



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff
RE: 153 South Street (Thoroughfare), P&Z 22-008
POSTED: October 20, 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 the Planning & Zoning staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the development review application submitted for 153 South 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 July 22, 2022 and is scheduled for a public hearing on October 27, 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

Boynton Yards LandCo, LLC proposes to develop a Commercial Shared Street Thoroughfare type in the High Rise (HR) zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Boynton Yards LandCo LLC is proposing to construct a 45,863 SF Commercial Shared Street Thoroughfare type known as both Thoroughfare 1 and Archibald Query Way (AQW). Thoroughfare 1 will be one of the first new streets constructed in the Boynton Yards neighborhood and will be primarily pedestrian and bike oriented, with allowed access by motor vehicles at a low speeds. Thoroughfare 1 will act as a central corridor, abutting Buildings 5, 6 and Civic Space 3 to the north; and Building 1,2, and 3, and Civic Space 1 to the south. Thoroughfare 1 will extend from Windsor Place to the west, wrapping around the corner of Harding Street to the east. Thoroughfare 1 is intended to function as a curbless, publicly accessible right-of-way designed primarily for pedestrians and bicyclists, to provide a space for events and gatherings, and as a central connection through Boynton Yards to further facilitate the development of the subarea.

BACKGROUND

Thoroughfare 1 is a development component of the Boynton Yards Master Plan authorized by the Master Plan Special Permit (MPSP) P&Z 21-097, as amended and

approved by the Planning Board on January 20, 2022. Each component of a Master Plan (building, civic space or thoroughfare) must go through a subsequent entitlement process after approval of the MPSP. Thoroughfare 1 is part of phase two (2) of the Master Plan, and preceded in permitting by 101 South Street (Building 1), 808 Windsor Street (Building 2), and 111 South Street (Civic Space 1).

Thoroughfare 1 was formally given the name “Archibald Query Way” on January 19, 2021 by the Memorialization Committee.

Thoroughfare 1 is located in the High Rise (HR) zoning district in the Boynton Yards Subarea of the Master Planned Development overlay district and the Boynton Yards neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor J.T. Scott. A new thoroughfare is permitted by Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address and potential development impacts, if necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-Variance) discretionary or administrative permits required by the HR zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

An initial neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward Councilor J.T. Scott and the development team on April 6, 2022 via the GoToWebinar virtual meeting platform. A second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward Councilor J.T. Scott and the development team on June 25, 2022 via GoToWebinar virtual meeting platform.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by the Somerville Urban Design Commission via GoToWebinar meeting platform on April 26, 2022 and May 10, 2022. The Commission provided its official recommendation on May 19, 2022.

ANALYSIS

Thoroughfare 1 is one of the required new thoroughfares in the Boynton Yards Subarea of the Master Planned Development overlay district, as depicted on map 8.3.12(b): *Thoroughfares and Civic Spaces* of the SZO. As stated above, thoroughfare 1 is a development component of the approved and amended Boynton Yards Master Plan. All required thoroughfares are mandatory and necessary to implement the Boynton Yards subarea.

Thoroughfare 1 is a critical component of the Boynton Yards Master Plan, and the overall Boynton Yards neighborhood, which is a Transform Opportunity Area¹. As called out in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan (USNP), to help facilitate development in the Boynton Yards neighborhood, a street network needs to be created. Thoroughfare 1 is a critical component of implementing this new street network and will help connect

¹ Transform Opportunity Area are mapped on the SomerVision Map of SomerVision 2040, the Comprehensive Plan for the City (page 11).

existing connections at Columbia Street and Ward Street to further complete an east-west network. The Boynton Yards Urban Design Framework (UDF) calls this new connection a “New Street”, which is intended to serve as the primary pedestrian-oriented street connecting the new civic spaces and buildings in Boynton Yards to the Union Square MBTA Station. Thoroughfare 1 will develop large segment of this new street, however, the west to east connections from Webster Avenue, Columbia Street, and Windsor Place will be developed as part of other independent Master Plans/development projects.

The proposed thoroughfare will be 45,863 SF, equating to 1.05 acres of space within Boynton Yards. Thoroughfare 1 will be constructed on Lot T1, as depicted on the proposed lot plan in the approved and amended Master Plan (figure 1.4), and will abut Buildings 5 and 6A, and 6B, and Civic Space 3 to the north; Buildings 1,2, and 3 and Civic Space 1 to the south. The thoroughfare, in conjunction with another future new thoroughfare to the west at 600 Windsor Place (not shown in graphic below) will create a four (4) way intersection at Windsor Place, and Windsor Street to the west, and will continue through the center of the neighborhood, wrapping the corner on to Harding Street to the east.



Boynton Yards MPSP Proposed Lot Plan (Figure 1.4). Thoroughfare 1 is highlighted in orange.

The SZO requires all new thoroughfares to be designed in accordance with the current edition of the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) street design guidelines. The Commercial Shared Street thoroughfare type is also referred to as

a Commercial Shared Street by NACTO. A Commercial Shared Street must have a minimum right-of-way (ROW) width of fifty-two (52) feet. The proposed thoroughfare complies with these requirements. Thoroughfare 1 is proposing to have a ROW width of sixty-two (2) feet and is consistent with NACTO design requirements for a Commercial Shared Street.

