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CITY OF SOMERVILLE

Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning & Zoning Staff
DATE: October 15, 2020
RE: PB2017-05-R2-09/20, 455 Grand Union Boulevard (Block 5B)

This memo summarizes the development review application submitted for 455 Grand Union Boulevard (Block 5B), identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was submitted on August 27, 2020 and deemed complete on September 28, 2020. It is scheduled for a public hearing on October 15, 2020.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The project proposes to add corporate signage at the rooftop of a 13-story (201 feet) building currently under construction at the ASQ Block 5B in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District. The building under construction is a new mixed-use office tower, which was approved by the city on April 20, 2017 in Case # PB 2017-05 and subsequently revised on October 18, 2018 in Case # PB 2017-05-R1. The proposed corporate signage on ASQ Block 5B is for branding, marketing and social programming for the new North American Headquarters of PUMA, North America, Inc.

LEGAL NOTICE

Applicant PUMA North America Inc. proposes to construct rooftop signage in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District (ASMD) under §6.4.14 as a revision to a Special Permit with Site Plan Review-A (SPSR-A).

ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

“6.4.14 Signage in the Assembly Square District. Notwithstanding any provision of this Ordinance to the contrary, the following provisions shall apply to signage in the ASMD: . . .

B. With respect to any Structure in the ASMD for which a waiver or other approval has been issued to allow such a Structure to exceed the maximum height otherwise set forth in this Ordinance, approval for signage on such Structure in excess of the maximum height requirements applicable under this Ordinance may be granted solely through a Special Permit from the SPGA.”

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Signage of the size proposed in this application requires a Special Permit from the Planning Board.

IMPACT ANALYSIS

A roof sign generally generates concerns of shadows and lighting. Block 5B is internal to the Assembly Square neighborhood and the building does not directly abut any residential buildings, and the current neighborhood plan documents indicate that the adjacent properties are anticipated to be a mix of commercial uses. The sign will be located on the western side of the building facing Intersect 93 so the size and the lighting will not adversely impact the neighborhoods of Ten Hills and is located far from the homes in East Somerville.

This proposal meets *6.4.7 Development Standards and Design Guidelines for Developments in the ASMD* and *6.4.9 Special Permit with Site Plan Review-A (SPSR-A)*. As this application is limited in scope the submittal requirements are appropriate to explain the proposal and the other agencies necessary will review this proposal in detail during the Building Permit application process. The only item under *C. Criteria for Review* that is applicable to this proposal is “g) The size, location, design, color texture, lighting and materials of all permanent signs and outdoor advertising structures or features shall reflect the scale and character of the proposed Buildings.”

The design of the proposed signage is the branding for the corporate headquarters in the colors required by the Puma brand. It is difficult to tie the branding to the architecture character of the building. However, the scale of the sign is appropriate to the high-rise building and the LED technology of the creative art installation at the garage screening will support the visibility of this location.

REQUIRED FINDINGS

The Board is required to make findings considering the following review criteria:

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
The intent of the ASMD zoning district is, in part: “to encourage the best use of Assembly Square physically, economically, environmentally and socially while promoting the best interests of residents of the City.”
3. Capacity of the local thoroughfare network providing access to the site and impact on pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic and circulation patterns in the neighborhood.
4. Location, visibility, and design of the principal entrance.

As a Transform Area identified by the comprehensive plan, SomerVision, Assembly Square is still a redeveloping and changing district of which a new corporate headquarters is a major component. This project meets the goals of the district and the city by generating a large employment base in a transit-oriented location – an easy walk to the orange line MBTA station. The bicycle facilities and wide sidewalks along Grand Union Boulevard, and throughout Assembly Square, provide for good non-motorized mobility to and from the main entrance to the building.

CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve this special permit, Staff recommends that all conditions of the original SPSR-A and subsequent revisions remain relevant.