



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

**PLANNING DIVISION**

**STAFF**

GEORGE PROAKIS, *PLANNING DIRECTOR*  
LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*  
ADAM DUCHESNEAU, *PLANNER*  
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*  
FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

**Case #:** PB 2010-22  
**Date:** January 20, 2011  
**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

---

**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

---

**Site:** 61 Union Square

**Applicant Name:** Elias Interiano

**Applicant Address:** 61 Union Square, Somerville MA

**Property Owner Name:** Union Sq Realty Trust – Francis Privatera

**Property Owner Address:** 59 Union Square, Somerville MA

**Agent Name:** Paul Cook

**Agent Address:** Divine Signs, 6 Norman St, Everett, MA

**Alderman:** Thomas Taylor

Legal Notice: The Applicant requests a Special Permit to alter signage for an existing restaurant (SZO §5.1 & 6.1.22.D.5).

Zoning District/Ward: CCD 55 / 2

Zoning Approval Sought: Special Permit - SZO §5.1 & 6.1.22.D.5

Date of Application: Dec 6, 2010

Dates of Public Hearing: Planning Board 1/20/11

---

**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property is known as “Barristers Hall” in the heart of Union Square. El Potro is an existing Mexican restaurant on the first floor of the commercial building. There is an existing belt sign above the restaurant.
2. Proposal: The proposal is to install a new sign that includes lighting and an awning. The owner of the restaurant is applying for funding through the City’s Storefront Improvement Program. The sign will be in the same location as the existing sign, the background of which is 3.2 feet by 21 feet. The logos



**CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143**  
**(617) 625-6600 EXT. 2500 • TTY: (617) 666-0001 • FAX: (617) 625-0722**

**[www.somervillema.gov](http://www.somervillema.gov)**



and background will be made of aluminum with a non-reflective finish. The letters will be reverse channel LED letters that have solid red opaque fronts. Lighting will be behind the letters to create a halo effect. The awning will also be red and made of sunbrella fabric. The paint surrounding the windows and doors will be updated to a neutral color that will not clash with the red color in the proposed sign.



3. Nature of Application: 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, shall require a Special Permit.
4. Surrounding Neighborhood: There are a variety of businesses in the immediate area of the subject property and their signs' designs vary greatly. The proposed sign will be located in the same "sign band" area as adjacent businesses. Another business along the 61 Union Square block has a rounded awning that staff do not recommend replicating. The Precinct restaurant's signage in Union Square has similar technology to the proposed sign – individual channels letters that are back lit to create a halo effect.
5. Impacts of Proposal: The signage will be an improvement to the existing signage that does not have lighting or an awning. The sign should accomplish the goal of attracting customers to the restaurant while not detracting from the character of the square or overburdening signs for the surrounding businesses.
6. Green Building Practices: The applicant will use 24 volt LED lights versus conventional neon lighting to reduce electricity usage.

7. Comments:

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

**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."

The sign complies with the signage design guidelines in the CCD (§6.1.22.H). The sign respects the building's context. The sign will be located in the existing sign band directly above the restaurant. The beige color of the sign background is intended to blend in with the grayish color of the building. The lighting will be subtle with the halo effect around the letters. The awning will shade the restaurant windows and will provide some shelter for pedestrians. The sign and awning do not conceal important architectural elements. The proposed aluminum sign, fabric awning and halo lighting comply with the list of materials and sign technologies that are recommended in the guidelines. The sign is legible and does not have 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 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 will be compatible with the building's design and improve the appearance of the restaurant.

**III. RECOMMENDATION****Special Permit under §5.1 & 6.1.22.D.5**

Based on the above findings and subject to the following conditions, the Planning Staff recommends **CONDITIONAL APPROVAL** of the requested **SPECIAL PERMIT**.

#	Condition	Timeframe for Compliance	Verified (initial)	Notes						
1	Approval is for an aluminum sign including halo lighting and a fabric awning. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	BP/CO	Plng.							
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>Dec 6, 2010</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office</td></tr><tr><td>(Jan 13, 2011)</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (elevation)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	Dec 6, 2010	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office	(Jan 13, 2011)	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (elevation)
	Date (Stamp Date)				Submission					
	Dec 6, 2010				Initial application submitted to the City Clerk's Office					
(Jan 13, 2011)	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (elevation)									
Any changes to the approved elevations 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.										
2	The Applicant shall repaint the areas around the windows and doors to a color that compliments the colors of the proposed sign. The color shall be provided to Planning Staff for review and approval.	Final sign off	Plng.							
3	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.							

