

DIFFERENCES IN THE EXISTING & PROPOSED ZONING CODE IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

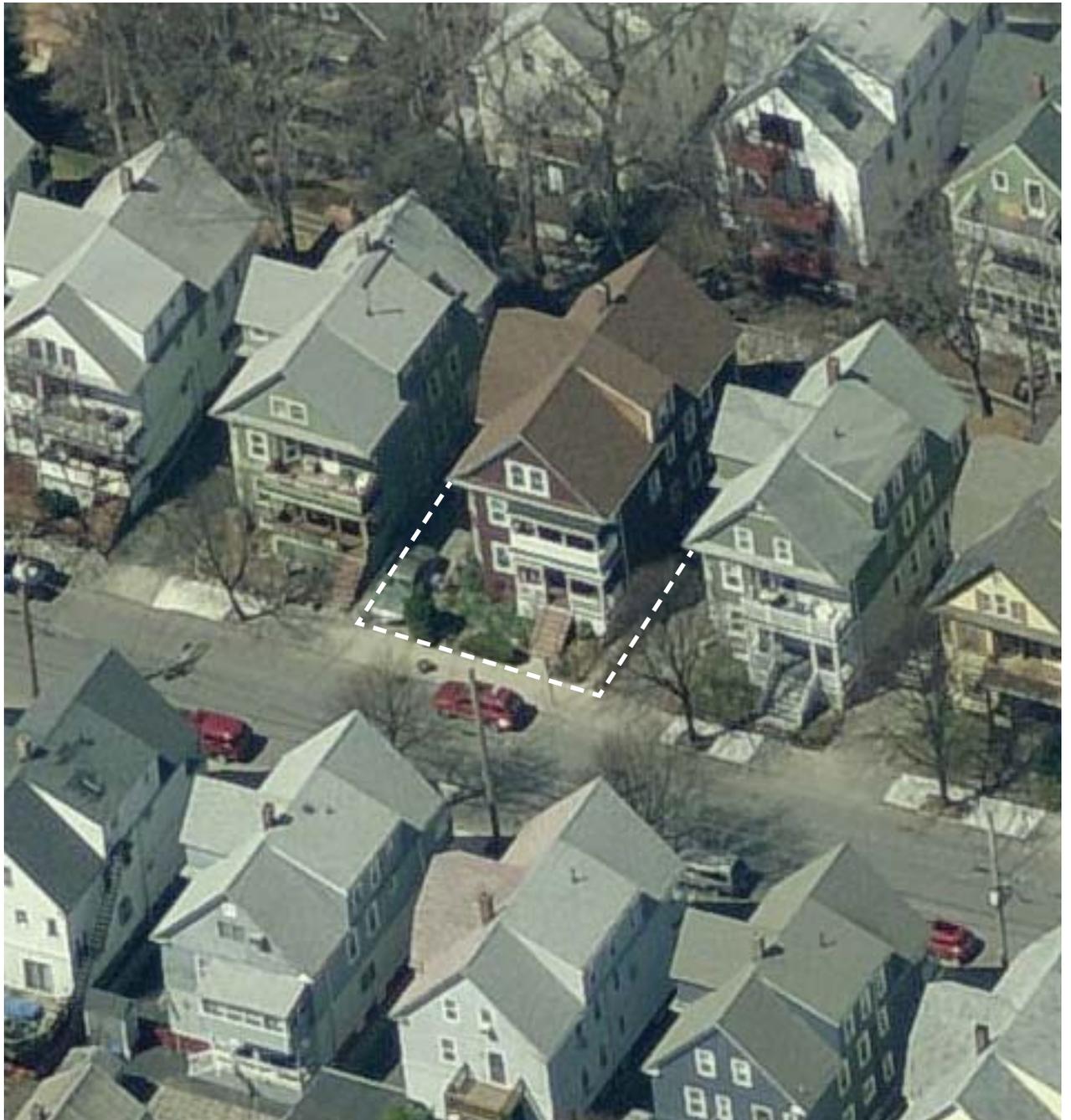


FOUR CASE STUDIES OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

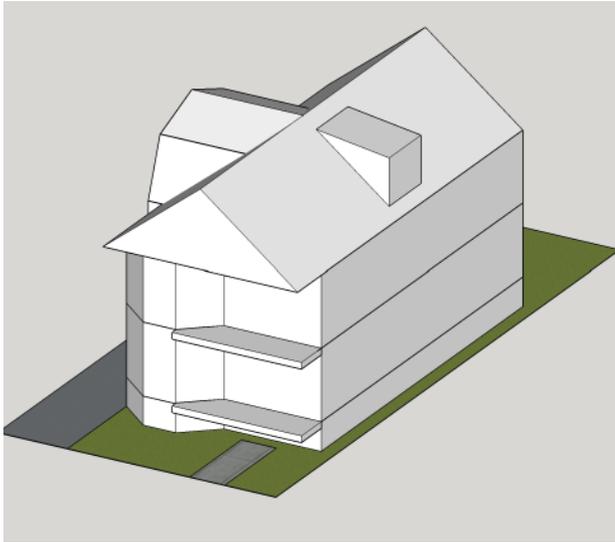
This guide is intended to illustrate the differences in development currently allowed by-right (which means without zoning relief) in the Residential A and Residential B zoning districts to the proposed by-right improvements allowed in the NR district in the zoning overhaul.



AERIAL IMAGE



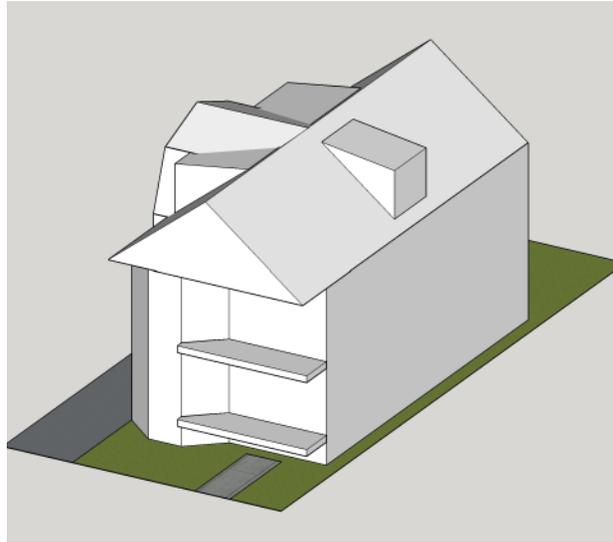
EXISTING



This is an existing Philly style 2-unit house in West Somerville. Philly Style units have a second floor split between two dwelling units. This house has an unfinished basement, finished attic, front porches, a paved driveway