



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff
SUBJECT: 16 and 20 Medford Street, P&Z 21-057
POSTED: June 2, 2022

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (SPA)
Approve with Conditions (SP)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from the Planning, Preservation & Zoning staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the development review application submitted for 16 and 20 Medford Street, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on May 18, 2022 and is scheduled for a public hearing on June 16, 2022. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICE

Somerville Living, LLC proposes to develop a four (4)-story LEED Platinum general building and establish a Household Living principle use for 41 dwelling units in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district. This proposal requires Site Plan Approval and one (1) Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Somerville Living, LLC is proposing to construct a four (4)-story, LEED Platinum general building. The proposed development will produce 3,500 sf of commercial space, 41 total dwelling units with eight (8) units being affordable dwelling units, 43 motor vehicle parking spaces, 42 long-term bicycle parking spaces, and ten (10) short-term bicycle parking spaces. The proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.255, meeting the minimum required score of 0.25.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

16 and 20 Medford Street is located in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott. The proposed general building requires Site Plan Approval, and the applicant is seeking a Special Permit to establish a Household Living principal use. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary. The Planning

Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR4 zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the development team on August 30, 2021 via GoToWebinar meeting platform. The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the development team on January 10, 2022 via GoToWebinar meeting platform.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by the Somerville Urban Design Commission via GoToWebinar meeting platform on October 19, 2021, November 2, 2021, and November 19, 2021. The Commission provided its official recommendation on December 15, 2021.

ANALYSIS

The proposal is for a four (4)-story, general building, with commercial space on the ground floor and residential units above within the MR4 zoning district. The property fronts four (4) streets, South Street on the north side, Medford Street on the northeast, Warren Street on the southeast, and Bedford Street on the west side. The Medford Street frontage is located on a pedestrian street. The property is located just outside the half-mile transit area.

As noted above, Site Plan Approval is the administrative approval process targeted at proposals which conform to the standards and requirements of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) and is intended to mitigate impacts related to the physical and formal aspects of the building. Site Plan Approval in the MR4 district is geared toward encouraging development that provides moderate floor plate buildings that are close to the sidewalk to create a well-defined street wall. Aspects of ground floor design are intended to provide an attractive and engaging pedestrian experience with storefronts and entry lobbies spaced that address the direct needs of the residents and employees of the neighborhood. Though no commercial use has been chosen, the Applicant in their neighborhood meeting report has noted they are looking at selecting a local retail component that will directly serve the neighborhood.

From the start of the site plan approval process, Somerville Living, LLC worked very closely with the surrounding community to thoughtfully design the proposed general building with respect to concerns raised at neighborhood meetings. Some of the primary points that were directly incorporated into the building proposal include, but are not limited to, traffic and parking, trash pickup and logistics, deliveries to the building, property management, sidewalk widths, construction related concerns, and general neighborhood traffic circulation.

The proposed building has been setback from the property line on all four (4) streets to create twelve (12) foot wide sidewalks along all four frontages as required by the SZO. Public realm improvements include new street trees, decorative permeable pavers, bike racks, streetlights, and plantings, along with the removal of several curb cuts on Medford, South and Warren Streets. Improvements to the South Street and Medford Street intersection are anticipated to occur in the future by an adjacent developer. Though the timeline is unknown for when exactly these improvements will occur, it will be imperative for the Applicant to coordinate with the developer regarding potential changes to their frontage area along South Street and Medford Street. The Applicant is encouraged to work with the Mobility Division regarding frontage design and future coordination with the adjacent developer.

Due to the size of the building, this proposal is required to achieve LEED Platinum certifiability. The proposed building is seeking to pursue 81 LEED credits which, if achieved, would meet the minimum 80 credits required to achieve LEED Platinum certification. The project plans to provide eleven (11) EV charging spaces out of the 43 parking spaces being provided. The project plans to have the remaining 32 parking spaces to be EV ready for level 2 EV chargers.

The project is proposing to provide 43 vehicle parking spaces, two (2) over the minimum allowed spaces required by the Zoning Ordinance. The commercial space within the building is not required to provide motor vehicle parking. To accommodate loading and short-term pick-up and drop-off uses, Staff have recommended a condition that two (2) parking spaces on the surface level portion of the garage be dedicated to those types of uses.

In January 2022, The Applicant collected traffic data for the Transportation Impact Study (TIS). Per the City's TIS guidelines, if traffic counts are not collected during the months of April, May, September, or October, then a second set of counts must be taken during one of those months as part of mitigation for the project. Staff have recommended a condition that additional traffic counts are taken during the month of September or October. The locations of the traffic counts must be the same locations used during the first traffic counts and the Applicant must notify the Mobility division prior to count taking.

As conditioned in the Mobility Management Plan approval, the Applicant needs to identify a location for a 19-dock Bluebikes bike share station on their property. Staff have recommended a condition that the Applicant provide a site plan identifying the location of the bike share station, to be approved by City Staff.

