



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

PLANNING DIVISION
STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, PLANNING DIRECTOR
CHRISTOPHER DI IORIO, *SENIOR PLANNER*
LORI MASSA, *PLANNER*
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*
FREDERICK J. LUND, *SENIOR DRAFTSMAN*

Case #: ZBA 2009-59
Date: January 21, 2010
Recommendation: Unable to recommend
as proposed

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 30 Washington Street

Applicant Name: Holiday Inn

Applicant Address: 30 Washington St., Somerville, MA 02143

Property Owner Name: Northeast Motel Associates

Property Owner Address: 319 Speen St., Natick, MA 01760

Agent Name: James Harvey

Alderman: Roche

Legal Notice: Applicant, James Harvey, & Owner, Northeast Hotel Associates, seek a Variance from SZO §12.4.1 to install a 385 square foot exterior commercial sign at a height of approximately 75 feet.

Zoning District/Ward: Business B / 1

Zoning Approval Sought: Variance from SZO §12.4.1

Date of Application: 9/8/09

Date(s) of Public Meeting • Hearing: PB 1/7/09 • ZBA 1/20/10

Date of Decision: N/A

Vote: N/A

The applicant is proposing a sign on the south side of the Holiday Inn that measures 385 sf and reaches a height of approximately 75 ft. The maximum dimensions of this sign are 25 ft high by 21 ft wide. The Holiday Inn Corporation provides various sized options for their signage and Planning Staff asked the applicant to produce a rendering of the sign for the next available size down. That sign is approximately 305 sf with maximum dimensions of 22 ft in height and 17.5 ft wide.



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

www.somervillema.gov



Staff finds that this smaller sign is more appropriate and appears more in scale with the façade for which it is proposed. In addition, the smaller sign could be situated to work with the design elements of the façade, namely the horizontal lines and the windows adjacent to the sign. Overall, Staff finds that either sign would be equally visible and be successful in attracting business from I93, but that the smaller sign would be less oppressive, more visually appealing and more harmonious with the building facade. Therefore, Staff can only recommend approval of the variance from the height requirements if it is in conjunction with the 305 sf sign.

The applicant's proposal is for a variance from height restrictions in order to install the larger 385 sf sign.

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Subject Property: The subject property is a corner lot of 144,264sf, at the intersection of Washington Street and Inner Belt Road. On the property is a 124,638nsf hotel that operates under the Holiday Inn brand. The Hotel is approximately 80ft in height with a 17ft high penthouse extending from the rooftop. On the east and west sides of the penthouse there is existing signage which has been recently updated with the new Holiday Inn signage and logo.

2. Proposal: The applicant is proposing to install a 385sf sign on the south side of the building below the 80ft roofline. The sign would be approximately 25ft high and 21ft wide at its maximum dimensions and reach a maximum height of 75ft on the side façade. The sign would feature the new Holiday Inn logo.

3. Nature of Application: The sign would be located above the top of the sills of the first level of windows above the first story and would therefore require a variance.

4. Surrounding Neighborhood: The south side of the structure where the sign is proposed faces the inner belt industrial area, commuter rail tracks, Interstate 93 and on towards Boston.

5. Green Building Practices: None indicated.

6. Comments:

Fire Prevention: Has been contacted but has not provided comments.

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

II. FINDINGS FOR VARIANCE (SZO §12.4.1.b):

In order to grant a variance the Board must make certain findings and determinations as outlined in §5.5.3 of the SZO.

1. There are "special circumstances relating to soil conditions, shape or topography of land or structures which especially affect such land or structures but not affecting generally the zoning district in which it is located, causing substantial hardship, financial or otherwise."

Applicant justification: *"When the Hotel was constructed 36 years ago, it was in anticipation of the exit ramp off 93 north being built. Almost 30 years later the ramp became a reality. The signage is requested to draw hotel demand from Boston through improved visibility from I-93. The new sign faces*

industrial/commercial buildings and will not impact local residents. Current economic conditions have magnified the impact of the hotels lack of exposure to Boston I-93 traffic."

Staff Finding: The topography of the land and the structures that exist between the Hotel and I-93/Boston limits the ability of the hotel to attract business from these areas due to poor visibility. This signage would enable the hotel to increase business through the opportunities provided by the new I-93 off-ramp. The hotel should have the ability to market itself and be visible to potential customers and not allowing this would cause financial hardship. Lodging facilities are important to the tax base and the commercial health of Somerville. These businesses attract patrons that might not otherwise come to the area and will strengthen the commercial and retail uses that are in the vicinity of the hotel.

2. "The variance requested is the minimum variance that will grant reasonable relief to the owner, and is necessary for a reasonable use of the building or land."

Applicant justification: *"Installing a sign lower on the building façade would not create the visibility necessary to increase demand/exposure to I-93 northbound traffic. The signage will match the existing signs and be in character for the structure and its intended use."*

Staff Finding: The proposed sign would be at least 1500ft away from I-93 and the sign would need to be at a significant height to become easily visible to traffic on that roadway. The proposed sign is lower than the two existing signs located on the penthouse.

