



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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Case #: PB 2015-06
Date: May 28, 2015
Recommendation: Approval

PLANNING STAFF REPORT

Site: 625 Grand Union Boulevard (Outback Steakhouse)

Applicant Name: Outback Steakhouse
Applicant Address: 2202 N. West Shore Boulevard, Tampa FL 33607
Property Owner Name: Federal Realty Investment Trust
Property Owner Address: 1626 East Jefferson Street, Rockville, MD 20852
Agent Name: Pretorius Electric & Sign Co. LLC
Agent Address: 267a South Main St, W. Bridgewater, MA 02379

Alderman: Matthew McLaughlin

Proposal Description: Outback Steakhouse is seeking waivers from the Assembly Row Sign Standards.

Dates of Public Meeting: June 4, 2015

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1. Proposal: The signage will be for The Outback Steakhouse. This retailer will occupy 7,391 square feet on the first floor of Block 1 along Grand Union Boulevard. The proposed signage can be found on sheets Front Elevation and Elevation of graphic dated with a revision date of March 19, 2015.
2. Applicable Signage Regulations / Approval: The general regulations for signage in the Assembly Square Mixed Use District are located in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance Article 12 - Signs and Section 6.4.14. These sections were further refined in the approved Planned Unit Development (PUD-PMP)



Preliminary Master Plan and Special Permits with Site Plan Review (SPSR) for Assembly Row. The PUD-PMP approval included a condition that required retail storefronts and signage to comply with design standards that were to be developed. Condition 28 states, “[t]he applicant shall provide a design guideline for all retail storefronts and signage within the PUD area for review by the Design Review Committee and approval by the Planning Board.” The Planning Board approved the Assembly Row Storefront & Signage Standards on March 21, 2013 and amended them on May 8, 2014.

All of the retail storefronts and signage shall be consistent with the approved Standards. Condition 4 of SPSR for the subject building, Block 1 of Assembly Square, reiterates this requirement. The condition states, “[a]ll storefronts and retail signage shall be consistent with the design to be developed. Storefronts or retail signage that is inconsistent with the guidelines shall be provided to DRC and Planning Board for review and approval.”

In addition to the conditions of approval related to signage, Block 1 received approval for signage as part of the SPSR approval. The Planning Board issued a Special Permit in part to waive the signage requirements related to the size and height requirements but only for signage that screened the parking garage.

The current application for Outback Steakhouse signage is inconsistent with the standards because the proposed digital print over the service doors pushes the signage over the size limit. The signage otherwise complies with the other standards and an application for a building permit for the other proposed signs has been submitted.

The storefront for this location is 61.5 feet long and the signage allowed is double this length or 123 square feet of signage. The proposed digital mural is approximately 122 square feet. The proposed square footage of the already permitted square footage is 46 which would bring the total to 168 square feet.

The Planning Board has made it clear that they are going to hold applicants to meet these standards unless there are circumstances related to the building and tenant where the waiver allows for signage that furthers the goals of creating unique storefronts and a positive experience for those who live, work and play in the Assembly Row neighborhood. The Board must consider each application separately because the impacts of the types of waivers requested in the context of the other signage for the tenant that meets the standards, as well as the design and location of the signage that needs a waiver, vary greatly from one application to the next.

To date, the tenants that have sought waivers from the signage standards are the largest tenants, anchors and junior anchors: AMC, LegoLand, Saks, Express, Tony C’s, and Outback. LegoLand and AMC are unique in that they occupy multi-levels of the building and have unique storefronts. LegoLand takes up an entire block face and AMC has a three-story storefront. Express comprises half of Block 3 along Grand Union Boulevard and wraps the corner onto Artisan Way. Tony C’s occupies a large portion of the ground floor of Block 2 and is trying to capture attention at the northern corner along Assembly Row since much of the storefront is along the water and not visible from the main streets. Outback is along Grand Union Boulevard, across from the Marketplace parking lot, not along a main pedestrian street and next to service doors.

Staff find that the mural sign will not overwhelm the storefront. The canopy sign over the door and signs on the trellises are only approximately a third of the signage allowed for the storefront. The mural sign is proposed to be large to cover some of the service doors. The Assembly Row Design Guidelines for building specially calls out treating loading and service areas in this way of painting them with a design

that minimizes their function. In this case the neighboring business is treating the service doors with an image that relates to the business so it is considered signage. It will improve the appearance of the unattractive doors and will draw interest to the restaurant without requesting signage with large letters. Also, the mural is proposed to be approximately 127" x 138" to keep all of the copy legible. Some of the smaller copy is approximately 2" and scaling the mural down further will make this small copy appear blurry and illegible. On the larger scale, the proposal fits with the rationale for other signage waivers that were approved for other retailers along Grand Union Boulevard that are on the outer edge of the pedestrian activity.

The large majority of the in-line retailers have approved sign or are anticipated to have signs that meet the Assembly Row Signage Standards and do not need waivers. There may be some special cases where waivers are justified and those would be brought to the Board. Generally, however, the waivers are intended to address project-wide goals and weave together a collection of storefronts to create a balanced retail environment that is not intended to give specific retailers an edge.

II. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the materials submitted by the Applicant, the above information the Planning Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the requested **SIGNAGE PROPOSAL**.

The recommendation is based upon a technical analysis by Planning Staff of the application material based only upon information submitted prior to the public meeting. This report may be revised or updated with new recommendations and/or conditions based upon additional information provided to the Planning Staff during the public meeting.