



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

STAFF PRESENT

CHRIS DIORIO, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*

MEMBERS PRESENT

JULIE BRADY

DEBORAH FENNICK

MATTHEW RICE

PETER WIEDERSPAHN

RECOMMENDATIONS and MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday, November 23, 2009, 6:30 p.m.** in City Hall, 3rd floor conference room, 93 Highland Ave, Somerville, MA.

The purpose of the meeting was to review and make recommendations on the following proposals:

ASSEMBLY SQUARE - IKEA “Phase 1AA” Revision to SPSR-A (PB2009-05-R-1109)

The Applicant, FR Sturtevant Street, LLC, and its Agent, Hugh Hahn, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. seek to revise a previously approved Special Permit with Site Plan Review-A final level approval of a phase ("Phase 1AA") of a planned unit development (S.Z.O. §16.8.3) in order to: (1) incorporate "gateway" elements at the intersection of Assembly Square Drive and Route 28, (2) revise the interior of the traffic circle at the intersection of Assembly Square Drive and A Street in order to incorporate up to 13 flag poles at up to 80' in height, (3) revise Assembly Square Drive in order to locate trees along the western edge of the right of way near Route 28, (4) revise Assembly Square Drive to reduce the size of the median and associated landscaping at the intersection of North Union Street (discontinued), (5) revise the IKEA flag circle to incorporate "gateway" elements.

Assembly Square Mixed Use District (ASMD); Planned Unit Development Overlay District - A (PUD-A); Waterfront Overlay District (WOD).

ASSEMBLY SQUARE - MARKETPLACE “Phase 1AAA”

The Applicant, FR Sturtevant Street, LLC, and its Agent, Hugh Hahn, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. seek to revise a previously approved Special Permit with Site Plan Review-A final level approval of a phase ("Phase 1AAA") of a planned unit development (S.Z.O. §16.8.3) for a Mall use (S.Z.O. §7.11.9.14) under the Planned Unit Development Preliminary Master Plan approved by the Planning Board on December 14, 2006 in order to locate trees and other landscaping elements in the area between the northernmost parking lot and the intersection of Middlesex Avenue and Route 28.

Assembly Square Mixed Use District (ASMD); Planned Unit Development Overlay District - A (PUD-A); Waterfront Overlay District (WOD).



OVERALL PROPOSAL

The Design Review Committee [DRC] is generally supportive of the overall strategy by Street-Works LLC for defining the main entranceways into the Assembly Square district with place-making elements. The DRC feels that these elements will give a coherent identity to the vehicular and pedestrian intersections leading to Assembly Square and from Assembly Square into the surrounding neighborhoods. The DRC particularly appreciates the contemporary lighting elements to make the highway-bridge underpasses more attractive and better illuminated.

As alternatives are tested for the proposed elements, the DRC would suggest that sustainable energy strategies, such as on-site energy capture, be considered. These strategies may not only generate energy, but also they may become integral to the image of the proposed place-making elements.

GATEWAYS

The DRC has four primary observations regarding the proposed brick and steel-grill gateway elements:

1. The aggregate of all of the gateway elements would help give definition to the open landscape areas. The DRC would, however, like to see better representation of the trees and landscape elements in the open space that would reinforce the place-making role of the gateways.
2. The plan form of the curving walls does define a space for potential artwork installations adjacent to the sidewalk. The DRC feels, however, that this plan form is too historically rooted as proposed, i.e., the plan form is too derivative of Baroque or Neo-Classical architecture. The DRC suggests that different space-defining forms are tested that would uniquely symbolize the 20th century heritage of Assembly Square district. This may include a more modern or contemporary space-making plan form.
3. The DRC feels that the proposed palette of square brick columns, horizontal steel grill, and contemporary light posts would benefit from strategic editing. The DRC is most attracted to the steel grill and contemporary lighting, and would like to see alternatives to the rustic, or irregular, brick as designed. This suggestion does not preclude brick as a material, but the DRC is suggesting that the form could be different.
4. The DRC does not advocate for the large letters on the horizontal grills as a way of identifying the adjacent neighborhoods. As an alternative, the DRC suggests that these gateway elements be designed to accept subsequent artistic and design works that will make the gateways unique to the Assembly Square district.

ASSEMBLY SQUARE DRIVE

The DRC applauds the place-making elements internal to the district such as the double alley of trees along Assembly Square Drive, and the twinkle lights and up-lighting for the trees. The DRC also praises the raised pedestrian walkways across, and the bike lane parallel to, Assembly Square Drive.

CIRCLE OF FLAGS

The DRC agrees that the traffic roundabout at the end of the axis of Assembly Square Drive is a good place for a vertical “landmark” element. The DRC does not, however, believe that the proposed circle of flags is the correct choice for this element. The DRC feels that the proposed flags would have too close an association with the approved IKEA circle of flags.



The DRC advocates for alternative proposals that may be unique to Assembly Square like the air-catching kinetic sculpture is unique to Porter Square, Cambridge, MA. Suggestions by the DRC for alternatives to the circle of flags include vertical-axis, omni-directional, wind turbine for the generation of electricity and to provide a demonstrable commitment to sustainable energy. Other suggestions included having flags in a distinctly different configuration from the IKEA circle of flags.

