



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 (Thoroughfare), P&Z 22-073
POSTED: September 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 Site Plan Approval application submitted for a thoroughfare at 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 was scheduled for a public hearing on August 4, 2022. The application has since been continued to the September 8, 2022, Planning Board meeting. 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 to develop a thoroughfare in the HR zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The subject property is part of Block D3-1 of the Union Square Coordinated Development Special Permit (CDSP), case # PB2017-21. The Applicant, US Union Square D3.1 Owner LLC, is proposing to construct a Thoroughfare within the area dictated by and consistent with the approved Union Square CDSP. The proposed thoroughfare will be an unnamed private alley, which will be used primarily for employees of the adjacent (proposed) commercial building to enter the site and for loading activities for the proposed lab/life science and retail uses. The alley will be 23 feet in width at its widest point and 20 feet in width at its narrowest point, which will allow for two (2) ten-foot (10') wide travel lanes.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

This Application is subject to a previously approved Coordinated Development Special Permit (CDSP) 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

Union Square Overlay District (USOD) zoning, underlying zoning being the High Rise (HR) District. The proposed alley at 50 Webster Avenue is located in the 0.25mi Transit Area in the Union Square neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott (who has recused himself from the project due to his ownership of a property within the CDSP-permitted area).

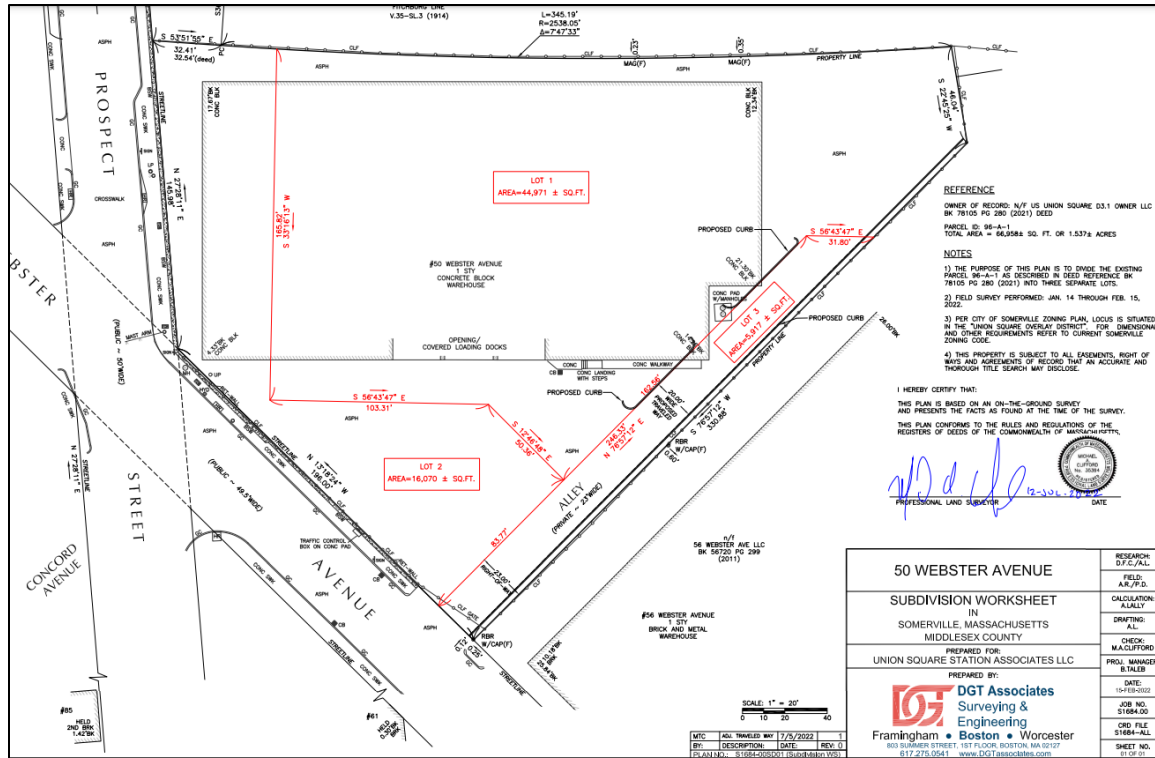
Design and Site Plan Review (DSPR) is required for the development of any lot as a building, civic space, or thoroughfare, subject to the Union Square CDSP. For the procedural purposes of this application, the current Site Plan Approval process is the direct equivalent of the Design and Site Plan Review (DSPR) required previously. Site Plan Approval is an administrative review and approval of a proposed thoroughfare 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.