that holds roughly 2 cars parked tandem, and a grass backyard. It is a typical Somerville land subdivision pattern of 40' wide by 80' deep.

This house was built around 1920, before the City had a zoning code. The house is currently considered nonconforming to many of the dimensional requirements. However, it is considered grandfathered which doesn't force owners to alter their buildings to the existing regulation.

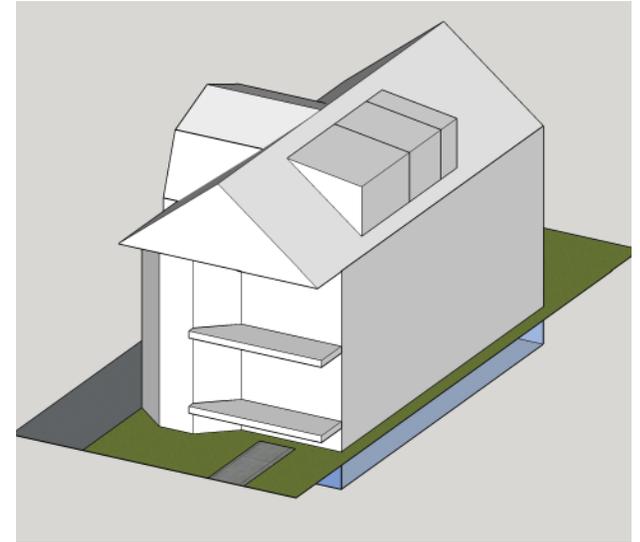
EXISTING ZONING



The zoning code allows one- and two-family units to be altered by-right if they do not change any existing non-conforming dimensional requirements. The one, by-right, alteration that this home can make is a dormer, up to 50% of the length of the roofline on the conforming sideyard setback. In Somerville, this is typically the driveway side of the home.

