



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff
SUBJECT: 50 Webster Avenue (Subdivision), P&Z 22-067
POSTED: August 2, 2022

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions

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

This memo summarizes the Subdivision Plan Approval application submitted for 50 Webster Avenue, 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 June 15, 2022, and is scheduled for a public hearing on August 4, 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

US Union Square D3.1 Owner LLC seeks a subdivision in the HR zoning district, which requires Subdivision Plan Approval.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

US Union Square D3.1 Owner LLC (the Applicant) proposes to subdivide the parcel of land at 50 Webster Avenue (Block D3.1) into buildable lots and a right-of-way to construct a new building, a new civic space, and a new thoroughfare, pursuant to the approved Union Square Coordinated Development Special Permit (CDSP). The property is bounded by the MBTA Green Line Extension to the north, Prospect Street and Webster Avenue to the west, and 56 Webster Street to the south.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

This Application is subject to a previously approved Coordinated Development Special Permit issued pursuant to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance in effect on December 14, 2017 and is entitled to be developed subject to the provisions of the High Rise (HR) zoning district. The property is located in the Union Square neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott.

Design and Site Plan Review is required for the subdivision of a development site, subject to the Union Square CDSP. For the procedural purposes of this application, the

current Subdivision Plan Approval process is the direct equivalent of the Design and Site Plan Review (DSPR) required previously. Subdivision Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of the subdivision of land to address any potential impacts, as necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required by the Union Square Overlay District in effect on December 14, 2017.

The proposed subdivision does not require any review beyond Subdivision Plan Approval. However, the development of any building, civic space, or thoroughfare in accordance with this subdivision requires Site Plan Approval (named Design and Site Plan Review in the SZO in effect on December 14, 2017) separately from the Planning Board. The Planning Board may only issue the respective Site Plan Approval applications after this Subdivision Plan Approval process is complete and the approved 50 Webster Avenue Subdivision Worksheet plat plan and permit Decision are recorded at the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.



NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen Campen and the applicant on August 25, 2021, via the Zoom meeting platform. A second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen Campen and the applicant on January 12, 2022, via the Zoom meeting platform. Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott had previously recused himself from the project due to his ownership of a property within the CDSP-permitted area.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on October 26, 2021, and November 19, 2021. The Commission provided its official recommendation on January 5, 2022.

ANALYSIS

Parcel Overview

The existing parcel at 50 Webster Avenue will be split into three different parcels. Lot 1 on the Subdivision Plan will be 44,971 square feet and is being proposed for building use. Lot 2 on the Subdivision Plan will be 16,070 square feet and is being proposed for civic space use, and Lot 3 on the Subdivision Plan will be 5,917 square feet and is being proposed as a thoroughfare (alley). Lot 1 (the building parcel) will remain with the address 50 Webster Avenue. The Engineering Department has approved the address 62 Prospect Street for Lot 2. Lot 3 is a thoroughfare and does not require a separate address.

Zoning Compliance

The proposal is compliant with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. Per the Union Square Overlay District, all buildable lots are platted with a lot line abutting a thoroughfare or civic space; as a corner, interior, or key lot; and with side lot lines that are generally rectilinear to the front lot line and straight throughout their length.

Compliance with CDSP

Per CDSP Decision Condition #3, the lots are being platted in a form substantially consistent with the Block and Lot Key Plan dated 11-07-2017 of the CDSP Application materials. Per CDSP Decision Condition #13, the Applicant is seeking approval of the subdivision of lots via Subdivision Plan Approval (stated in the Decision as Design and Site Plan Review).

Departmental Comments

Engineering: The Engineering Department has reviewed the proposed subdivision and raised no issues related to the platting of land.

Mobility: The Mobility Division has reviewed the proposed subdivision and raised no issues related to the platting of land.

Potential Impacts

As platted, the proposed subdivision of land does not include any external impacts that require mitigation.

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. Please note that due to the existing Union Square CDSP, the required considerations and findings reference Somerville Zoning Ordinance §5.4 – Design and Site Plan Review in effect on December 14, 2017.