Establishment of the thoroughfare lot at 50 Webster Avenue requires Subdivision Plan Approval prior to the issuance of this Site Plan Approval, authorizing development of the lot as a thoroughfare. The Planning Board may only make a decision regarding the Site Plan Approval for the proposed thoroughfare following approval of the related subdivision and subsequent recording of the land plat with the Middlesex Registry of Deeds. The Board voted at its August 4, 2022, meeting to approve a subdivision for this area.

No additional review is required following Site Plan Approval. However, the Application must comply with the requirements of the existing CDSP.

ANALYSIS

The subject property is a portion of Block D3 (as identified in the Union Square CDSP, Union Square Revitalization Plan, and Union Square Neighborhood Plan). The subdivision plat approved by the Board on August 4, 2022, lists this parcel as "Lot 3" (see the image on the next page). The Applicant is proposing to create an alley using an existing curb cut on Webster Avenue, to allow service and delivery vehicles to access the loading dock at the rear of the building lot property and to allow personal vehicles to access the commercial garage under the building at 50 Webster Avenue.



Subdivision Plan



Ground Floor Plan (Building Site Plan). Please note that this plan does not show at-grade long-term bicycle parking, as shown in the plans provided in the updated TAP.

The proposed alley will provide two-way access to and from Webster Avenue. It will eventually be extended to provide access to Columbia Street during Phase 3 of the Union Square CDSP development and the construction of adjacent D3.2 and D3.3 parcels (see the included image below). The proposed construction of the thoroughfare is consistent with Phase 2 of the project, which involves the build-out of D3.1 – the proposed building at 50 Webster Avenue and associated civic space and thoroughfare.

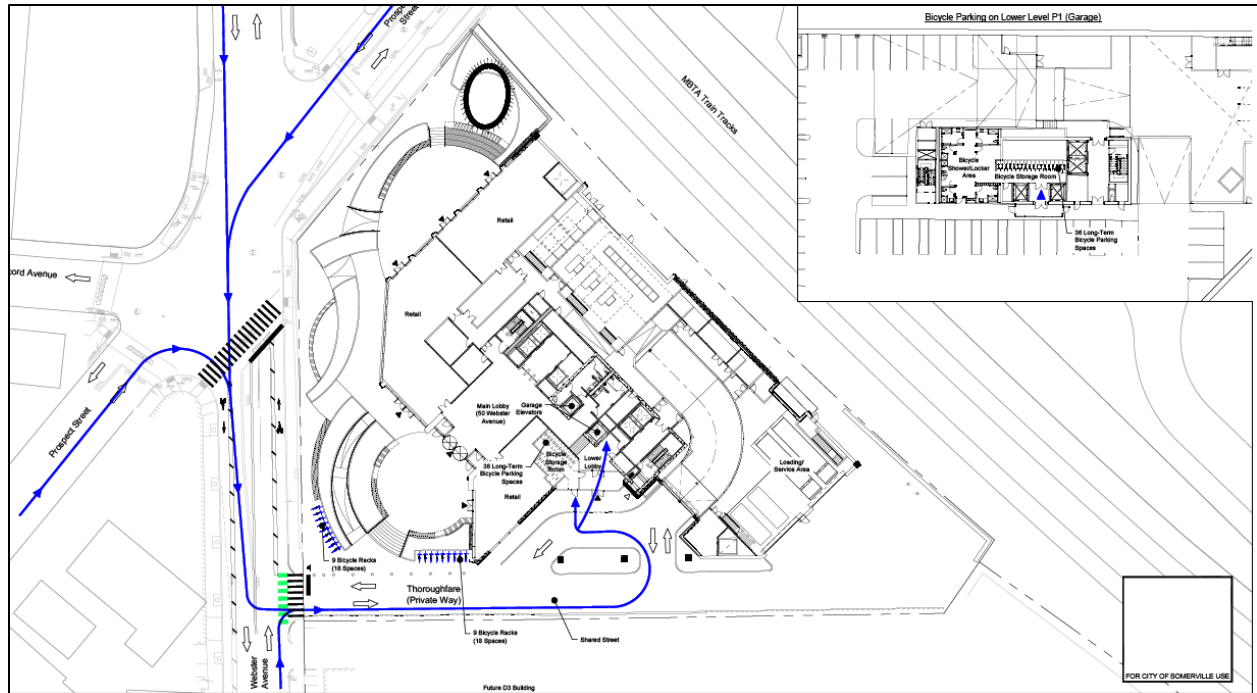
The USOD zoning requires thoroughfares and alleys to be designed, engineered, and constructed as required by the City Engineer and the Mobility Director (previously referred to as the Director of Transportation & Infrastructure). Alleys must be twenty (20) feet wide in total right of way, with two (2) ten-foot (10') wide travel lanes. The proposed alley complies with these requirements. Compliant with expectations for alleys, the thoroughfare will be used by both vehicles and bicyclists. The adjacent civic space and the sidewalk along the northeast side of Webster Avenue will support pedestrians entering and existing the site.