You may be surprised to learn that this property owner would need zoning relief to expand living area into their basement. This is because the existing code regulates by floor area ratio or FAR which is the comparison of the square footage of your house to the square footage of the lot. Putting living area in the basement requires no physical change to the outside of the house yet goes through a public hearing process. Many people are concerned about substandard or unsafe living areas crammed into basements. However, building code (not zoning code) regulates things like necessary egresses and minimum bedroom sizes.

PROPOSED ZONING

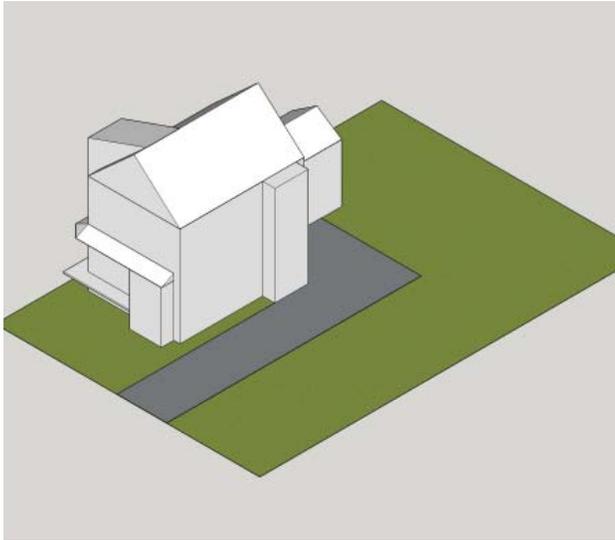


The proposed zoning code permits modest modifications to existing houses. The owner of this home could, by-right, finish the basement, expand the dormer on the narrow sideyard of the home, and add rear decks.

AERIAL IMAGE



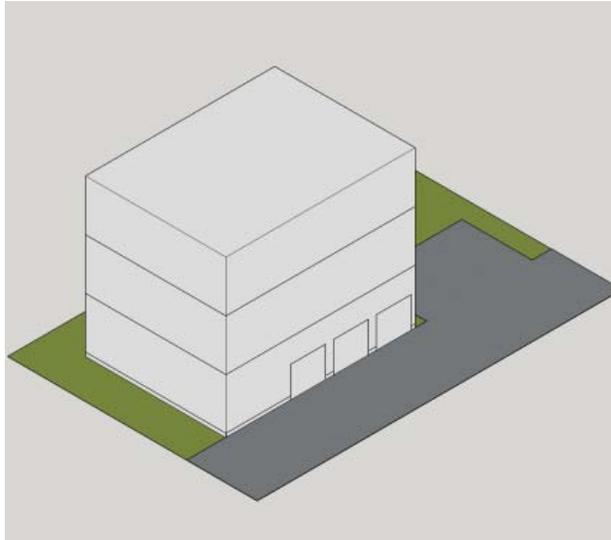
EXISTING



This is an existing detached house outside of Davis Square. Detached houses have one or two units, this house is a single family. This house has an unfinished basement, finished attic, a front porch, an enclosed and unfinished back porch, and a paved driveway that holds roughly 2 cars parked tandem, and a grass backyard. The unique feature of this house is the wide sideyard which is actually a separate lot. The fact that this is a separate lot indicates that at one time, this may have been under separate ownership, likely with a house on the lot. Presently, both lots and the existing house are owned by the same person. Combined, they are 64' wide by 93' deep (5,744 square feet).

This house was built around 1920, before the City had a zoning code. The house is currently considered nonconforming to many of the dimensional requirements. However, it is considered grandfathered which doesn't force owners to alter their buildings to the existing regulation.

