

July 16, 2025

VIA CITIZENSERVE PORTAL

City of Somerville
Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning &
Community Development
City Hall
93 Highland Avenue, Third Floor
Somerville, Massachusetts 02143
Attention: Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning

**RE: 74 Middlesex Avenue, Somerville (the "Property")
Special Permit for Authorization of Wall Signs**

Dear Sarah -

On behalf of my client, 74M Property Owner, LLC, the owner of the Property (the "**Owner**") and the applicant, we hereby request approval of a Special Permit pursuant to Section¹ 7.4.9.b. of the City of Somerville Zoning Ordinance ("**SZO**") to authorize nonconforming Wall Signs on the Property (the "**Signs**").

The Property is located in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District (the "**ASMD**") and measures approximately 36,932 square feet of land area. It was redeveloped pursuant to a Master Plan Special Permit, issued on June 22, 2020 (as the same has been amended thru the date hereof, the "**MPSP**"), and Site Plan Approval, issued December 30, 2021, by the Somerville Planning Board (as the same has been amended thru the date hereof, the "**Site Plan Approval**"). The MPSP and Site Plan Approval authorized the development of an approximately 525,000 square foot Commercial Building, containing laboratory and office uses, first floor retail and active uses, and below-grade parking (the "**Building**").

In connection with the construction of the Building, the Owner installed building address logos, as depicted in the signage plans attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference (the "**Signage Plans**"), above the doors at the north, south and west entries to the Building to provide wayfinding for the Building. The logos are consistent with the logos, both as to size and location, included with the Site Plan Approval materials submitted to the Planning Board, which materials did not specifically request the issuance of a Special Permit pursuant to Section 7.4.9.b. of the SZO, as the Owner did not believe that such property address logos constituted signage based on the definitions contained in the SZO.

¹ Unless noted otherwise herein, any use of the term "Section" shall refer to a specific section of the SZO.

The City Inspectional Services Department has determined that the property address logos constitute signage under the SZO. We note that the Signs, as shown on the Signage Plans, deviate from the requirements and limitations contained in Section 10.8.11, which pertain to Wall Signs, as follows:

- The Signs have a diameter (and, therefore a height) of 5 feet, thereby exceeding the maximum allowable height of such signs by 1 foot (See Section 10.8.11.a.);
- The Signs provide the address identification (in the form of the “74m” in the center of the circle) for the Building and are not technically for a “ground story business” (See Section 10.8.11.b.i.);
- The Signs are adhered to the glass curtain wall above the entry doors and, therefore, technically are located on a window, which is prohibited by Section 10.8.11.b.iii.;
- The Signs provide property information for the Building and do not contain a “business name and logo”, which information is not technically permitted on a Wall Sign (See Section 10.8.11.vii); and
- The Signs are located at three (3) separate entrances on the Building, the north and south entry doors as well as the westerly entry door to the bicycle room serving the Building, which exceeds the number of signs permitted for a single user of 1 per Tenant or 2 per Corner Tenant (See Section 10.8.11.a. “Location”). As property identification signage, it serves the entire Building and not an individual Tenant, so the number of Signs does not technically comply with the limitations of Section 10.8.11.a.

Section 7.4.9.b.iii. provides that Walls Signs that do not conform to the requirements of Section 10.8 may be approved by Special Permit, provided that the requested signage complies with the review criteria for Special Permits set forth in Section 15.2.1.e., and the Planning Board makes the following favorable findings considering the following:

- “i.). The creation of legible urban environment free from the overuse of signage.
- ii.). Aesthetics, proportion, scale of the proposed sign in relation to the building or storefront.
- iii.). The signage and its location is appropriate given the design, location, and context of signage on the building and the surrounding properties.”

As you know, Section 15.2.1.e. requires the Planning Board, when granting a Special Permit, to make the following findings that consider the following:

- a. The Comprehensive Plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
- b. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

- c. Considerations indicated elsewhere in the SZO for the required Special Permit.

The Owner contends that the Signs as depicted on the Signage Plans satisfy the Special Permit Criteria of Section 15.2.1.e., and that the Planning Board can make favorable findings as required by Section 7.4.9.b.iii., sufficient to grant a Special Permit thereunder.

More specifically, the Planning Board can make favorable findings with regard to the criteria of Section 15.2.1.e., as follows.

1. The Signs comply with the Comprehensive Plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City. First, the Signs are consistent with and advance the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Somerville, one of the primary tenets of which was to increase commercial development, especially in the Assembly Square Neighborhood. The Building was the first building to be permitted and completed under the Master Plan Special Permit zoning provisions of the ASMD adopted in December 2019. As such, the Building will add 525,000 commercial square feet to Somerville and contribute to the increase of commercial development in the Assembly Square Area. Given the desired commercial density in the ASMD, wayfinding and building identification signage will need to be visible to help pedestrians and motorists unfamiliar with the ASMD find the buildings and businesses contained therein readily. The Signs will further that important and necessary wayfinding feature.

