



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

18 FEBRUARY 2021 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Sam Dinning	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Rob Buchanan	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Rebecca Lyn Cooper (Planning & Zoning), Dan Bartman (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:54pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes Approval

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve minutes from 3 September 2020 and 1 October 2020.

RESULT:

APPROVED

OTHER BUSINESS: SomerVision 2040

(continued from 21 January 2021)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to take up the discussion again on March 18, 2021.

RESULT:

CONTINUED to 03/18/2021

PUBLIC HEARING: 3 Hawkins Street

Architect Peter Quinn presented the project context and existing conditions, as well as the proposed design, and discussed the building's formal amenities.

Chair Capuano paused the presentation to ask for confirmation that the project was in a transit area; Mr. Quinn confirmed that the project was in the ½ mile walkshed. The proposed building is expected to have 59 units and will provide 15 parking spaces.

Erin Hossaini-Fitch presented the site strategy and landscaping plans.

Chair Capuano opened up the public testimony portion of the hearing.

Jeff Byrnes (294 Summer Street) voiced his support for the proposal. He appreciated that the building was in compliance with the new Zoning Ordinance, that it was environmentally friendly by meeting the Passive House requirements, and that it won't have too many parking spots since it will be in a transit area.

Councilor JT Scott (269 Washington Street) voiced his support for the proposal. He was pleased with the expanded set-backs and the fact that it will be a Passive House. He confirmed that the developer committed to providing a transportation screen in the lobby of the building to provide the transit schedule of nearby buses, since the residents will not be able to obtain on-street parking permits, considering they are within the ½ mile walkshed. He also noted that he was in favor of the use of the pavers in the landscape plan, and how they will be useful for moving vans. He also mentioned that he and the neighborhood were in favor of the proposed upgrades that will be made to the intersection of Hawkins and Lake. Councilor Scott was concerned with the lack of short-term spots for deliveries and ride shares and the placement of the parking spots on Lake Street, as the residents on Lake Street might have some trouble pulling out into traffic because of those parking spots.

Justin Fidler (22 Ellington Road #2) voiced his support for the proposal, noting that housing is exactly what Somerville needs; minimal parking and a lot of units will help with the rent crisis.

Alexander Frieden (4 Lake Street) voiced his support for the proposal. He appreciated the raised crosswalks and the long-term bike storage in the basement. Like Councilor Scott, he was concerned with the parking spots along Lake Street. Mr. Frieden was also concerned with the placement of the transformer box.

Chair Capuano closed the public testimony portion of the hearing.

The Board and applicant discussed committing to having another Neighborhood Meeting, as the project had not gone back to the community since 2019. They also discussed the fact that the project had not gone before the Urban Design Commission to discuss design and materials, since the UDC had not yet been established. The Board further discussed the improved intersection of Hawkins and Lake Streets, and touched upon the short-term spots for ride shares and deliveries on Hawkins Street, as well as the underground transformer placement.

Clerk Dinning asked Staff to clarify if the Planning Board has purview to require the applicant to have another Neighborhood Meeting and present their design and building materials to the Urban Design Commission. Staff confirmed that it is within the Board's authority to request those steps.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) that the applicant appear before the Urban Design Commission for a recommendation and then proceed to a Neighborhood Meeting to present any revised designs, before returning to the Planning Board.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 152-158 Broadway

Rich DiGirolamo, Michael LeBlanc, Michael D'Angelo, and Stephen Siragusa presented the proposal for an MR5 general building with ground floor commercial space and 45 residential units above, 9 of which would be set aside as Affordable Dwelling Units (ADU). The site is located just outside the transit zone, but does not include any on-site motor vehicle parking. There will be 58 long-term and short-term bicycle parking spaces. The applicants spoke in depth about the transit situation and also touched upon the landscape plan.

Chair Capuano opened the public testimony portion of the hearing.

Jeff Byrnes (294 Summer St) voiced his support for the proposal. Even though extra permission is needed to provide no parking, he wanted to recognize that many people do not have personal vehicles

and would benefit by having a building that is geared toward people who rely instead on bicycles and public transportation.

Tom Lamar (17 Cross Street Apt #3) voiced his support of the proposal. He is in support of the convenience of using public transit, using bus routes, etc., in a neighborhood where it is very convenient to not have a car. He supports the design of the building in regards to the height, continuous street wall, convenient bike parking, and retail space.

Colin Christopherson (17 Rush Street) expressed his concern about the proposal, noting a concern that the board might be setting a precedent in using the zoning of a neighboring plot to govern in the lot in question. He is also concerned about moving the curb cut to the corner, as some delivery vehicles are large and hard to see around as you are pulling out of the side streets.

Chair Capuano closed the public testimony portion of the hearing.

Councilor Matthew McLaughlin (28 Mt Vernon Street) noted that there have been two community meetings about this project, where neighbors were concerned over the focus on studio apartments. The developer noted the presence of 3-bedroom units in the building preserved as affordable.

The Board discussed the parking relief needed in detail, as some members were in favor and some were opposed. Some members argued that parking is an amenity and requiring on-site parking would sacrifice other on-site uses; others felt that since the site is outside the transit zone, this amount of parking relief should not be provided. Concerns about setting an approval precedent were raised, as was as the benefits of allowing the parking relief in this neighborhood considering the amount of transit options and amenities.

The Board also questioned the position of the loading zones. They proposed possibly consolidating the two loading zones into one at the middle of the building or adding a loading bay instead. Staff confirmed that the use of a loading dock is not typically supported on a pedestrian street. They also touched upon the fact that there is only one elevator for all forty-five (45) units and noted the placement of the trash room.

Councilor McLaughlin stated that he wished that more developers were willing to do zero parking buildings with the condition that residents of the building will not receive on-street parking permits. He doesn't want to set a precedent, but is supportive of that change in this neighborhood on East Broadway.

The applicant confirmed that they completed a traffic study, walkability analysis, and that the project is eligible to apply for a Special Permit for MR5 zoning and parking relief. He noted that after the studies that they completed, the team feels that this proposal would be a great addition to this active neighborhood. He noted that curb cuts are prohibited on pedestrian streets, so adding a loading zone would not be allowed. After working with the Mobility team, both Staff and the applicant team agreed that the currently indicated loading zone is the best potential placement.

The Board and applicant discussed the units proposed within the building. The staff memo noted research documenting that 95% of the people looking for rental apartments in Somerville are comprised of single people or couples that would prefer not to have roommates. Therefore, the applicant believes this building will provide an alternative to these people and will free up the family-style units in the City for families, where now many are taken up with single people living together with several roommates.

The applicant confirmed that the building will be marketed to people without personal vehicles, confirming that the residents will not be permitted to obtain on-street parking passes and would have to rent out personal parking spaces, if they would like access to one. He believes that people with cars would not choose to live at this location. The Board questioned the traffic and parking related to any retail store that may occupy the space. Staff noted that there is an exemption for parking for this retail space due to size.

The Board and the applicant discussed the overall design, including the penthouse, and how the UDC approved of the design. They also discussed the plainness of the sides of the building. They spoke about the different building materials that are being proposed. The Board requested that the applicant develop the design further, especially on the sides of the building.

Chair Capuano left the written public testimony open until noon on February 26, 2021.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Dinning, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the discussion on this proposal on March 4, 2021.

RESULT:	CONTINUED to 03/04/2021
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NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.