



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

17 MARCH 2022 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>Present</i>	
Russell Pildes	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Charlotte Leis (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Sarah Lewis (Director of Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Daniel Bartman (Deputy Director of Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 8:42pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: MEETING MINUTES

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the minutes from 16 December 2021, 6 January 2022, 20 January 2022, 3 February 2022, and 17 February 2022.

OTHER BUSINESS: ZONING AMENDMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Mayor Ballantyne proposes a zoning text amendment to Sections 3.1.14.a and 3.2.13.a Contextual Front Setbacks of the Neighborhood Residence and Urban Residence zoning districts.

Deputy Director Dan Bartman explained Staff's recommendation to support the zoning map amendment.

The Board concurs that the language should be agreed upon by all parties prior to adoption of the amendment to address the concern that was raised during the public hearing regarding any lot that is looking for a contextual front setback to ensure there are no unintended consequences.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to recommend the zoning text amendment to Sections 3.1.14.a and 3.2.13.a Contextual Front Setbacks of the Neighborhood Residence and Urban Residence zoning districts.

Broadway Somerville Apartments, LLC proposes a zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of 383 Broadway from UR to MR5.

Deputy Director Dan Bartman explained Staff's recommendation to support the zoning map amendment.

The Board noted that there was no public testimony on this amendment and inquired why the applicant is seeking new zoning on this parcel.

Staff stated that the building is currently non-conforming and converting it to MR5 allows the redevelopment of the site, which will allow for the applicant to provide more affordable housing, as well as have commercial rights.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to recommend the zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of 383 Broadway from UR to MR5.

Michael E. Olson proposes a zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of 125 Lowell Street from NR to UR.

Deputy Director Dan Bartman explained Staff's recommendation to support the zoning map amendment.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to recommend the zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of 125 Lowell Street from NR to UR.

Vivaldo Meneses Sr. proposes a zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of 86 Prospect Street from UR to MR5.

This amendment will need to be further studied; therefore the Board will not be making a recommendation at this time.

Vice Chair Aboff recused herself.

PUBLIC HEARING: 600 Windsor Place (P&Z 21-059)
(continued from 3 March 2022)

Chair Capuano noted that a covenant has been signed by both the applicant team and the city.

Director Lewis presented on behalf of the Mobility Division regarding the overall Boynton Yards area traffic flow.

The Board and Staff discussed the parking cap and distribution, the proposed raised alleyway, and better sightlines for pedestrian and bicyclist's safety. Staff noted that pedestrians and cyclists have priority, and the Mobility Division will do everything they can to ensure safety for all.

The Board requested a bigger picture look at the whole Boynton Yards area from the Mobility Division and what the long-term plan is, as well as how they plan to mitigate the traffic congestion in this area.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Buchanan, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve with conditions, the Master Plan Special Permit.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 15 McGrath Highway (P&Z 21-062)

(continued from 3 March 2022)

Chair Capuano noted that a covenant has been signed by both the applicant team and the city. The applicant team gave a brief overview of the agreed upon covenant.

Chair Capuano spoke in support of the project, as the applicant team worked with the Board and neighborhood to provide a cohesive design that fits well within the neighborhood.

The Board and applicant team discussed the landscaping plan along the backside of the property, the lighting plan especially in the rear of the building for safety, and the parking ratio being proposed. The applicant team clarified that the parking ratio is per the zoning ordinance, and they have executed a MMP with the Mobility Division which requires the applicant to reduce parking and automobile reliance over time.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Buchanan, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with conditions, the Site Plan Approval to construct a 9-story LEED platinum lab building.

RESULT:

APPROVED

The Board went into recess at 7:05pm and reconvened at 7:08pm.
Vice Chair Aboff rejoined the meeting.

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

(continued from 3 March 2022)

Chair Capuano asked the applicant whether there has been a Neighborhood Meeting since there has been a redesign of the building. The applicant team responded that the application is still the same with only a few minor changes to the façade. Chair Capuano disagreed with the applicant team, as the neighbors have not been able to give feedback on the changes to the dwelling unit count, setbacks, number of commercial units, etc. Although Chair Capuano was concerned, he allowed the applicant team to continue their presentation.

The applicant team presented the design changes such as a reduction in the number of dwelling units, affordable units, and commercial square footage; an increase in setbacks on Mt. Vernon Street and George Street; and the location of the lobby and bike parking. The applicant team presented the updated materiality of the building, renderings from several different angles, and the updated landscape plan.

The applicant team noted that after discussions with the utility company, the transformer has been relocated to the inside of the building. Chair Capuano asked Staff to clarify. Staff stated that they are happy with the change and the impact to the public realm. Staff also noted that the condition referencing the transformer in the staff memo could be amended to state that if the transformer is moved to another location inside the building it would be considered a de minimus change. However, if the transformer is moved to another location outside the building it would be considered a major amendment and the applicant would need to seek approval from the Planning Board.

