

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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF

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Case #: ZBA 2016-76-R1-7-2017

Date: October 18, 2017

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 35 Dane Street

Applicant Name: Zero Dane, LLC **Applicant Address:** 246 Newbury Street,

Peabody, MA 01960

Owner Name: Zero Dane, LLC Owner Address: 246 Newbury Street,

Peabody, MA 01960

Agent Name: Richard Di Girolamo

Agent Address: 424 Broadway, Somerville

Alderman: Maryann Heuston

spaces. RC zone. Ward 2.



Aerial view of 35 Dane Street

Legal Notice: ZBA 2016-76-R1-7-2017 (Note: This project was originally permitted by the ZBA as "0 Dane Street" and has since been assigned the street number of 35 Dane Street, Units 1 - 4). Applicant and Owner, Zero Dane, LLC, Variances under §5.5 of the SZO to construct a 4-unit residential structure on an undersized lot and a revision to Special Permits under §5.3.8 to reduce the number of units from the previously-permitted 5 units to four units, increase the proposed height from 37.4 feet to 38.4 feet, reduce the net floor area, increase the amount of right and left side yard setbacks provided, increase the landscaped and pervious areas and reduce the amount of ground coverage; under Article 9 of the SZO for a shared driveway and a reduction of parking by reducing the amount of standard-sized parking provided and replacing it with compact

Dates of Public Hearing: October 18, 2017



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I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. <u>Subject Property:</u> The subject property is a 7,295sf vacant lot in the RC district and directly abuts an active railroad track.

2. **Proposal:**

Staff Note: In December, 2016, the ZBA approved a larger proposal for this property. At the time, no street number had been assigned to the parcel and, therefore, it was known as "0 Dane Street." Since this time, the Planning Office has instituted a new policy that we will no longer advertise cases to be heard by the ZBA unless it has a formal street number assigned by Engineering. Because of this policy, this property is now formally known as "35 Dane Street."

Generally, the Applicant proposes constructing a 4-unit residential building on a non-conforming lot. As noted in their 2016 approvals, the property qualified for Variances due to the fact that the lot was undersized due to a taking of land more than 30 years ago. Before this taking, the lot in question would have been a full-sized, buildable lot in the RC zone. The taking of a few hundred square feet rendered the lot unbuildable under the SZO. As described later in this Staff Report, this, among two other factors, qualifies the Applicant for relief under the Variance category.

The nature of the Applicant's proposal has changed since it was approved by the ZBA in December, 2016. The Applicant, therefore, seeks a revision to their Special Permit and Variances that were approved by the ZBA in 2016. The table immediately following lays out each of the dimensionals for which the Applicant is proposing a revision from the original approvals.

Dimensional Category	ZBA Approved 2016	New Proposal	Staff Comments		
Dwelling Units	5	4	Reduced by 1 unit		
Lot area per dwelling	1,459	1,823	Improved due to reduction of 1 unit		
unit					
Ground Coverage	48%	38%	Improves % of ground coverage by		
			a reduction of 10%		
Landscaped area	37%	49%	Increases landscaping by 12%		
Pervious Area	35%	53%	Improves pervious area by 18%		
Net Floor Area	9,569	6,926	Improves NFA by a reduction of		
			2,643 s.f.		
Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	1.3	.95	Improves FAR by reducing it by .35		
Front yard setback	10	10.1	"Improves" by 1 inch		
Side Yard – Left	10.4	17	Improves the setback by 6.6 feet		
Side Yard – Right	10	15	Improves the setback by 5 feet		
Parking spaces	9	8	Reduces the number of parking		
	(five standard &	(four standard,	spaces on the site, but the reduction		
	four compact)	three compact &	is in keeping with the removal of		
		one HC space)	one of the dwelling units. The		
			number of spaces reduced are done		
			so uniformly by space type - one		
			standard, one compact)		
Bicycle parking	10	6	Removes 4 bicycle spaces form the		
			site.		

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3. **Green Building Practices:** The application states that the project will meet or exceed stretch code.

4. **Comments:**

Ward Alderman: Maryann Heuston sponsored neighborhood meetings for the previous iteration of this project that was approved by the ZBA.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT under §5.3.8 and Article 9 of the SZO:

In order to grant a special permit, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in Article 9 and §5.3.8 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through Article 9 and §5.3.8 in detail.

