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Director

STAFF MEMORANDUM

Meeting Date: **Wednesday, November 9, 2022**
DATE: November 4, 2022
TO: Urban Design Commission
FROM: Shubee Sikka, Urban Designer
SUBJECT: **Additional Review Information**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the members of the Urban Design Commission (UDC) and the public with technical information and planning analysis which may be useful in the review and decision-making process of the UDC. The Department of Planning and Development’s intention is to provide a balanced view of the issues with the information it has at the time of the application’s review. Additional information may be presented at the meeting that the UDC can take into consideration when discussing Sign Permit, Fence Appeal applications or Design Reviews.

Dear UDC Members,

The following is a brief discussion of the sign permit applications that you should have received in your meeting packet and staff’s recommendations for these items.

I. Roll Call

II. Regular Agenda

Sign Permits

1. 242-244 Commonwealth Avenue – Elizabeth Home

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 242-244 Commonwealth Ave is within a Multi-Residence 1 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to reface the following sign:

1. *Reface* of one wall mounted perpendicular principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 47 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing Commonwealth Avenue.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The perpendicular principal sign is a reface of an old existing sign.
- Window signs appear to be less than 25% of the window area and hence do not require a sign review.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of reface of the perpendicular principal sign as proposed.

2. 400 Centre Street – Sonesta Global Headquarters

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 400 Centre Street is within a Business 1 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to install the following sign:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 158 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing Centre Street.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed principal sign appears to be not consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 250 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 100 sq. ft., which the applicant is exceeding.
- The applicant will either need to apply for a special permit or decrease the size of the sign to less than 100 sq. ft. Staff has emailed the applicant about both options.
- Staff has found a document that indicates there may be a sign plan authorized via a special permit for this property, but staff has not found it yet. Staff is investigating and will provide a recommendation to the Commission either before or at the meeting.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff will provide a recommendation either before or at the meeting.

3. 416 Watertown Street – Dion’s

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 416 Watertown Street is within a Business 2 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to replace and install the following sign:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 26 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing Watertown Street.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed principal sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 51 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 100 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.

- The application mentions that the sign is not illuminated but the drawings show that the wall letters will be externally illuminated with a LED strip fixture.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the principal sign as proposed.

4. 1296-1298 Centre Street – Learning Express

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 1296-1298 Centre Street is within a Business 1 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to replace and install the following signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 43 sq. ft. of sign area on the western façade facing Cypress Street.
2. One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 36 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern façade facing the rear parking lot. From the drawing, it appears that the sign area is smaller than 36 sq. ft. Staff has requested the applicant to provide the correct dimensions and is waiting to hear back from the applicant.
3. One awning sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 2 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern façade facing the rear parking lot.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed principal sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 30 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 90 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.
- Staff will provide a recommendation about the secondary either before or at the meeting after receiving the correct sign area of the secondary sign.
- The proposed awning sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, awning signs that cover up to 20% of awning area are allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of both proposed principal and awning signs. Staff will provide a recommendation about the secondary sign either before or at the meeting.

5. 1134-1136 Beacon Street – Avenue Deli

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 1134-1136 Beacon Street is within Business 2 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to reface the following signs:

1. *Reface* of one free-standing principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 14 sq. ft. of sign area perpendicular to Beacon Street.
2. *Reface* of one awning mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 20 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern façade facing Beacon Street.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The free-standing sign is a reface of an old existing free-standing sign, but it does not match the free-standing sign approved in the special permit via Board Order #600-70. The Commissioner has determined that the existing free-standing sign is allowed and reface of the sign only needs a review by UDC.
- Reface of the proposed secondary sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, two secondary signs are allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 28 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 28 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of both the free-standing sign and secondary sign as proposed.

Design Review

1. 1 Jackson Street

The subject property consists of a 12,512 square foot lot in the Business 1 (BU-1) zone in Thompsonville. The property is improved with a two-level parking garage built in 1973 which provides parking for the abutting office building at 345 Boylston Street. The applicant proposes to keep the existing parking structure and construct a four-to-six-unit, multifamily dwelling over it. To construct the proposed multi-family dwelling, the petitioner requires the following special permits: allowing a three-story structure with 36 feet in height, allowing a floor area ratio of 1.48, a waiver of up to eight parking stalls, a dimensional waiver to extend the nonconforming front setback, and allowing assigned parking stalls.