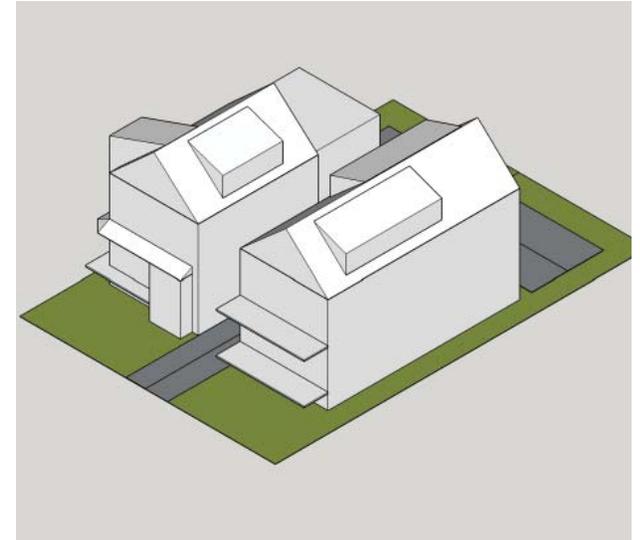
EXISTING ZONING



In Somerville, demolition of structures over 50 years old are reviewed by the Historic Preservation Commission. If structures are determined to be "Significant" to the history of Somerville and "Preferably Preserved," the owner must wait 9 months to demolish the building. In this 9 month waiting period, they are encouraged to work with the HPC on alternatives to demolition or preservation, documentation, or salvage of the existing building.

Under the existing zoning code very few things can be built 'by-right' or without zoning review. However, there are some lots, that can be drastically changed. This is an example of undesirable results that are allowed by the existing zoning code and are permitted if the demo delay expires. The existing code does not require design features familiar to most Somerville homes like front porches, bays, or back decks that help new construction blend in with its surrounding context. The zoning code allows for three units to be built on site with six parking spaces (3 garaged, 3 surface).

PROPOSED ZONING



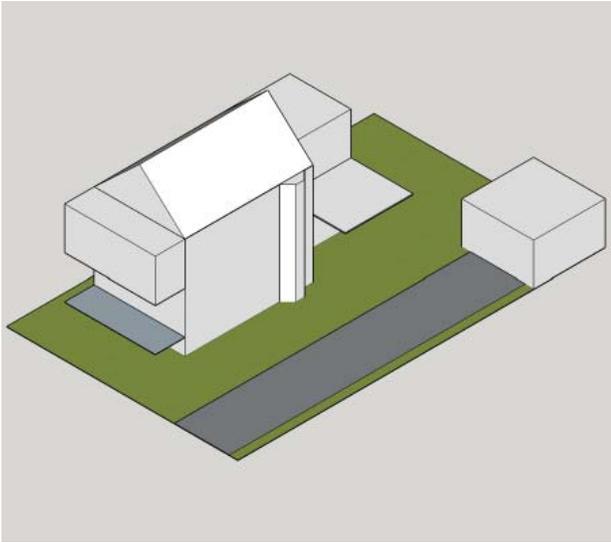
The proposed zoning code is based on the analysis of the existing lots and buildings of Somerville's residential neighborhoods (if you're interested, check out the RA/RB Report). When an existing lot is large enough, the proposed zoning code permits new structures in large sideyards. The proposed code regulates by building type which ensures that the new home has similar setbacks, dimensions, lot size, and features of existing homes on the street.

Generally speaking, Somerville is loved because of the neighborhoods of single-, two-, and three-family homes. This design strikes a balance by producing more housing but within the existing context of Somerville's neighborhood streets.

