



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: PB 2017-16
Date: April 19, 2018
Recommendation: Conditional approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 374 Somerville Ave

Applicant / Owner Name: 374 Somerville Ave, LLC

Applicant / Owner Address: 374 Somerville Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143

Agent Name: Richard G. DiGirolamo

Agent Address: 424 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02145

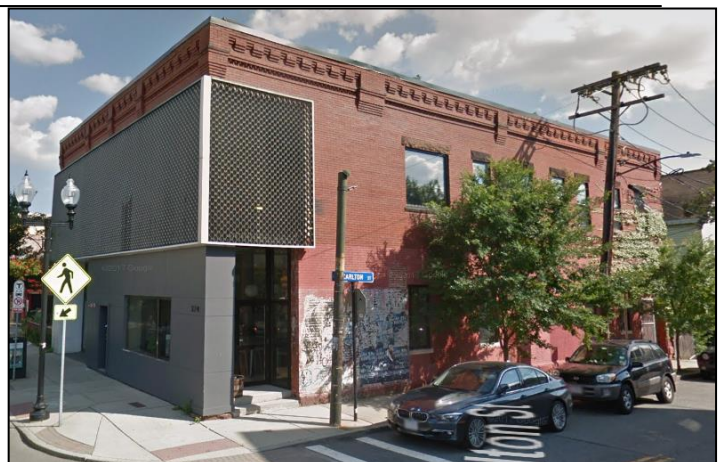
Alderman: J.T. Scott

Legal Notice: Applicant and Owner, 374 Somerville Ave, LLC, seeks Design and Site Plan Review (DSPR) approval under SZO §6.1.22 to construct an addition on top of and in the rear of the existing structure. Retail space will remain and a live/work unit will be added to the first floor, the second floor will have three dwelling units, and a fifth dwelling unit will occupy the third and fourth floor. A Special Permit under SZO §9.13 is also being sought for parking relief. CCD-55 zone. Ward 2.

Dates of Public Hearing: Planning Board – April 19, 2018

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property consists of one parcel of 4,550 square feet that contains a two-story masonry building with office and retail tenants with a small parking area in the rear. The property is located on the corner of Carlton Street and Somerville Avenue. The retail tenant is located on the ground level and an architect's office is located on the second floor.



2. Proposal: The proposal is to construct a contemporary style addition on top of the existing structure with a portion of the addition being in the rear. The retail tenant on the ground floor will remain and a new one-bedroom dwelling unit will be located in the rear portion of the ground floor. The second floor office space will be converted into three residential units (two two-bedroom units and one one-bedroom unit). The proposed third and fourth floor addition will include a two-bedroom residential unit. In total the building will include five dwelling units and the existing retail tenant.

The proposed addition will also include a shared roof deck above the second story and a private roof deck above the fourth floor for the exclusive use of the top unit. The proposed addition on the rear will be used to create an interior stairwell and trash/recycling enclosure.

3. Green Building Practices: The property owner also owns the architect's office in the building. The application states that "as LEED qualified professionals, we apply green building standards to deal with selection, detailing, and disposal of all materials as well as upgrade insulation, heating and cooling systems, and windows to improve energy efficiency".

4. Comments:

Design Review Committee: Overall, the Design Review Committee (DRC) like the proposed design scheme and recommended that the Applicant increase the amount of landscaping and replace the fence surrounding the two abutting property lines.

Ward Alderman: Alderman Scott has been informed of this proposal and supports the project. He has met with the Applicant and neighbors that resulted in a redesign that pulled the building massing away from the abutting residential district.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT with SITE PLAN REVIEW (SZO §6.1.22.D and §9.13):

In order to grant a special permit with site plan review, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.2.5 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.2.5 in detail.

1. Information Supplied:

The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.2.3 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project.

