



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: ZBA 2012-77
Date: October 11, 2012
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 29 Elmwood Street

Applicant Name: Charles Casassa
Applicant Address: 17 Elmwood Street, Somerville MA 02144
Property Owner Name: Casassa Realty Trust
Property Owner Address: 17 Elmwood Street, Somerville MA 02144
Architect Name: SFG Studios, Sharon Gaffney
Architect Address: 278 Elm Street, Suite 226, Somerville MA 02144
Alderman: Robert Trane

Legal Notice: Applicant Charles Casassa and Owner Casassa Realty Trust, seek a Special Permit under SZO §4.4.1 to alter a nonconforming structure, including adding a dormer on the left side of an existing single-family dwelling, and a Special Permit under SZO §9.13.a to modify parking requirements for relief from two parking spaces to convert the structure into a two-family dwelling. RB zone. Ward 7.

Zoning District/Ward: RB zone / Ward 7

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permits under SZO §4.4.1 and §9.13.a

Date of Application: September 18, 2012

Dates of Public Hearing: Zoning Board of Appeals – **October 17, 2012**

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a single-family dwelling on a 3,750 square foot lot located on Elmwood Street near its intersection with Holland Street. The 2½ story gable roofed, wood frame structure has 2,728 gross square feet and 1,288 square feet of living space. There is a living room, dining room, kitchen, pantry, and mudroom on the first floor and three bedrooms and a full bathroom on the second floor. The lot has one legal parking space as the driveway is only one car wide, but is almost 50 feet long. The property is located in an RB zoning district.



2. Proposal: The Applicant/Owner would like to convert the existing single-family dwelling into a two-family structure by putting an addition on the back of the building and adding dormers onto each side of the roof. The front of the house would be altered to have two doorways, one that would lead directly into the first floor unit (Unit # 1) and a second doorway that would open to a stairway that would lead the upstairs unit (Unit # 2). The entire house would be renovated on the inside. For Unit # 1, the existing footprint of the building would be used for a living room, dining area, and kitchen. A rear, one story addition to the first floor would add a master bedroom, a full bathroom, a guest bedroom/study, and a small deck at the rear of the unit. The addition would have five skylights that would let in a substantial amount of natural light.

The second floor and attic space would be renovated and combined into a second unit at the property. The first floor of Unit # 2 would have a kitchen, dining area, living room, a bedroom, and a full bathroom. A second means of egress would lead out from the kitchen and exit out on the left side of the building. The former attic space would be converted into the master suite for Unit # 2 with a full on-suite bathroom and a loft/study area at the top of the landing. A small, 7 foot long dormer would be added to the left side of the existing structure to provide the appropriate headroom for the stairway that would lead to the third floor. A larger, 14 foot long dormer would be added to the right side of the building to provide additional living space in the master suite. This dormer on the right side could be constructed as-of-right but is part of the overall project design. Two skylights would also be added to the left side of the third story to increase the natural light into the master suite. There would be no additional parking added to the site as part of this proposal. The Applicant/Owner would occupy Unit # 1 and Unit # 2 would be rented out for extra income.

3. Nature of Application: The property is currently nonconforming with regard to minimum lot size at 3,750 square feet and frontage at 37.50 feet, as 7,500 square feet and 50 feet respectively are required in the RB district. The structure itself is currently nonconforming with respect to the left side yard setback. The proposed alterations to the third floor and roof along the left side of the building would be occurring within the required left side yard setback. Under Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) §4.4.1, alterations to nonconforming structures that affect the nonconforming aspect of a single-family dwelling may only occur via Special Permit approval from the Special Permit Granting Authority.

Additionally, according to SZO §9.5, the property is also nonconforming with regard to the required number off-street parking spaces at the site, as there is only one legal parking space at the property and three off-street parking spaces should be provided for the two-family dwelling use. Since the Applicant/Owner is proposing to increase the number of dwelling units at the property and is adding onto the existing structure, the Applicant/Owner is required to provide two additional off-street parking spaces at the property. The Applicant is choosing to not provide these additional off-street parking spaces, but instead is requesting relief from these additional parking requirements of SZO §9.5 via a Special Permit under SZO §9.13.a. A Parking Memorandum that discusses the parking impacts of this requested relief to the on-street parking situation in the surrounding neighborhood has been requested by the Somerville Traffic and Parking Department. At this time, the Applicant/Owner is still having the Parking Memorandum prepared by a transportation/traffic/engineering firm.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The subject property is located within an RB District. The surrounding area is comprised of a mixture of single-, two-, and three-family homes, with a few multi-family dwellings as well, between 2½ and 3 stories. The project site is approximately 1,300 feet from the heart of Teele Square and 1,800 feet from the Davis Square Red Line stop.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed modifications to the existing structure would not appear to be detrimental to the building or the surrounding neighborhood. The alterations to the roof through the

