



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE**  
**MAYOR**

***DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE***

**STAFF PRESENT**

LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*  
ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

JULIE BRADY  
DEBORAH FENNICK  
JAMES KIRYLO  
MATTHEW RICE  
FRANK VALDES

**RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES**

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, May 26, 2011, 6:30 p.m.** in City Hall, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Conference Room, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was to review and make recommendations on the following proposals:

**63-67 Summer Street (Case #ZBA 2011-01)**

Review of changes since the last DRC meeting where the Applicant presented.

**Legal Advertisement:** Applicant & Owner Mark Grassia seeks a Special Permit with Site Plan Review to convert a nonconforming commercial structure into two dwelling units under SZO §7.3, one of which would be an affordable unit as defined in §13. The Applicant also seeks a special permit to alter the nonconforming structure by altering window and door locations under §4.4.1. RB zone. Ward 3.

**SPGA:** Zoning Board of Appeals

**Hearing Date:** TBD

This was the second time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant changed the design of the new building from a linear, rectangular one to a more stepped building that was angled toward the street. The new design allowed for more space in front of the building and it separated the entrances into the proposed new structure. Overall the DRC thought the new design was a huge improvement from the original.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- Can you please explain the driveway and the parking area in the rear in more detail? – (r) Traffic and Parking stated that a 14 foot wide driveway with a 1 foot landscaped buffer on both sides would be sufficient. With this parking layout, only one space would require a three point turn for a driver to turn around and drive forward out of the parking area.



- The first unit in the new building, is this two apartments? – (r) Yes, there is a one bedroom apartment on the first floor and a two bedroom apartment on the second and third floors.
- Would you be required to have a second means of egress for the apartment on the second floor? – (r) That is what we asked the building inspector. Apparently not because the new building code requires the building to have sprinklers, but two egress points are not necessary.

With regard to the unit on the right and its proximity to the parking area, there may be a benefit to getting a little more of a buffer between the driveway and the building, even if it is only another foot or two feet. Because there is a single story dwelling unit on the first floor, additional screening could help to add privacy to that unit. The buffer area should be large enough to be able to sustain some type of vegetative screening.

A larger buffer in the rear between the parking area and the building would help with the space for parking, getting in and out of vehicles, and for plowing purposes.

The Applicant should look at the turning radius for the parking space closest to the new building and a way to possibly improve this as it currently seems very tight in the proposed design.

The Committee encouraged the Applicant to create a distinction between the two different buildings but to not make them too drastically different. Perhaps the use of color shade or texture variation would achieve this differentiation. However, the buildings might also be separate enough where implementing a color shade or texture difference may not be necessary. The setback of the building and the separate entrances may have already achieved this aspect.

Some consistency between the materials of the building foundations is preferable.

It would be helpful to see the other buildings on adjacent properties as well as the other elevations of the proposed new building.

### **253 Washington Street (Case #PB 2011-11)**

Review of design to alter the façade of an existing commercial space as part of the creation of a new restaurant before the case goes to the Planning Board.

**Legal Advertisement:** Applicant Angelina Jockovich of Casa B LLC, seeks a special permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5 to alter the façade of the building including window and door openings as well as signage. CCD 55 zone. Ward 3.

**SPGA:** Planning Board

**Hearing Date:** June 9, 2011

This was the first time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. Currently the space is a vacant storefront in a single story, office and retail mixed-use building with numerous businesses in the heart of Union Square. The Applicant is proposing to renovate the façade of the space, including adding new signage, as part of the improvements being made to open a new restaurant at the location.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- Will there be any lighting introduced to the façade? – (r) If we can use the metal façade, there will be LED lighting behind the lettering cut into the metal. If we have to use the wood façade with



attached metal lettering, there would be back lighting behind the metal letters. There will also be a constant down light at the entrance.

The nana walls doors are very nice because they will activate the façade of the building much more so than what currently exists there now.

The cut out in the metal façade says that there is brick behind it and therefore this existing element of the façade will not be lost.

