



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

PLANNING DIVISION

STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*

LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*

ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*

DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

Case #: PB 2011-18

Date: Nov 10, 2011

Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 379 Somerville Ave

Applicant Name: Josh Banville

Applicant Address: 205 Highland Ave, Apt 2, Somerville MA 02143

Property Owner Name: Victor Ortiz

Property Owner Address: 181 Kennedy Dr, Apt 504, Malden, MA 02148

Agent Name: None

Alderman: Thomas Taylor

Legal Notice: Applicant, Josh Banville, and Owner, Victor Ortiz, seeks a Special Permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5 to alter the signage for a by-right restaurant.

Zoning District/Ward: CCD 55 / 3

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5 and 5.5.1

Date of Application: Oct 8, 2011

Dates of Public Hearing: Planning Board – Nov 17

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a 3,487 sf parcel located in Union Square at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Bow Street. The one-story 2,115 nsf building was previously a nightclub called Club Choices but has changed tenants to a restaurant that will be called Radio. The previous sign was a red awning that spanned the length of the building. The windows and doors have overhead rolling metal shutters that are closed during the day.



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379 Somerville Ave: existing sign and façade (left), surrounding streetscape (below)



2. Proposal: The proposal is to remove the awning sign and install a wood sign. The name of the restaurant will be carved into 5 wood blocks that resemble pieces from the game Scrabble. There will be up-lighting to illuminate the sign. The metal shutters over the windows and door will be removed. The Applicants would like the restaurant to be a comfortable place for people to eat and enjoy a neighborhood setting.

The Applicants plan to make other alteration to the façade of the building in the future to continue to make the building more interactive with the street.

3. Nature of Application: The property is located in the Corridor Commercial District 55 (CCD 55). Alterations to an existing or approved façade other than a one-for-one replacement require a special permit under SZO §6.1.22.D.5 with findings giving consideration to the Design Guidelines of SZO §6.1.22.H.

The night club use and the restaurant use are in the same use cluster (§7.13.D) and will occupy the same floor area. Therefore the new use is by-right.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: There are various businesses in the immediate area of the subject property. Some of the signs are parallel to the building and others are on awnings. Most of the signs that are parallel to the building are flat wood, painted signs that are centered in the middle of building.

5. Impacts of Proposal: The proposed changes to the façade will greatly improve the appearance of the building. The awning sign is outdated and covers up the brick detailing in the façade. The new sign

will be made of quality materials. It will be located along the intended sign band on the building and it will not obscure the design of the building. The removal of the overhead metal shutters will make the building more inviting and attractive.

6. Green Building Practices: The Applicants plan to put solar panels on the roof when they have the revenue to do so.

7. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Did not have any comments at this time.

Ward Alderman: Has been contacted but has not provided comments.

II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT (SZO §5.1 & §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."

The sign design complies with the design guideline for signage in the CCD (§6.1.22.H).

1. The proposed façade alterations and repairs will help to improve the street wall along this area in Union Square. The proposed façade design retains the same amount of fenestration along the public way; however, with the metal shutters removed the fenestration will be more visible. The renovations aesthetically improve the space along this portion of the sidewalk. The proposed façade design also helps create pedestrian interest along the streetscape, while at the same time improving the appearance of the building.
2. The massing and height of the one story structure will not change.
3. The height of the building is only one story and it is located between a 2 story building and a 2 ½ story building. The project design is not proposing to alter the height of the existing structure and a transition to residential or historically designated properties is not applicable.
4. The Applicant will be maintaining the existing width of the building, which is approximately 31 feet, along with maintaining a separate entrance for the restaurant along the sidewalk. The windows will be more transparent than they have been in the past with the removal of the metal shutters. Future planned renovations to the façade should meet the guideline which states that there should be 75% transparent material on the ground floor. The existing windows will not be blocked by interior storage, displays, or signage. The guideline limits windows from being blocked by more than 30%.
5. The material of the sign will be wood, which is encouraged in the guidelines for the Corridor Commercial District.
6. The left side of the restaurant is visible from the streetscape but is not proposed to change. The right side and rear of the building are not visible from the streetscape.

7. The proposed signage design respects the building's context by creating a signage band that typically holds signage for similar buildings. The existing awning signage is large and obscures the façade of the building. The proposed signage will be five wooden blocks that make up approximately 20 feet by 3 ½ feet of the façade. The sign will not conceal the architectural details of the building. Up-lighting is proposed to illuminate the sign. The sign is legible and does not have excessive wording. The Applicant may want to add other signage in the future to clarify the use of the building; however, new signage would require another special permit review.
8. This façade renovation proposal will allow the space to be converted to a restaurant which is a pedestrian-oriented uses, as encouraged on the ground floor in this district.
- 9./10. Artist Live/Work Spaces and residential unit size do not relate to this proposal.
11. The Applicant is not proposing to change the width of the sidewalk as part of this proposal as the building location and depth of the façade from the sidewalk is not changing. The sidewalk is approximately 11 feet wide in this location and the project will maintain that width.

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 providing for and maintain the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City and the purpose of the CCD by promoting an active mix of uses with structures that complement the historic structures in the area.

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 sign would be compatible with the building's design and other signs in the area as explained in finding two.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §5.1 & §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 the installation of new signage on the building. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	ISD/PIng.							
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Oct 8, 2011</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct 28, 2011</td> <td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan, elevation/rendering)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	Oct 8, 2011	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	Oct 28, 2011	Plans submitted to OSPCD (floor plan, elevation/rendering)
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Any changes to the approved elevations that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.										
2	The Applicant shall at his expense replace any existing equipment (including, but not limited to street sign poles, signs, traffic signal poles, traffic signal equipment, wheel chair ramps, granite curbing, etc) and the entire sidewalk immediately abutting the subject property if damaged as a result of construction activity. All new sidewalks and driveways must be constructed to DPW standard.	CO	DPW							
3	To the extent possible, all exterior lighting must be confined to the subject property, must not intrude, interfere or spill onto neighboring properties.	CO	PIng.							
4	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	PIng.							

