



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 22 McGrath Highway, ZP24-000061
POSTED: November 4, 2024

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (SPA)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the Site Plan Approval application submitted for 22 McGrath Hwy, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on October 15, 2024, and is scheduled for a public hearing on November 20, 2024. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICE

Twin City Plaza, LLC proposes a substantial renovation to an existing façade in the Commercial Business (CB) zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Twin City Plaza, LLC is proposing façade modifications to an existing Strip Commerce building known as Twin City Plaza. Proposed changes include new cladding on existing columns, painting, increase in glazing on a portion of the building, relocation of gas meters, and the second floor entrance will be modified with more glass.

BACKGROUND

22 McGrath Hwy is located in the 0.5mi Transit Area in the Commercial Business (CB) zoning district in the Twin City neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott. The scale of the façade renovation requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary. The Zoning Board of Appeals is the decision-making authority for all discretionary or administrative permits required for the CB zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor Scott and the applicant on April 4, 2024, via the Zoom meeting platform. A second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor Scott and the applicant on June 11, 2024. The following feedback has been summarized from comments made by members of the public at those two (2) neighborhood meetings:

- General support for façade updates
- Site lighting changes
- Bird infestation control measures
- Construction impacts on access to retail stores
- Green roof infrastructure
- Building height changes
- Changes to rear of the building
- Trash management
- Car towing
- Construction timeline
- Changes to signage
- Changes to bike parking
- Replacement of existing tenants

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the Zoom meeting platform on May 14, 2024. The Commission provided its official recommendation on June 25, 2024. The Commission provided the following final design guidance:

- Shade trees should be added to combat heat island effect
- Applicant's architect shall have flexibility to incorporate elements of the non-preferred façade options to the facade around the Marshall's store entrance
- Landscape plantings closest to the pedestrian walkway and in the parking lot islands should be improved

ANALYSIS

22 McGrath Hwy (Twin City Plaza) consists of an existing strip commercial building, a stand-alone pad commerce building, and a parking lot. The plaza has a variety of retail tenants, along with food & beverage services such as Dunkin Donuts and a McDonalds Restaurant. A portion of office space is located on the upper level of the strip commercial building. The property is partially located in Cambridge but the extent of this project is within Somerville City limits only.

Site & Building Design

The applicant's proposal pertains to the existing façade of the commercial strip building and does not propose any changes to the building gross floor area (GFA). The existing fenestration is pre-existing and nonconforming to zoning, however, the increase in glazing will bring the building closer to conformity. The existing columns will slightly

expand due to new cladding (this will not impact GFA). There will be a small increase in glazing with the addition of windows in front for the existing Dunkin Donuts and the ground floor level. Current gas meters will be relocated to the rear of the building. Any new commercial signage proposed will be permitted through a subsequent by-right process after Site Plan Approval. Other modifications to the façade and site include painting, replacing rusted railings, and fixing up existing courtyard.

Economic Development

Economic Development Staff have conducted a review of all plans and related documents and have provided the following comments:

- **Active ground floor spaces and facades:** The project will activate ground floors and facades by improving the facade of the existing commercial structures on the property.
- **Interplay of ground floor space and open space:** The project will improve the interplay of ground floor space and civic space by increasing the amount of glazing with the façade renovation.
- **Building signage and wayfinding:** The project will improve the buildings signage and wayfinding around the site by preserving existing non-conforming signage and upgraded facades will increase the readability of commercial and wayfinding signage.
- **Outdoor dining and commercial activity outside:** The applicant's proposal does not include dedicated space for outdoor dining or commercial uses.
- **Ground floor layout:** The project will improve the ground floor layouts for retail space by upgrading windows and increasing light transmission. The applicant's proposed façade will enlarge and improve the existing windows of the building on site. These upgrades will refresh the appearance of the strip commercial building on the property, allowing them to better compete in the local retail property market.
- **Pedestrian and Bicyclist accessibility:** The applicant's proposal only pertains to façade and small landscaping upgrades, and does not enhance the site's accessibility to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mobility

There are no proposed changes to the existing motor vehicle access and parking configuration. There are no proposed changes to the pedestrian access and site configuration. The existing short-term bike parking will remain with the addition of two (2) new sheltered short-term bike parking. Each shelter can park six (6) bikes for a total of twelve (12) new short-term bike parking spaces.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Zoning Board of Appeals is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must

discuss and draw conclusions for each consideration, but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is accessible, inviting, and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.

2. *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*

Staff believes that the proposal meets the intent of the CB zoning district is, in part: "[T]o maintain already existing areas appropriate for moderate- and large-scale, low-rise buildings and community- and region-serving commercial uses that do not readily assimilate into other zoning districts.

3. *Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

Staff believes that, as conditioned, the proposal does not create any impacts which require mitigation.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for a substantial façade renovation, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be submitted to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

3. One (1) digital copy of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
4. A digital copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

Construction Documents

5. Materials specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
6. An outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.7 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaires; total site lumen limit table (calculations from the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lamp type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of any timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.
7. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.

Site & Building Design

8. Utility meters are not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.