3. "The granting of the variance would be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of this Ordinance and would not be injurious to the neighborhood or otherwise detrimental to the public welfare."

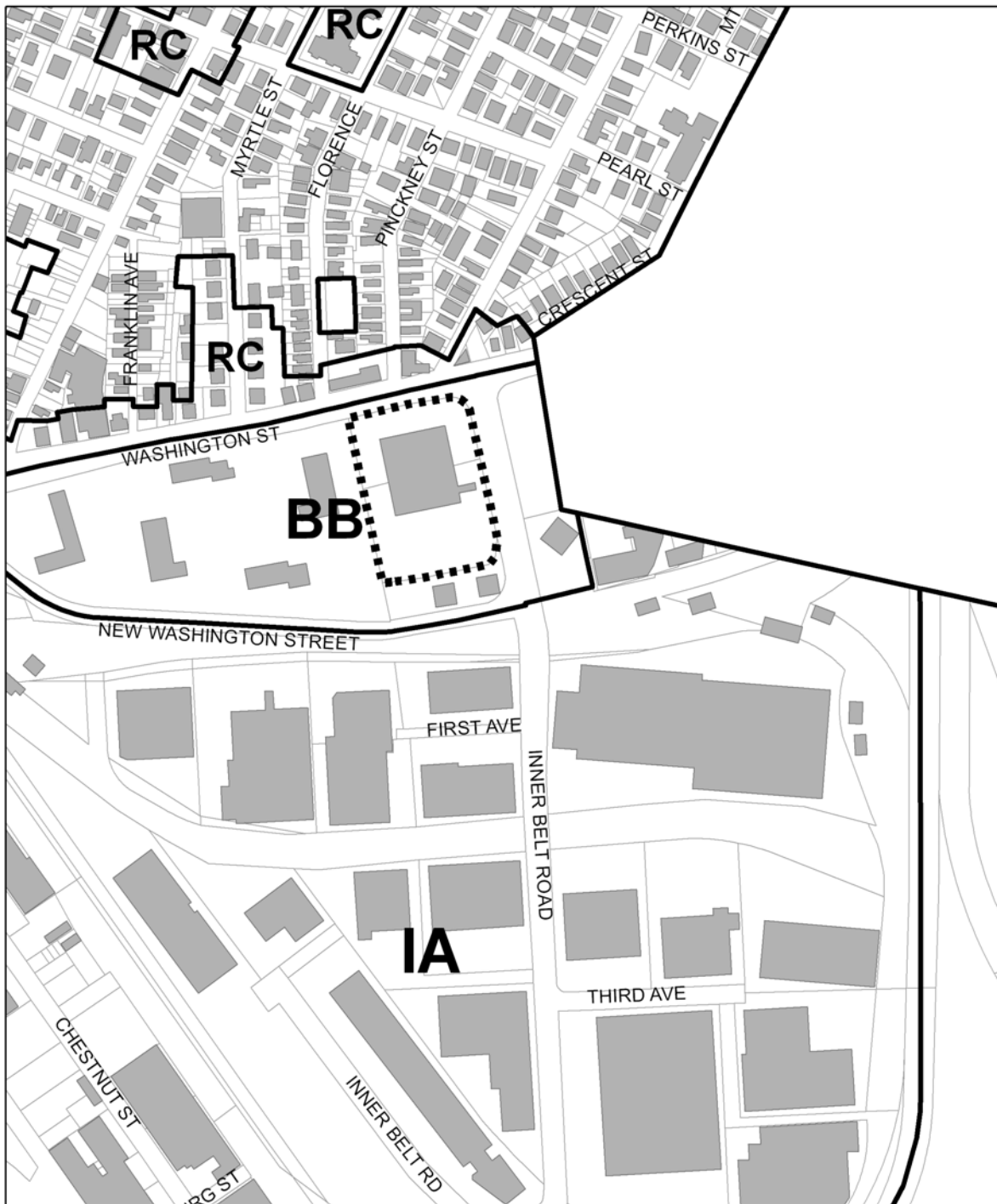
Applicant justification: *"The sign variance, if granted, would place new signage at a lower level than existing signage. It does not face any residential properties in Somerville. The increased exposure to the Boston hotel customer will bring increased tax revenues, increase demand for area businesses and create additional jobs. With the replacement of existing signage the hotel has reduced the size of the signs that face residential areas of the city."*

Staff Finding: The reduction of the square footage of the signs that face residential areas and the increased business that could be generated by the new signage would be beneficial to the City and more consistent with the intent of the SZO.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Variance under SZO §5.5

Based upon the above findings, the Planning Staff would recommend approval of the requested variance from height requirements set forth under the SZO. However, The Planning Staff finds that the proposed signage is excessively large for its height and prominence and is not consistent with the direction the City wants to move in regarding signage. Therefore, Planning Staff is **UNABLE TO RECOMMEND** the **VARIANCE** for signage. The applicant has submitted a sign with reduced measurements that Planning Staff would recommend for approval.



30 WASHINGTON STREET