



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: PB2018-16
Date: November 8, 2018
Recommendation: Unable to recommend

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 311 Somerville Avenue

Applicant Name: Edson Lino
Applicant Address: 311 Somerville Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143
Owner Name: Edson Lino
Owner Address: 311 Somerville Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143
Agent Name: Jeff Newman
Agent Address: 280 Worcester Rd, #118, Framingham, MA 01702
Alderman: Ben Ewan-Campen

Legal Notice: Applicant/Owner Edson Lino International Optical requests a Special Permit for a new wall sign under SZO §6.1.22.D.5. Commercial Corridor District (CCD-55). Ward 3.

Dates of Public Hearing: November 8, 2018

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: 311 Somerville Avenue is an existing one-story commercial building on a 4,112sf lot in a CCD-55 zone in Union Square.
2. Proposal: The Applicant is requesting a Special Permit to replace a faded internally lit 32 square feet (sf) box sign mounted on the front of a retail space in Union Square. The proposed sign is shown as two rows of individual channel letters and a logo connected by raceways providing internal lighting and one sign box all with a total area of 44.6sf. The faces of the sign elements are proposed as red and blue acrylic with white LED lights.
3. Green Building Practices: None listed.



4. Comments: As this is a signage request only, the application was not shared with other departments.

Historic Preservation: Not applicable

Ward Alderman: None at this time.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1):

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."*

Nature of Application: 6.1.22 Corridor Commercial Districts (CCDs).

Based on the distance of the façade to the centerline of the street and the sign frontage factor in §12.4.4, the maximum area permitted at this location is 53.33sf. The proposed sign, at 44.6sf, is conforming to dimensional requirements. However, the proposed signage does not comply with the Design Guidelines for signage technology. Please see the explanation below under Site and Area Compatibility.

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 promote 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 facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks and other public requirements; to conserve the value of land and buildings; to preserve the historical and architectural resources of the City; and to preserve and increase the amenities of the municipality.

The proposal is generally consistent with the purpose of the district, 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."

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."*

Surrounding Neighborhood:

The existing structure is a one-story brick commercial building located in the heart of Union Square. The surrounding buildings are also brick on the north side of Somerville Avenue and a mix of one- and three-story brick or clapboard buildings across the street.

Impacts of Proposal (Design and Compatibility):

Only one of the Design Guidelines for the CCDs in SZO §6.1.22.H applies to signage:

“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."

As proposed, the sign is not large but is internally lit with red and blue acrylic letters which does not meet the intent of the ordinance.

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. Impacts of Proposal (Environmental):*

It is difficult to determine whether this signage will create an excessive level of illumination but, given the specified thickness of the acrylic face, it is not anticipated to be overly bright.

The additional findings, such as circulation and affordable housing, are not applicable to a signage application.

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 is **UNABLE TO RECOMMEND** 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.