AERIAL IMAGE



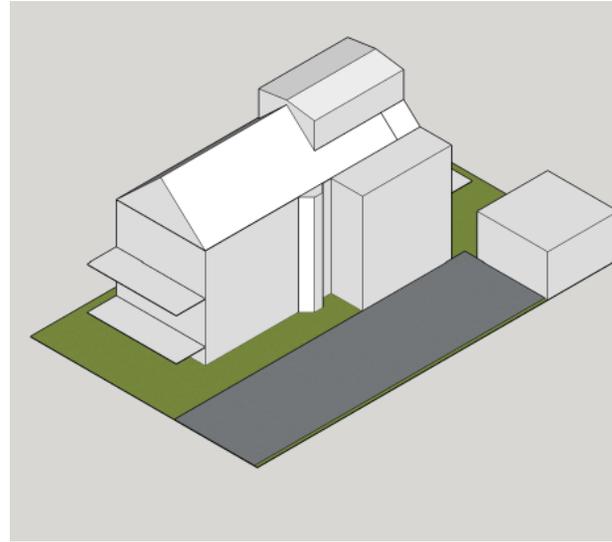
EXISTING



This was an existing detached two-family house in West Somerville. This house has an unfinished basement, finished attic, an enclosed front porch, a rear addition, and a back deck. The house is on a 52' wide by 87' deep lot (4,824 square feet).

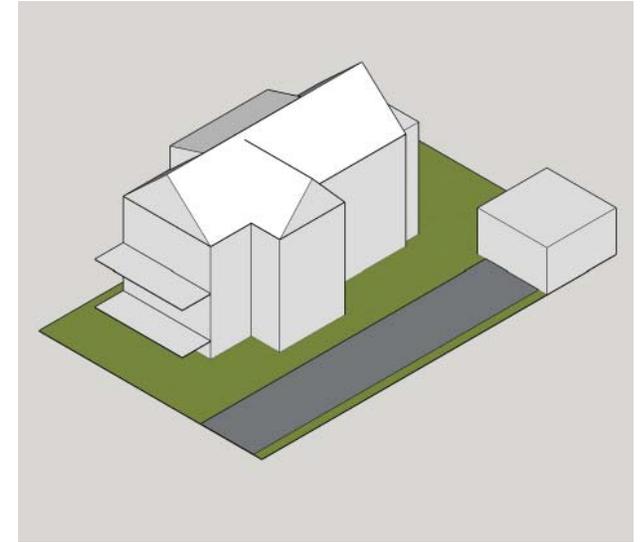
This house was built around 1920, before the City had a zoning code. The house is currently considered nonconforming to many of the dimensional requirements. However, it is considered grandfathered which doesn't force owners to alter their buildings to the existing regulation.

