



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

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**PLANNING DIVISION STAFF**

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*  
LORI MASSA, *SENIOR PLANNER*  
ETHAN LAY-SLEEPER, *PLANNER*  
SARAH WHITE, *PRESERVATION PLANNER*  
DAWN PEREIRA, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

**Case #:** PB 2016-01  
**Date:** February 11, 2016  
**Recommendation:** Conditional Approval

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**PLANNING STAFF REPORT**

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**Site:** Assembly Row Block 11 – Signage – 399 Revolution Drive

**Applicant Name:** Partners Healthcare

**Applicant Address:** 101 Merrimac Street 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Boston, MA 02114

**Property Owner Name:** Federal Realty Investment Trust

**Property Owner Address:** 1626 East Jefferson Street, Rockville, MD 20852

**Agent Name:** Bill Dillon

**Agent Address:** 400 Atlantic Ave, Boston, MA 02210

**Alderman:** Matthew McLaughlin

Legal Notice: Applicant, Partners HealthCare, and Owner, Federal Investment Realty Trust, seek a Special Permit to install signage for Partner HealthCare on “Block 11” of the Planned Unit Development Preliminary Master Plan (PUD-PMP) approved by the Planning Board on December 14, 2006 and as revised on August 5, 2010 and June 19, 2014. Applicant and owner seek approval under SZO Article §5.1 and condition 9 of the SPSR-A for the office and garage buildings, case PB 2014-17.

Assembly Square Mixed Use District (ASMD); Planned Unit Development Overlay District - A (PUD-A) / Ward 1

Dates of Public Hearing: February 18, 2016

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**I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

1. Subject Property: The subject property is Block 11 of the Assembly Row Planned Unit Development Preliminary Master Plan approved under cases PB 2006-59-R3(1/2016) and PB 2014-17. The approved development of the block includes a 874,297 square foot mixed use building with



768,375 square feet of office and 105,922 square feet of retail/restaurant/health club and a proposed 13,624 square foot daycare facility that is currently before the Planning Board for approval. There is also an approximately 744,800 gross square foot garage being built on the site. Phase 3 of the site calls for additional office space.

2. Proposal: Because the location, size and technology of the office and wayfinding signs were not yet determined at the time of the SPSR-A approval for the mixed use building and garage on Block 11, a condition was placed on the permit that required the signage package outside of the retail signage on the podium to receive special permit approval from the Planning Board. The retail signage on the podium is regulated by the Assembly Row Storefront and Signage Design Standards that were approved by the Planning Board as part of the Master Plan Approval. Staff review and approve retail signage and if it is inconsistent with the Standards it goes before the Planning Board for approval.

Condition 9 of SPSR PB 2014-17 for mixed-use and garage buildings:

*This approval does not constitute approval for any signage on the building or garage above the podium level. This approval does not constitute approval for any free-standing wayfinding signage on the site. Such signage shall require special permit and/or appropriate waivers from the Planning Board prior to installation.*

The signage proposal is detailed in the plan set entitled Partners Healthcare On the Move. There are three high building signs on the rooftop screening of the mixed building at 399 Revolutionary Drive. The rest of the signs are exterior ground level signs. These signs consist of monumental identity and directional signage along Grand Union Boulevard and Revolution Drive as well as signs within the landscaped area for wayfinding and interpretive signs. There are two distinct but complimentary designs proposed for the ground level signs. The signs along Revolution Drive will match the style of the wayfinding signs through the blocks of the Master Plan and the remainder of the signs will have a different aesthetic for the Partners campus.

4. Comments:

*Fire Prevention, Traffic & Parking, Wiring Inspection, Lights and Lines & Engineering* have reviewed the application. The Electrical Inspector will review more detailed plans at the time of the electrical permit. Ideally the conduit for the lit signs was designed and implemented as part of the original construction for the mixed use building and site work.

*Design Review Committee:* The DRC reviewed the proposal on January 14, 2016. The Partners Healthcare Design Team presented the proposed signage for the Partners Healthcare Building as well as wayfinding signage on the site for pedestrians and automobiles. The DRC was pleased with the graphic and design solutions for the signage and provided no further recommendations regarding the signage.

*Ward Alderman:* Alderman McLaughlin is aware of the application.

## **II. FINDINGS FOR SPECIAL PERMIT**

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 Applicants have submitted a Special Permit application for signage on Block 11 as is specified in condition 9 of the SPSR-A approval PB 2014-17 for the mixed use building and garage.

The following are the signage standards in the Assembly Square District under SZO §6.4.14.

- A. *The top of a wall Sign attached parallel to a Building shall be no higher than thirty-five (35) feet above finished Grade.*

The signs at the top of the building require a waiver because they are taller than 35 feet above finished grade. The waiver findings are below.

- B. *With respect to any Structure in the ASMD for which a waiver or other approval has been issued to allow such a Structure to exceed the maximum height otherwise set forth in this Ordinance, approval for signage on such Structure in excess of the maximum height requirements applicable under this Ordinance may be granted solely through a Special Permit from the SPGA.*

The building and therefore the signage did not receive a waiver to exceed the maximum height set forth in the Ordinance.

