



City of Somerville

# PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**TO:** Planning Board  
**FROM:** Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff  
**SUBJECT:** 231-249 Elm Street and 6-8 & 12 Grove Street, P&Z 21-068  
**POSTED:** September 2, 2022

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

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 development review application submitted for 231-249 Elm Street and 6-8 & 12 Grove 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 4, 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

Scape Davis Square, LLC proposes to develop a LEED Platinum four (4) story Lab Building in the Commercial Core 4 (CC4) district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Scape Davis Square, LLC is proposing to construct a 4-story LEED Platinum Lab Building. The proposed development will produce 17,292 square feet of commercial space, 102,190 square feet of lab/office, 77 motor vehicle parking spaces, 33 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 28 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.20.

## ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

231-249 Elm Street and 6-8 & 12 Grove Street is located on a Pedestrian Street and in the 0.25mi Transit Area in the Commercial Core 4 (CC4) zoning district in Davis Square represented by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis. The subject property is also located within the Small Business Overlay District. Establishing a Lab Building in the CC4 district requires Site Plan Approval. 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 Commercial Core 4 (CC4) zoning district.

## NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis and the applicant on August 25, 2021, via a remote participation platform. The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis and the applicant on December 14, 2021, via a remote participation platform. The summary of these meeting included in the materials submitted to the Planning Board is an accurate account of the event.

## DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on October 12, 2021. The Commission provided its official recommendation on November 9, 2021.

## ANALYSIS

The proposal provides for three (3) stories of lab/office space over a ground floor comprised of lobby space for the upper stories, access to a two (2) story underground parking garage below, a multi-purpose space, and 17,292 square feet of retail/commercial space. Approximately 9,040 square feet (5% of the gross floor area) will be leased to a use within the Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) category. The proposal includes the preservation and restoration of the Burren, which is considered to be a primary location within the Davis Square neighborhood. Additionally, approximately 9,334 square feet of a roof deck will be provided.

During the neighborhood meetings, numerous attendees expressed a strong desire to see this Applicant engage in the preservation of the existing community of small-owned businesses within Davis Square. Councilor Davis raised concerns about potential displacement of the existing local and small-owned businesses as a result of the proposed development and requested the Applicant mitigate the impacts through a commitment to support the existing businesses to remain in the Square or to assist in relocation. Other concerns raised and discussions had by the neighborhood include:

- Strong desire to see a pedestrianized Elm Street
- Impacts of construction on Elm Street
- Limitations on the level of lab use permitted
- Corner of Elm Street/Grove Street to be utilized to activate the space
- Loading and traffic impacts

The following are official recommendations from the Urban Design Commission:

- Explore incorporating a taller signage band along retail storefronts
- Simplify front façade stories three (3) and four (4) above the Burren
- Reexamine ground story materiality with its relationship to the brick materiality of the upper stories
- Upper story façade design should incorporate a full brick return at façade windows.

Staff notes the following revisions were made to address the above recommendations (respectively): a taller awning valence for retail signage, addition of a glass curtainwall design on the upper stories of the Burren, revision of the brick base with custom shapes at rounded pilasters to be more harmonious with the brick façade of the upper stories and incorporating brick to the upper stories and ground level windows.

The proposal is on track to be LEED Platinum certifiable and is targeting 82 points of the 80 required to reach Platinum. As currently designed, the proposed Lab Building will use Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) as part of their heating plan, along with heat recovery chillers and water-cooled centrifugal chillers. The heat recovery chillers allow for energy to be reused when simultaneous heating and cooling loads occur. Overall, on-site fossil fuel emissions will be reduced by 95%. The proposal is targeting to provide 20 EV charging stations, while the remaining spaces will be EV ready.

As a part of the final approval of the Mobility Management Plan (MMP) from the Mobility Division, the Applicant reduced the parking count from 120 parking spaces to 77 parking spaces. The Applicant is also proposing two curb cuts on Grove Street, one to access the loading area and one to access the garage; these curb cuts are 24 and 22 feet wide, respectively. Mobility Staff notes that the proposed curb cuts should not exceed 10 feet per lane, totaling to a maximum 20 feet per curb cut. The Transportation Impact Study (TIS) identifies new impacts which require mitigation. Mobility Staff recommends several conditions aimed at mitigating transportation impacts. This mitigation will be accomplished through improvements to the pedestrian and/or transit facilities within or in proximity to the project study area.

The Applicant met with relevant City departments throughout the process to ensure the proposal is consistent with the City's efforts with the Davis Square Area Plan and incorporated draft public realm design guidelines from the draft plan. Discussions included sidewalks treatment, streetscape improvements, and pedestrianization of Elm Street. The Engineering Department recommends several conditions aimed at reaching the goals for the Square.

Following Site Plan Approval, a Streetscape Construction Permit (also known as a Thoroughfare Permit) must be submitted to the Engineering Department.

