

**Standards to be Applied to Special Permits  
For Conversion of Single-Family Dwellings to Two-Family Dwellings**

*[Recommendations by the 1 to 2 Family Conversion Task Force]*  
January 17, 2018

The following Standards were developed with the intent that the Planning Board apply them as part of the Special Permit application process for conversion of single-family dwellings to two-family dwellings:

Owner-Occupancy. At least one of the dwelling units must be owner occupied.

Design Standards. The appearance and character of a single-family dwelling is preserved. The following features are to be deemed objectionable:

- Multiple entryways visible from a single public way;
- More than one driveway accessing the structure from a single public way.

Footprint Expansion – Limited to Safety Items. The footprint of the building may not be expanded except for code required installation of safety items.

Footprint Expansion – Limited to 5%. The footprint of the building may not be expanded by more than 5% to incorporate these code required safety features; however, any such expansion is to be generally screened from view from adjoining properties used as single-family residences. Exit stairways shall be located at the rear of the building, or shall be located within the walls of the building. On corner lots, the exit stairway shall be located within the walls of building or sufficiently screened from view by adjoining single-family residences.

Exterior Façade. The exterior facade of the dwelling shall not be altered other than to improve its appearance. Measures to upgrade the building to more sustainable conditions (by such means as installation of energy efficient building materials including but not limited to windows, installation of gutters and downspouts, and similar such measures) will generally not be considered as impermissibly altering the exterior appearance.

Parking. No parking shall be allowed in the required front yard; however, parking in an existing driveway that is located in the front yard is permitted. No expansion of the driveway that is located in the front yard shall be permitted for accommodating additional cars required by the conversion.

Timing of Conversion. No conversion shall be permitted if proposed within 10 years of the issuance of a building permit that established the dwelling, or a building permit that had been issued to increase the habitable area of the dwelling.

Size. The minimum size of the single family dwelling to be considered for conversion to a two family dwelling is 1,600 square feet of habitable space.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Single-Family to Two-Family Conversion Task Force was appointed by the Planning Board in May, 2017. Originally a 7-person committee, member Ken LeBlanc indicated that he was not able to serve after having attended a few meetings. The remaining 6 member-group has met monthly to discuss, debate and develop these Standards. Meetings were held on the following dates: May 31, June 21, July 19, August 23, September 27, October 17, November 7 and 28, 2017 and January 16, 2018.

At many times during the process, this group questioned motivation behind developing these Standards, hoping to trend in the direction of "guided encouragement" rather than outright prohibition. Additionally, there was a fair amount of confusion regarding the cases to which the Standards were to be applied. The group agreed that only those cases where a Special Permit is required for conversion; in other words, Residence A2 and Agricultural, were the targets of these Standards. The Task Force has never intended that the Standards be applied for use in districts where such conversions are allowed by right. In order to clarify the intent under which this Task Force was operating, we included the following introductory sentence to the Standards:

*The following Standards were developed with the intent that the Planning Board apply them as part of the Special Permit application process for conversion of single-family dwellings to two-family dwellings.*

All of the Standards were developed with one main concept in mind: maintaining the character and appearance of a single family dwelling, particularly in cases where the dwelling is located in a predominantly single family neighborhood.

Unless noted, the Task Force was unanimous in recommending each of these Standards.

#### **STANDARDS WITH BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

*Owner-Occupancy.* *At least one of the dwelling units must be owner occupied.*

**Background:** the Task Force hopes that this provision will alleviate problems that can arise from absentee owners. This element is key and in a sense, acts as a "watchdog" for the other aspects of these Standards. The driving force behind including this provision is that with the re-codification of the Zoning By-laws, the "abutter consent" was eliminated, making those most affected by a proposed conversion feeling powerless. The Task Force believes that maintaining this requirement will allow citizens to feel less like something was "taken away." This provision was carried forward from the *Interim Policy Regarding*

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*Standards to be Applied to Special Permits for Conversion of Single-Family Dwellings to Two-Family Dwellings* as approved January 23, 2017 (hereafter referred to as the Interim Policy). After much discussion and debate over several meetings, the Task Force was unanimous in recommending this standard remain included.