additions of dormers and skylights will still be in keeping with the roof styles of other structures in the surrounding neighborhood. There are a number of other structures in the surrounding neighborhood that have small shed dormers and the Applicant is proposing reasonably small ones as well. The dormer on the left side of the structure is only large enough to meet the headroom requirements for the stairway to the third floor. Additionally, while the dormer on the right side would be as-of-right, the length of this dormer is less than 50% of the roof line which will keep the building a 2½ story structure. The skylights proposed on the first and third floors will not be detrimental to the surrounding neighbors and will add substantial natural light to both units. The first floor addition will be at the rear of the structure and should not greatly impact the Elmwood Street streetscape. The overall height of the building will remain the same and the entire structure will be re-sided to result in a cohesive look even though 739 square feet of new livable space will be added to the building. Furthermore, the proposed project will maintain all other zoning dimensional compliance at the property. The structure will become a two-family dwelling used for residential purposes which is consistent with the surrounding area.

The requested relief from the two additional required off-street parking spaces for this proposal should only have a minimal impact to abutters and the surrounding neighborhood. While the property currently only has one legal off-street parking space according to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the existing driveway at the property is almost 50 feet long and three vehicles could most likely be parked in a tandem fashion in the driveway. Three off-street parking spaces would meet the parking requirements for the proposal when completed and Planning Staff is therefore anticipating minimal, if any, impacts to the on-street parking situation in the surrounding neighborhood as a result of this proposal. Additionally, by not paving more area at the rear of the property to provide these spaces, the Applicant is preserving a substantial amount of landscaping and pervious area at the property. The Traffic and Parking is requesting a Parking Memorandum that discusses the parking impacts of providing the two off-street parking spaces of relief for this proposal on the surrounding neighborhood's on-street parking situation. At this time, the Applicant has not provided this Parking Memorandum. Until Traffic and Parking has this memorandum they will not comment on the proposal and will remain concerned about the possible on-street parking situation in the neighborhood that would result from this application.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicant has indicated they will be “renovating the entire structure to include new insulation values, new energy star rated windows and doors, new high efficiency appliances and mechanical equipment, new electrical, new roofing and siding.”

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Ward Alderman: Alderman Trane has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.

Traffic & Parking: Indicated the following in an email to Planning Staff on Wednesday, October 10, 2012: “The Traffic & Parking Department has concerns about the on-street parking situation that would be created in the Elmwood Street neighborhood should relief be provided to the Applicant for this proposed project. Traffic & Parking is requesting a Parking Memorandum that discusses the parking impacts of providing the two off-street parking spaces of relief for this proposal on the surrounding neighborhood's parking situation. At this time, the Applicant has not provided this Parking Memorandum. Until Traffic & Parking has this memorandum, our office will not comment on this proposal and we remained concerned about the possible on-street parking situation in the neighborhood that would result from the Applicant receiving this relief.”

Wiring Inspector: Has been contacted but has not yet provided comments.



Existing Conditions: Streetscape



Existing Conditions: Backyard

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §4.4.1 and §9.13.a):

In order to grant a Special Permit, the SPGA must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.1.4 of the SZO. This section of the report goes through §5.1.4 in detail.

1. Information Supplied: The Staff finds that the information provided by the Applicant conforms to the requirements of §5.1.2 of the SZO and allows for a comprehensive analysis of the project with respect to the required Special Permits.
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."

In considering a Special Permit under §4.4 of the SZO, Staff finds that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The alterations to the roof through the additions of dormers and skylights will still be in keeping with the roof styles of other structures in the surrounding neighborhood. While the dormer on the right side would be as-of-right, the length of this dormer is less than 50% of the roof line which will keep the building a 2½ story structure. The overall height of the building will remain the same and the entire structure will be resided to result in a cohesive look even though 739 square feet of new livable space will be added to the building. Further, the proposed project will maintain all other zoning dimensional compliance at the property including setbacks, landscaping at 45%, pervious area at 44%, Floor Area Ratio at 0.54, and ground coverage at only 34%. Additionally, the requested parking relief from two required off-street parking spaces for this proposal should only have a minimal impact to abutters and the surrounding neighborhood. While the property currently only has one legal off-street parking space according to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the existing driveway at the property is almost 50 feet long and three vehicles could most likely be parked in a tandem fashion in the driveway. Three off-street parking spaces would meet the parking requirements for the proposal when completed and Planning Staff is therefore anticipating minimal, if any, impacts to the on-street parking situation in the surrounding neighborhood as a result of this proposal.

3. Consistency with Purposes: 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."

The proposal is consistent with the general purposes of the Ordinance as set forth under §1.2, which includes, but is not limited to promoting "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 conserve the value of land and buildings; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to encourage housing for persons of all income levels."

