



Planning Department

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MEMORANDUM

To: Planning Board

Date: February 5, 2015

From: Roland Bartl, AICP, Planning Director

**Subject: Application for Sign Special Permit – 245 Arlington Street
Advance Auto Parts**

Attached please find the beginning of a decision draft more or less completed (with some place holders) through the findings of facts. Please review them, they are not repeated here. In short, the applicant proposes to fully replace an existing wall sign and to reface an existing non-conforming freestanding sign.

As a baseline:

- The applicant has a right to reface the existing nonconforming freestanding sign subject only to an administrative sign license from this office through which we can seek to effect forward compliance with the sign illumination and landscaping standards, but not the dimensions.
- The applicant is entitled to only one sign by right, subject to dimensional constraints. If the freestanding sign remains, the new wall sign can only be allowed with a special permit. If not granted, the applicant might choose to be content, if not satisfied, with that outcome and simply reface the freestanding sign, and perhaps use window signage (up to 25% of the store window area can be used for signage - no permit or license required).
- If the Board is considering granting a special permit for a new wall sign, then consideration under the special permit of the freestanding sign is also appropriate.

I suggest that a conversation may be had with the applicant about bringing the entire signage scheme more in tune with the West Acton Village setting. Arlington Street is not a highway thoroughfare. Rather it is a narrow street with sidewalks. With a 4-way stop intersection just one property to the east, cars move slowly through the area. There really is no need for imposing signs in order to be seen. In another setting the proposed sign dimensions might be considered relatively modest, here it is out of proportion.

Recommendations:

The Planning Board can issue special permits for a number of exemptions from the by-right sign standards, including additional signs, dimensions, placement, materials and illumination. The

principal considerations for the Board when allowing signage by special permit deal with design and aesthetics - scale, proportion, context, colors, materials, etc. Where the context is West Acton Village (WAV zoning district) tending to its visual hygiene should be a paramount consideration.

Wall sign:

The commercial building in which the store is located is rather plain. It will look too bare without any signage. Therefore, I recommend that the Board consider granting a special permit for a wall sign. I understand the dilemma of the long name. However, I think a smaller sign might be more appropriate here. The applicant should provide an alternative rendering with a down-scaled sign that complies with the WAV standards for dimension, materials, and illumination.

Freestanding sign:

Where a special permit for a new wall sign is requested, the continued existence of the freestanding sign is not a given. I recommend that Board consider granting a special permit with a freestanding sign remaining in place. In the absence of anything else on this side of the property, it helps define the boundary, more or less, to the railroad right-of-way. However, the freestanding sign should be brought into compliance with the WAV standards for dimension, illumination, materials, and landscaping. The applicant should provide an alternative rendering for a freestanding sign that meets the WAV standards.

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