At the request of the Planning Department, the petitioner has been asked to present the revised project proposal to the UDC for consideration. The Planning Department encourages the UDC to review the project with regards to, but not limited to, the following: the proposed site plan; the building's design; bulk and massing; and relationship to context and the street.

III. Old/New Business

1. Zoning Redesign – Village Center

The City of Newton's Zoning Redesign project is a multi-year effort to update and rewrite Newton's Zoning Ordinance. Zoning Redesign is currently focused on Village Center Zoning Updates. [Click here](#) to learn about the current phase.

Planning staff and consultant Utile presented version 1.0 of the village center zoning districts to Zoning and Planning Committee at their October 24 meeting. This initial mapping process ran in parallel to the recent engagement, mentioned above, and builds upon nearly two years of research, analysis, and City Council deliberation.

In short, the version 1.0 village center district maps propose three new village center zones that could be applied in twelve of our village center commercial areas. Unlike the current zoning, with its one-size-fits-all format, Utile and Planning staff customized these new zoning districts to each village center. This first draft is intentionally meant to be reviewed and updated. Working closely with the City Council, Planning staff have recommended an iterative process that will set up public hearings and a possible City Council vote in spring 2023.

Please click on the links below to access the online exhibit and village center zoning map:

[Zoning Framework – Online Exhibit](#)

[Village Center District Zoning Map – Version 1.0](#)

2. Approval of Minutes

Staff has provided draft meeting minutes from the September meeting that require ratification (Attachment A). Staff will email October meeting minutes before the meeting.

Attachments

- Attachment A: September UDC Meeting Minutes



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Urban Design Commission

MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the City of Newton Urban Design Commission (UDC) was held virtually on Wednesday, **September 14, 2022**, at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86462592445>

Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

The Chair, Michael Kaufman, called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

Shubee Sikka,
Urban Designer
Planning & Development

Members
Michael Kaufman, Chair
Jim Doolin, Vice Chair
John Downie
Robert Linsky
William Winkler
Visda Saeyan

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I. Roll Call

Those present were Michael Kaufman (Chair), Jim Doolin (Vice Chair), John Downie, Bill Winkler, Robert Linsky, and Visda Saeyan. Shubee Sikka, Urban Designer, was also present.

II. Regular Agenda

Sign Permits

Mr. Kaufman asked if the Commission felt there were any applications they could approve without discussion.

The Commission agreed to approve the following signs without discussion:

Sign Permits

1. 978 Watertown Street – The Body Center

Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 20 square feet of sign area on the northern façade facing Watertown Street.

4. 33-41 Austin Street – M&T Bank

Proposed Signs:

- Reface one free-standing principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 26 sq. ft. of sign area facing Austin Street.
- Replace one secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 13 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Austin Street.

6. 131-181 Needham Street - Citizens

Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 27 sq. ft. of sign area on the southeastern building façade facing Needham Street.
- One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 27 sq. ft. of sign area on the northeastern building façade facing the parking lot.
- One bracket mounted blade sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 6 sq. ft. of sign area on the northeastern building façade facing the parking lot.

9. 1199-1217 Centre Street - Ceremony

Proposed Signs:

- One perpendicular split principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 13 sq. ft. on the southern building façade perpendicular to Pelham Street
- One wall mounted split principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 6 sq. ft. of sign area on the southeastern building façade at the corner of Pelham Street and Centre Street.

Staff provided additional information to the Commission before the meeting by email:

“Applicant has provided the following information about the split perpendicular sign. Both the proposed split principal signs appear to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 800 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 100 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding. Per Zoning Ordinance §5.2.8, “In particular instances, due to the nature of the use of the premises, the architecture of the building, or its location with reference to the street, the total allowable sign area may be divided between two wall signs which together constitute the principal wall sign.” The height clearance is 10 ft, DPW requires a clearance of 89 inches.

Staff recommends both proposed split principal signs for approval. “

10. 10 Langley Road – Ding’s Kitchen

Proposed Signs:

- One awning mounted principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 20 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Langley Road.
- One awning mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 46 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern awning perpendicular to Langley Road.