1. <u>Information Supplied:</u>

The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of Article 9 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project with respect to the required Special Permits.

2. <u>Compliance with Standards:</u> 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."

Regarding SZO Article 9

As presented, this proposal requires the Applicant to apply for a Special Permit under SZO §9.13.c which states that an easement must be obtained in order for a driveway on one lot to be used to lead to (a) parking space(s) on another lot. The Applicant must provide a copy of the easement to the City Solicitor for review and approval and file with the Registry of Deeds per the SZO.

This proposal also requires relief for the parking spaces provided for the site under SZO §9.17.2B which allows the SPGA to consider granting a Special Permit to allow for a greater number of compact parking spaces on a project instead of the standard size spaces.

The property is currently a vacant lot filled with trees and other vegetation, thus providing no parking. The 35 Dane Street proposal requires that **8.5 standard-size parking spaces** be provided based on the bedroom count distributed over the five units. The Applicant proposes a total of eight spaces. However only four (4) of those spaces are standard size and three (3) are compact while one space for handicapped accessibility will be provided. Six (6) bicycle spaces are also proposed. The handicapped space is proposed in the left side yard with another four standard spaces proposed inside and under the building. All three compact spaces are proposed for inside the building.

3. <u>Consistency with Purposes:</u> 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."

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Staff finds that the proposal is consistent with the purpose of the RC district, which is: "...to establish and preserve a district for multi-family residential and other compatible uses which are of particular use and convenience to the residents of the district.

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 of the ordinance Article as set forth in Section 9.1. Staff finds the project proposal to be consistent with those purposes as follows:

a. Promote traffic safety by assuring adequate places for storing of motor vehicles off the street, and for their orderly access and egress to and from the public street;

Staff finds that the proposal provides adequate off-street vehicular parking for the project by providing a combination of compact and standard parking spaces all located on the subject parcel.

b. Increase the traffic-carrying capacity of streets and highways in the City and obtain a more efficient utilization of on-street curbside parking;

Staff finds that this is item is not applicable to the project proposal. All parking is provided off-street and on-site. There will be no alterations made to the surrounding city streets.

c. Reduce hazards to pedestrians;

While the project will increase the number of vehicles present in the neighborhood and using the surrounding city streets, Staff finds that the addition of eight (8) vehicles does not comprise a substantial increase in vehicular volume. The vehicles will be entering and exiting from an existing driveway with which the neighborhood is already familiar.

- d. Protect adjoining lots and the general public from nuisances and hazards such as:
 - 1) Noise, glare of headlights, dust and fumes resulting from the operation of motor vehicles,

Staff finds that the proposal mitigates these issues by placing all but one of the parking spaces inside the building. There is little to no exterior space that would allow for cars to be on and idling on the property, thus confining any such nuisances to a contained, yet ventilated space inside the building.

2) Glare and heat from parking lots,

There will be no parking lots on this property.

3) Lack of visual relief from expanses of paving,

There will be no paving on this parcel. All hardscaped areas - walkable, parkable – and drivable surfaces will be conditioned to be constructed of pervious pavers, natural stone or similar materials.

4) Accelerated run-off of surface water from land covered by impervious materials; and

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Staff finds that there will be a minimum amount of impervious material on the site. (Conditions have been included in this report that require stormwater mitigation plans to be presented to and approved by the Engineering department.)

- e. Increase the number of locations bicycles can be safely secured in order to:
 - 1) Promote bicycle use throughout the City as a means to reduce motor vehicle traffic congestion, and
 - 2) Encourage more active lifestyles as a means to improve public health and welfare, and
 - 3) Prevent theft and vandalism of bicycles.

Staff finds that the proposal to include 6 bicycle spaces inside the underground garage allows for residents to securely store their bicycles and helps to passively encourage more active lifestyles and bicycle use in the City.

Regarding §5.3.8 of the SZO

This section of the SZO states that: Subsequent to a special permit, special permit with design review, or special permit with site plan review being granted by the SPGA, revisions in the plan may be made prior to the granting of the Certificate of Occupancy, in accordance with the following procedures and applicable law, ordinances, and regulations".

