



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

MARCH 9, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Dan Bartman	Designated Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Cortney Kirk	Designated Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Heidi Cron	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Co-Chair, Daniel Bartman at 6:05pm and adjourned at 8:41pm. As authorized by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, Co-Chair and Director of Planning & Zoning Sarah Lewis designated Senior Planner Daniel Bartman to serve as Co-Chair in her place for this meeting. Co-Chair & Director of Public Space & Urban Forestry Luisa Oliveira designated Cortney Kirk to serve as Co-Chair in her place for this meeting.

DESIGN REVIEW: 28 Chestnut

(continued from February 23, 2021)

Doug Gensler presented for the applicant team. He stated that the goal is to be sensitive to the lack of context today, but what the neighborhood will be in the future. They expect that it will be a great pedestrian place and had intended the building to be a backdrop for activity at the public realm. There is a lot of life science competition, so they are trying to respond to the market as well. Mr. Gensler acknowledged that the team may not have addressed all of the comments yet, but have continued to evolve the design. He also noted that the open space is part of a future project and an overall Master Plan by the owner.

Drew Stangel noted that “community, connectivity, resiliency, wellness, and activate” are their district drivers. They worked to create a great place with great character, with a focus on the streetscape and the public realm. They did this by creating green vibrant pedestrian zones, furniture zones, planting zones, an 8-10’ clear zone, and protected bike lanes. Human comfort was a big driver when planning the streetscape. They tied in urban tree canopies, native plantings, cobbles, green pockets at the buildings edge, and permeable pavers between planters.

Mr. Gensler spoke about the penthouse. He noted that there is no requirement for screening or a step-back, but they are doing both. They intended the penthouse to be fairly quiet and they changed to a smaller module and slight chamfering with a 42’ setback. He also noted that the team made some refinements to the podium of the building, as well. The elements of corten at the framing of the storefront, along with some zinc elements, made the design come together and feel warmer. The entry canopy was also redesigned to include some warmer color, possibly including some wood.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend that all the feedback given this evening is incorporated into the final report.

RESULT:**RECOMMENDED****DESIGN REVIEW: 28 Fitchburg**

(continued from February 23, 2021)

Drew Stangel continued the presentation. He noted that the plan was similar to 28 Fitchburg in that they were trying to maximize the greenery, the clear zone continues across the loading dock and parking entry, and the permeable paving continues along Fitchburg at the parking stalls. He discussed the plantings and tree canopy they planned along the pedestrian walk. They will use simpler materials, multi-stem grove at the corners, green wall at the base of the building, and they will be restoring the cobblestone paving.

Mr. Gensler noted that the penthouse will have a significant setback to minimize impact along Chestnut Street, a 33' frame with a folded panel for different light during the day. The hope is to be able to landscape the area between the retaining wall and the MBTA service drive and the area between the MBTA service drive and the community path, in the East alley. The retaining wall will need to be rebuilt and fire/maintenance access must be maintained.

The Commission and the applicant discussed the updated landscaping plan, building materials, and the possibility of incorporating art in the public space. Lighting options were discussed; including building, penthouse, entryway, and pedestrian lighting. They also discussed improved seating options, bike lanes, and the drop-off area at the lobby entrance.

Following a motion by Member Cron, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend that all the feedback given this evening is incorporated into the final report.

RESULT:**RECOMMENDED****DESIGN REVIEW: 64 Webster Ave**

Member Arabugh recused himself.

Dick Galvin and David Enrique presented for the applicant team. There are two attached buildings – straddling two zoning districts (the MR5 district and the HR district) on the edge of Boynton Yards and entrance to the area at Webster and Columbia/Windsor so called “Boynton Gateway”. Beach Avenue is private easement going through the site and 80 Webster is an immediate abutter. Mr. Enrique discussed the site plan, the massing, and setbacks. He noted that they plan to increase the sidewalk width, shape the corner of the entrance to the district, and create a metal “brow” top to the building with the possibility of outdoor space on the roof.

He discussed the proposed materials, such as masonry or terracotta, to create a commercial/industrial building. They plan to use updated masonry materials, such as high performance concrete. The preferred Option 1 incorporates these materials as well as a slimmer warmer expression of the corner and a 70' façade of more transitional glass and lighter color. Traditional columns and storefront glazing will be included.

Alternate Option 2 included a darker metal, warm masonry, an 85' façade on the corner building.

Alternate Option 3 included warm terracotta, an industrial metal on the corner building, and a darker rainscreen.

Mr. Enrique noted that Beach Ave is a shared access for loading/service and the applicant team is holding 30' for green space as buffer for the abutting residential building, as they would like to emphasize this as an Eco-District.

Ian Ramy presented the landscape plan. He mentioned that these two properties are being looked at as a unified public realm, despite being 2 buildings. He discussed proposed plantings, pavers, and flexible plaza places with varied seating options.

The Commission agreed that Option 2 is their preferred scheme as starting point, but would like additional refinement before making a recommendation. They prefer that the corner be studied further for a transition threshold experience, as well as the entry on Webster Ave. They also noted that the base and/or podium may not have to be uniform in height along the entire façade.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that all the feedback given this evening is incorporated into the revision of Design Option 2 and presented at a regularly scheduled upcoming meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

DESIGN REVIEW: 495 Columbia

David Enrique continued the presentation. He gave some zoning and HR district context. There is no height restriction for a Lab Building, but they are proposing 12 stories for feasibility and market ability. He discussed the massing options and setbacks, as well as the zoning transition between the HR and MR5 districts.

The preferred Massing Option 1 had a layering of volumes at the corner to emphasize the Beech Ave pass-through. Alternate 1 had a notch cut out at the corner to create movement and Alternate 2 kept the natural curve of the corner. The Beech Ave private access easement must be maintained and is shared with neighbors, but does provide service uses.

Mr. Enrique then reviewed the façade design options. Preferred Option 1 had a crisp curtainwall, the remaining faces were broken down with staggered frames to break down the scale of the tower but unite with the low rise, the side was clad in textured masonry, the sign band tying the 2 buildings together, active lobby spilling onto street with a canopy marking the pass through for service access – not intended to be a pedestrian way, penthouse material wraps down at building core but must be interesting as very visible for residential building and up the street, and potentially including art in the public realm.

Alternate 1 investigated the frame concept across the entire façade with a heavier graining and material change, then also included metal and textured masonry to provide interest where massing is limited, horizontality preferred rather than vertical emphasizing height too much, horizontal readings across both buildings but still read as separate.

Alternate 2 included metal panels and glass that broke down the scale of the building. Increased solids on the façade reduced the overall window to wall ratio, and increased the building's vertical reading. This option also included textured masonry and warmth.

Mr. Enrique then showed how the two buildings would work/look together.

The Commission and the applicant team discussed the zoning districts, the location of the lobbies, the possibility of art in the public realm, and the façade and massing options. The Commission preferred Design Option 2, but recommended continuing the brick podium down to the lower levels of the tower and establishing a stronger

canopy over the entryway. They also preferred less blank wall space on the ground floor and a more prominent design on the corner to create a “gateway” into the neighborhood. The Commission and the applicant team also discussed the streetscape plans; including the sidewalk widths, bicycle lanes, and mobility plans for the entire neighborhood. The Commission had some concerns about the courtyard area regarding fencing and the location of the picnic benches. The Commission would like to see additional views of the building from around the City.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Cron, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that all the feedback given this evening is incorporated into the revised design and presented at a regularly scheduled upcoming meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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.