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 with site plan review."*

6.1.22.G CCD. All new developments shall meet the following standards:

1. *Penthouses and Mechanical Equipment. All elevator and stairwell penthouses, roof-mounted mechanical equipment (including enclosure, if any) and other similar rooftop installations shall be set back behind a plane inclined at 45 degrees from the vertical, beginning at the maximum height of the building, along all street lines and rear lot line and shall be screened pursuant to the screening provisions in Section 14.3. Ventilation for restaurants and other businesses producing odors should vent away from residential districts. Equipment shall be designated to comply [with] the City's Noise Ordinance during operation. The first fifteen (15) feet in height of such equipment shall be exempt from the calculation of maximum height; if such equipment is greater than fifteen (15) feet in height, the additional*

height shall count toward the building's height.

The proposed addition will also include a shared roof deck above the second story and a private roof deck above the fourth floor for the exclusive use of the top unit. Both decks will be incorporated into the design of the proposed addition. The roof also has many existing sky lights toward the front part of the roof that will remain. The roof plan does not include any mechanical penthouses or installations.

2. *Service Areas and Loading Spaces. Ground level mechanical equipment, utility and trash enclosures, loading docks and other utilitarian and service elements shall not abut the street edge(s) of the parcel and shall be visually and acoustically screened (sufficient to conform to the City's Noise Ordinance during operation). Access to these areas shall not interrupt pedestrian and sidewalk treatments. The SPGA may limit the hours of delivery so as to minimize any adverse impacts the service and loading aspects of proposed use may have on the surrounding neighborhood. Generally, loading times should take local traffic patterns into consideration.*

The proposed trash/recycling area will be screened within the proposed rear portion of the addition.

3. *Pedestrian Oriented Requirements. To promote pedestrian activity, buildings shall be designed with separate front entrance doors to lobbies, cultural spaces, retail and business, and other sources of pedestrian activity. These entrances shall be oriented to existing public sidewalks and other open space (as opposed to a central "mall" entrance).*

Separate residential and retail entrances are proposed within existing door openings along the Somerville Avenue frontage. The residential unit on the ground floor will have a separate entrance off of Carlton Street.

4. *Lighting. Lighting shall be appropriate to the historic and pedestrian-oriented character of surrounding neighborhoods and buildings, and shall enhance safety and security while minimizing glare and light trespass.*

There is no exterior lighting proposed as part of the proposal.

5. *Transition to Abutting Residential District. The minimum side or rear yard setback of a property abutting or spanning a residential district line (RA, RB, RC) shall be 20 feet from the district line with outermost 10 feet of the setback to consist exclusively of vegetative landscaping. The building shall have a 15 foot Upper Level Setback at a Tapering Height of 35 feet from the property line(s) abutting the residential district. The building shall be designed so that its massing is concentrated along the commercial corridor and away from properties in residential zoning districts to the extent possible.*

The proposed addition is setback twenty feet from the abutting residential district line in the rear with the outermost ten feet being vegetative landscaping. The upper levels are setback an additional 15 feet from the building's 35 foot height level.

6. *Parking Design. Refer to Section 9.17 for parking requirements. Parking and loading areas shall be hidden from view from public ways. They may be located at the side or rear of a lot or in concealed structures shall be suitably screened both visually and acoustically from*

the street and abutters (sufficient to conform to the City's Noise Ordinance during operation). Any views into parking structures shall be minimized through use of landscaping or architectural treatment.

There are two proposed tandem spaces (considered one space for zoning purposes) in the rear of the building that are accessed off of Carlton Street. A new cedar fence is proposed along the side and rear property line that will help visually and acoustically screen the parking space from the abutting residential district.

