



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
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**Case #:** PB 2013-14  
**Date:** August 1, 2013  
**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site: 16-18 Bow Street**

**Applicant Name:** United States Postal Service  
**Applicant Address:** 6 Griffen Road North, Windsor, CT 06006  
**Property Owner Name:** 16 Bow Street Realty Trust  
**Property Owner Address:** 424 Broadway, Somerville, MA 02145  
**Alderman:** Thomas Taylor

Legal Notice: Applicant, the United States Postal Service, and Owner, 16 Bow Street Realty Trust, seek a Special Permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5.a to alter a nonconforming structure which includes modifications to signage and the rear egress as well as to provide ADA accessibility. CCD55 zone. Ward 3.

Zoning District/Ward: CCD 55 / Ward 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5

Date of Application: July 9, 2013

Dates of Public Hearing: Planning Board – **Thursday, August 8, 2013**

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 6,448 square foot parcel comprised of a mixed-use masonry building with a building foot that is 6,220 square feet. The structure extends through the block and is predominantly two stories with a flat roof; however, between the Bow Street and Somerville Avenue facades is a single story component. The property has a net floor area of 10,071 square feet with a 1.56 floor area ratio. The parcel is located within Union Square and is located in a CCD55 and the Arts Overlay district.



There has been no prior zoning relief.



16-18 Bow Street

2. Proposal: Applicant, the United States Postal Service, and Owner, 16 Bow Street Realty Trust, propose to alter a masonry structure, which includes modifications to signage and the rear egress as well as to provide ADA accessibility.

The subject commercial space at 16-18 Bow Street is 1,438 net square feet and interior renovations would fit-out the interior space for the by-right post office use. The existing storefront has been heavily altered and a large inappropriate metal panel obscures a large portion of the original storefront. The project would alter the existing storefront to allow for ADA accessibility. To provide a level accessible landing, the center of the entrance would be recessed further to allow a separate entrance into the Box Lobby and the Customer Lobby, which is required for postal operations.

The signage is proposed to be slightly larger than the existing and conforms to CCD and Arts Overlay district guidelines. There is approximately 31 feet of frontage for this commercial space; therefore, approximately 62 square feet of signage is allowed. The main sign above the door would be painted wood and approximately 51 square feet while decals identifying this branch of the post office would be located to the left of the center entrance, measuring 2.5 square feet. Hours of operation would be located to the right of the entrance and measure approximately 1.25 square feet. All signage would be approximately 55 square feet.



16-18 Bow Street, storefront

The rear egress currently consists of a single concrete step down to grade. The proposal would create a raised platform, which is necessary for postal deliveries. As part of the interior renovations, a ramp would extend toward the rear of this space and the egress would become slightly higher with a handrail and bollards on three sides.

3. Nature of Application: The structure is located in a CCD55 and the Arts Overlay district. In accordance with SZO §6.1.22.D.5.a, alterations to an existing façade, other than one-for-one replacement of signage, require a Special Permit. Therefore, the proposed modifications require Special Permit approval.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The subject parcel is located in a CCD55 district and the Arts Overlay district on Bow Street in Union Square. The surrounding neighborhood is composed of a mix of uses which include residential, commercial, office and retail as this area is part of the larger Union Square neighborhood. This structure is also within close proximity to the Bow Street Local Historic District which is a mixed-use historic district.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposal to modify signage and the rear egress as well as to provide ADA accessibility would not be detrimental to the structure.

Providing an ADA accessible entrance is a requirement for this space to be used as a post office and minimally alters an already heavily modified storefront. The proposed signage conforms to CCD and Arts Overlay district guidelines in size and material. The size is approximately 51 square feet while the sign itself is proposed to be a painted wood sign with no lighting. Further, Staff has conditioned that the vertical metal siding between the first and second stories be removed and that either the brickwork beneath be appropriately restored to blend with the historic façade or that a new, more appropriate material replace the metal panel.

The raised rear platform with railings and bollards, which is necessary for postal deliveries, would enhance the safety of this rear egress.

