



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

DESIGN REVIEW RECOMMENDATION

50 Webster Ave

January 5, 2021

The Urban Design Commission (UDC) met virtually via GoToWebinar on October 26, 2021 and November 23, 2021 to review a **Lab Building** proposed at 50 Webster Ave in the High Rise (HR) zoning district of the Union Square neighborhood of Somerville. The purpose of design review, as established by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, is for peers in the professional design community to provide advice and recommendations during the schematic design phase of the architectural design process. In accordance with the UDC's adopted Rules of Procedure and Section 15.1.4 Design Review of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, this recommendation includes, at least, the following:

1. Identification of the preferred schematic design option
2. Identification if applicable design guidelines are satisfied
3. Guidance and recommended modifications to address any design issues or concerns

Design review was conducted over the course of two meetings and the Commission guided the Applicant through various recommendations and suggestions to the applicants preferred façade design concepts. Recommendations that were incorporated into the design through the review process included the following:

- Explore opportunities to “celebrate” the northwestern corner of the building and make it a prominent feature of the building facing Union Square station and at terminated vista from nearby D2 plaza.
- Explore the ground story of the southwestern corner further.
- The Commission appreciated the applicant's site research and precedent imagery related to cut glass. The Commission recommend looking for opportunities to better integrate the unique materiality in the design of the building on the north side and/or elsewhere.

Following a presentation of the design by the Applicant and review of the design guidelines for the HR district, the Commission provided the following final guidance and recommended modifications:

- Penthouse should not be as prominent. Revise penthouse design to be a secondary component of the building and overall have a less imposing effect. Examine using a finer grade for the serrated edges at the top of the penthouse, changing the materiality. Building design included larger penthouse setback along west side of the building, this should be maintained. Penthouse should be set back to minimize visibility from adjacent proposed civic space and sidewalk along the east side of Prospect St and Webster Ave.

- Building materiality needs to be examined further, pursue the use of red brick consistent with what the project team presented at their first UDC design review. Concerns expressed about switching from stone to concrete at the ground floor and tactile quality of textured concrete where people will touch it.
- Proposed cut glass column needs to be developed further. Needs to engage more with the rest of the building and proposed civic space in front.
- Look for opportunities to add additional variation to the long, repetitious north building elevation. Also explore adding screening such as a green wall all or art at the lower level concrete face facing the GLX station.

The Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend approving façade option 3, voted unanimously (3-0) that all of the HR design guidelines were satisfied, and voted unanimously (3-0) to incorporate further design guidance into the final design for the building.

Attest, by the voting membership:

Tim Talun
Deborah Fennick
Andrew Arbaugh

Attest, by the meeting Co-Chairs:

Cortney Kirk
Luisa Oliveira



Sarah Lewis,
UDC Co-Chair
Director of Planning & Zoning

APPLICABLE DESIGN GUIDELINES:

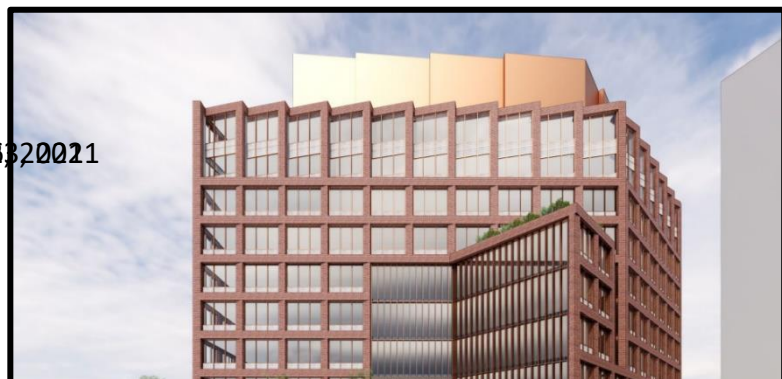
HR – HIGH RISE DISTRICT			
LANGUAGE	SATISFIED?	PRIORITY?	NOTES
Facades should be visually divided into a series of architectural bays that are derived, in general, from the building's structural bay spacing.	YES (3-0)		
Piers, pilasters, or other features defining each architectural bay should either extend all the way to the ground or terminate at any horizontal articulation defining the base of the building.	YES (3-0)		
Architectural bays should align, in general, with individual or groups of storefronts and lobby entrances.	YES (3-0)		
Piers, pilasters, or other features defining each architectural bay should always project forward and be uninterrupted by any horizontal articulation, excluding any horizontal articulation used to differentiate the base of the building.	YES (3-0)		
Vents, exhausts, and other utility features on building facades should be architecturally integrated into the design of the building and should be located to minimize adverse effects on pedestrian comfort along sidewalks and within open spaces.	YES (3-0)		
Buildings at terminated vistas should be articulated with design features that function as focal points.	YES (3-0)		
Fenestration glazing should be inset from the plane of exterior wall surfaces.	YES (3-0)		
Ribbon windows should be avoided.	YES (3-0)		
Monotonous and repetitive storefront or lobby systems, awnings, canopies, sign types, colors, or designs should be avoided.	YES (3-0)		
Storefronts and lobby entrances should include awnings or canopies to provide weather protection for pedestrians and reduce glare for storefront display areas. Awnings should be open-ended and operable.	YES (3-0)		
Lobby entrances for upper story uses should be optimally located, well defined, clearly visible, and separate from the entrance for other ground story uses.	YES (3-0)		
Lobbies should be limited in both width and total area to preserve floor space and frontage for other ground story uses. Buildings should use any combination of facade articulation, a double-height ceiling, a distinctive doorway, a change in wall material, a change in paving material within the frontage area, or some other architectural element(s) to make lobbies visual and materially distinctive.	YES (3-0)		

HR – HIGH RISE DISTRICT			
LANGUAGE	SATISFIED?	PRIORITY?	NOTES
The selection of materials, fenestration, and ornamentation should result in a consistent and harmonious composition that appears as a unified whole rather than a collection of unrelated parts.	YES (3-0)		
The type and color of materials should be kept to a minimum, preferably three (3) or fewer.	YES (3-0)		
Two (2) or more wall materials should be combined only one above the other, except for bay windows.	YES (3-0)		
Wall materials appearing heavier in weight should be used below wall materials appearing lighter in weight (wood and metal above brick, and all three above stone)	YES (3-0)		
Horizontal or vertical board siding or shingles, regardless of material, should be avoided.	YES (3-0)		
Architectural details and finish materials for the base of a building should be constructed of architectural concrete or pre-cast cementitious panels, natural or cast stone, heavy gauge metal panels, glazed or unglazed architectural terracotta, or brick.	YES (3-0)		
Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS) should be avoided.	YES (3-0)		

Façade Evolution



November 2011



**Further Refinement:
Building Penthouse**



**Further Refinement:
Cut Glass Column**



**Further Refinement:
North facing Building Façade and base**