Design and Site Plan Review Findings and Compliance

Pursuant to Somerville Zoning Ordinance, Union Square Overlay District, the Planning Board shall approve an application for Design and Site Plan Review (in this case,

defined as a Subdivision Plan Approval) upon verifying that the submitted plan conforms with the provisions of this Ordinance and demonstrates consistency to the following:

1. Compliance with the standards of §5.4 Design & Site Plan Review, including consistency with the following:
 - a. The adopted comprehensive Master Plan of the City of Somerville, existing policy plans and standards established by the City, or to other plans to be deemed appropriate by the Planning Board;
 - b. The purpose of this Ordinance in general;
 - c. The purpose of the district where the property is located; and
 - d. Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Design and Site Plan Review.
2. Consistency with the approved Coordinated Development Special Permit and any previously approved Special Permits, as applicable;
3. Consistency with the 2012 Union Square Revitalization Plan and the 2016 Union Square Neighborhood Plan, as amended; and
4. Conformance with all applicable provisions of this Ordinance.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Design & Site Plan Review

1. Compliance with the standards of §5.4 Design & Site Plan Review:

- a. The adopted comprehensive Master Plan of the City of Somerville, existing policy plans and standards established by the City, or to other plans to be deemed appropriate by the Planning Board.*

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan. Specific goals and objectives that will be accomplished include the following:

- Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency (SomerVision 2040). This subdivision will facilitate commercial development that will bring jobs to a site directly adjacent to an MBTA Green Line Extension stop.
- Add jobs and encourage more commercial development (SomerVision 2040, Union Square Revitalization Plan). This subdivision will facilitate commercial development that will bring life science and related jobs to Somerville.
- Reduce demand for parking and personal vehicle use (SomerVision 2040). This subdivision will facilitate the transit-oriented development directly adjacent to an MBTA Green Line Extension stop, and will encourage walking, biking, and transit use.

- b. The purpose of this Ordinance in general.*

Staff believes that the proposed subdivision is consistent with the purpose of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout the City.

c. The purpose of the district where the property is located.

The proposal is consistent with the intent of the HR zoning district which is, in part, “To accommodate neighborhood-, community-, and regional-serving uses.” The proposal is also consistent with the intent of the Union Square overlay district, which is in part, to permit the development of multiple lots including buildings, civic spaces, and thoroughfares as identified in the master plan.

d. Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Design and Site Plan Review.

Staff believes that the proposed subdivision is consistent with the additional review criteria cited below.

2. Consistency with the approved Coordinated Development Special Permit and any previously approved Special Permits, as applicable.

Staff believes that the proposed subdivision is consistent with the Coordinated Development Special Permit. The CDSP Decision (Case #PB2017-21) was approved with conditions on December 14, 2017. The proposal is consistent with the conditions of the CDSP, including the following:

- Per Condition #3, the lots are being platted in a form substantially consistent with the Block and Lot Key Plan dated 11-07-2017 of the CDSP Application materials.
- Per Condition #13, the Applicant is seeking approval of the subdivision of lots via Subdivision Plan Approval (stated in the Decision as Design and Site Plan Review).

3. Consistency with the 2012 Union Square Revitalization Plan and the 2016 Union Square Neighborhood Plan, as amended.

Staff believes that the proposed subdivision is consistent with the 2012 Union Square Neighborhood Plan and the 2016 Union Square Revitalization Plan. Specific goals and objectives that will be accomplished include the following:

- Parcel division that will allow the development of open space, a commercial building with ground-floor retail, and an alley to facilitate rear access and loading for 50 Webster and adjacent parcels (Union Square Neighborhood Plan).
- Create a street network that gives access with blocks appropriately designed for commercial buildings...[and] open space (Union Square Neighborhood Plan).
- To create high quality open space that is inviting to users of Union Square and allows residents, workers and visitors to enjoy the parks, plazas, cafes, and community events (Union Square Revitalization Plan).

4. Conformance with all applicable provisions of [the] Ordinance.

Staff believes the proposed subdivision is confirming with the applicable provisions of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance and Union Square Overlay District. Specifically, the Applicant has met the requirements for the permitting review process and neighborhood scale (shape) standards for lots.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Subdivision Plan Approval, PPZ Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- This Decision and endorsed final subdivision plat must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Land Plat Documentation and Public Record

- Final subdivision plat created for recording must be substantially equivalent to the approved preliminary plat plan.
- Prior to the issuance of any building permit or other permit authorizing construction on any of the new lots created by this subdivision, one (1) digital and one (1) physical copy of the recorded Decision and final subdivision plat stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division for the public record.