



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation, & Zoning (PPZ) Staff
SUBJECT: 28-44 Broadway, P&Z 21-029
POSTED: May 26, 2022

RECOMMENDATION: No change

This memo is supplemental to the PPZ Staff Memos dated December 8, 2021, and March 11, 2022, and provides additional analysis.

BACKGROUND

This case was heard by the Board at the March 17 hearing at which the Applicant presented an updated design for the building. The Board stated that the updated design appeared to make substantive changes compared to what had previously been presented to the community, and directed the Applicant to hold an additional neighborhood meeting and present the updated design there.

The Applicant returned to the Board on April 7 and indicated that they had held an additional neighborhood meeting on March 31; the Board disagreed, as the March 31 meeting did not satisfy the SZO's requirements for a neighborhood meeting. The Board continued the application until such a time as that meeting was held.

A neighborhood meeting as required by the Board was held on May 9, 2022, at 6:30pm.

ANALYSIS

Many of the comments and questions at the March 31st community meeting and May 9th neighborhood meeting were regarding the anticipated impacts of the proposed garage on traffic congestion and parking availability in the surrounding area. This has been a consistent theme of public comments received throughout the various neighborhood meetings held by the Applicant and the public hearings held by the Board.

The Applicant's proposal for parking is compliant from a zoning perspective: the property is within the 0.25mi Transit Area which means that the SZO sets maximums for the amount of motor vehicle parking that can be provided. Accounting only for the residential portion of the project, a maximum of 81 motor vehicle parking spaces could be provided; if the commercial portion of the project were accounted for, the maximum permitted number of spaces would further increase. At only 26 proposed motor vehicle parking spaces, the project is well within the permitted range. However, the proposal would also be compliant with the SZO if it provided zero parking spaces and, based on comments during the neighborhood meetings, it seems clear to Staff that the neighborhood and Ward Councilor would be supportive of this change.

To enable the Board to evaluate the potential impacts that a project of this scale may have on the surrounding area, the Applicant is required to submit a Transportation Impact Study (TIS). The Applicant completed their TIS before the proposed number of units was decreased from 91 to 81 and the amount of commercial space was decreased from 11,208 to 9,472sf. Based on this slightly larger version of the proposal, page 87 of the TIS concludes that “[t]he incremental increases of traffic at the study intersections due to the proposed development will result in minimal impact to traffic operations.” As the scale of the project has slightly decreased since the TIS was completed, it is reasonable to assume that any impacts anticipated in the TIS have either remained substantively the same or have slightly decreased. While some neighbors have expressed skepticism that the TIS accurately captures the impacts of the proposal, it is not clear to Staff what specific aspects of the TIS lead to this skepticism.

The Applicant’s proposal for a 26-space Commercial Parking facility is permitted by the SZO, but if the Board believes that this aspect of the proposal would have a significant impact on the neighborhood and that mitigation is necessary, Staff can work with the Board during the public hearing process to identify possible solutions. Generally speaking, Staff is supportive of reducing or eliminating the amount of motor vehicle parking provided by proposals within the 0.25mi Transit Area (especially when doing so would not impact loading plans), as those properties are within walking distance of transit stations and a stated intent of the SZO is “[t]o encourage the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking in lieu of motor vehicle use when a choice of travel mode exists.”

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw conclusions for each consideration, but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

Findings number 3 and 7 from the December 8 Staff Memo may be affected by this update.

Site Plan Approval Considerations

3. *Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

Neighbors have repeatedly expressed a belief that the proposal will significantly and negatively impact the availability of on-street parking in the surrounding area and that the 26 vehicles parking at this property will increase congestion on surrounding streets.

If the Board believes that additional mitigation beyond what has already been recommended by Staff is necessary, this item will need to be discussed in more detail during the public hearing.

If the Board believes that no additional mitigation beyond what has already been recommended by Staff is necessary, the statement in the December 8th Staff Memo (“As conditioned, the proposal is not anticipated to create any negative impacts that require mitigation.”) can be used as the basis for making a finding regarding this consideration.

Special Permit Considerations

7. *The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.*

The March 11th Staff Memo provided an update on this consideration to account for the change in the number of units proposed (and thus also in the maximum number of permitted parking spaces). If the Board believes that additional mitigation related to parking is required, the statements provided by Staff regarding this consideration in the previous Staff Memo may no longer be relevant, and the Board will need to make a finding regarding this consideration that accounts for any changes the Board may require of the project.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the 6-story LEED Platinum General Building, PPZ Staff does not recommend any changes to the conditions recommended as part of the December 8 and March 11 Staff Memos.

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Household Living use, PPZ Staff does not recommend any changes to the conditions recommended as part of the December 8 and March 11 Staff Memos.