The proposal is also consistent with the purpose of the district in which the residential building is located, (6.1.2. RB - Residence Districts), which is, "To establish and preserve medium density neighborhoods of one-, two- and three-family homes, free from other uses except those which are both compatible with and convenient to the residents of such districts."

In considering a Special Permit under §9.13.a of the SZO the SPGA may grant such a Special Permit only when consistent with the purposes set forth in Section 9.1 which establishes standards ensuring the

availability and safe use of parking areas within the City, and this proposal is also consistent with these purposes.

4. Site and Area Compatibility: 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."

The alterations to the roof through the additions of dormers and skylights have been designed to be compatible with the built and unbuilt surrounding area. There are a number of other structures in the surrounding neighborhood that have small shed dormers and the Applicant is proposing reasonably small ones for this project as well. The dormer on the left side of the structure is only large enough to meet the headroom requirements for the stairway leading to the third floor. Additionally, while the dormer on the right side would be as-of-right, the length of this dormer is less than 50% of the roof line which will keep the building a 2½ story structure, which is the height of many buildings in the surrounding area. The project will create a two-family dwelling used for residential purposes which is consistent with the surrounding area.

5. Adverse 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.

No adverse environmental impacts are anticipated from this project. No new noise, glare, smoke, vibration, nor emissions of noxious materials nor pollution of water ways or ground water nor transmission of signals that interfere with radio or television reception are anticipated as part of the proposal. Additionally, by not paving more area at the rear of the property to provide additional parking spaces, the Applicant is preserving a substantial amount of landscaping and pervious area at the property. The project will create a two-family dwelling used for residential purposes which is consistent with the surrounding area.

6. Vehicular and Pedestrian Circulation: The circulation patterns for motor vehicles and pedestrians which would result from relief of two parking spaces for the subject property does not suggest a change in conditions that create traffic congestion or the potential for traffic accidents on the site or in the surrounding area.

The requested relief from the two additional required off-street parking spaces for this proposal should only have a minimal impact to abutters and the surrounding neighborhood. While the property currently only has one legal off-street parking space according to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the existing driveway at the property is almost 50 feet long and three vehicles could most likely be parked in a tandem fashion in the driveway. Three off-street parking spaces would meet the parking requirements for the proposal when completed and Planning Staff is therefore anticipating minimal, if any, impacts to the on-street parking situation in the surrounding neighborhood as a result of this proposal. Traffic and Parking is requesting a Parking Memorandum that discusses the parking impacts of providing the two off-street parking spaces of relief for this proposal on the surrounding neighborhood's on-street parking situation. At this time, the Applicant has not provided this Parking Memorandum. Until Traffic and Parking has this memorandum they will not comment on the proposal and will remain concerned about the possible on-street parking situation in the neighborhood that would result from this application.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permits under §4.4.1 and §9.13.a

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 PERMITS**.

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 to alter a nonconforming structure, including adding a dormer on the left side of an existing single-family dwelling, under SZO §4.4.1 and for relief from two off-street parking spaces under SZO §9.13.a to convert the structure into a two-family dwelling. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant: | BP/CO | ISD/Plng. | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>(September 18, 2012)</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>September 26, 2012 (October 9, 2012)</td> <td>Plot Plan</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(October 9, 2012)</td> <td>Elmwood Street Addition & Renovation (Cover Sheet)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>September 17, 2012 (October 9, 2012)</td> <td>Existing and Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations (A.01 – A.04)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | | | Date (Stamp Date) | Submission | (September 18, 2012) | Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office | September 26, 2012 (October 9, 2012) | Plot Plan | (October 9, 2012) | Elmwood Street Addition & Renovation (Cover Sheet) | September 17, 2012 (October 9, 2012) | Existing and Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations (A.01 – A.04) |
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| September 17, 2012 (October 9, 2012) | Existing and Proposed Floor Plans and Elevations (A.01 – A.04) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Any changes to the approved site plan or elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 2 | The Applicant will be required to demonstrate that the project plans meet the current City of Somerville stormwater policy. Utility, grading, and drainage plans must be submitted to the Engineering Department for review and approval. | BP | Eng. | | | | | | | | | | | |

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|---|---|---------------------|-------|--|
| 3 | All construction materials and equipment must be stored on-site. 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 | |
| 4 | The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements. | CO | FP | |
| 5 | The Applicant or Owner shall replace the tree in the backyard that is scheduled for removal with a new 3.5" caliper tree. | CO | Plng. | |
| 6 | New siding type and color, roofing, trim, and materials of the addition shall match or be complimentary to the rest of the existing structure. | CO | Plng. | |
| 7 | 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 | |
| 8 | 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. | |



29 Elmwood Street