



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

16 DECEMBER 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>	
Rob Buchanan	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Erin Geno	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Debbie Howitt Easton	Alternate	<i>Absent</i>	
Russell Pildes	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Sarah Lewis (Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Rebecca Lyn Cooper (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Cortney Kirk (Public Space and Urban Forestry).

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm and adjourned at 9:38pm.

OTHER BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

The Chair requested to move the approval of meeting minutes to the 6 January 2022 meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the approval of meeting minutes to the 6 January 2021 meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 494 Medford Street (P&Z 21-180)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the case to the 6 January 2021 meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 690 Broadway (P&Z 21-050)

(continued from 18 November 2021)

The Board expressed that there are several questions that require the Case Planner (she could not be present tonight, as she is on vacation) and the Transportation Access Plan was not reviewed by the Mobility Division.

The Chair requested to continue the case to the 6 January 2022 meeting. There was some confusion as to whether or not the Mobility Division did or did not approve the Transportation Access Plan that was submitted. The applicant team provided an email sent by the Case Planner stating that their Transportation Impact Study was

approved. Director Lewis explained that the TAP and the TIS are different documents that are both required by the Mobility Division. Director Lewis noted that she reached out to the Director of Mobility for clarity.

Chair Capuano stated that they will hold this case to the end of the meeting to await the Director of Mobility's reply.

The Mobility Division emailed stating that they did not review the updated TAP that the applicant team sent in.

The applicant team agreed to continue the case to 6 January 2022.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the case to the 6 January 2022 meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

Chair Capuano and Member Habib disclosed that they were not present at the 18 November 2021 meeting but have since reviewed the materials and recording related to this area.

OTHER BUSINESS: Milk Square Area Urban Design Framework

Director Lewis gave an overview of the location, history of the area, and how the site fits in with the Union Square Neighborhood Plan. Director Lewis also spoke about how the plan will still be further developed and touched upon the proposed parking plan.

Chair Capuano requested to continue the discussion for this item to the 6 January 6 2022 meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the discussion to the 6 January 2021 meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 74 Middlesex Avenue (P&Z 21-022)

(continued from 18 November 2021)

The applicant team gave an overview of the proposal as a refresher for the Board. The team then presented distance views of the building, materiality choices, ground floor programming, bicycle storage, rooftop amenities, and the parking plan. The team also spoke about the canopy and base of the building, as well as the utility plan.

Chair Capuano noted that the public testimony for this case had already been taken and is closed; therefore no further public comments will be heard.

Chair Capuano commented on the many previous proposals the Board has seen for this site, the progression of the air quality filtration plans, and the fact that he thinks the lab use will be great for the location.

The Board and applicant team discussed the accessible shower amenities and towel service, and the successful design of the building.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve with conditions, the Site Plan Approval to construct a 16-story lab building.

RESULT:

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS

PUBLIC HEARING: 0 Kensington Avenue (P&Z 21-023)

(continued from 18 November 2021)

The applicant team presented the changes made to the previous design including the pedestrian and bicycle circulation and connection to the Kensington Connector.

Again, Chair Capuano noted that the public testimony for this case had already been taken and is closed; therefore no further public comments will be heard.

The Board and applicant team discussed the coordination with the City and MassDOT's plans of the Kensington Connector, the legal easement of the site, and concerns with having an open space so close to the highway.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve with conditions, the Site Plan Approval to develop a Neighborhood Park.

RESULT:

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS

PUBLIC HEARING: 73 Summer Street (P&Z 20-003)

(continued from 18 November 2021)

Prior to the presentation, Chair Capuano noted that changes have been submitted to the Board regarding the proposal for this case and therefore public testimony will be reopened. He asked that any public testimony this evening be relevant to the changes presented, considering that there was a chance to offer public testimony on the originally presented materials previously.

The applicant team explained the process they have been through so far and acknowledged "Elfland" that has received increasing community support, but noted that the site is a construction zone and safety is their number one priority. They are hoping to honor "Elfland" as a community art installation in some way.

The applicant team presented the urban context of the site, zoning summary, massing diagrams, landscape plan, dark sky lighting plan, below grade parking plan, amenity spaces, loading & delivery zone, and the floor plans. The team then went through the design changes they have made to their proposal, including materiality and façade updates.