- 1. Only revisions deemed de minimis (i.e., minor details, final touches) by the Planning Director (or designee) may be approved without a public hearing. Approval of such changes shall be documented in the case file and Planning Director approval or disapproval of such changes may be appealed to the SPGA in accordance with Article 3.1.9.
 - a. Revisions may only be considered de minimis upon the Planning Director's making the following findings:

i. Changes would not contravene the legal notice, any finding, or condition of the SPGA in the original approval;

ii. Changes would not detrimentally impact matters of substance identified in meeting minutes of original hearings;

iii. Changes would not alter the character of the development; and iv. Changes would be so insignificant as not to be noticeable to persons generally familiar with the original approval.

None of the Applicant's changes were deemed to be de minimis in nature, thus the Applicant is before the ZBA seeking to amend their previous approvals.

b. The Planning Director shall memorialize any de minimis findings and approvals in memoranda to the SPGA, affected City departments, and the Applicant.

None of the Applicant's changes were deemed to be de minimis in nature, thus the Applicant is before the ZBA seeking to amend their previous approvals.

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c. Approved revised plans shall be marked by Planning Staff as substantially conforming to prior SPGA approval.

None of the Applicant's changes were deemed to be de minimis in nature, thus the Applicant is before the ZBA seeking to amend their previous approvals.

2. Revisions that are not de minimis shall be subject to the full notice and hearing provisions of § 5.3.2 of this Ordinance, but shall not be subject to review by additional boards, departments, city agencies or commissions except as requested by the SPGA or upon the recommendation of the Planning Director. Applicable findings shall be made in accordance with the type of permit(s) being revised.

The Applicant's proposed changes were not de minimis in nature and the revisions have been duly noticed as required.

3. The use or development as originally approved shall otherwise be in accordance with the originally approved plans and conditions of approval.

The use and development is in accordance with the originally-approved plans and conditions.

4. Additional rules may be set forth in the Rules and Regulations of the Permit Granting Authorities.

Staff has no input.

5. Upon the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy for a development, revision rights shall lapse, and further development or use changes shall be subject to the zoning applicable at that time.

A Certificate of Occupancy has not been issued.

4. <u>Site and Area Compatibility:</u> 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."

Surrounding Neighborhood:

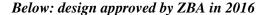
The property is located between the intersection of Dane Street, Village Street and Dane Avenue and the railroad bridge on Dane Street. The entirety of Dane Street is an eclectic mix of older, single-story former industrial buildings and single-, double-, and three-family, wood-framed residential properties built in a traditional style (pitched roofs with gables fronting Dane Street and flat-topped triple decker). With the exception of one of two buildings of more contemporary styling on Village Street, the proposed structure would be the first of its style in the area.

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Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility):

The proposed structure would bring a completely different residential design style to the streetscape. There are myriad residential and commercial styles along Dane Street. Though this structure will be the only "modern" design in the immediate Dane Street area, the proposed structure is an opportunity to provide visual interest and visual relief from the oft-graffitied backsides of the commercial buildings lining the rail bed opposite this parcel.

The proposed design has changed since originally approved in December, 2016. Staff finds that the changes to the design, including the reduction in size, massing, and volume and the increase in plantable areas lessen the visual impact of the proposed structure, as illustrated below:





5. <u>Adverse environmental impacts:</u> 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.

Impacts of Proposal (Environmental):

No adverse environmental impacts on the surrounding area are anticipated as a result of this project. The neighborhood can anticipate typical construction noise and related dust and dirt during the construction process. It would appear that the active railroad track which this property abuts might provide a greater means of bringing noise and depositing pollutants and other disagreeable materials and substances to the area than the construction and later habitation of the proposed structure would cause.

6. <u>Vehicular and pedestrian circulation:</u> The circulation patterns for motor vehicles and pedestrians which would result from the use or structure will not result in conditions that create traffic congestion or the potential for traffic accidents on the site or in the surrounding area.

Impacts of Proposal (Circulation):

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Staff does not find that 8 additional motor vehicles on this street will be significantly more detrimental to the traffic situation in this location as not all vehicles will enter and exit the property at the same time. Circulation patterns on Dane Street will remain the same. The vehicles will be entering and exiting the property via an existing driveway known to the neighborhood and will have access to sufficient on-site parking.