12. 323-333 Washington Street – Tech Rescue

Proposed Sign:

- One wall mounted principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 19 sq. ft. of sign area on the southeastern building façade facing Washington Street.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs at 978 Watertown Street – The Body Center, 33-41 Austin Street – M&T Bank, 131-181 Needham Street – Citizens, 1199-1217 Beacon Street – Ceremony, 10 Langley Road – Ding’s Kitchen, 323-333 Washington Street – Tech

Rescue. Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, John Downie, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed. The decision is hereby incorporated as part of these minutes. According to the Newton Zoning Ordinance, staff concurs with the recommendation to approve the signs as proposed.

2. 135 Wells Ave – The Y

Proposed Signs:

- Reface of one free-standing sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 20 square feet of sign area perpendicular to Wells Ave.
- One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 61 square feet of sign area on the western façade facing Wells Ave.

Presentation and Discussion:

- Staff informed the Commission that they are still looking for the drawings associated with the special permit.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs as submitted at 135 Wells Ave pending planning department locate the drawings and they are found to be consistent with the special permit. Mr. Linsky seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, John Downie, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed.

3. 823-833 Washington Street – Crystal’s Bakery

Applicant/Representative: Ricky Zeng

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 26 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Washington Street.

Presentation and Discussion:

- Mr. Kaufman asked the applicant if the white portion of the sign will be blacked out and the applicant confirmed that it will be.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs as submitted at 823-833 Washington Street. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, John Downie, Robert Linsky, William Winkler, and Visda Saeyan in favor and none opposed.

5. 1-55 Boylston Street - Gorjana

Applicant/Representative: Ashley Fella

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall mounted split principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 19 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Boylston Street.
2. One perpendicular split principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 4 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade perpendicular to Boylston Street.

Presentation and Discussion:

- Staff commented that the proposed wall mounted sign is not consistent with the approved comprehensive sign package. The blade sign is within the approved sign band, but the wall mounted sign is outside the approved sign band. Mr. Doolin asked where the sign band is, staff shared their screen showing the approved comprehensive sign package.
- The applicant explained why they are requesting the sign to be at the proposed location. The business logo does not show well when it is added on a raceway or standoffs. The “G” and “J” don’t align nicely in the same way as Peloton sign where it is one consistent raceway. It looks tacky that way and it will look more elevated if the proposed sign is aligned with Warby Parker.
- Ms. Saeyan commented that Warby Parker is visible from far when you are driving but when you are walking, Warby Parker sign is not visible. If the applicant finds a way to lower it, it will catch more attention. Mr. Kaufman mentioned that they have a blade sign.
- Mr. Doolin commented that UDC spent hours reviewing and then approving the sign bands in the comprehensive sign package, it will be helpful to see the alternative sign that would demonstrate to UDC that this is problematic to the tenant. It’s troubling that the landlord will come to UDC with the proposed sign. Staff clarified that the landlord has included a letter that they are not in support of the proposed sign location.
- Mr. Kaufman commented that the comprehensive sign package was done with the landlord and the landlord is not supporting this proposed sign location, not sure how UDC can support this without landlord’s approval.
- The applicant sent the alternative sign to staff during the meeting and staff shared the alternative sign at the meeting. The applicant commented that it comes down to “G” and “J” being incredibly difficult to align appropriately and then there are a lot of standoffs. It looks like a factory execution versus a premium execution.
- Mr. Downie commented that it looks like that Peloton sign is on a background, is that the raceway? The applicant commented that the sign could either have a back panel or a raceway and back panel will block a lot of the store front. A back panel will block a lot of the light. Mr. Downie commented that he would like to see the sign with the back panel before the Commission decides on this sign. At this point, he doesn’t recommend the sign for approval.
- Mr. Winkler commented that the background is black so if the small vertical pieces were also black, would they not disappear so “Gorjana” sign would jump forward? The applicant responded that their storefront is going to be all white. Mr. Kaufman asked why the backer panel couldn’t be white, so it looks like part of the storefront.
- Ms. Saeyan commented that it will be helpful to see the entire façade, the photo is only showing 2 stores and 1 store at an angle. It will help to see how other tenants dealt with the installation issue and to see how this store in the entire façade will be the only one above the store and it is also a narrower storefront too. Also, a pedestrian will not be able to see the sign because it is so high up. The applicant responded that they capture that with the blade sign.
- The applicant commented they will look at an option with full backer panel and don’t want to do standoffs because it will not look good. All the cables for the electrical are below and not above.