The new alley utilizes an existing curb cut on Webster Avenue to provide access to the D3.1 building and, in the future, to the D3.3 building. The thoroughfare is designed to allow motor vehicles to access parking and loading facilities, bicycles to access long-term parking, and pedestrians to access the building's secondary entrance. The thoroughfare will be made of colored concrete. It will be flush with the curb for the building and civic space, and will be separated from the civic space using bollards. The building, civic space, and thoroughfare have been designed to facilitate pedestrian access while limiting potential conflicts with motor vehicles.

No traffic signage changes are proposed for Webster Avenue adjacent to the thoroughfare, but a stop sign will be installed on at the corner of Webster Avenue and the alley to address vehicles exiting back on the Webster Avenue. The thoroughfare also provides access to a covered vehicular pick-up and drop-off area within the Building Lot.

The updated Transportation Access Plan (TAP)¹ provided as part of the building's Site Plan Approval application further details vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian access and movement.

¹ The Applicant submitted an updated TAP on August 29, 2022. This updated TAP has been reviewed by Staff, included in the application materials, and should be reviewed by the Board in place of the original TAP.



Bicycle Access Plan, excluding legend (updated TAP)

Mobility Staff have provided comments related to multimodal facilities and compatibility with the Union Square streetscape redesign process. While most relate to the development of the civic space and building, some relate to this Site Plan Approval application for a thoroughfare. Specifically, adjacent bus and bicycle facilities must be improved for consistency with the Union Square Neighborhood Plan. Additionally, Mobility Staff have noted that the Applicant must preserve compatibility with the Union Square streetscape redesign process, and that bicycle and pedestrian travel on the east side of Prospect Street and Webster Avenue (including across from the proposed thoroughfare) must be maintained to the extent feasible throughout construction of the thoroughfare and the site. Staff have proposed conditions to address these comments.

The Site Plan Approval application for the proposed thoroughfare includes a Layout & Materials Plan, a Grading, Drainage, & Utilities Plan, and subsequent details. Water and sewer lines are proposed underground beneath the thoroughfare, to connect to water, infiltration, and drainage systems on the Building Lot. The Engineering Department did not cite any additional comments about the proposed thoroughfare design but has restated that per PB2017-21 CDSP Condition #84, the capacity of the proposed Webster Avenue sewer and drain systems must be evaluated, and the connects for D3 may need to be relocated to the Boynton Yards system. The Applicant should coordinate with the Engineering Department prior to approval of any building permit or streetscape construction permit (thoroughfare permit) for the site.

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 considerations and findings that must be made consistent with the previously approved Somerville Zoning Ordinance §5.4 – Design and Site Plan Review.

Design and Site Plan Review Findings and Compliance

Pursuant to Somerville Zoning Ordinance Union Square Overlay District and §5.4.6 Findings and Compliance, the Planning Board shall approve an application for Design and Site Plan Review (in this case, defined as a Site Plan Approval) upon verifying that the submitted plan conforms with the provisions of this Ordinance and demonstrates consistency to the following review criteria:

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. Conformance to the applicable Coordinated Development Special Permit, the adopted Master Plan of the City of Somerville, the Union Square Neighborhood Plan, existing policy plans and standards established by the City, or other plans deemed to be appropriate by the Planning Board; and
3. 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.*

The proposal will help achieve 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.
- Add jobs and encourage more commercial development.