EXISTING ZONING



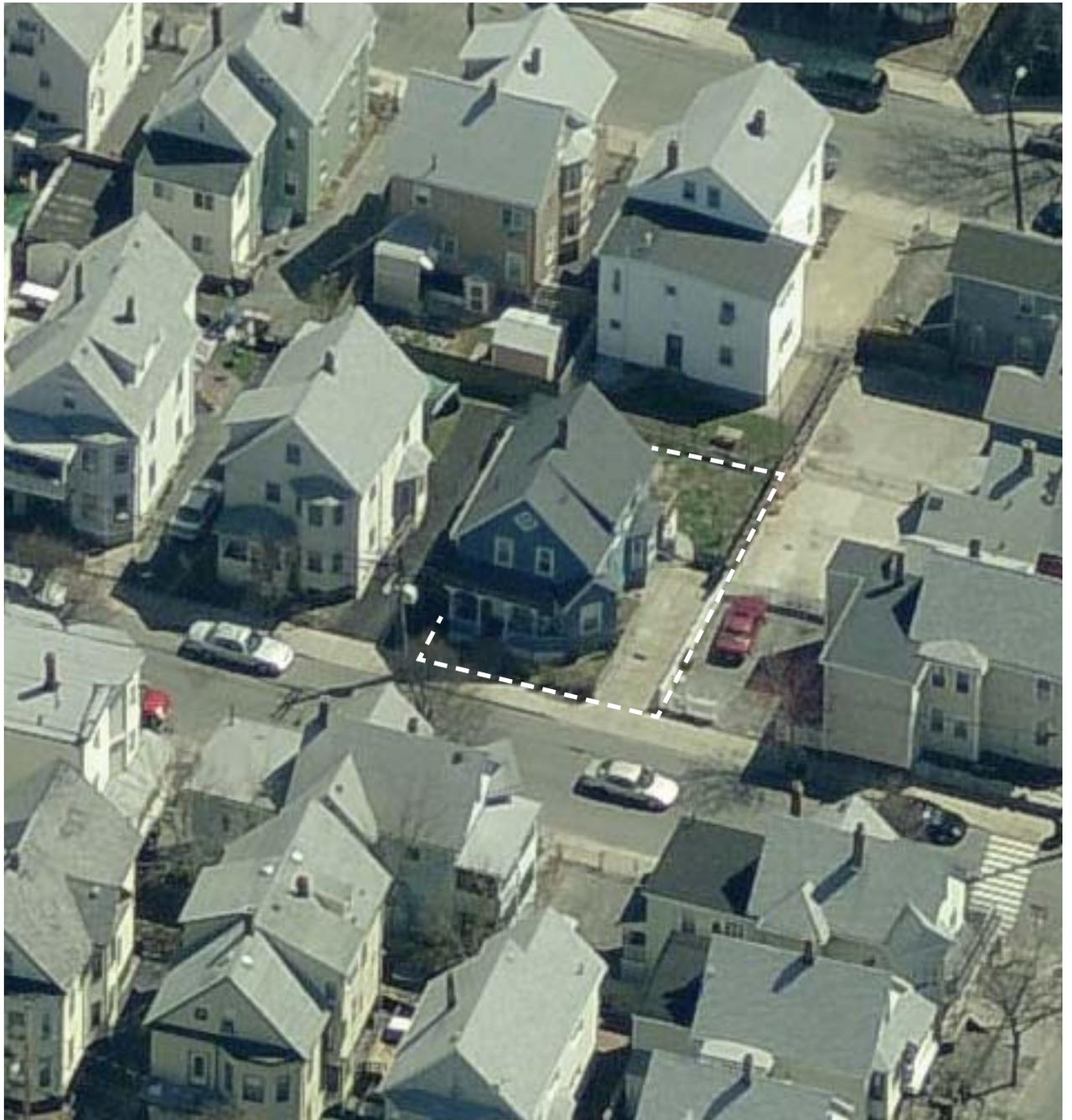
The zoning code allows one- and two-family units to be altered by-right if they do not change any existing non-conforming dimensional requirements. In 2013, this house was substantially altered as shown above. The Residential A and Residential B zoning districts are regulated by floor area ratio or FAR which is the comparison of the net square footage of the house to the lot size. In this case, the property owner manipulated the FAR by removing square footage from the interior of the home by making rooms with vaulted ceilings but added bulk to the back of the house. Rear additions are typical in Somerville. However, rear additions should be smaller than the main body of the house to be both contextual and respectful to the views and daylight of neighboring homes. On a positive note, the front porch was opened back up to provide an outdoor space for the second floor unit.

PROPOSED ZONING

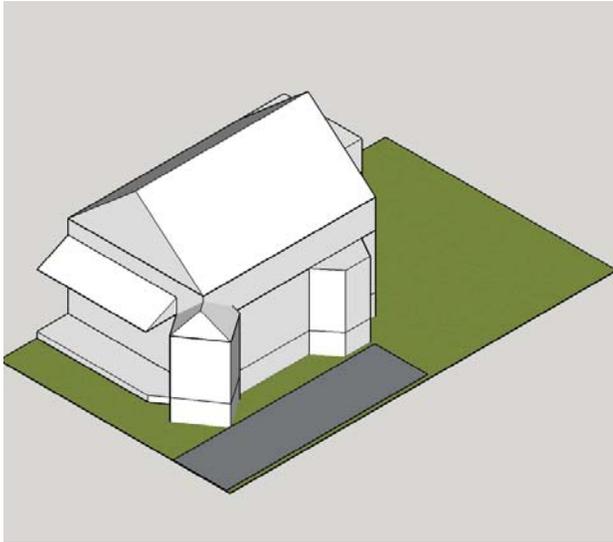


The proposed zoning code permits modest modifications to existing houses. The owner of this home could, by-right, finish the basement (not visible from this perspective), add a dormer on the narrow sideyard of the home, and create a cross gable for additional living space.