The Signs also comport with the intent of the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan (the “**Assembly Square Plan**”). The first “big idea” of the Assembly Square Plan is “Build Great New Places.” The Assembly Square Plan highlights the importance of building design, emphasizing how building features should work to create a unified outdoor space and noting the importance of well-designed streets. The Signs will contribute substantially to this big idea by providing for an aesthetically pleasing building and wayfinding signage that has a minimalistic appearance that blends in with the design and color palette of the Building. The design of the Signs intentionally complements the Building, leaving a unified appearance, and not detracting from the abutting outdoor spaces and providing for important wayfinding to assist pedestrians and motorists navigating in and thru the ASMD.

2. The Signs align with the intent of the zoning district where the property is located. In addition to furthering the Assembly Square Plan (addressed below), the Signs contribute to the modern appearance of the Building, which in turn supports the goal of having *transformational* redevelopment in the ASMD, espoused in the Assembly Square Plan. In addition, as noted above, the building identification signage will serve an important wayfinding function that will be necessary in the ASMD as it is further developed.

3. Considerations indicated elsewhere in the SZO for the Special Permit. As noted below, the Planning Board is able to make favorable findings with regard to the other criteria to be considered in granting the requested Special Permit, which criteria is set forth in Section 7.4.9.b.iii. (and Section 7.4.9.b.iv., to the extent required).

In addition, the Owner believes that the Planning Board will be able to make the following favorable findings with regard to the Signs in accordance with the review criteria set forth in Section 7.4.9.iii.

1. The Signs do not contravene the creation of a legible urban environment free from the overuse of signs. The Signs are sited above three separate entry doors to the Building. One on the north side along McGrath Highway, one on the south side at the door facing the Civic Space constructed by the Owner situated to the south of the Building in a portion of Kensington Street and the city-owned park at 0 Middlesex Avenue, and one on the west side of the Building above the door providing access to the bicycle parking facilities situated within the Building. The Signs are visible from the pedestrian realm given their location above the entry doors, but do not detract from the urban realm as the coloring of the graphic circle and text matches the color of the Building's façade. Additionally, the Signs assist in creating a legible urban environment by providing important wayfinding and address identification signage that is visible from the abutting sidewalks and streets, but the use of a minimalist font and coloring matching the building allows the Signs to convey important building information without being obnoxious or contributing to oversaturation of signage.
2. The aesthetics, proportion, and scale of the Signs are appropriate in relation to the Building. The Signs' design complements the sleek façade of the Building, utilizing clean lines and a color intended to be visible yet innocuous. The Signs are appropriately placed over entrance ways and occupy no more space than necessary to clearly demarcate points of entry into the Building.
3. The Signs harmonize with the design, location, and context of other signage on the Building and on surrounding properties. The Signs' color resembles the materials used on the Building's façade. This aligns with the visible signs nearby that similarly use colors located elsewhere on the Building on which they are located. Further, the Signs are designed such that one can see the glass they are placed on through them, which aesthetically matches the neighboring glass-curtain wall buildings.

We note that this signage is intended to be visible from the abutting roadways as a means of identifying the Building's address and location and, as a result, we do not believe that they would qualify as Window Signs under Section 10.8.12. If the Planning Board makes a determination that the Signs are, in fact, Window Signs, the Owner hereby requests a waiver by Special Permit pursuant to the provision of Section 7.4.9.b.iv. (as a

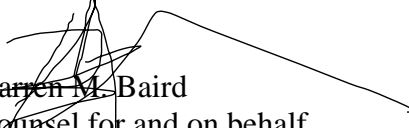
Special Permit under Section 7.4.9.b.iii. does not apply to Wall Signs), granting a waiver from the requirement of Section 7.4.9.b.ii., which requires that Window Signs comply with the provisions of Section 10.8. In order for the Planning Board to approve a Special Permit pursuant to Section 7.4.9.b.iv., the Planning Board is required to make favorable findings taking into account the criteria set forth in Section 15.2.1.e., and that the Signs are consistent with the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan. As noted above, the Planning Board can make favorable findings with regard to the Signs as to each of the criteria set forth in Section 15.2.1.e. and Section 7.4.9.b.iv.

As a result of compliance with the above criteria, we believe approval of a Special Permit for authorization of the Signs is appropriate.