7. *Payment in Lieu of Parking. With the approval of the SPGA, the applicant may make either a cash payment in lieu of providing the required parking, or a partial cash payment combined with a partial provision of the required vehicle or bicycle parking. Applicants wishing to make use of this option are strongly encouraged to meet with the Planning Director prior to formal submission of an application to help determine project compliance. Payment must be made in an accordance with an adopted plan for payment-in-lieu of parking, and must be applied to the nearest planned or existing municipal facility to the site in question.*

N/A

8. *Credit for Provision of Land for Public Infrastructure. Where land is to be dedicated to the City of Somerville for public infrastructure (including roadways, sidewalks, public paths, parks, and other public infrastructure), the area of dedicated land shall be applied to calculations for dimensional requirements except for setbacks requirements.*

N/A

Article 9: Off-Street Parking and Loading

	<i>Existing</i>		<i>Proposed</i>	
Retail	3,082 s.f	7.87 spaces	3,082 s.f	7.87 spaces
Office	3,150 s.f	3.93 spaces	-	-
Unit #1	-	-	1 BR	1.5 spaces
Unit #2	-	-	2 BR	1.5 spaces
Unit #3	-	-	2 BR	1.5 spaces
Unit #4	-	-	1 BR	1.5 spaces
Unit #5	-	-	2 BR	1.5 spaces
Total	12 spaces (rounded from 11.8)		15 spaces (rounded from 15.4)	

SZO §9.13 allows for sites with nonconforming parking to apply for a Special Permit to modify parking requirements if the total number of spaces is six or fewer. The locus is currently nonconforming with respect to the number of required off-street parking spaces as 12 spaces are required and two are provided on the site. The proposal increases the parking requirement by three spaces.

Since the locus does not currently have sufficient off-street parking and an addition is being added to the property that increases the parking requirement by three, SZO §9.4.2 requires the Applicant to provide the three required additional spaces. The owner is required to landscape a 10 foot buffer in the rear of the property that removes one of the existing parking spaces and does not have any additional land to add the required spaces. He is requesting relief from providing the additional parking spaces.

In considering a special permit under §9.13 of the SZO “the SPGA may grant such a special permit only when consistent with the purposes set forth in Section 9.1, and upon reaching the findings and

determinations set forth in Section 5.1.4”. Staff finds that granting the requested Special Permit is consistent with the purposes of SZO §9.1 and will not cause detriment to increased traffic volumes, traffic congestion of queuing of vehicles, changes in the type of traffic, change in traffic patterns and access to the site, reduction in on-street parking, or unsafe conflicts of motor vehicles and pedestrian traffic.

3. Purpose of District: *The Applicant has to ensure that the project "is consistent with the intent of the specific zoning district as specified in Article 6”.*

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the CCD-55 district, which is, “to promote appropriate infill development along heavily traveled transportation corridors, especially where those corridors meet at named Squares. The district recognizes that such corridors present opportunities for an active mix of uses while also addressing development challenges posed by smaller lots and nearby existing residential development and the need to be accessible by multiple modes of transportation. The major objectives of the districts are to:

1. Encourage active mid-rise commercial and residential uses that contribute to a multi-modal-friendly street;
 2. Increase commercial investment in high-profile, accessible areas including retail that is largely neighborhood-serving in multi-tenant, mixed use buildings;
 3. Preserve and complement historic structures;
 4. Discourage inappropriate auto-oriented, significant trip-generating uses along transit corridors;
- and,
5. Promote pedestrian and bicycle activity.

4. Site and Area Compatibility: *The Applicant has to ensure that the project “(i)s designed in a manner that is compatible with the existing natural features of the site and is compatible with the characteristics of the surrounding area, and that the scale, massing and detailing of the buildings are compatible with those prevalent in the surrounding area”.*

Surrounding Neighborhood: The subject property is located on the southern side of Broadway on the block between George Street and Mount Vernon Street. East Broadway includes a mix of use types and a combination of building heights that range from one story to five stories.

Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility):

6.1.22.H. Design Guidelines for the CCDs. These guidelines are not intended to inhibit design creativity or discourage innovative architectural design solutions. Rather, they provide general standards for building massing, siting and articulation. It is understood that Buildings and Structures may not be able to comply with all of the following Guidelines. For projects located in both the Arts Overlay District and the Corridor Commercial Districts, the following CCD Design Guidelines shall apply.

1. Building(s) should complete the streetwall along the primary street edge(s).

The existing building completes the streetwall along Somerville Ave and Carlton Street.