AERIAL IMAGE



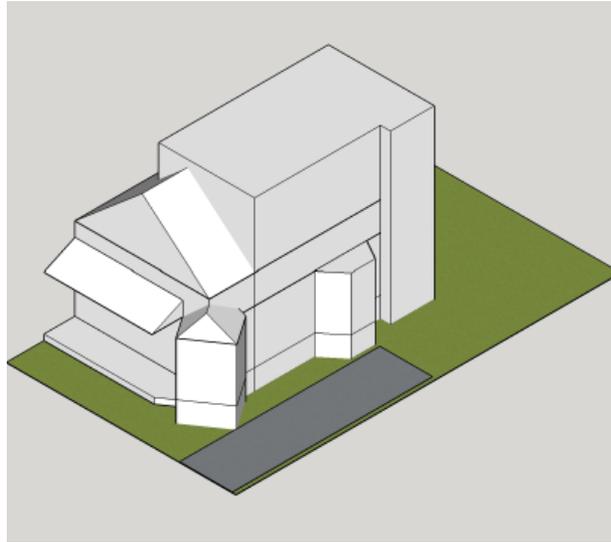
EXISTING



This was an existing cottage with two units in the Winter Hill neighborhood. Cottages are one or two story structures typically with only one unit. Generally the lots are smaller too, this lot is 40' wide by 67' deep (2,680 square feet). This cottage has a partially finished basement, an enclosed rear porch, and rear egress stairs (from when the house was converted to two units).

This house was built around 1900, before the City had a zoning code. The house is currently considered nonconforming to many of the dimensional requirements. However, it is considered grandfathered which doesn't force owners to alter their buildings to the existing regulation.

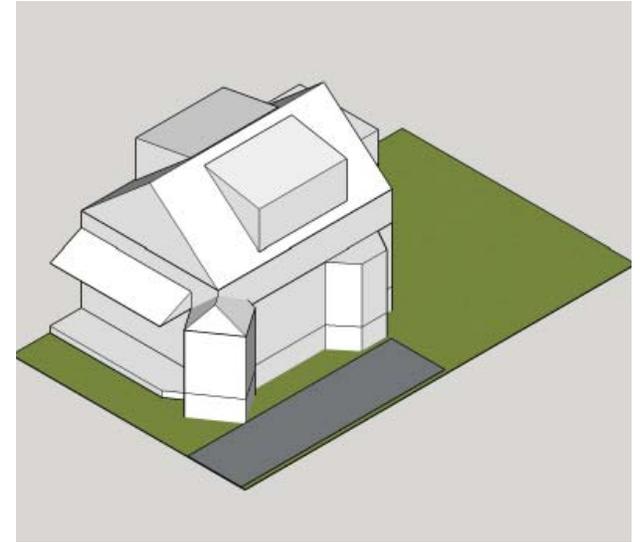
EXISTING ZONING



The zoning code allows one- and two-family units to be altered by-right if they do not change any existing non-conforming dimensional requirements. This cottage is currently being substantially altered as shown above. When finished it will still be a two-family but with larger units.

The current zoning regulates the entire district dimensionally, not by building form. Three stories are allowed in this district. The property owner is changing the cottage from a 1 1/2 story structure to three stories by adding a rear addition that extends forward onto the main body of the cottage. Three story buildings, like triple deckers, are common in Somerville. However, rear additions are typically smaller than the main body of the house to be both contextual and respectful to the views and daylight of neighboring homes. This addition substantially alters the cottage to where it is no longer part of the existing neighborhood context.

PROPOSED ZONING



The proposed zoning code is based on the analysis of the existing lots and buildings of Somerville's residential neighborhoods (if you're interested, check out the RA/RB Report). The proposed zoning code permits modest modifications to existing houses unless the lots are large enough to fit a larger building type. The lot is typical of a cottage lot dimension so only smaller modifications could be made. Dormers on both sides of the home could add enough head height to increase living area on the second floor. The basement is currently partially finished. The proposed code would allow the finishing of the remainder of the basement.