The plan also calls provides for separate paths for pedestrian access to the building including a handicapped-accessible ramp facing Dane Street.

7. <u>Housing Impact:</u> Will not create adverse impacts on the stock of existing affordable housing.

This project will not add any additional affordable housing units to the City's affordable housing stock.

8. <u>SomerVision Plan:</u> 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, 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 groups; and, make Somerville a regional employment center with a mix of diverse and high-quality jobs.

This proposal will add five new residential units to the City's housing stock.

III. FINDINGS FOR A VARIANCE UNDER §5.5 AND §8.5 OF THE SZO

5.5.3. Authorization and Conditions for Variances. A variance from the requirements of this Ordinance may be authorized by the Board of Appeals only for reasons of practical difficulty and substantial hardship, and only where the Board finds that all of the following conditions apply:

<u>(a)</u>

There are special circumstances relating to soil conditions, shape or topography of land or structures which especially affect such land or structures but not affecting generally the zoning district in which it is located, causing a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise.

Applicant Narrative: The existing lot is existing non-conforming as to minimum lot size and requires a variance for any proposed work. The proposed work would dimensionally comply to the zoning ordinance with respect to density and massing.

Staff Response: In the RC zone, the minimum lot size required is 7,500 square feet. This parcel is just shy of that amount at 7,295+/- square feet. The Applicant provided

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documentation to the ZBA during their December, 2016 hearing that this parcel was the subject of a land taking approximately 30 years ago, resulting in the loss of a few hundred square feet of land. As a result of this taking, the property was rendered unbuildable according to the SZO. Staff finds that this taking constitutes a hardship under item A of the variance criteria.

(b)

The specific variance as may be granted by the Board is the minimum variance that will grant reasonable relief to the owner, and is necessary for a reasonable use of the building or land.

Applicant Narrative: The existing lot is existing non-conforming as to minimum lot size and requires a variance for any proposed work. The proposed work would dimensionally comply to the zoning ordinance with respect to density and massing.

Staff Response: The granting of this Minimum Lot Size Variance is the minimum variance that would allow any owner to build on the lot. This Variance is necessary for any reasonable use of the land that involves building a structure.

(c)

The granting of the variance will be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of this Ordinance and will not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare. In addition to considering the character and use of the nearby buildings, the Board, in making its findings, shall take into account the number of persons residing or working in such buildings or upon such land, and the present and probable future traffic conditions.

Applicant Narrative: Any work on the existing non-conforming lot requires a variance. The proposal will comply with the zoning ordinance dimensionally with respect to density and massing. The proposal will be in character with its residential surrounding and in scale with its neighboring multi-family developments.

Staff Response: The proposal is consistent with the zoning ordinance for uses and dimensions in RC zones in every way except for total lot area. Granting a Variance to allow for the construction of this 5-unit residential property will not be detrimental to the public welfare. Instead, the proposal will activate a lot that directly abuts an active rail bed - a challenging location on which to create a palatable experience for residents. As noted earlier in this staff report, thought the design of the proposed building differs from that of other residential structures in the area, the multi-family residential use is compatible with the RC zone and with the surrounding neighborhood. Earlier findings in this report determined that the increased

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number of vehicles on the street (9) would not negatively impact the traffic situation currently extant on the street.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under Article 9 & Variance under §5.5 and §8.5 of the SZO.

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 & VARIANCE.**

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
	Approval is for a revision to the special permit and variance approved in December, 2016. Approval is to build on an undersized lot, to build 4 units in an RC Zone and for relief to provide more compact parking. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:		BP/CO	ISD/Pln g.	
1	Date (Stamp Date)	Submission			
	July 26, 2017	Plans submitted to City Clerk			
	are not de minimis must recei	site plan or elevations/use that we SPGA approval.			
Pre	Pre-Construction			1	
2	The Applicant must contact the Engineering Department to obtain a street address prior to a building permit being issued.		BP	Eng.	
3	The Applicant shall provide a copy of the easement that was secured in order for residents of 0 Dane to access their parking area from the abutting property prior to the issuance of a building permit.		BP	City Solicitor / proof to Plng & ISD	
4		e current City of Somerville ading, and drainage plans <u>must</u> ng Department for review and	ВР	Eng.	