2. Massing and height of buildings should be articulated in a manner compatible with the physical character of the surrounding districts, particularly where a building abuts a residential or historically designated property. Whenever possible, historical variety in the scale, rhythm, and relationship of buildings to pedestrian public ways should be preserved.

The proposal is to add mass and height on top of the building that is setback from the abutting residential district. It is articulated in such a way that it maintains the character of the existing building and is compatible with the surrounding district. The existing scale, rhythm, and relationship

of the building to pedestrian public ways will be preserved.

3. A transition in height should be established between residential or historically designated properties and new development.

Although the building is not designated as a historic building or as a local historic district it does have a thoughtfully detailed cornice that will remain. The cornice establishes the difference between the existing building and the new addition. The height of the proposed addition does decrease as it approaches the abutting residential district.

4. Thirty-foot-wide commercial bays with independent entrances onto the street are typical in Somerville and should be repeated in new developments to create visual and pedestrian interest. Varied architecture should be created and flat facades avoided by using recessed or projected entryways, bays, canopies, awnings, residential balconies on 2nd floor or above, and other architectural elements. Non-residential ground floor façades should have a minimum seventy-five (75) percent transparent material, and second floor facades should have a minimum of forty (40) percent transparent material. These openings should provide views into the building and should not be blocked by interior storage, nonartistic displays, or greater than thirty (30) percent internally mounted signage.

The existing façade will remain, with the exception of western red cedar siding replacing the existing cement board panels. The recessed left and right entry will remain for the retail tenant and the recessed doorway will be reserved for the entrance to the residential units. The building has an existing metal screen on the front of the second story that wraps around a portion of the side elevations.

5. Exterior building materials for all visible portions of the building should be high quality, durable, and aesthetically appropriate. Particular attention should be paid where properties abut residential districts and historically designated property. Predominant exterior building materials should include an appropriate combination of brick, glass, wood, artistically used metal, stone, or stucco. Precast concrete panels, EIFS-type finishes, and large expanses of glass or corrugated sheet metal are generally discouraged. Bare or painted concrete as the only exterior facade material shall not be allowed.

Exterior building materials for all visible portions of the building will be high quality, durable, and aesthetically appropriate. The existing building is red brick with an artistic metal screen on the second story. The proposed materials of the addition include cementitious board panels, western red cedar siding, and perforated metal panels.

6. Visible rear and side façades should maintain a similar character to the front façade of the building and the intended character of the surrounding district.

The existing side facades will remain on the first and second story. The rear façade is currently red brick and the proposed rear façade on the first and second story will use a western red cedar siding system that will complement the proposed addition and is that same material that will be used on the front façade.

7. Signage and awning design should respect buildings' context (e.g., scale, design, style, colors, materials), be oriented to pedestrians, and be subordinate to the overall building composition. Creative shapes must be carefully designed and coordinated with the overall appearance of the building. The design should also maintain an existing "signage line" and respect the character, scale,

and locations of adjacent signs and awnings. Large, interior-lit or back-lit signs or awnings, neon "open" signs, vinyl or plastic materials and overly bright colors are generally discouraged. To add interest and character to the retail environment signs or awnings may convey interesting elements or logos without excessive wording. They should be limited to advertising the business name and its main goods or services, with minimal or no national brand names or logos. Type styles should enhance readability of the sign and provide information simply and legibly. Use awnings to create pleasant shaded spaces in front of a building. Signs and awnings should enhance important architectural details and not conceal or obliterate them.

The existing retail tenant will remain and does not currently have signage. Signage is not included in the proposal. If the signage is proposed at a later date it shall respect the buildings' context (e.g., scale, design, style, colors, and materials), be oriented to pedestrians, and be subordinate to the overall building composition. Signage shall be limited to advertising the business name and its main goods or services, with minimal or no national brand names or logos. Text styles should enhance readability of the sign and provide information simply and legibly.

8. Retail, restaurant and other pedestrian-oriented uses are encouraged, particularly on the Ground Floor. As noted in 6.1.22.E, residential uses shall not be permitted on the Ground Floor street frontage along major streets unless they are located in structures that are historically residential on the Ground Floor.