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

Staff believes that the proposed thoroughfare is consistent with the purpose and intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including the following:

- To ensure the development of a well-connected thoroughfare network;
- To require the platting of land so that lots have frontage upon and buildings are properly oriented toward the public realm of an abutting thoroughfare or civic space; and
- To develop a comprehensive network of thoroughfares that accommodate multiple modes of transportation.

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, and to facilitate the coordinated redevelopment of multiple parcels located within close walking distance to the future Union Square T-station and accommodate mixed-use, mid-rise and high-rise development that will support the transformation of Union Square into urban employment center.”

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

Staff believes that the proposed thoroughfare is generally 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 thoroughfare is generally consistent with the Coordinated Development Special Permit. The CDSP Decision (Case #PB2017-21) was approved with conditions on December 14, 2017.

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

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

- 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.
- To provide useable open space onsite within the D3 Parcel.

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

Staff believes the proposed thoroughfare conforms with 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 is compliant with the Thoroughfare Standards and development standards for thoroughfares and alleys.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the Thoroughfare Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- This Decision is not valid unless a land plat is approved to establish the private thoroughfare (alley) lot and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Public Record

- Physical copies of all development review submittal materials, as permitted by the Planning 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 to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

Construction Documents

- Prior to the construction of the alley thoroughfare, construction documents must be submitted for review and approval by relevant City departments as part of the Thoroughfare Permit (Streetscape Construction Permit) application for construction. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the Site Plan Approval plans and other materials submitted for development review.

Legal Agreements

- Following successful approval of the required thoroughfare or streetscape construction permits, the Applicant will proceed to execute a public access easement agreement, and a maintenance and operation agreement consistent with the Development Covenant by and between the City of Somerville and Union Square Station Associates LLC dated June 8, 2017, as amended.

Infrastructure

- The capacity of the proposed Webster Avenue sewer and drain systems must be evaluated, and the connections for D3 may need to be relocated to the Boynton Yards system. The Applicant shall coordinate with the Engineering Department prior to the approval of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction space permit.

Public Space

- The property owner shall not preclude the City of Somerville's Union Square plaza and streetscape project design and construction work along Webster Avenue and Prospect Street. Coordination with the appropriate City departments must be completed prior to the issuance of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction permit.

Mobility

- To mitigate transportation impacts, the east side of Webster Avenue along the frontage of the site shall be improved with a curb-separated bikeway or its substantial equivalent. This bikeway shall be interconnected with existing and proposed bikeways on Prospect Street and shall not preclude a substantially equivalent bikeway on the west side of Webster Avenue. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments prior to the issuance of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction permit.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, the east side of Prospect Street along the frontage of the site shall be improved with a curb-separated bikeway or its substantial equivalent. This bikeway shall be interconnected with the bikeway on Webster Avenue and shall not preclude a substantially equivalent bikeway on the west side of Prospect Street. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments prior to the issuance of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction permit.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, the east side Prospect Street along the frontage of the site shall be improved with design enhancements the existing busway, including the possibility of curb separation. This busway shall be interconnected with the existing and proposed busways on Prospect Street. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments prior to the issuance of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction permit.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, the intersection of Webster Avenue and the proposed alley thoroughfare must be improved with, at least, a raised pedestrian and bicycle crossing across the alley. Final intersection design must be approved by relevant City departments prior to the issuance of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction permit.
- The design of the project shall not preclude the City of Somerville's Union Square plaza and streetscape project design and construction work along Webster Avenue and Prospect Street. Coordination with the appropriate City departments must be completed prior to the issuance of a thoroughfare or streetscape construction permit.

Construction

- To the extent feasible, bicycle and pedestrian travel access shall be maintained on the west side of Prospect Street and Webster Avenue during construction.

General Conditions

- Development must comply with the approved Coordinated Development Special Permit dated November 7, 2017, as applicable.

- 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