Should you have any questions concerning the above, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



~~Darren M. Baird~~
Counsel for and on behalf
of 74M Property Owner, LLC

cc: Ryan Souls and Charles Spivey (Greystar)(via electronic mail)
Anthony D. Galluccio, Esq. (via electronic mail)

Exhibit A – Signage Plans

EXHIBIT A
SIGNAGE PLANS
[attached behind]



List of Sign Types

Sign Type	Description	Qty
1	Logo /Address at South Entrance	1
2	Logo /Address at North Entrance	1
3	Logo /Address at West Entrance	1
4	Parking Entrance ID	1
5	Parking Enter / Exit	1
6	Parking Blade	1
7	Freestanding Parking Directional	1
8	Loading ID	3
9	Somerville Park Sign - Tavern Style	1
10	Somerville Park Dedication Plaque	1

Site Plan
Not to Scale

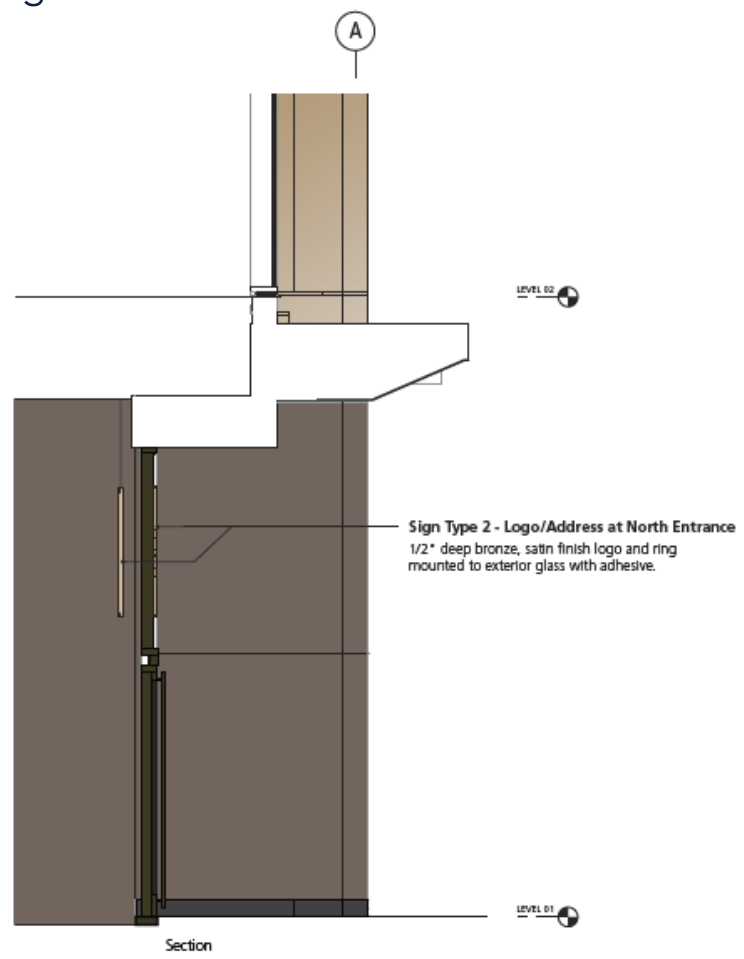
South Building Entrance



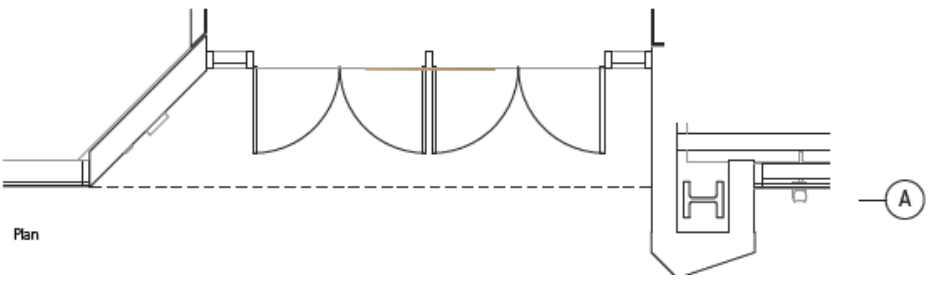
South Building Entry Looking Northwest from Middlesex Ave
Not to Scale