- C. *The size of signs in the ASMD shall not exceed the requirements outlined in Section 12.4. ("Signs in Nonresidential Districts") unless such requirements are superseded in 6.4.14.A or 6.4.14.B., above. However, approval for freestanding, directional and/or wall signage in the ASMD that does not comply with the applicable provisions of this Ordinance may be granted solely through a Special Permit from the Planning Board.*

The signs do not exceed the size limits as allowed in Section 12.4. The total allowed is 2,340 square feet and the proposal is for 2,023 square feet. The details on the signage sizes can be found in the attached signage size analysis submitted by the Applicant. The allowed size in that analysis will differ from the number in this report because the multiplier should be calculated based on the building's setback from the centerline of the street and not on the distance as the crow flies from the street to the height of the sign.

Per SZO §6.4.12 the Planning Board may grant relief from Development Standards, and any other requirements of the ASMD outlined in Sections 6.4.6 through 6.4.11. In such cases, in granting such relief, the SPGA must find that:

- 1) *Strict enforcement of such standards or requirements would run counter to achieving the objectives of the ASD Plan;*

Not allowing this large commercial tenant that is bringing 4,500 jobs to Somerville the ability to install signs at the top of the building that has been carefully designed to integrate into the design of the building would be counter to the ASD Plan.

- 2) *The application is substantially consistent with the objectives of the ASD Plan and advances the objectives of the ASD Plan;*

The signs at the top of the building are consistent with the objectives of the ASD Plan. An objective of the Plan is to attract commercial tenants and create jobs in Somerville. The signs will identify a large office employer at Assembly Square which will potentially further this goal in changing the perception and reality that Assembly is the home of large scale commercial development. The signs will be visible at a distance and not overpower the human scale signs and public realm details at Assembly Row.

- 3) *In the case of any Alteration of a Nonconforming Structure, a Change of Nonconforming Use, or a Major Amendment to an Approved PUD, such alteration, change or amendment shall conform, to the extent feasible, to the objectives of the ASD Plan; and*

This proposal is not one of these application types.

- 4) *In the case of waivers from the landscaping requirement, the SPGA must determine that such a level of landscaping is incompatible with the objectives of the ASD Plan.*

This proposal does not involve waiving landscape requirements.

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 consistent with the purpose of the ASMD district, which is, "...to encourage the best use of Assembly Square physically, economically, environmentally and socially while promoting the best interests of residents of the City. The ASMD is intended to fulfill the goals and objectives contained in the Assembly Square District Plan. The ASMD zoning is designed to allow the district to reach these goals. The major objectives of the ASD Plan are the following: Facilitate development of a mix of uses including...office..."

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 signage types at ground level has been designed to be of a pedestrian scale to fit into the mixed use, walkable neighborhood. Some of the signs were reduced in scale to move away from office park scale and vehicular oriented signs. The signs have minimal wording and have clear directional symbols. The small LED displays will efficiently convey if parking is available in the garage to avoid cueing while looking for a parking space. The small LED displays will be the only portion of the Partners signs that will be lit. FRIT's signs will have a subtle glow behind the lattice and the individual letters on the sign will glow.

The building signs are proportional to the scale of the building. They have been placed on the screening of the mechanical equipment so that they are visible but do not interfere with the façade. The letters and symbols are simple and do not overwhelm the design of the building. The individual letters will be lit but there will be no other illumination on the roof top signs so they will not be overly bright.

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

There is no existing or proposed housing as a part of this proposal.

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.*

Assembly Row is a key transformational area in SomerVision. The signage is a part of the package that will make this neighborhood functional.

9. Impact on Affordable Housing: *In conjunction with its decision to grant or deny a special permit for a structure of four or more units of housing, the SPGA shall make a finding and determination as to how implementation of the project would increase, decrease, or leave unchanged the number of units of rental and home ownership housing that are affordable to households with low or moderate incomes, as defined by HUD, for different sized households and units.*

There is no housing as part of this application.

### III. RECOMMENDATION

#### Special Permit under Condition 9 of SPSR-A PB 2014-17

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 building and ground level signage for Block 11 of Assembly Row. This approval is based upon the following application materials and the plans submitted by the Applicant:	CO / BP	ISD/Plng.													
	<table><tr><th>Date (Stamp Date)</th><th>Submission</th></tr><tr><td>January 15, 2016</td><td>Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office</td></tr><tr><td>January 13, 2016</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Building Signs – South, North, West, Elevation, Location Plan, Sign Family, EX1.1, EX1.2, Ex2, EX2.1, Courtyard entrances, West entry layout, EX3.1 pedestrian directional, EX3.2 Pedestrian bollard, EX3.3 Interpretive sign)</td></tr><tr><td>November 25, 2015</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Site Wayfinding – median site directional, - site/retail directory)</td></tr><tr><td>December 1, 2015</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Site Wayfinding – median site directional)</td></tr><tr><td>February 5, 2016</td><td>Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Site Parking Directional)</td></tr></table>				Date (Stamp Date)	Submission	January 15, 2016	Initial application submitted to the City Clerk’s Office	January 13, 2016	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Building Signs – South, North, West, Elevation, Location Plan, Sign Family, EX1.1, EX1.2, Ex2, EX2.1, Courtyard entrances, West entry layout, EX3.1 pedestrian directional, EX3.2 Pedestrian bollard, EX3.3 Interpretive sign)	November 25, 2015	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Site Wayfinding – median site directional, - site/retail directory)	December 1, 2015	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Site Wayfinding – median site directional)	February 5, 2016	Modified plans submitted to OSPCD (Site Parking Directional)
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Any changes to the approved plans that are not <i>de minimis</i> must receive SPGA approval.																
Final Sign-Off																
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.													