



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

16 JUNE 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>	
Erin Geno	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Debbie Howitt Easton	Alternate	<i>Absent</i>	

City staff present: Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation & Zoning),

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 9:37pm.

Chair Capuano stated that he was absent from the 2 June 2022 meeting, however he has watched the recording and signed the affidavit stating such.

PUBLIC HEARING: 304 Somerville Avenue (P&Z 21-087)

(continued from 2 June 2022)

The applicant team stated that they are satisfied with their previous presentation, the Staff Memo, and are available to answer any further questions the Board may have.

Chair Capuano stated that the team's presentation was very thorough, the discussion was thoughtful, and he does not foresee any issues with this proposal.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve with conditions the Special Permit to establish a Cannabis Retail Sales use in the Mid-Rise 5 District.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Other Business: 299 Broadway Update

Staff stated that the applicant has a different path forward than originally planned. They will go before the Zoning Board of Appeals to seek a Comprehensive Permit through the 40B process. These projects are designed specifically to facilitate more affordable housing, as well as allow the applicants to apply for a number of waivers, which may or may not be approved. Staff is still confirming the process they must adhere to with the applicant team and explaining that they will still most likely have to present to the Planning Board at the request of the ZBA.

The Board inquired why the application process changed, as the plan was agreed upon by Staff and the Planning Board. Staff responded that the applicant team's funding strategy may have changed but they are not fully aware of the reasoning. Staff noted that the applicant team is enthusiastic about meeting with the Planning Board prior to completing their application so that they can answer any initial questions the Board may have, and Staff is encouraging that plan.

The Board also inquired about any changes that has been made to the proposal since it was presented to the community and the Planning Board. Staff confirmed that they now have a co-developer, are in need of zoning relief, the amount of affordable housing has increased, the manner in which they are proposing to develop the site has changed slightly which will result in needing to request a number of waivers, and possibly a few more subtle changes.

The Board questioned the community involvement since the changes have been made. Staff stated that the applicant team has continued to meet and discuss the project with the Winter Hill Civic Advisory Committee, as well as the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. Staff has also discussed the neighborhood meeting process with the team, and they are supportive of going through that process when the time comes.

The Board and Staff discussed the details of the 40B process and whether Somerville has met the affordable housing threshold. Staff noted that, as of right now, they are unsure if Somerville falls into the category, but the administration is supportive of the project and plans to move it forward as a “friendly 40B”. The Board requested that they be updated on this process and any way that they can be involved in making sure the applicant team adhere to the Urban Renewal Goals they committed to previously. The Board is concerned that the 40B process typically allows applicants more leeway than the standard permitting process and they would like to ensure that the applicant team is held to the zoning requirements.

The Board and Staff discussed how the 40B process affects how the applicant team will present their proposal. Staff stated that under the Comprehensive Permit, the team will present the entirety of the proposal at once which will require a holistic understanding of the site and the development.

Other Business: Policies and Procedures Update

Staff stated that they are working on amending the Board’s current Policies and Procedures. Staff requested that the Board review the current regulations and provide feedback to incorporate into the new draft.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the discussion at the 4 August 2022 meeting.

Other Business: Ward Councilor Representation

Staff answered the Board’s question from the previous meeting regarding this topic; the Board is able to write an amendment on their own or can request Staff’s assistance. The Board would then present their proposed amendment to the City Council and the Mayor for their consideration. The Board requested that Staff recommend appropriate language and draft the amendment so that they can move forward with this process.

The Board went into recess to join the Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee at 6:29pm.
The Board reconvened the meeting and took a recess for a short break at 7:56pm and reconvened at 8:01pm.

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

(continued from 2 June 2022)

The applicant team presented the changes made to the proposal including the updated façade design and materiality. The Board agreed that the updated design elements meet the design guidelines of the zoning ordinance much better than the previous iteration.

The Board inquired about the concerns raised at the last hearing regarding traffic impacts in the neighborhood and the proposed parking. The Board asked Mobility Staff to clarify the recommendations made in the Supplemental Staff Memo. Mobility Staff responded that the best way to mitigate traffic concerns is to reduce parking and expand Blue Bike and transit passes.

The Board and Mobility Staff discussed the procedure for the residents of the building that want to purchase a parking space, how the parking spaces must be open for commercial use in this area, how anyone that does not purchase a parking space in the building will not be eligible for a street parking permit from the City, a possible foreseen issue with the limited number of spaces, and how the applicant team is required to conduct research and update their Mobility Management Plan annually.

The Board spoke in support of encouraging more people to utilize the nearby transit options rather than using vehicles by extending the passes provided, as well as taking stock of the parking in the neighborhood in general. The Board deliberated the amount of parking proposed versus reducing the amount of parking versus zero parking. They stated that they do understand the need for some parking regarding the viability of the commercial space(s). The Board inquired whether the affordable units could have reserved parking from the applicant team. The Board also asked Staff if any affordability conditions were present in the previous Supplemental Staff Memo provided in March 2022.

The Board and applicant team discussed reducing the amount of parking spaces. The applicant team noted that two of the spaces will be reserved for car-pool sharing, two spaces will be reserved to be ADA accessible, some parking is necessary for viable commercial/retail uses, and if the Board would like the team to set aside two or three spaces to be available as right-of-first-refusal spaces for the affordable units that does leave a lot of room for reducing parking. However, the team stated that they are willing to reduce parking from 26 to 21 spaces. The Board noted that they believe there may already be accommodations in place to account for the affordable unit residents, in which they are in fact allowed to obtain City-issued street parking permits regardless of the conditions placed upon the development.

After reviewing the Staff Memos, Staff responded that there was a condition proposed that at least 20% of the parking spaces must be available annually as right-of-first-refusal spaces for the affordable units. However, Staff also noted that the City's policy allows for people with disabilities, people living in affordable units, and people with extenuating circumstances to apply for and may obtain City-issued street parking permits.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve with conditions as amended, with 21 parking spaces, the Site Plan Approval.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve with conditions as amended the Special Permit.

RESULT	APPROVED W/ CONDITIONS
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PUBLIC HEARING: 16 & 20 Medford Street (P&Z 21-057)

The applicant team presented the site context, existing conditions, development timeline, vehicle and bicycle parking plan, amenity spaces, and the landscape plan including street trees and plan for widening the sidewalks. The team continued the presentation with the proposed floor plans, façade design and materiality, elevations, and details regarding the mobility management plan.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Stephen Lombardi (48 Warren St) – is a direct abutter and shared his concern with the proposal mostly due to the traffic impacts, especially on Warren Street, Bedford Street, and Medford Street. He felt that if South Street is redirected, as proposed, the traffic issues will be even more severe than they already are. Mr. Lombardi also expressed concerns regarding the garbage pick-up at this location, as he felt there is not enough room for a garbage truck to reach the dumpsters.

Amelia Sorensen (7 Bedford St #1) – expressed that she is pleased with the proposal overall, however she voiced concerns with the traffic impact that this will have on Bedford Street due to the size of the street. Ms. Sorensen stated that Bedford Street is in both Somerville and Cambridge and experiences neglect by both cities regarding snow plowing and parking enforcement.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Chair Capuano left written testimony open until noon on 29 July 2022.

The Board raised concerns to be addressed at a future meeting; functionality of deliveries and how they can ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists on the street, why the applicant team did not pursue a Special Permit for reducing the number of parking spaces at this building, the context around the challenge of burying the powerlines, and the neighborhood's concerns regarding the width of Bedford Street and the overall traffic concerns in the area.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the case to 4 August 2022.

RESULT:	CONTINUED
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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.