6. Green Building Practices: The application indicates that this project was developed under the Stretch Code.

7. Comments:

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

*Historic Preservation:* Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Historic Staff reviewed the plans for alterations to this historic structure and submitted a letter to Ann Yarnell, United States Postal Service, on June 19, 2013 stating that there would be no adverse effects as a result of this proposal.

*Ward Alderman:* Has been contacted and inquired about parking. Staff explained that as this is a CCD55 district and no additional square footage is proposed as part of this application, that there is no additional parking requirement.

## **II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §6.1.22.D.5):**

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 find that the alterations proposed would not be substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing structure. The proposal would allow the necessary modifications to the front entrance and rear egress that are necessary for a post office to operate in this commercial space. Signage would conform to CCD and Arts Overlay district guidelines. To further enhance the historic façade, streetscape, and nearby local historic district, the vertical metal siding between the first and second stories is conditioned to be removed and that either the brickwork beneath be appropriately restored to blend with the historic façade or that a new, more appropriate material replace the metal panel.

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 protect health; to secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers; to provide adequate light and air; to facilitate the adequate provision of... other public requirements; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the City; and to preserve and increase the amenities of the municipality."

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the CCD55 district, §6.1.22, which is, "to promote appropriate infill development along heavily traveled transportation corridors, especially where those corridors meet at named Squares. The district recognizes that such corridors present opportunities for an active mix of uses while also addressing development challenges posed by smaller lots and nearby existing residential development and the need to be accessible by multiple modes of transportation."

The major objectives of the CCD55 district are addressed with respect to the subject proposal below.

1. Encourage active mid-rise commercial and residential uses that contribute to a multi-modal-friendly street;
2. Increase commercial investment in high-profile, accessible areas including retail that is largely neighborhood-serving in multi-tenant, mixed use buildings;
3. Preserve and complement historic structures;
4. Discourage inappropriate auto-oriented, significant trip-generating uses along transit corridors; and,
5. Promote pedestrian and bicycle activity.

The proposal incorporates a by-right institutional use into this area of Union Square that will contribute to a multi-modal-friendly street. Enhancing the historic masonry façade, through the removal of metal siding and either the restoration of brickwork or the installation of a more

appropriate material, will encourage commercial investment in the surrounding buildings and will serve to preserve and complement adjacent historic structures within the streetscape as well as the Bow Street Local Historic District. This post office branch would be a contributory neighborhood amenity that is not auto oriented and would encourage pedestrian and bicycle activity.

The proposal is consistent with the purpose of the Arts Overlay District, §6.1.23, which is, “to encourage the preservation and enhancement of Arts-Related Uses, particularly within Union Square. The district is also intended to preserve and enhance the area as a center for a variety of retail, business services, housing, and office uses and to promote a strong pedestrian character and scale throughout the district.”

The design guidelines of the Arts Overlay district, SZO §6.1.23.G, are addressed with respect to the subject proposal below.

1. Building(s) should complete the streetwall along the primary street edge(s).
2. Massing of the building should be articulated in a manner compatible with the surrounding district, particularly where a building abuts a lot or lots within a residential district.
3. Major building entrances and entrances to retail stores and other sources of pedestrian activity should be oriented to existing public sidewalks and other open space.
4. On-site, off-street parking should be located either at the rear of the lot behind the building or below street level; parking should not abut the primary street edge(s) of the parcel.
5. Access to on-site, off-street parking should be provided from either a side street or an alley; Where this is not possible, provide vehicular access through an opening in the street level facade of the building of a maximum of twenty-five (25) feet in width.
6. Signage and awning design should respect buildings' context (e.g., scale, design, style, colors, materials), be oriented to pedestrians, and be subordinate to the overall building composition. Creative shapes must be carefully designed and coordinated with the overall appearance of the building. The design should also maintain an existing "signage line" and respect the character, scale, and locations of adjacent signs and awnings. Large, interior-lit or back-lit signs or awnings, neon "open" signs, vinyl or plastic materials and overly bright colors are generally discouraged. To add interest and character to the retail environment signs or awnings may convey interesting elements or logos without excessive wording. They should be limited to advertising the business name and its main goods or services, with minimal or no national brand names or logos. Type styles should enhance readability of the sign and provide information simply and legibly. Use awnings to create pleasant shaded spaces in front of a building. Signs and awnings should enhance important architectural details and not conceal or obliterate them.

