



Town of Arlington, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Community Development
730 Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, Massachusetts 02476

Public Hearing Memorandum

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the Arlington Redevelopment Board and public with technical information and a planning analysis to assist with the regulatory decision-making process.

To: Arlington Redevelopment Board
From: Claire V. Ricker, AICP Secretary Ex-Officio
Subject: Environmental Design Review, 892 Massachusetts Avenue, Docket #3870
Date: October 2, 2025

I. Docket Summary

This is an application by Darcy Gould and Gretchen Paulson of Activate SBP, LLC, to open Special Permit Docket #3870 in accordance with the provisions of MGL Chapter 40A § 11, and the Town of Arlington Zoning Bylaw Section 3.4, Environmental Design Review, and Section 6.2, Signs.

The applicant proposes to install one exterior wall sign, two door window signs, and 13 window transparencies for a storefront in the multi-use building located at 892 Massachusetts Avenue, in the Neighborhood Business Zoning District (B2) and Residential/Business Sign District. The opening of the Special Permit is to allow the Board to review and approve the project under Zoning Bylaw Section 3.4, Environmental Design Review, and Section 6.2, Signs.

Materials submitted for consideration of this application include:

- Application for EDR Special Permit,
- Dimensional information of the proposed signage, and
- Renderings of signage.

Section 6.2, Signs, directs the Redevelopment Board to review any requests for signage special permits via Environmental Design Review. Given that the proposed window signs and transparencies exceed the maximum dimensional requirements for window signage permitted by the Zoning Bylaw, this application was forwarded to the ARB for review.

II. Application of Special Permit Criteria (Arlington Zoning Bylaw, Section 3.3)

1. Section 3.3.3.A.

The use requested is listed as a Special Permit in the use regulations for the applicable district or is so designated elsewhere in this Bylaw.

The applicant has a physical therapy business at this location in the B2 Neighborhood Business Zoning District. The signage is the subject of the special permit as required by Section 6.2, Signs. The Board can find this condition met.

2. Section 3.3.3.B.

The requested use is essential or desirable to the public convenience or welfare.

The business provides physical therapy service to the community. The Board can find this condition met.

3. Section 3.3.3.C.

The requested use will not create undue traffic congestion or unduly impair pedestrian safety.

Only the signage is subject to review. The Board can find this condition met.

4. Section 3.3.3.D.

The requested use will not overload any public water, drainage or sewer system or any other municipal system to such an extent that the requested use or any developed use in the immediate area or in any other area of the Town will be unduly subjected to hazards affecting health, safety, or the general welfare.

Only the signage is subject to review. The Board can find this condition met.

5. Section 3.3.3.E.

Any special regulations for the use as may be provided in the Bylaw are fulfilled.

No special regulations are applicable to the proposal. The Board can find this condition met.

6. Section 3.3.3.F.

The requested use will not impair the integrity or character of the district or adjoining districts, nor be detrimental to the health or welfare.

The use does not impair the integrity or character of the neighborhood. The Board can find this condition met.

7. Section 3.3.3.G.

The requested use will not, by its addition to a neighborhood, cause an excess of the use that could be detrimental to the character of said neighborhood.

The use will not be in excess or detrimental to the character of the neighborhood. The Board can find this condition met.

III. Environmental Design Review Standards (Arlington Zoning Bylaw, Section 3.4)

1. EDR-1 Preservation of Landscape

The landscape shall be preserved in its natural state, insofar as practicable, by minimizing tree and soil removal, and any grade changes shall be in keeping with the general appearance of neighboring developed areas.

No changes to the landscape are proposed, as the only proposed exterior alterations are the proposed signage. The Board can find this condition met.

2. EDR-2 Relation of the Building to the Environment

Proposed development shall be related harmoniously to the terrain and to the use, scale, and architecture of the existing buildings in the vicinity that have functional or visible relationship to the proposed buildings. The Arlington Redevelopment Board may require a modification in massing so as to reduce the effect of shadows on the abutting property in an R0, R1 or R2 district or on public open space.

No changes to the exterior of the building are proposed other than the proposed signage. The Board can find this condition met.

3. EDR-3 Open Space

All open space (landscaped and usable) shall be so designed as to add to the visual amenities of the vicinity by maximizing its visibility for persons passing by the site or overlooking it from nearby properties. The location and configuration of usable open space shall be so designed as to encourage social interaction, maximize its utility and facilitate maintenance.

No changes to open space would result from this sign proposal. The Board can find this condition met.

4. EDR-4 Circulation

With respect to vehicular and pedestrian and bicycle circulation, including entrances, ramps, walkways, drives, and parking, special attention shall be given to location and number of access points to the public streets (especially in relation to existing traffic controls and mass transit facilities), width of interior drives and access points, general interior circulation, separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic, access to community facilities, and arrangement of vehicle parking and bicycle parking areas, including bicycle parking spaces required by Section 6.1.12 that are safe and convenient and, insofar as practicable, do not detract from the use and enjoyment of proposed buildings and structures and the neighboring properties.

No changes to circulation patterns would result from this sign proposal. The Board can find this condition met.