Sign Type 1
Logo/Address at South Entrance

South Building Entrance

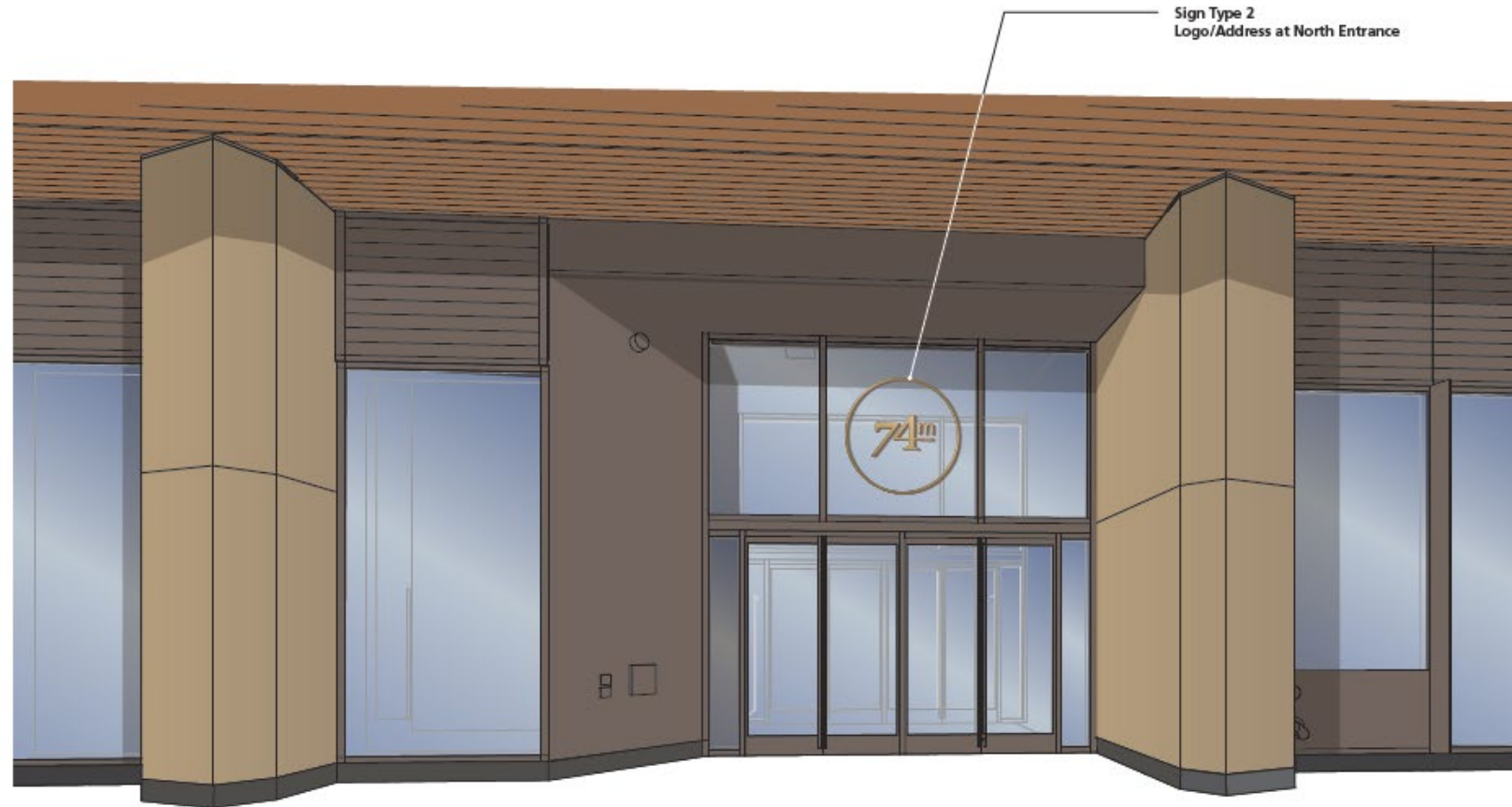


Elevation - South Building Entry
Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0"





Bronze letters mounted to glass



Sign Type 2
Logo/Address at North Entrance

North Building Entry
Not to Scale

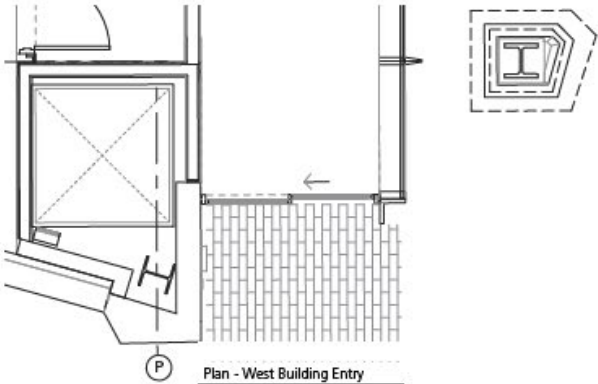
West Building Entrance



West Building Entry
Not to Scale



Elevation - West Building Entry
Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0"



Plan - West Building Entry
Scale: 3/16" = 1' - 0"