



City of Somerville
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

RECOMMENDATION

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals
FROM: Planning Board
SUBJECT: 299 Broadway Comprehensive Permit (40B), P&Z 22-092
DATE OF VOTE: January 5, 2023
DATE OF ISSUANCE: January 12, 2023

The Somerville Planning Board met virtually via GoToWebinar on December 15, 2022, and January 5, 2023, to review the Comprehensive Permit application for 299 Broadway in the MR4, MR6, and NR zoning districts in the Winter Hill neighborhood of Somerville. The proposal includes a proposal for two General Buildings and two civic spaces, as well as related site improvements. The Planning Board reviewed the application at the request of the Applicant, who also requested that the Planning Board provide a recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) regarding the application.

Following a presentation by the Applicant and some questions from the Board on December 15, 2022, and a question-and-answer session and discussion by the Board on January 5, 2023, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to **recommend that the ZBA approve the Comprehensive Permit and associated waivers, subject to a number of additional considerations described below.**

The Planning Board notes that its charge is to review proposed development projects for alignment with the city's comprehensive master plan, SomerVision 2040. While the Board believes this proposed project aligns with many aspects of SomerVision 2040, there are several opportunities to bring the project into even better alignment with the City's long-term objectives. The Planning Board recommends that the ZBA take these opportunities under advisement as it conducts its review of the Comprehensive Permit application and requested waivers.

Climate & Sustainability

SomerVision 2040 stresses the importance of reducing our emissions and designing sites that promote broader sustainability practices. This project will use sustainable design, technology, and building practices in the development of the buildings and site as a whole. However, the site is also located within a Transit Area – a feature of the 2020 zoning update that makes new dwelling units ineligible for the Somerville Residential Permit Parking program. This policy supports the City's sustainability goals by reducing air pollution and discouraging car ownership for those living within a ten-minute walk of a T station. The Applicant represented to the Planning Board that they have been working closely with the Director of Mobility to develop a variety of incentives that would encourage future residents to select transportation modes better aligned with the City's sustainability targets.

Given the SomerVision sustainability goals and the establishment of Transit Areas to support those goals, the ZBA should carefully consider the implications of granting the requested waiver from SZO section 11.2.7, to allow up to 78 on-street parking passes to be provided to households in market-rate units in a Transit Area, and only approve the waiver with rigorous conditions of approval that appropriately incentivize non-vehicular transportation modes, disincentivize the use of single-occupancy vehicles, and mitigate anticipated impacts to the surrounding area. The Planning Board notes that the ZBA can deny the waiver if they do not feel that the application and conditions of approval properly mitigate impacts.

Housing & Equity

SomerVision 2040 established equity as one of our central community values, defined as going “beyond equal opportunity” to consider what everyone needs to be successful – regardless of a variety of factors including income and physical ability. In addition, SomerVision established the goal of increasing the share of housing stock that will be permanently affordable to at least 20% by 2040, and established the goal of increasing the overall housing supply. This project will create 288 housing units, with 132 units will be affordable at multiple levels of affordability. Additionally, the affordable units will include a mix of 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units, supporting a range of household sizes. This is commendable, and very well-aligned with the SomerVision 2040 goals.

However, SomerVision also calls out a severe lack of affordable accessible units, particularly those that go beyond basic ADA requirements (which often fall short of actual need). Given the challenges of retrofitting existing housing stock to meet accessibility requirements, much of this gap will need to be filled by new construction projects. In discussions with the Planning Board, the Applicant represented a willingness to consider increasing the share of highly-accessible (‘Group 2’ or otherwise) units within the project.

Given SomerVision’s housing goals and focus on creating an equitable Somerville, the Planning Board recommends that prior to any decision by the ZBA, the Applicant meet with the Commission for Persons with Disabilities to better understand the City’s need for accessible affordable units, and examine whether the number of Group 2 or otherwise highly-accessible dwelling units could be expanded.

Public Space

SomerVision 2040 sets the goal of creating 105 new acres of publicly accessible open space by 2040. This project supports that goal by creating two publicly

accessible civic spaces (and associated connections and pathways) that are ADA-compliant and support neighborhood needs and goals.

The open/civic spaces, including connections to those spaces, should be dedicated to and accessible by the public. The Planning Board recommends that the design of the civic spaces, including connections from public ways and wayfinding signage, should clearly establish public access and encourage public use.

Attest, by the Planning Board:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Capuano', written over a horizontal line.

Michael A. Capuano
Chair of the Planning Board

Michael Capuano, *Chair*
Amelia Aboff, *Vice-Chair*
Erin Geno, *Clerk*
Jahan Habib
Debbie Howitt Easton, *Alternate*