The existing retail use will remain on the ground floor. The proposed ground floor residential unit does not front along the major street.

9. Individual Artist Live/Work Spaces should be designed as closely as possible in accordance with the "Design Guidelines for Artist Housing" produced by the Somerville Arts Council.

The ground floor residential unit is labeled as a live/work unit. If the space is intended to be used by a local artist it shall be designed as closely as possible in accordance with the "Design Guidelines for Artist Housing" produced by the Somerville Arts Council.

10. Residential units should be of varying sizes to accommodate a range of family sizes. Generally dwelling units within a structure should not have an average size of less than 1,000 square feet.

Three two-bedroom units and two one-bedroom units are proposed.

11. A sidewalk depth of at least ten (10) feet from the street curb to building is strongly encouraged for developments fronting major streets.

The existing sidewalk depth does not change with this proposal and is currently approximately 10.6' between the building face and the curb on Somerville Avenue.

5. Functional Design: *The project must meet "accepted standards and criteria for the functional design of facilities, structures, and site construction."*

The project meets "accepted standards and criteria for the functional design of facilities, structures, and site construction."

6. Impact on Public Systems: *The project will "not create adverse impacts on the public services and facilities serving the development, such as the sanitary sewer system, the storm drainage system, the*

public water supply, the recreational system, the street system for vehicular traffic, and the sidewalks and footpaths for pedestrian traffic.”

The project is not expected to create adverse impacts on the public services and facilities serving the development.

7. Environmental Impacts: *“The proposed use, structure or activity will not constitute an adverse impact on the surrounding area resulting from: 1) excessive noise, level of illumination, glare, dust, smoke, or vibration which are higher than levels now experienced from uses permitted in the surrounding area; 2) emission of noxious or hazardous materials or substances; 3) pollution of water ways or ground water; or 4) transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception.”*

The project is not expected to create adverse environmental impacts.

8. Consistency with Purposes: *“Is consistent with: 1) the purposes of this Ordinance, particularly those set forth in Article 1 and Article 5; and 2) the purposes, provisions, and specific objectives applicable to the requested special permit with site plan review which may be set forth elsewhere in this Ordinance, such as, but not limited to, those at the beginning of the various sections.”*

The proposal is consistent with the general purposes of the Ordinance as set forth under §1.2, which includes, but is not limited to promote the health, safety, and welfare of the inhabitants of the City of Somerville; to provide for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City; to lessen congestion in the streets; to protect health; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to provide adequate light and air; to prevent the overcrowding of land; to avoid undue concentration of population; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; to adequately protect the natural environment; and to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City.

21. Housing Impact: Will not create adverse impacts on the stock of existing affordable housing.

22. SomerVision Plan: Complies with the applicable goals, policies and actions of the SomerVision plan, including the following, as appropriate: Preserve and enhance the character of Somerville’s neighborhoods, transform key opportunity areas, and preserve and expand an integrated, balanced mix of safe, affordable and environmentally sound rental and homeownership units for households of all sizes and types from diverse social and economic group.

<i>SomerVision Summary</i>	<i>Existing</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
<i>Dwelling Units:</i>	0	5
<i>Commercial Sq. Ft.:</i>	6,232	3,082
<i>Parking Spaces:</i>	3	1

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit with Site Plan Review under §6.1.22.D and §9.13

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 with SITE PLAN REVIEW**.