Staff stated that the last Neighborhood Meeting was January 2021 and there is no confirmation on whether the applicant has worked with the neighborhood since. Chair Capuano affirmed that the proposed changes are significant and requested that the applicant team have an additional neighborhood meeting to ensure that the neighbors are engaged with what is going on in their neighborhood.

The Board and applicant team discussed the materiality of the recessed area of the façade, how the two parts of the building are too similar, the lack of awning or canopy over the commercial entrances, the success of the

vestibules for the residential lobby entrances, how the residential lobby entrance needs to be differentiated from the commercial storefronts, and the location of the residential trash room. They also discussed how the ground floor façade design is too flat, the shared amenity space and the maintenance plan for that space, the plans for the street trees, and the loading/unloading area. The Board asked the applicant team to come back to the next meeting with a detailed plan for the loading/unloading for this building.

The Board supported Chair Capuano's desire to request that the applicant team hold another neighborhood meeting.

Chair Capuano felt it would be premature to reopen public testimony prior to the applicant team holding another public meeting since the design could be amended again based on neighborhood feedback.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to continue the case to 7 April 2022.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Accessibility Best Practices

Vice Chair Aboff spoke regarding accessibility best practices and universal design when it relates to projects and the public realm. She was hopeful that in a future meeting Staff or an outside consultant could present their expertise on the subject so that the members of the Planning Board are better informed when they review cases and they can make sure to be as inclusive as possible for all the community members of Somerville.

Director Lewis addressed the Board to discuss that Public Space & Urban Forestry is developing guidelines to respond to some of these issues addressed by Vice Chair Aboff. She will reach out to Director Olivera to address the Board as the expert in universal design. A city ADA Coordinator has been hired that will be reviewing the development projects in the early stages. Director Lewis noted that we must be careful as this matter is handled in the Building Code; we can make comments, but Planning, Preservation, & Zoning does not have the expertise for ADA concerns. The zoning compliance plans are more conceptual; however, when they go to acquire their building permit, they usually have more detailed plans.

Chair Capuano expressed his gratitude for Vice Chair Aboff raising this topic up. It's important to think about making sure we are being inclusive.

Vice Chair Aboff commented that she understands that it's not in the purview of the Planning Board and they are bound by the limits of not interfering with the Building Code, but rather they have the opportunity to suggest and encourage applicants to be more inclusive with their designs. Member Pildes inquired about the distinction between the different purviews regarding asking an applicant about conceptual ADA accessibility. Director Lewis will reach out to the Legal Department on this matter.

Vice Chair Aboff noted that the city's SomerVision Comprehensive Plan lists this topic as an objective, so her hope is that they could use that to nudge applicants in the right direction.

Chair Capuano inquired about a possible training that will take place to better understand the purview of different Boards and Commissions. Director Lewis commented that the meeting will include the purview of the Boards, as well as Open Meeting Law rules, and general Board practices and a date has yet to be determined.

Chair Capuano inquired about how to resolve this agenda item. Director Lewis answered that this agenda item should be tabled, and she will follow up with the Legal Department and PSUF Director Olivera.

This item was continued to the 21 April 2022 Planning Board meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: Planning Board Election

Chair Capuano started by giving a brief background of his life and career on the Planning Board.

Chair Capuano praised Vice Chair Aboff's time and work on the Planning Board and nominated Amelia Aboff to remain the Vice Chair of the Planning Board.

Clerk Buchanan stated that the Chair has the responsibility to strike the right balance between having their own opinion and facilitating an open dialogue while Chairing Planning Board meetings. He also feels that the Chair should exercise a degree of restraint during meetings regarding holding back their own opinion until the other members have expressed their feelings and have asked their questions without being interrupted by said Chair. Clerk Buchanan stated that having a "passive second" on any motion gives the impression that the debate on the topic is being cut off and if there is a motion, there should be a strong "second".

Chair Capuano noted that the "passive second" practice was a suggestion by Staff to his predecessor to facilitate a vote in conformity with other permit-granting Boards, therefore that procedure was passed down to him.

Vice Chair Aboff praised the organization, leadership, and prospective of Chair Capuano and nominated Michael Capuano to remain the Chair of the Planning Board.

Clerk Buchanan stated that he would no longer wish to remain the Clerk of the Planning Board.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Geno, the Board voted unanimously (6-0), with Vice Chair Aboff abstaining, to confirm Amelia Aboff as Vice Chair of the Planning Board.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (5-1), with Chair Capuano abstaining and Clerk Buchanan dissenting, to confirm Michael Capuano as Chair of the Planning Board.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0), with Member Geno abstaining, to confirm Erin Geno as Clerk of the Planning Board.

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.