



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: PB 2015-08
Date: July 30, 2015
Recommendation: Conditional Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 92 Union Square

Applicant Name: Craig Murphy
Applicant Address: 21 McGrath Highway, Somerville, MA 02143
Owner Name: City of Somerville, MA
Owner Address: 93 Highland Ave, Somerville MA 02143
Alderman: Maryann Heuston

Legal Notice: Applicant, Craig Murphy, and Owner, City of Somerville, seek a Special Permit under SZO 6.1.22.D.5.a. to install signage. CCD55 zone. Ward 2.

Dates of Public Hearing: August 6, 2015

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The property is located at the intersection of Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, and Prospect Street in Union Square. The structure on the property is a two-story former firehouse, owned by the City and currently rented by Somerville Community Access Television (SCATV) and the Massachusetts Association of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS). The property consists of a cobblestone plaza area that borders a small parking lot along Washington Street. SCATV has a banner sign on the parking lot side of the building and a blade sign and flat mounted sign on the Somerville Avenue side of the building. MAPS has a flat mounted sign above the door on Somerville Avenue. The main entrance to MAPS is through the door on the parking lot side of the building.

2. Proposal: The proposal is to remove the existing MAPS sign and install two, canvas, 36 inch by 102 inch banners on the building. One will be along Somerville Avenue and the other will be close to the main entrance to MAPS





*Existing signage at 92
Union Square for MAPS &
SCAT*



3. Green Building Practices: The banners will be made out of canvas instead of vinyl.
4. Comments:

Ward Alderman: Alderman Heuston has been contacted.

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."*

In the CCD, the SZO §6.1.22.D.5 states that any change in signage, other than a one-for-one replacement of an existing sign, and alterations to facades shall require a Special Permit.

The signage complies with the design guidelines for signage in the CCD (§6.1.22.G):

- The signs respect the building's context. The signs are subordinate to the overall building in size and appearance and do not conceal important façade details such as the brick patterns.
- The signs are made of canvas and are not lit from within. This complies with the list of recommended materials and sign technologies. The multi-colored lettering is vibrant without being excessively bright.
- The signs are legible and convey the MAPS name and logo without excessive wording.

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 maintaining the uniquely integrated structure of uses in the City. The proposal is also consistent with the purpose of the CCD by encouraging an active mix of uses and contributing to a pedestrian-friendly street.

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 banners will improve the visibility of MAPS and better orient people to the front door. Banner signage already exists on the building for SCAT and the proposed signs will continue this sign type on the building. The existing sign that covers a large portion of the brick above a door that is not an entrance for MAPS will be removed. The proposed signs are not overly large and the total square footage of signage on the building for MAPS will be approximately the same but will be divided between two sides of the building.

The signage and lighting will be compatible with the building's design as explained in finding two. The signs will also be compatible with the surrounding area. The signage should enhance the property and will not detract from the pedestrian experience in the area.

7. Housing Impact: *Will not create adverse impacts on the stock of existing affordable housing.*

The proposal does not involve housing.

8. SomerVision Plan: *Complies with the applicable goals, policies and actions of the SomerVision plan, including the following, as appropriate: Preserve and enhance the character of Somerville's neighborhoods, transform key opportunity areas, preserve and expand an integrated, balanced mix of safe, affordable and environmentally sound rental and homeownership units for households of all sizes*

and types from diverse social and economic groups; and, make Somerville a regional employment center with a mix of diverse and high-quality jobs. The areas in the SomerVision map that are designated as enhance and transform should most significantly contribute towards the SomerVision goals that are outlined in the table below. The areas marked as conserve are not expected to greatly increase the figures in the table since these areas are not intended for large scale change.

The proposed signage will add to the vibrancy of this area of the City that is called out as being enhanced in SomerVision.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Special Permit under §5.1 & §6.1.22.D

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	<p>Approval is for the proposed signage. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date (Stamp Date)</th> <th>Submission</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>June 16, 2015</td> <td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td> </tr> <tr> <td>(July 30, 2015)</td> <td>Plans submitted to OSPCD (Elevations and sign details)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Any changes to the approved plans that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval. Sign replacement of the same size within the same sign footprint and using the same sign technology shall be permitted by right.</p>	Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	June 16, 2015	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	(July 30, 2015)	Plans submitted to OSPCD (Elevations and sign details)	BP/CO	Plng.	
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2	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.							

