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INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, November 28, 2017, the ZBA held a special meeting to hear further testimony regarding the proposed Somerville High School building project. This project requires Special Permits to alter the existing, non-conforming structure under Section 4.4.1 of the SZO and a Variance for parking under Article 9 of the SZO.

At the November 28th meeting, the ZBA decided to separate the Special Permit components of the project from the Variance component and deliberate and vote on each type of relief separately. To this end, the ZBA voted unanimously to approve the requested Special Permits for the high school building project.

The ZBA also voted to continue deliberations on the parking Variance to the December 13, 2017 ZBA meeting date.

PURPOSE

The High School Building Committee, staff from the Capital Projects team, members of the external project team, the ZBA, Planning Staff, and Transportation & Infrastructure Planning Staff have been presented with and acknowledge the concerns that members of the public, high school staff and their representatives, and several Aldermen have raised regarding the proposal to significantly reduce the amount of on-site parking during and after the construction phases of the building project.



In the staff report for the high school project, Staff recommended that the ZBA approve the proposed project without attaching conditions thereto. Such a recommendation is due to the extensive inter-departmental coordination¹ required for this public project. Essentially, ZBA conditions are not necessary on a public project that will be receiving internal review and scrutiny of the issues that are typically the subject of our standard project conditions. On November 28, 2017, the ZBA passed the requested Special Permits for the project without attaching conditions.

The above said, given the concerns raised around parking, Planning Staff is amending the recommendation to the ZBA by adding a set of conditions to consider attaching to the requested parking Variance.

Staff notes that the initial opinion of the staff report has not changed with regard to recommending approval of the requested Variance: this project meets the test for granting a variance. The Central Hill site is the best site for the high school, based on an extensive study, and the uses set up in the proposed school plan are there to meet the educational needs of the students. It is the unique topography of the lot and specific and individualized project needs that make it reasonable to approve this variance. Nonetheless, to further limit any risk of detrimental impact, Staff recommends the following:

RECOMMENDATION

Planning Staff recommends that the following conditions be attached to any approvals granted for the requested parking Variance:

1 – Transportation & Infrastructure Planning Staff (T&I), in coordination with Capital Projects and the external project team retained to execute this project, shall hold regularly-occurring public meetings to gather additional feedback and suggestions from the public and city staff² and to report on their progress to creating solutions to some of these parking concerns.

- a. By January 15, 2018, T&I, Capital Projects, and the external project team shall create and make publicly available a calendar of said public meetings, their times and locations.
- b. By January 15, 2018, T&I, Capital Projects, and the external project team shall create and announce an online mechanism through which the public, including city staff, can submit comments, questions, and suggestions pertaining to the high school parking issue.

2 – T&I, Capital Projects, and the external project team shall commit to providing an estimate of overall parking supply and anticipated demand, on both the Central Hill Campus and the surrounding neighborhoods, for the following times of day/situations at a minimum:

- a. Arrival time for teachers and high school staff
- b. Typical commuting windows (residential neighborhoods)
- c. Pick-up and drop-off times for parents/buses

¹ For example, Engineering Department for drainage and storm water management, the City Arborist for open space planning and review, Inspectional Services Division (ISD) for building and safety code inspections throughout the project, etc.).

² The term “city staff” is intended to include any employees of the City of Somerville, but especially employees and their representatives whose normal work activities are undertaken at the central civic campus site.



