertised and the application form and plans need to be updated.

The proposal is to construct a 2½ story separate structure behind the rear of an existing two-family dwelling. The existing front structure will be restored, keeping it like a cottage, and giving it a different vocabulary than the building in the rear. The front structure will then be converted into a single unit. The building in the back will be simpler and less prominent - as a backdrop to the restored front building - and will contain two units. The front building is 2 stories and the back building is 2½ stories. The front stairway on the existing building will be removed.

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

- Is the front room, on the front building a mudroom? – (r) It will be a foyer. The first floor will also have a kitchen, living room, dining room, and spare bedroom.
- What is the age of the building? – (r) It was built around the 1880s.
- Is there a pattern of big buildings in these blocks? – (r) The pattern is actually a lot of big barns, so there is a smaller building in front and then usually an attached building which usually is not particularly successful.

It would be helpful to see the context of these buildings, the structure in the surrounding area, and the scale of other buildings in the neighborhood.

This is reminiscent of a property with a barn in the back. Barns tend to have a bigger scale and taking the small scale and applying it to the rear building is not working. The scale should be larger, with larger

windows in the larger rear building. A big building with small windows does not work well. Consider reworking the scaling of the windows on the rear building because the current scaling is odd. It would be more appropriate if the windows were more organized and made to look like more of a background building.

The second detached structure is preferable to one large attached structure at the property. The rear building seems to dwarf the front building.

It would be nice to screen the cars in the parking lot with landscaping. More screening by the sidewalk, perhaps with landscaping, would be better to reduce the view of the rear building and the paved parking lot.

The front portion of the front building seems odd; it seems like an enclosed porch. More windows might help make it more inviting, as would shingles on the bump out. The Commission likes how the door to the front building opens to the side because it seems to address the rear structure a bit more. Perhaps keeping the volume higher on the front portion would help. The Commission would rather see an open front porch with a side entrance and detailing than what is being proposed.

The Architect originally felt that the front portion of the front structure was too large in relation to the building, so he intentionally scaled it back so it would not crowd the structure. He is therefore hesitant to return to the larger scale. However, the Commission thinks that the proposed shed is too small and feels like a tack-on. It would be worth revisiting this portion of the design in the future. The case will return to the Design Review Commission in August.