



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

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

TO: Board of Zoning Appeals
FROM: Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff
SUBJECT: 14 McGrath Highway
POSTED: July 31, 2025

RECOMMENDATIONS: Approve with Conditions (Special Permit establish Alcohol Sales Retail Use – ZP25-000044)

Approve with Conditions (Special Permit for >10,000 sf of leasable floor area for a single use – ZP25-000063)

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 two (2) Special Permit applications submitted for 14 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 applications were deemed complete on June 30th, 2025, and are scheduled for a public hearing on August 6th, 2025. 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

ZP25-000044 – 14 McGrath Hwy

Liquor Junction is proposing to expand their alcohol sales business in the Commercial Business (CB) district, which will require a Special Permit under SZO 4.3.13. 'Permitted Uses.'

ZP25-000063 – 14 McGrath Hwy

Liquor Junction is proposing to increase the leasable floor area of their business's use to more than 10,000sqft, in the Commercial Business (CB) district requiring a Special Permit per SZO 9.1.7.c.i.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Applicant proposes the merging of 2 commercial units by removing an interior wall. The proposal includes merging an existing 8,130 ± GSF commercial space currently occupied by Liquor Junction with an adjacent 3,282± GSF space previously occupied by Sew Fisticated Fabrics. Expansion will bring the Applicant's total occupied floor area to

11,412 ± GSF. The Applicant also requires a Special Permit for Alcohol Sales Retail Use as part of this overall project. To expand their alcohol sales business in the Commercial Business (CB) district, the project will require an additional Special Permit under SZO 4.3.13. 'Permitted Uses.'

BACKGROUND

14 McGrath Highway, or Twin City Plaza, is located in the Half-Mile Transit Area in the Commercial Business (CB) zoning district. Twin City Plaza is located in both Somerville and Cambridge. However, the proposed project is entirely located in the Somerville portion of the property. The subject property is in the East Somerville neighborhood in Ward 2 represented by Councilor JT Scott.

The Applicant is proposing to expand their alcohol sales business which requires a Special Permit under SZO 4.3.13. 'Permitted Uses.'

The Applicant also proposes increasing the leasable floor area to more than 10,000sqft, which also requires a Special Permit per SZO 9.1.7.c.i.

The Zoning Board of Appeals is the decision-making authority for all discretionary or administrative permits required for the CB zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

One neighborhood meeting is required for Special Permits. The neighborhood meeting was held and hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the Applicant on April 17th, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform. The Applicant provided an overview of the project. Key questions/comments raised by attendees included:

- why the business expansion was necessary,
- need for more family-oriented businesses in Twin City Plaza,
- concerns about construction disruption to plaza area,
- how the public could share any concerns about the expansion.

ANALYSIS

14 McGrath Highway (Twin City Plaza) is an existing auto-oriented commercial plaza dominated by strip commercial building types which house mostly formula businesses. The Plaza is serviced by a large parking lot. Twin City Plaza is partially located in Cambridge, but the extent of this project is within Somerville city limits only.

Liquor Junction's Alcohol Sales Retail Use was established without a Special Permit prior to the December 12, 2019, adoption of the current zoning ordinance, making it a pre-existing non-conforming use (SZO 14.1.6.a.i). This use is allowed in the CB zoning district only through Special Permit (SZO 6.4.14), which the Applicant now must obtain due to the desired expansion.

The overarching goal of the Applicant's project is to expand their business into the abutting commercial space previously occupied by Sew Fisticated Fabrics. Combining the two commercial spaces will result in an increase in leasable floor area for alcohol sales retail use from ~8,130 square feet to ~11,412 square feet. All changes to the premises will be internal to the abutting commercial spaces. The expansion of leasable floor area for a single retail use to more than 10,000 square feet requires a Special Permit in the CB zoning district.

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.

Special Permit Considerations

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:

- "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.

The intent of the CB zoning district is, in part: "To maintain commercial activities that are primarily accessed by motor vehicles and to 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"

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the **Special Permit to increase the leasable floor area to more than 10,000sqft** (ZP25-000063), Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommend 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.

ISD Zoning:

5. Approval does not allow for changes to the facade without additional review.
6. Any commercial signage additions or alterations will need to adhere to SZO 10.8 and SZO 14.1.8, as applicable, and will require additional review.

Should the Board approve the **Special Permit to establish Alcohol Sales Retail Use** (ZP25-000044), Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Staff recommend the following conditions:

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.
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