The Committee was very supportive of the proposed changes to the façade of the commercial space. They felt that the proposed façade design would bring some variety to the storefronts in this building and that these changes would be very healthy and welcome for the existing structure.

### **131 Middlesex Avenue (Case #PB 2011-10)**

Review of the design of an approximately 4,500 square foot, single-story building for a restaurant with outdoor seating and/or retail, along with 29 parking spaces before the case goes to the Planning Board. **Legal Advertisement:** Applicant & Owner FR Assembly Square, LLC seek a Special Permit with Site Plan Review–A, final level approval of a planned unit development under the Planned Unit Development Preliminary Master Plan approved by the Planning Board on December 14, 2006 and as revised on August 5, 2010 for Block 10. Applicant and owner also seek approval under SZO Article §16.8.3 and §5.2, to construct an approximately 4,500 square foot, single-story building for a restaurant with outdoor seating (§7.11.10.1.1.B or 7.11.10.2.2.b) and/or retail (§7.11.9) along with 29 parking spaces. Assembly Square Mixed Use District (ASMD); Planned Unit Development Overlay District - A (PUD-A); Waterfront Overlay District (WOD). Ward 1.

**SPGA:** Planning Board

**Hearing Date:** June 9, 2011

This was the first time this project had been presented to the DRC for review. The Applicant is proposing a 4,500 square foot building for a restaurant with outdoor seating and/or retail oriented towards the Mystic River. Additional pedestrian connections into the existing marketplace, new sidewalks, bike racks, and intensive landscaping are all being proposed at the site.

The DRC asked about the following aspects of the project and the Agent/Architect provided the following responses.

- What is the reasoning behind the number of parking spots that were added? Is it part of the program of the structure? – (r) The building itself only requires 9 parking spaces but we wanted to build out the parking bay and build it into the existing parking in the area. Adding parking here will also fit into the master plan for the overall project and is line with minimizing surface parking for the entire project.
- Will the outdoor seating area be surrounding by a fence or vegetative wall? – (r) This will depend upon the tenant and the style of fencing or buffering that they will desire.
- What kind of tenants are you looking to have for this space? – (r) Restaurants we are hoping, but we are talking to a lot of different vendors.
- Does this building have to be a restaurant? – (r) No, but it has to be an approved use under the ordinance.



- Why are you choosing to construct this building in this area of the overall project now? – (r) The other part of the project is so massive that it is taking longer to get going and we are also trying to build momentum for the rest of the project site.
- Will the lantern element of the structure bring any natural light into the building? – (r) It would be artificially lit at night but it would not bring natural light into the space.

An angled crosswalk towards the Christmas Tree Shop across the access drive will be needed.

The transformer would probably work better in a different area of the project site, away from the parking access drive's intersection with Assembly Square Drive.

It seems odd to have the building designed like a restaurant but to still have the potential to be a space for some type of retail use. If this is going to be a more neutral or flexible building, it needs to speak more to the gateway concept for the entire project. If you are not trying to design a restaurant, the building needs to take advantage of what is around it.

The building needs to be more reactionary to the urban environment or perhaps be more elegant. It needs to be more reactive to the gateway concept for the project or to the Mystic River. The building is not taking advantage of what is around it and it feels very neutral. The building needs to speak more towards the future of the development that will occur in Assembly Square.

The structure seems to be too tied into the vocabulary of the existing buildings that are there and could be more forward thinking or aspirational in terms of the materiality. The Applicant spoke about attempting to give the central portion of the building a warehouse or industrial feel, but it does not have this aesthetic connotation to it. It seems to have a more standard retail, type of strip mall, infill feel in between the two ends of the building.

The triangle area of the site by Assembly Square Drive might work better if it had a more open feel to it. Implementing a plaza, stairway, or some type of ramping system here, that allowed you a better view out onto the water would be preferable in this area. Furthermore, if this area was a bit more open it might give you a better urbanistic feel.

The building needs to be more of an iconic gateway and begin to set an architectural standard for what will come later, with regard to design, in the overall project.

The Committee would like to see a structure that speaks to this place, this site, and the vision for this site.