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 the construction of a contemporary style addition on top of the existing structure with a portion of the addition being in the rear. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	CO / BP	ISD/Plng.									
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>June 29, 2017</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>March 8, 2018</td> <td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (G100, A101, A102, A103, A104, A105, A106, A301, A302, A303, A304)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>March 27, 2018</td> <td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (EC100, EC101, EC102, EC103, EC201, EC202, EC203, EC204)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	June 29, 2017	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	March 8, 2018	Plans submitted to OSPCD (G100, A101, A102, A103, A104, A105, A106, A301, A302, A303, A304)	March 27, 2018	Plans submitted to OSPCD (EC100, EC101, EC102, EC103, EC201, EC202, EC203, EC204)
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Any changes to the approved (site plan or elevations/use) that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.												
Pre-Construction												
2	The Applicant must contact the Engineering Department to obtain street addresses prior to a building permit being issued.	BP	Eng									
3	The Applicant must contact the Engineering Department to coordinate the timeline for cutting or opening the street and/or sidewalk for utility connections or other construction. There is a moratorium on opening streets from November 1st to April 1st and there is a list of streets that have additional opening restrictions.	BP	Eng									
Construction Impacts												
4	The applicant shall post the name and phone number of the general contractor at the site entrance where it is visible to people passing by.	During Construction	Plng.									
5	The Applicant shall at his expense replace any existing equipment (including, but not limited to street sign poles, signs, traffic signal poles, traffic signal equipment, wheel chair ramps, granite curbing, etc) and the entire sidewalk immediately abutting the subject property if damaged as a result of construction activity. All new sidewalks and driveways must be constructed to DPW standard.	CO	DPW									

6	All construction materials and equipment must be stored onsite. If occupancy of the street layout is required, such occupancy must be in conformance with the requirements of the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and the prior approval of the Traffic and Parking Department must be obtained.	During Construction	T&P	
Design				
7	Applicant shall provide final material samples for siding, trim, windows, and doors to Planning Staff for review and approval prior to construction.	BP	Plng.	
Site				
8	Landscaping should be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards;	Perpetual	Plng. / ISD	
9	The parking area shall be constructed of a pervious paver material.			
10	The Applicant shall submit a revised site plan that includes bicycle parking spaces, which can be satisfied with "U" type bicycle racks.			
Miscellaneous				
11	Gas and electric meters shall not be on the front of the structure. Gas and electric meters may be located on the side of the structure but shall be screened from the street by a hardy, staff approved evergreen planting. Utilities shall not be located adjacent to windows and shall not impact any parking, landscaping, or egress. The provisions of this condition may be waived by staff if the applicant submits a letter from the utility, signed by a utility representative, on utility letterhead, indicating that there is no feasible alternative to placing meters in violation of this condition.	CO	ISD	
12	Electrical conduits on the exterior facades of buildings shall be painted to match the wall material to which they are attached. Conduits are not allowed on the front of any structure.	CO	Plng.	
13	Granting of the applied for use or alteration does not include the provision for short term rental uses, such as AirBnB, VRBO, or the like. Separate approvals are needed for the aforementioned uses.	Ongoing	ISD / Plng.	
14	The Applicant, its successors and/or assigns, shall be responsible for maintenance of both the building and all on-site amenities, including landscaping, fencing, lighting, parking areas and storm water systems, ensuring they are clean, well kept and in good and safe working order.	Cont.	ISD	
15	If the ground floor residential unit is intended to be used by a local artist it shall be designed as closely as possible in accordance with the "Design Guidelines for Artist Housing" produced by the Somerville Arts Council.	CO	Plng.	
Public Safety				
16	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP	
17	Per Somerville fire safety regulations, grills, barbecues, chimineas and the like are NOT permitted on decks or porches.	Perpetual	FP	

18	Any transformers should be located as not to impact the historic building or landscaped area, and shall be fully screened.	Electrical permits & CO		
19	To the extent possible, all exterior lighting must be confined to the subject property, cast light downward and must not intrude, interfere or spill onto neighboring properties.	CO	Plng.	
Signage				
20	Signage shall respect the buildings' context (e.g., scale, design, style, colors, and materials), be oriented to pedestrians, and be subordinate to the overall building composition. Signage shall be limited to advertising the business name and its main goods or services, with minimal or no national brand names or logos. Text styles should enhance readability of the sign and provide information simply and legibly. Lighting after 10p.m. facing residential property will be turned down or off.	CO/Cont.	Plng.	
Final Sign-Off				
21	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.	