- d. Arrival time for City Hall staff
- e. Release time for teachers and high school staff
- f. Release time for City Hall staff
- g. Regularly scheduled night-time meetings at City Hall (for example, BOA, ZBA, Planning Board, BOA committee meetings, etc.)
- h. High School events
- i. High School sports practices (after project completion)
- j. Snow emergency parking
- k. Street cleaning days
- l. Days with higher than normal demands for short-term visitors to City Hall
- m. Election days (assuming a central hall building is continued to be used as a polling location)

These studies should include, but not be limited to, strategies to address:

- a. Number of student drivers who regularly rely on area parking due to driving themselves to school
- b. The number of resident parking permits issued within a ½ mile radius of the central campus
- c. The sidewalk quality in the immediate area and its impact on the pedestrian experience (assuming an uptick in the number of pedestrians)
- d. The number of school staff and city hall staff with mobility issues and devise accommodation strategies
- e. The number of current and potential regular bike and public transportation-reliant school and city staff

Due consideration shall be given to strategies that include but are not limited to:

- a. Assigning drivers to specific zones for parking
- b. Prioritization of snow clearing and full removal of snow from sidestreets in the immediate area of City Hall
- c. Transportation Demand Management strategies, including but not limited to discounted T pass programs (with greater publicity), guaranteed ride home programs (for those who use transit), better bicycle storage/shower facilities, work from home programs for snowy days, etc.
- d. Review of options for off-site parking in lots or garages with or without shuttle services
- e. Creating an outer “ring” zone for those who are able to walk longer distances
- f. Create a subset of the ring zones for those who cannot walk long distances
- g. Subsidized MBTA passes
- h. Expand pre-tax MBTA passes to school staff
- i. Additional bicycle racks
- j. Secure, covered bike parking (bike lockers)
- k. Carpool ride matching
- l. Carpool incentives
- m. Shuttle service to satellite lot
- n. Neighborhood shuttle service
- o. Carpool lot
- p. Satellite lots within walking distance of campus
- q. Construct parking garage within walking distance of campus
- r. Provide locker rooms/showers to incentivize bicycling/walking/running to work
- s. Provide city staff with use of city vehicles if they arrive by carpool/MBTA/walk/bike
- t. Provide equivalent Resident Permit stickers to employees so they can park anywhere in the city (or, alternatively, along the length of Highland Avenue allowing staff to get on the 88 or 90 bus)

- u. Shift street sweeping zones
- v. Reduce street sweeping in study area to 1x per month
- w. Provide parking “stipend”
- x. Encourage work-from-home

Whatever system is chosen shall be monitored regularly, with the opportunity to adjust the program if on-street parking demand is squeezed too much in any particular area due to the program.

3 – By January 31, 2018, T&I, Capital Projects, and the external project team shall create a set of milestones that will govern when key analyses will be completed, data shared, and solutions created to address parking concerns. These milestones will be made publically available upon completion and will reflect a schedule that is ambitious but achievable. At a minimum, the City will begin to implement steps to encourage alternatives to driving by September 2018, and will seek out additional parking location opportunities by the start of 2019.

4 - By May 1, 2018, T&I, in coordination with Capital Projects and the external project team, will conduct a new study of existing parking demand and capacity in the neighborhoods surrounding City Hall and the High School.³

5 – By September 15, 2018, T&I, in coordination with Capital Projects and the external project team, will release an analysis of potential strategies, their feasibility and anticipated timeframes.

6 – By December 31, 2018, T&I, in coordination with Capital Projects and the external project team, will set up a schedule to implement the selected strategies.

³ The following criteria were used in the Nelson/Nygaard parking study released in November, 2017:

- Assumes all parking is removed from the site, rather than leaving the ~85 spaces that are proposed. This helps to account for things like snow blocking on-street spaces after snowstorms and on-street capacity in general (and particularly during street sweeping).
- Studies were done beginning at 5:00am, 9:00am, and 5:00pm, and last about 1.5 hours each. The purpose of these start time is to get snapshots of parking utilization throughout the day. As such, critical times such as 7:00-8:30am are not captured; this is because these times are the most volatile, and a 7:00-8:30am collection period would show the most variability from day to day. Data can be collected during those times, but with different methodology, including more frequent observations.
- The streets in the original study area were counted up to three different times (as detailed on Page 4 of the full study). The highest occupancy of the three days collected were the ones reflected in the report.