



Planning Department

TOWN OF ACTON
472 Main Street
Acton, Massachusetts
01720
Telephone (978) 929-6631
Fax (978) 929-6340
planning@acton-ma.gov
www.acton-ma.gov

INTERDEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION

To: Planning Board **Date:** October 16, 2013
From: Kristen Domurad-Guichard, Assistant Town Planner *KDG*
Subject: Acton Plaza Shopping Center – 381 Mass Ave. and 295 Main Street

Location: 381 Mass Ave. and 295 Main Street
Applicant: E&A Northeast, LP/ c/o Sam Judd
Owner: E&A Northeast, LP
Sign Type: Projecting Blade Signs, Wall Sign and Freestanding Sign
Bylaw Sections: 7.13.1.1, 7.13.1.2(a), 7.13.1.3, 7.13.1.8, 7.13.13
Map & Parcel: F3-89, F3-97, F3-97-1 and F3-98
Zoning: Kelley's Corner (KC)
Public Hearing: November 5, 2013
Decision Deadline: February 3, 2014

Background

The Acton Plaza Shopping Center contains two large buildings, the upper plaza or Plaza I located at 295 Main Street, and the lower plaza or Plaza II, located at 381 Main Street. On behalf of owner, E&A Northeast LP, E&A Northeast LP/ c/o Sam Judd applied for one Business Center Wall Sign, which reads "Acton Plaza" at Acton Plaza II, one or two (depending on the Board's determination) Wall Sign, which reads "TJ Maxx/HomeGoods" at Acton Plaza II, an additional Projecting Sign for each tenant in Acton Plaza I and Acton Plaza II, and a second Freestanding Monument Business Center Sign to be located at 381 Mass Ave. E&A Northeast LP is currently going through façade improvements for the entire business center which includes Acton Plaza I and Acton Plaza II. The sign special permit requests are part of the larger design scheme for tenants at their plaza. All other sign permits have been submitted to the Planning Department for administrative review.

Comments

Other Town departments/committees have also reviewed the application and appear to have no issues with the sign special permit application request. The Applicant has received all department/committee comments, a copy of this memo, and the draft decision. Below are the Planning Department comments broken down by sign special permit request:

1. Business Center Wall Sign "Acton Plaza":

- a. The proposed Business Center Wall Sign is mounted directly on top of a horizontal architectural "eyebrow" element. Bylaw Section 7.7.3 requires signs to be located at least 6 inches from any architectural features.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.3 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a sign in a position or location not otherwise permitted.

2. Projecting Signs Acton Plaza I:

- a. Each tenant is proposed to have one Projecting Sign in addition to one wall sign. Bylaw Section 7.7.1 limits one exterior sign per each principal use.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.1 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a greater number of signs than otherwise permitted per principal use.

- b. The proposed Projecting Signs are to be hung down from the underside of the canopy. Bylaw Section 7.7.5 defines Projecting Sign to be mounted on the face of the wall projecting out.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.3 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a sign in a position or location not otherwise permitted.

3. Projecting Signs Acton Plaza II:

- a. Each tenant is proposed to have a Projecting Sign in addition to a wall sign. Bylaw Section 7.7.1 limits one exterior sign per principal use.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.1 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a greater number of signs than otherwise permitted per principal use.

- b. The proposed Projecting Signs are to be hung down from the underside of the canopy. Bylaw Section 7.7.5 defines Projecting Sign to be mounted on the face of the wall projecting out.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.3 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a sign in a position or location not otherwise permitted.

- c. The proposed Projecting Signs project 5'-1 ¼" from the face of the wall. Bylaw Section 7.7.5 limits the projection of the sign from the wall to 3 feet.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.3 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a sign in a position or location not otherwise permitted.

4. Freestanding Monument Business Center Sign:

- a. Two Freestanding Signs are proposed for the Business Center. Bylaw Section 7.8.1 limits each business center to one freestanding business center sign.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.1 grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a greater number of signs than otherwise permitted.

- b. The proposed Freestanding Signs do not show a required landscaped area. Bylaw Section 7.8.3 requires each proposed freestanding sign to be integrated into a 256 square foot landscaped area.

Bylaw Section 7.13.1.8 grants the Planning Board authority to allow a freestanding sign with less than the required landscaped area, provided sufficient landscape treatment is provided to compensate for the reduction in area.

5. Wall Sign(s) “TJ Maxx/HomeGoods”:

- a. The application states that TJ Maxx and HomeGoods operate as individual business entities with separate tax identifications numbers (see memo Item #2) and therefore are two different principle uses. The Applicant requests the words, “TJMaxx” and “HomeGoods” with the line above it, be considered two separate signs for two separate businesses, although both operate from within the same retail space. If the Board determines they are two separate signs, the Planning Department offers the following comments:
 - ii. The proposed height of the “TJMaxx” portion is 3’-10 3/8”. The proposed height of the “HomeGoods” portion with the line above is 3’-7 1/2”. Bylaw Section 7.7.4.2 limits the height of a wall sign to 3 feet in the Business, Industrial and Office Districts.

If the Board considers the Applicants request to view TJMaxx and HomeGoods as two separate signs as shown on the plan, Bylaw Section 7.13.1.2(a) provides the Planning Board with the authority to grant a special permit for a sign higher than one and one half times the maximum height, in this zoning district the maximum height would be 4.5 feet.

- b. If the Board determines both the words “TJMaxx” and “HomeGoods” with the line above it, are considered one sign, the Planning Department offers the following comments:
 - i. The proposed height of the wall sign is 7’-11”. Bylaw Section 7.7.4.2 limits the height of a wall sign to 3 feet in the Business, Industrial and Office Districts.

*Bylaw Section 7.13.1.2(a) grants the Planning Board the authority to allow a sign higher than one and one half times the otherwise allowed height, in this zoning district the maximum height would be 4.5 feet. The Planning Board does **not** have the authority to grant a special permit for a wall sign height of 7’-11”.*

One principal use or two for TJMaxx and HomeGoods is a judgement call similar to the determination made for Acton Chrysler/Dodge/Jeep/Ram. Staff would like to defer to the Planning Board in this case, also.

Recommendation

The Planning Board has the authority to grant special permits to allow the proposed Business Center Wall Sign, the Projecting Signs, and the Freestanding Monument Business Center Sign as noted above. The Board must find the requests meet the criteria of Bylaw Section 7.13.2.

The Planning Board should determine if TJMaxx/HomeGoods presents as one sign or two signs. If the Board determines it is one sign, they do not have the authority to approve it at the current height. In all other respects the proposed Business Center Wall Sign, the Projecting Signs, and the Freestanding Monument Business Center Sign comply with the Bylaw. If the Planning Board determines TJMaxx/HomeGoods is two signs, it would comply as well.

Overall, the Planning Department believes the proposed wall and free standing business center signs, as well as the projecting signs are appropriate and consistent with the overall renovation plan for the building. As noted above, the Planning Department questions the presentation of the TJMaxx/Homegoods sign(s) and therefore defers to the Planning Board.