The Board and applicant team discussed the improvements to the design and an appropriate way to incorporate "Elfland" into the design. Director Lewis noted that the community's creativity is outstanding and hoped that "Elfland" can continue, whether it be a mobile or a permanent art installation on the site. She invited the "budding urban planner" that created "Elfland" to City Hall to meet with the Director of Planning to learn more about City Planning.

The Board and applicant team discussed the conflict between pedestrians on the sidewalk and drivers in the loading zone and the digital security entry system for deliveries.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – was in support of relocating the elves. Ms. Antonino urged the applicant team to use indigenous plants such as vines and honeysuckle to encourage butterflies to return to Somerville. There are several “Trees of Heaven” on the site that are invasive and she recommended that they are taken down before they cause more damage.

Patricia Wild (25 School St) – was concerned about the number of delivery trucks at the site. Ms. Wild felt the trucks would obstruct traffic and be unsafe.

Daniel McKanan (5 Berkeley St) – supported the proposal and hoped there would be more affordable housing available in the City soon.

Vivian Lee (47 Berkeley St) – supported the project. Ms. Lee suggested a future location for “Elfland” in the flowerbed on the corner of Summer Street and School Street.

Lucie March (24 Cherry St) & Lena Hornby (106 School St) – asked what the applicant planned on doing with “Elfland” once construction begins.

Chair Capuano reminded members of the public that the public testimony portion of the hearing is not a question and answer period. The applicant team may respond to issues raised during this time, if they wish to do so.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board and applicant team discussed the number of materials being used in the building design. The Board recommended that a condition be drafted that the applicant team work with Staff for the final building design. They also spoke about other alternatives that may work better due to its simplicity, the accessibility of the open space area, and if there are ways to protect the bike lane other than signage. The Board inquired if any of the improvements of the public right-a-way can be conditioned or is it the responsibility of the City. Director Lewis confirmed that it is normally enforced by the Mobility, Engineering, and Parking divisions, but a condition can be drafted to further enforce this.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve with conditions as amended, the Site Plan Approval to construct a 3-story residential building.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve with conditions as amended, the Special Permit to establish household living use.

RESULT:	APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS
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The Board took a recess at 8:35pm and returned at 8:42pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 28-44 Broadway (P&Z 21-029)

The applicant team introduced the team and their 6 story, 91-unit, mixed-used building. The applicant team presented the site context, history of the project, elevation, floor plans, commercial ground floor plans, shadow study, and landscape plan. The team showed perspective views, explained materiality choices, and disclosed vehicular ingress and egress of the parking garage.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – spoke in opposition of the proposal. She recognized that the onus is not on the developer for this one, but on zoning for allowing such a large building with not enough green space. Ms. Antonino doesn't feel that there is enough open space. She thinks the parking should be removed and a green roof should be added.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board and applicant team discussed the overwhelmingly large design of the building, the loading zone for a building of this size, how the user experience could be improved considering the building is on a major pedestrian street, and how the bike parking and green score counts are inconsistent throughout the application.

Chair Capuano reopened public testimony due to a member of the public experiencing technical difficulties.

Elio LoRusso (7 & 11 George St) – spoke in opposition of the project as the building would overshadow everything else in the neighborhood because it is too big. He also disclosed that he is currently in litigation with the developer over a piece of property.

Chair Capuano reclosed public testimony.

Chair Capuano stated that written testimony will be open until 31 December 2021 at noon.

The Board and applicant team discussed how the building doesn't meet the design guidelines, how the Board encouraged the team to explore other design options, how the size of the building is intrusive to the homes abutting it, the parking plan in relation to the close proximity to several transit options, and the location of the parking garage entrance on George Street.

Chair Capuano requested that the applicant team respond to the Board's concerns regarding the design and massing of the building at a future meeting.

The Board inquired how the applicant made the development materials accessible for non-English speaking members of the public for the Neighborhood Meetings. The applicant team responded that they had interpreters for every meeting, as well as other resources.

The Board noted that with respect to the design guidelines, there is a lot lacking in the design such as window patterns, canopies, etc. They encouraged the team to review the guidelines in the zoning ordinance to ensure they are meeting the requirements. The Board also urged the applicant team to explore adding a green wall or vines to add more life and greenery to the building. Currently, the building reads as very commercial and in the potential changes, it should ensure it reads as a residential building.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the case to the 6 January 2021 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.