Thoroughfare 1 will be a pedestrian-first street, with second priority to bicyclists, followed by motor vehicles, which will be allowed to access the thoroughfare but only at low operating speeds. There will be no public transit services operating along Thoroughfare 1. The design of Thoroughfare 1 will be a flush condition, that reinforces a pedestrian-first hierarchy and delineates a non-linear path of travel. The thoroughfare will have three zones: a 20-foot wide "movement" zone, a 12 to 15 feet hybrid/flexible-use zone, and an 8-11 foot wide pedestrian sidewalk zone. The hybrid zone will accommodate the street trees, planters, and bio-infiltration areas; site furnishings (seating, lighting, and bike parking); and on-street motor vehicle parking. Tactical warnings will be located at the crosswalks and within the hybrid zones.

As mentioned above, Thoroughfare 1 embodies the basic principles of a shared street, however additional refinement with relevant City Departments prior to construction is needed to ensure the street prioritizes pedestrians. OSPCD Staff have recommended a condition to address the remaining design and programming concerns for Thoroughfare 1, prior to the Applicant receiving a Streetscape Construction Permit for the thoroughfare. Further, Staff have also recommended a condition that the Applicant, with consultation from City Staff, design and install signage at different locations along Thoroughfare 1 with language that prohibits trucks from entering during specific times of the day.

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 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. Consistency with the approved Urban Design Framework for the sub-area where the subject property is located.
4. Conformance with any approved Master Plan Special Permit and any other Special Permits applicable to the subject lot.
5. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Information relative to the above considerations is provided below:

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

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

- 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.
- Minimize the overall land use in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles while encouraging alternative modes.

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

Staff believe that the proposed thoroughfare is consistent with the intent of the HR zoning district which is, in part, “[T]o accommodate the development of areas appropriate for an intense mix of multi-story multi-unit, mixed-use, and commercial buildings; neighborhood-, community-, and regional-serving uses; and a wide variety of employment opportunities.”

Staff also believe that the proposed thoroughfare is consistent with the intent of the Boynton Yards overlay district which, in part, to permit the development of multiple lots including buildings, civic spaces, and thoroughfares as identified in the Master Plan.

3. Consistency with the approved Urban Design Framework for the sub-area where the subject property is located.

Staff believe that this proposed thoroughfare is consistent with the approved Boynton Yards Urban Design Framework. Thoroughfare 1 will contribute to creating a “New Street” as called out in the UDF, which will extend existing connections at Windsor Street to Harding Street. Thoroughfare 1 is also intended to be primarily pedestrian-oriented helping connect new civic spaces and commercial buildings.

4. Conformance with any approved Master Plan Special Permit and any other Special Permits applicable to the subject lot.

Staff believe that this proposed thoroughfare is in conformance with the approved and amended Boynton Yards Master Plan Special Permit (P&Z 21-097).

5. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

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

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the commercial shared street thoroughfare, Planning & Zoning Staff recommends 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 Thoroughfare 1 lot and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- This Decision does not authorize the removal of any public shade trees or private trees, which is subject to the Tree Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 12, Article VI) of the Somerville Code of Ordinances.

Legal Agreements

- Thoroughfare 1 must be dedicated to the public by a covenant or other deed restriction prior to the issuance of the Streetscape Construction permit authorizing construction.

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

- Construction documents submitted for the required Streetscape Construction permit authorizing construction must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for this Site Plan Approval.

Transportation Mitigation

- To mitigate transportation impacts, the intersection of Windsor Street and Windsor Place must be improved with, at least, interconnected curb separated bicycle facilities, pedestrian safety and infrastructure improvements, and a specialized gateway treatment for Thoroughfare 1. Final intersection design must be approved by relevant City departments.
- Applicant must coordinate with the Mobility Division on signage that prohibits delivery trucks from entering the thoroughfare during specific times of the day. Final design and location must be approved by the Director of Mobility prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.

Design and Programming

- Updated site plan(s) and supporting documents must be submitted to relevant City Departments that include but not limited to the following prior to applying for a Streetscape Construction Permit:

- Detailed design of the Windsor Street/ Windsor Place/ Thoroughfare 1 intersection and their integration with adjacent developments to the west of Thoroughfare 1 that is consistent with the approved and amended MPSP.
- Documentation outlining design solutions to easily close the thoroughfare during an event or festival.
- Plans showing secondary circulation routes across the thoroughfare to support pedestrian comfort.
- Plans showing integrated seating and placemaking both inside and outside the travel lane corridor of the thoroughfare.
- Verification of construction details to support the health and longevity for the new street trees.

General Conditions

- Development must comply with the approved and amended Master Plan Special Permit dated January 20, 2022, as applicable.
- All Phase 3 conditions of the Master Plan Special Permit dated January 20, 2022, must be completed prior to the acceptance of this thoroughfare as a public-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.