The subject building completes the streetwall and has a two-story massing that is compatible with the surrounding structures. The primary entrance is oriented to the sidewalk and parking is not part of this proposal. The proposed painted wood sign conforms to CCD and Arts Overlay district guidelines in size and material, and would not be lit.

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 proposal to alter a masonry structure, which includes modifications to signage and the rear egress as well as to provide ADA accessibility is compatible with the site and the neighborhood. This project will enhance the historic structure, due to appropriate signage, the removal of metal siding, and either the restoration of brickwork or the installation of a more appropriate material, as well as relocate a useful neighborhood amenity to this area of Union Square. There will likely be no impact on the surrounding

neighborhood as this proposal enables the necessary modifications for a by-right institutional use to operate in this commercial space.

Further, this proposal adheres to CCD signage guidelines, as outlined below.

7. Signage and awning design should respect buildings' context (e.g., scale, design, style, colors, materials), be oriented to pedestrians, and be subordinate to the overall building composition. Creative shapes must be carefully designed and coordinated with the overall appearance of the building. The design should also maintain an existing "signage line" and respect the character, scale, and locations of adjacent signs and awnings. Large, interior-lit or back-lit signs or awnings, neon "open" signs, vinyl or plastic materials and overly bright colors are generally discouraged. To add interest and character to the retail environment signs or awnings may convey interesting elements or logos without excessive wording. They should be limited to advertising the business name and its main goods or services, with minimal or no national brand names or logos. Type styles should enhance readability of the sign and provide information simply and legibly. Use awnings to create pleasant shaded spaces in front of a building. Signs and awnings should enhance important architectural details and not conceal or obliterate them.

The proposed painted wood sign conforms to CCD and Arts Overlay district guidelines in size and material, and would not be lit.

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.

6. Vehicular and pedestrian circulation: 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.

The proposal would not alter circulation patterns for motor vehicles or pedestrians as a result of this project.

**III. RECOMMENDATION****Special Permit under §6.1.22.D.5**

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**.

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 for a Special Permit to alter a mixed use structure which includes modifications to signage and the rear egress as well as to provide ADA accessibility. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/Png.											
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>(July 9, 2013)</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June 18, 2008 (August 1, 2013)</td> <td>Plot plan submitted to OSPCD</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June 26, 2013 (August 1, 2013)</td> <td>Demolition and floor plans submitted to OSPCD (D1.1, A1.1, A1.2, &amp; A2.2)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>August 1, 2013 (August 1, 2013)</td> <td>Proposed elevation &amp; signage (Sheet A-3)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	(July 9, 2013)	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	June 18, 2008 (August 1, 2013)	Plot plan submitted to OSPCD	June 26, 2013 (August 1, 2013)	Demolition and floor plans submitted to OSPCD (D1.1, A1.1, A1.2, & A2.2)	August 1, 2013 (August 1, 2013)	Proposed elevation & signage (Sheet A-3)
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Any changes to the approved elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.														
<b>Design</b>														
2	The vertical metal siding between the first and second stories shall be removed. The brickwork behind the panel shall be appropriately repaired to be consistent with the existing in color, texture, tooling, and vapor permeability. Should Staff determine that the above is not an option, the Applicant shall work with Staff to determine an appropriate alternate material other than the existing metal panel.	BP	Png.											
<b>Public Safety</b>														
3	The Applicant or Owner shall meet the Fire Prevention Bureau's requirements.	CO	FP											
<b>Signage</b>														
4	Signage will be limited in size and location to that shown in the elevation diagrams which does not illustrate lighting.	CO/Cont.	Png.											

Final Sign-Off				
5	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.	

16-18 Bow Street

