



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff
SUBJECT: 200 McGrath Hwy, P&Z 21-172
POSTED: January 13, 2023

RECOMMENDATION: None

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 200 McGrath Hwy, 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 October 27, 2022, and was scheduled for a public hearing on January 5, 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

US McGrath Owner, LLC proposes a Master Plan in the Union Square East sub-area of the Master Plan Development overlay district, which requires a Master Plan Special Permit; the proposal is for an approx. 3 acre site and includes two buildings totaling approx. 980,000SF and three thoroughfares.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

US McGrath Owner, LLC is proposing a master plan for a 3.11 acre development site bounded by Somerville Ave and McGrath Hwy to the north and east, Medford St to the west, and the MBTA right-of-way to the south. The proposal includes:

- Two (2) buildings totaling 980,000 SF of commercial space, including the 5% Arts & Creative Enterprise (ACE) requirement (49,000 SF) and 4,500 SF of ground floor retail
 - Building A is a 12-story LEED Platinum Lab Building with a total of 420,000 SF
 - Building B is a 16-story LEED Platinum Lab Building with a total of 560,000 SF
- Three (3) new thoroughfares
 - Thoroughfare 1 ("the Connector") is an Alley connecting Medford St and Somerville Ave on the northwest side of the site
 - Thoroughfare 2 ("Gateway Court") is a dead-end Alley from Somerville Ave Ext between Buildings A and B

- Thoroughfare 3 is an Alley providing access to underground parking from the Somerville Ave Ext
- Five hundred and eighty-eight (588) below ground parking spaces and 16 on-street parking spaces

BACKGROUND

200 McGrath Hwy is located in the Union Square East (USQE) sub-area of the Master Planned Development (MPD) overlay district in the Union Square neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott.

If the Master Plan Special Permit (MPSP) proposed here is approved by the Board, each building and thoroughfare identified in this MPSP will individually require 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 MPD zoning district.

At Staff's recommendation, the Applicant requested to continue the opening of the public hearing to January 19, 2023, in order to allow Staff additional time to analyze the proposal.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the applicant on October 6, 2021, via the Zoom meeting platform.

ANALYSIS

On January 5, 2023, the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) determined that the proposed land platting plan of this Master Plan is noncompliant with the standards for platting lots; ISD notified the Applicant of this determination on January 9, 2023.

Due to the noncompliant land platting, two potential paths forward exist: the Applicant can redesign the lot platting to be compliant or they can apply for whatever Hardship Variances are necessary to allow them to move forward with the current design. Regardless of the approach the Applicant chooses to take, this proposal is unlikely to be ready for a vote by this Board on January 19, 2023.

The Board may wish to continue this case for one meeting to allow the Applicant additional time to meet internally and determine which permitting path they wish to pursue.

Staff recommendations for each permitting pathway are provided below.

1. **If the Applicant decides to pursue any Hardship Variances, the Board should continue the case date-uncertain until the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is able to issue a decision regarding the Hardship Variances.** This would allow the Applicant to apply for whatever Hardship Variances ISD identifies as being required and allow the ZBA to issue a decision regarding the request. If the Variances are approved, the case before this Board could then be readvertised and continue moving forward; if the Variances are denied, the Applicant could withdraw this application and resubmit a design that is compliant with zoning.
2. **If the Applicant decides to redesign to become complaint, the Board should encourage the Applicant to withdraw without prejudice and resubmit a compliant proposal.** Redesigning the lot plan will take time and is likely to result in substantive changes to the site plan to account for the changes in the lot plan. Withdrawing this application without prejudice would allow the Applicant time and flexibility to redesign the proposal and come back to the Board once they are ready.

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.

Master Plan Special Permit 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. The proposed alignment and connectivity of the thoroughfare network.
4. The gross floor area allocated to different use categories.
5. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any adverse impacts on utility infrastructure.
6. Proposed development phasing.
7. Proposed on-street parking to address demand by customers of Retail Sales, Food & Beverage, or Commercial Services principal uses.

Information relative to the required considerations will be provided in a supplemental Staff Memo.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Staff will recommend conditions in a supplemental Staff Memo.