The site is located in close access to the Boynton Yard neighborhood, one of the City's transform areas, where multiple high-rise buildings and civic spaces are proposed or are currently going through the local permitting process/have been constructed. The existing site is a commercial garage, and the addition of a higher density residential development will add more units to the neighborhood, which is already transforming and suitable for increased urban habitation.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

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

Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Household Living Special Permit Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.
4. The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.
5. The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.
6. The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval + Special Permit:

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

Staff believe the proposal will help to achieve the following from SomerVision, the comprehensive Master Plan of the City of Somerville:

- Significantly increase housing stock to keep up with demand while pursuing the goals of increasing the proportion of affordable housing and housing stock diversity.

2. *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*

Staff believes the proposal is consistent with the intent of the MR4 zoning district which is, in part, “[T]o create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving uses.”

Site Plan Approval:

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

Staff believe as conditioned, the proposal does not produce any impacts that require additional mitigation.

Household Living Special Permit:

4. *The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.*

Planning Staff believes the development site is highly suitable for a residential use above a ground floor commercial space due to the project's location to the Boynton Yards neighborhood, one of the City's transform areas. The site's presence along a Pedestrian Street, and with the affiliated requirement to provide for an active use at the ground floor, makes it a good location for a general building, while the existing characteristics of the neighborhood make this location a less desirable to be strictly either a commercial or apartment building type.

5. *The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.*

The proposal includes eighteen (18) 1-bedroom units, four (4) 1 bedroom + units, seventeen (17) 2-bedroom units, and three (3) 3-bedroom units. The distribution of units is consistent with the findings of studies conducted by MAPC which found that a dearth of one- and two-bedroom units contributes to the increased demand on larger units that could otherwise be utilized by families.

All three (3) of the 3-bedroom units will be ADU's, as required by the SZO, and the remaining five (5) required ADUs will be distributed among the other unit sizes.

6. *The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing AUDs.*

There are no previously existing ADUs on the site.

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

The property is not located within a Transit Area; therefore, Staff this finding is not applicable to the proposal.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Special Permit

Should the Board approve the required *Special Permit to establish a Household Living use*, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Housing

- An Affordable Housing Implementation Plan (AHIP) must be submitted to the Director of Housing prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.

- All 3-bedroom affordable dwelling units must comply with the Director of Housing's quality standards for 3-bedroom ADU's.
- A deed restriction limiting the sale or rental of all affordable dwelling units to eligible households in perpetuity must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Parking

- At least four (4) accessory vehicular parking spaces must be offered annually to all ADU households as a right of first refusal until each parking space is either rented or refused.
- Formal acknowledgment that residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission, must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
- All buyers, grantees, lessees, renters, and tenants must be notified in writing prior to sale or lease of any dwelling unit that the residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission. This decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- At least two (2) parking spaces must be reserved for loading and drop-off uses on the surface level parking area. The spaces should be regulated with signage with the following language:
 - Loading Zone
Monday – Saturday
8am-10pm
Commercial Plate 20 Min.
Passenger Plate 5 Min.

Site Plan Approval

Should the Board approve the *required Site Plan Approval for the 4-story LEED Platinum general building*, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
- A public right-of-way or pedestrian access easement must be provided in perpetuity by a covenant or other deed restriction for the full area of the sidewalk provided within the frontage area of the lot. Final easement language must be approved by the City Solicitor.
- Frontage area provided for a widened sidewalk along [Medford St, South St, Warren St and Bedford St] must be designed and paved to properly correspond with any sidewalk improvements approved within the public right-of-way.

- A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be submitted to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection

Mobility

- The property owner and applicable future tenants shall comply with the Mobility Management Plan as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility on January 28, 2022.
- Product details and design specifications for the forty-two (42) long-term bicycle parking spaces must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 11.1 Bicycle Parking of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance prior to applying for a building permit.
- The location of the proposed Bluebike station must be identified via a site plan prior to the issuance of the building permit and location approved by the Mobility Division.
- The Bluebike station must be installed and operational prior to issuance of the Certificate of Occupancy
- Traffic count data must be taken for one of the following months: September 2022, or October 2022. Counts must be taken at the same location as previous traffic counts and the Mobility Division must be informed when the traffic counts occur prior to data collection.

Sustainability

- All Stage 2 documentation required by the LEED Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment
- All Step 3 documentation required by the LEED Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.

Construction Documents

- Utility meters are not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.
- Materials specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
- An updated outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.7 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaires; total site lumen limit table (calculations from the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lum type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of day timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.

Maintenance

- The property owner is responsible for all of the regular and long-term maintenance, replacement, insurance, and other applicable costs associated with all on-site sidewalk improvements.

Public Record

- Physical copies of all development review submittal materials, as permitted by the Panning Board, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.
- A copy of the Recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted for the public record.