- Ms. Saeyan asked if the raceway was used in the middle of the letters, would there be a gap? The applicant responded that there would be a gap and you would see the raceway behind because the circle is separated from the letters itself and there is also 2-inch space in between each letter. Ms. Saeyan asked if it was above, will it still be difficult with the letters. The applicant responded the circle is higher.
- Mr. Kaufman asked the applicant if they want to talk their team and come back to UDC with the alternatives.

7. 45 Crescent Street - Forge

Applicant/Representative: Andy Layman

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 187 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Massachusetts Turnpike.
2. One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 18 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing Crescent Street.
3. One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 36 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern building façade facing the parking lot.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve two signs and deny one sign at 45 Crescent Street - Forge. Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, John Downie, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed. The Commission recommended approval of the following two signs:

- One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 18 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing Crescent Street.
- One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 36 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern building façade facing the parking lot.

The Commission recommended **denial** of the following sign:

- One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 187 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Massachusetts Turnpike.

The Commission recommended denial of the above-mentioned principal sign because of two reasons:

- UDC's point of view is that the sign doesn't comply with the Ordinance. The Ordinance mentions that it must be either a street or a drive and there is no direct access to the business from Mass. Turnpike.
- Sign is too big; ordinance allows a sign of up to 100 sq. ft.

8. 714-724 Beacon Street – Small Door Veterinary

Proposed Sign:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 31 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern façade facing Beacon Street.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the sign at 714-724 Beacon Street – Small Door Veterinary. Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, John Downie, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed.

11. 118 Needham Street – Heine Goodale law

Applicant/Representative: Jon Farnsworth

Proposed Signs:

1. One free-standing principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 11 sq. ft. of sign area perpendicular to Needham Street.
2. One wall-mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 32 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade facing the parking lot.
3. One perpendicular secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 7 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade facing the parking lot.

Presentation and Discussion:

Free-standing sign

- The applicant explained that there is an existing free-standing sign with the business name and there is shrubbery all around which cover up the sign completely. There are two buildings on the property and this business is in the back building. The customers have been saying that they can't find the business, so the business owner is looking for signage to help the customers find this business. It is a hidden building and it's a struggle to find it.
- Mr. Kaufman asked if it is possible to make the free-standing sign taller, so all the tenants are on there and not be cut off by the bushes, not sure if the proposed solution is a good one. The applicant responded that they would need to talk to the landlord about it.
- Mr. Doolin commented that it will be great to have a couple of images that step back. Its hard to understand if this is a good solution or not.
- Mr. Kaufman commented because of the location of the business, it needs a sign on Needham Street. There is no visibility to this space without that sign, although not in favor of this solution.
- The applicant commented that the structure of the existing sign is very old, and it's probably just built of plywood, taking it apart will probably just destroy it.
- Ms. Saeyan commented that it should be a unified sign.
- The Commission commented that they do not support the attachment but would support a redo of the free-standing sign to include this tenant in a visible way.

Wall mounted and perpendicular signs

- Mr. Kaufman commented that typically UDC is not in favor of having signs on the second floor unless there are outstanding circumstances.
- Mr. Doolin commented that blade sign is effective and don't understand another sign is needed. Mr. Doolin asked if there are vacant spaces in the building on the first floor. The applicant responded that it appears that it is fully occupied.
- Mr. Kaufman commented that the second-floor sign will probably be better if it was in between the windows and not above the windows but would prefer a large projecting sign and no sign on the second floor.

The UDC recommended the applicant come back with revisions to the proposed signs based on comments at the meeting.

III. Old/New Business

1. Approval of meeting minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes of August meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion recommending approval of the regular meeting minutes for August as submitted. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote (Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, Bill Winkler, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan, and John Downie) in favor, none opposed. The decision is hereby incorporated as part of these minutes.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Kaufman made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Downie seconded the motion and there was general agreement among the members.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shubee Sikka

Approved on

DRAFT