## **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.

### **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.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

#### Site Plan Approval

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

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Build a sustainable future through climate leadership, balanced transportation, engaging civic spaces, exceptional educational opportunities, improved health, varied and affordable housing options, and the responsible use of our natural resources.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is accessible, inviting, and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders
- 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.
- Create an environment that enables existing small businesses to thrive and produce entrepreneurial opportunities for new ones. Ensure that the regulatory environment supports the innovative business models necessary for businesses to adapt.
- Protect and foster the diversity of our people, culture, and economy.

Staff believes that this project supports the intent and purpose of the Small Business Overlay District, including the following:

- To create, maintain, and enhance locations appropriate for neighborhood and community-serving businesses.
- To require multiple ground story commercial spaces for real property in underlying mid-rise, high-rise, and commercial districts.

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

The intent of the Commercial Core 4 (CC4) zoning district is, in part: "[t]o create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for moderately-scaled single and multi-use commercial buildings; neighborhood, community, and region serving uses; and a wide variety of employment opportunities."

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

As conditioned, the proposal is not anticipated to create any negative impacts that require mitigation.

## PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval to develop a LEED Platinum four (4) story Lab Building in the Commercial Core 4 (CC4) district, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

### Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- 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.
- Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.

### Public Record

- One (1) physical copy of the original application materials and one (1) digital and (1) physical copy of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, 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 to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

### Construction Documents

- Material 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 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, lamp type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of any timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.
- Detailed plans for protecting street trees intended to remain during construction must be approved by the City Arborist.

### Site & Building Design

- Frontage area provided for a widened sidewalk along Elm Street must be designed and paved to properly correspond with any sidewalk improvements approved within the public right-of-way.
- A pedestrian access easement must be provided in perpetuity by a covenant or other deed restriction for the full area of the sidewalk and curb ramps provided

within the frontage area of the lot. Final easement language must be approved by the City Solicitor.

- Utility meters are not permitted on any facade or within the frontage area of the lot.

#### 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.

#### Mobility/Parking

- The property owner and applicable future tenants shall comply with the Mobility Management Plan dated April 11, 2021, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility.
- An annual report, including documentation of any changes to the layout plan or operations plan of the parking facility, must be submitted to validate continued compliance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, this Decision, and the Director of Mobility's standards for monitoring and annual reporting.
- A layout plan identifying all parking access and revenue control features for the parking facility must be submitted to the Director of Mobility for approval prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- The initial operations plan for the Commercial Parking facility identifying, at least, the type and pricing of various passes, rates, and fees must be submitted to the Director of Mobility.
- A sign must be provided near the vehicular entrance to the parking structure.
- The underground structured parking must be operated as a Commercial Parking facility principal use.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, Scape Davis Square, LLC shall improve the sidewalk along their frontage on Elm Street by reconstructing it to a consistent width with curb extensions at Grove Street and opposite Chester Street, or other sidewalk improvements approved by the Director of Mobility, prior to the issuance of Certificate of Occupancy. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, Scape Davis Square, LLC shall construct a raised intersection with four-way crosswalks at the intersection of Elm St and Grove St prior to the issuance of Certificate of Occupancy. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, Scape Davis Square, LLC shall improve the accessibility and comfort of the existing MBTA bus stop on Elm St @ Chester St by constructing an in-lane bus stop curb extension, or other improvements approved by the Director of Mobility, prior to the issuance of Certificate of Occupancy. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments.
- Garage entrances shall be a maximum of 10 ft in width for each vehicle lane (entering and exiting the garage), so that the total curb cut for the garage entrance is no wider than 20 ft.



- If the loading area curb cut is designed to accommodate two trucks at the same time, each lane shall be a maximum of 10 ft in width, of a maximum curb cut width of 20 ft for the proposed loading area.
- All curb cuts must comply with zoning and be constructed so that the grade, cross slope, and clear width of the walkway of the sidewalk is maintained between the driveway apron and the abutting driveway. The appearance of the walkway (i.e., scoring pattern or paving material) must indicate that, although a vehicle may cross, the area traversed by a vehicle remains part of the continuous sidewalk through curb cut.

#### Sustainability

- All Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.
- All Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.
- The building must be registered with the USGBC and evidence that the required registration forms were submitted and registration fee were paid must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment prior to applying for a Building Permit.

#### Engineering

- Scape Davis Square, LLC shall submit a Construction Management Plan (CMP) for Engineering and Mobility Division review and comment twenty-one (21) days prior to submission of the Building Permit.
- Scape Davis Square, LLC shall install a raised crossing adjacent to the project site at Grove and Elm Streets, or an acceptable and preferred alternative, with review and approval by Engineering. Scape Davis Square, LLC shall reconstruct all Accessible Curb Ramps (ACRs) adjacent to the project site on both sides of the street crossings.
- Scape Davis Square, LLC shall reconstruct the Elm Street sidewalk curb line to the existing (one-lane operation) fog line for a sidewalk width of approximately 20' inclusive of any parking and/or loading spaces. Final design must be submitted to the Engineering Department for approval prior to construction by Engineering's Streetscape Construction Permit.
- In order to accommodate future signal timing changes and other off-site transportation improvements in the neighborhood necessary to support the proposed development, Scape Davis Square, LLC will contribute to an Elm Street Reconstruction Stabilization Fund in cooperation with the Director of Engineering and Mobility.