5. EDR-5 Surface Water Drainage

Special attention shall be given to proper site surface drainage so that removal of surface waters will not adversely affect neighboring properties or the public storm drainage system. Available Best Management Practices for the site should be employed, and include site planning to minimize impervious surface and reduce clearing and re-grading. Best Management Practices may include erosion control and stormwater treatment by means of swales, filters, plantings, roof gardens, native vegetation, and leaching catch basins. Stormwater should be treated at least minimally on

the development site; that which cannot be handled on site shall be removed from all roofs, canopies, paved and pooling areas and carried away in an underground drainage system. Surface water in all paved areas shall be collected in intervals so that it will not obstruct the flow of vehicular or pedestrian traffic and will not create puddles in the paved areas.

In accordance with Section 3.3.4., the Board may require from any applicant, after consultation with the Director of Public Works, security satisfactory to the Board to ensure the maintenance of all stormwater facilities such as catch basins, leaching catch basins, detention basins, swales, etc. within the site. The Board may use funds provided by such security to conduct maintenance that the applicant fails to do.

The Board may adjust in its sole discretion the amount and type of financial security such that it is satisfied that the amount is sufficient to provide for any future maintenance needs.

No changes to the exterior of the building or surface water run-off would result from this sign proposal. The Board can find this condition met.

6. EDR-6 Utilities Service

Electric, telephone, cable TV, and other such lines of equipment shall be underground. The proposed method of sanitary sewage disposal and solid waste disposal from all buildings shall be indicated.

No changes to the utility service would result from this sign proposal. The Board can find this condition met.

7. EDR-7 Advertising Features

The size, location, design, color, texture, lighting and materials of all permanent signs and outdoor advertising structures or features shall not detract from the use and enjoyment of proposed buildings and structures and the surrounding properties.

The applicant proposes to install one exterior wall sign, two door window signs and transparencies, and 13 window transparencies on a storefront in the multi-use building located at 892 Massachusetts Avenue. As the business provides physical therapy and other treatments to clients, the applicant requests that transparencies be allowed across all storefront windows to support the privacy of the clients. A Special Permit is requested to allow the business to install signage in excess of what is permitted. A 20 square-foot sign composed of PVC letters with a painted finish is proposed above the five storefront windows to the right of the entry doors. Installation of the sign directly over the doors is infeasible given that a large safety light is currently installed above the doors.

Additionally, the applicant proposes two window signs and two window transparencies on the doors. These signs are in excess of the 25% maximum window coverage allowed per 6.2.5.D(11) of the Zoning Bylaw. The applicant further proposes transparencies in excess of 25% coverage on the five storefront windows to the right of the doors and on the eight storefront windows to the left of the doors. These proposed transparencies include a graphic letter "A" on every other window, which breaks up the consistent pattern of transparencies on the windows and may serve to activate the streetscape by providing a more engaging storefront.

Per Section 6.2.2(C), the ARB may grant a Special Permit to allow signs of greater size and/or in a location other than what is allowed by section 6.2, "provided the architecture of the building, the location of the building relative to the street, or the nature of the use being made of the building is such that an additional sign or signs of a larger size should be allowed in the public interest."

8. EDR-8 Special Features

Exposed storage areas, exposed machinery installations, service areas, truck loading areas, utility buildings and structures, and similar accessory areas and structures shall be subject to such setbacks, screen plantings or other screening methods as shall reasonably be required to prevent their being incongruous with the existing or contemplated environment and the surrounding properties.

No changes are proposed. The Board can find this condition met.

9. EDR-9 Safety

With respect to personal safety, all open and enclosed spaces shall be designed to facilitate building evacuation and maximize accessibility by fire, police and other emergency personnel and equipment. Insofar as practicable, all exterior spaces and interior public and semi-public spaces shall be so designed to minimize the fear and probability of personal harm or injury by increasing the potential surveillance by neighboring residents and passersby of any accident or attempted criminal act.

No changes are proposed. The Board can find this condition met.

10. EDR-10 Heritage

With respect to Arlington's heritage, removal or disruption of historic, traditional or significant uses, structures or architectural elements shall be minimized insofar as practical whether these exist on the site or on adjacent properties.

The property at 892 Mass Ave is not listed on the *Inventory of Historically or Architecturally Significant Properties in the Town of Arlington*. The Board can find this condition met.

11. EDR-11 Microclimate

With respect to the localized climatic characteristics of a given area, any development which proposes new structures, new hard surface, ground coverage or the installation of machinery which emits heat, vapor or fumes shall endeavor to minimize insofar as practicable, any adverse impacts on light, air and water resources or on noise and temperature levels of the immediate environment.

No changes are proposed. The Board can find this condition met.

12. EDR-12 Sustainable Building and Site Design

Projects are encouraged to incorporate best practices related to sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality. Applicants must submit a current Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) checklist, appropriate to the type of development, annotated with narrative description that indicates how the LEED performance objectives will be incorporated into the project.

No changes are proposed. The Board can find this condition met.

IV. Findings

1. The ARB finds that the commercial use of the building is supportive of Board and Town economic development goals such that allowing window signage and transparencies to be installed across more of the street facing windows than is otherwise allowed, is in the public interest consistent with Section 6.2 of the Zoning Bylaw.
2. The ARB finds that the project is consistent with Environmental Design Review per Section 3.4 of the Zoning Bylaw.

V. Conditions

1. Any substantial or material deviation during construction from the approved plans and specifications is subject to the written approval of the Arlington Redevelopment Board.
2. The Board maintains continuing jurisdiction over this permit and may, after a duly advertised public hearing, attach other conditions or modify these conditions as it deems appropriate in order to protect the public interest and welfare.