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5	The Applicant shall submit a proposed grading and drainage plan, stamped by a registered PE in Massachusetts that demonstrates compliance with the City's stormwater policy. This plan shall be reviewed and approved by the Engineering Department prior to the issuance of a building	BP	Eng.	
	permit.			
6	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.	ВР	Eng	
7	The Applicant shall present their electrical plan to lights and lines/wiring for their review and approval prior to the issuance of a Building Permit.	BP	Lights & lines / wiring	
8	New sanitary connection flows over 2,000 GPD require a removal of infiltration and/or inflow by the Applicant. This will be achieved by submitting a mitigation payment, established by the City Engineers Office, to the City based on the cost per gallon of I/I to be removed from the sewer system and a removal ratio of 4:1. If a different ratio of removal or mitigation payment amount is adopted by the Board of Aldermen prior to the Applicant receiving a Certificate of Occupancy, payment will be adjusted to the BOA rate. The Applicant shall work with Engineering and meet this condition before a certificate of occupancy is issued.	BP	Eng.	
9	The Applicant shall provide their parking plan to the Traffic & Parking division for their review and approval prior to receiving a building permit.	BP	T&P	
10	The Applicant will provide the Traffic & Parking Division with a plan for construction traffic management for that division's review and approval prior to the issuance of a building permit. This plan will include delivery windows for construction equipment.	BP	T&P	
Con	struction Impacts			l .
11	The applicant shall post the name and phone number of the general contractor and all sub-contractors at the site entrance where it is visible to people passing by.	During Construction	Plng.	
12	Approval is subject to the Applicant's and/or successor's right, title and interest in the property.	Cont.	Plng.	Deed submitted & application formed signed
13	The Applicant shall at their 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.	СО	DPW	_

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14	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
15	The Applicant will provide the Traffic & Parking Division with a plan for construction traffic management for that division's review and approval prior to the issuance of a building permit.	BP	T&P
Desi			
16	Applicant shall provide final material samples for siding, trim, windows, and doors to Planning Staff for review and approval prior to construction and prior to the issuance of a building permit.	BP	Plng.
17	All exterior lighting on the site shall be downcast and shall not, in any way, spill onto abutting properties.	Final sign off / Perpetual	Wiring Inspecto r
18	Windows shall not present a reflective quality in any way.	Final Sign off / CO	ISD/Pln g
Site			
19	Landscaping shall be installed and maintained in compliance with the American Nurserymen's Association Standards.	CO – installation / Perpetual - maintenance	Plng. / ISD
20	Applicant shall present a landscaping plan to Planning Staff for their review and approval prior to the issuance of a Building Permit. ANY changes to said plan shall be reviewed and approved by Planning Staff prior to installation.	ВР	Plng./ ISD
21	The electric, telephone, cable TV and other such lines and equipment shall be placed underground from the source or connection. The utilities plan shall be supplied to the Wiring Inspector before installation.	Installation of Utilities	Wiring Inspector
22	Applicant shall supply secure inside bicycle parking on-site for 6 bicycles (this doesn't include space within the units).	СО	Plng.
23	All exterior drivable, parkable or walkable surfaces (meaning sidewalks) shall be constructed of pervious pavers, stone, or similar. No asphalt shall be used in any way on this project.	СО	Plng.
Tra	ffic & Parking		
24	The Applicant shall engage Design Consultants to re-design the curb cut to prevent left-hand turns out of the property. Signage indicating as such may also be included. Planning, Engineering, Traffic & Parking and Highways shall all review and sign off on this part of the proposal prior to any activity to implement this traffic controls being undertaken.	BP and recheck upon	
Puh	lic Safety	1	1
25	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	СО	FP
26	Any transformers shall be located as not to impact the historic building or landscaped area, and shall be fully screened.	Electrical permits &CO	
27	The building shall be sprinkled.	CO	FP/ISD

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Final Sign-Off				
	The Applicant shall contact Planning Staff at least five	Final sign	Plng.	
	working days in advance of a request for a final inspection	off		
28	by Inspectional Services to ensure the proposal was			
	constructed in accordance with the plans and information			
	submitted and the conditions attached to this approval.			