*Design Standards.* *The appearance and character of a single-family dwelling is preserved. The following features are to be deemed objectionable:*

- *Multiple entryways visible from a single public way;*
- *More than one driveway accessing the structure from a single public way.*

*Background:* This Guideline follows the intent of the Interim Policy; however, the language has been made more specific and provides the reason behind its inclusion: that the appearance and character of a single family dwelling be maintained.

*Footprint Expansion – Limited to Safety Items.* *The footprint of the building may not be expanded except for code required installation of safety items.*

*Background:* This provision is similar to that of the Interim Policy. the Task Force did research guidelines from other communities across the state, and believe that this language is consistent with criteria found in other Massachusetts communities.

*Footprint Expansion – Limited to 5%.* *The footprint of the building may not be expanded by more than 5% to incorporate these code required safety features; however, any such expansion is to be generally screened from view from adjoining properties used as single-family residences. Exit stairways shall be located at the rear of the building, or shall be located within the walls of the building. On corner lots, the exit stairway shall be located within the walls of building or sufficiently screened from view by adjoining single-family residences.*

*Background:* This guideline is similar to that of the Interim Policy, however goes further in specifying where exit stairways may be located including in the case of a corner lot condition.

*Exterior Façade.* *The exterior facade of the dwelling shall not be altered other than to improve its appearance. Measures to upgrade the building to more sustainable conditions (by such means as installation of energy efficient building materials including but not limited to windows, installation of gutters and downspouts, and similar such measures) will generally not be considered as impermissibly altering the exterior appearance.*

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Background: This guideline maintains the intent of the Interim Policy however alters the original language to pertain less to historic homes and to more generally specify what types of improvements should be considered acceptable.

Parking. *No parking shall be allowed in the required front yard; however, parking in an existing driveway that is located in the front yard is permitted. No expansion of the driveway that is located in the front yard shall be permitted for accommodating additional cars required by the conversion.*

Background: As with the other standards, this one also attempts to preserve the appearance of a single family dwelling by way of describing the deleterious effects of parking at the front of a residential site. The intent of this guideline is to keep any additional required parking in the rear of the property and to avoid the condition where cars are parked all over a front yard.

Timing of Conversion. *No conversion shall be permitted if proposed within 10 years of the issuance of a building permit that established the dwelling, or a building permit that had been issued to increase the habitable area of the dwelling.*

Background: The Task Force debated this guideline extensively. Inspired by examples from other Massachusetts communities, the intent is to prohibit owners from making additions to their houses with a quick conversion in mind. The example of a finished basements was discussed because this would typically not entail any additional square footage but would likely have required a building permit and would have increased habitable area. Some Task Force members felt that if required exiting could be accomplished with a basement dwelling, then a conversion of this type should be permitted. However, as this standard is currently written, such a conversion would not be allowed.

Size. *The minimum size of the single family dwelling to be considered for conversion to a two family dwelling is 1,600 square feet of habitable space.*

Background: The Task Force was not unanimous in its recommendation of this guideline. Linda Young and Russ Boudreau compiled and analyzed data on a few example A-2 neighborhoods. Data from 47 addresses, 4 each on the following streets: Mountainview, Judd, Highland, Chestnut Hill, Applewood, Summit, Landers, Washington, Wood, Berwyn, Boynton were utilized as a representative sample. Size of dwelling ranged from 750 GSF to 3,292 GSF. The average gross square footage for these dwellings was 1,411 GSF.

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By a vote of 4 to 2, the group voted to apply a minimum building size for a dwelling to be considered for a conversion. Those in favor hoped to both encourage homeowners with dwellings of a more practical size to pursue conversion, as well as discourage homeowners with very small dwellings from pursuing this action. Those in dissent felt the layout of the house was more critical to determining whether it was a viable candidate for conversion. Additionally, South Hadley's Zoning By-laws do provide a minimum dwelling size of 420 SF.

Respectfully Submitted:

Helen Fantini, Chair  
Martha Terry, Secretary  
Russ Boudreau  
Marion Canning  
Gerry Coderre  
Linda Young