



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

8 SEPTEMBER 2022 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Erin Geno	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Debbie Howitt Easton	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Sarah White (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), and Rachel Nadkarni (Economic Development)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 9:00pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 16 & 20 Medford Street (P&Z 21-057)

Chair Capuano explained that this is a re-vote by the Planning Board on this case due to an administrative error. Vice Chair Aboff stated that she reviewed the recording from 18 August 2022 and completed the affidavit, which confirms her ability to participate in the discussion and vote on the case.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0), with Member Howitt Easton abstaining, to approve the Special Permit for a Household Living principal use for 41 dwelling units, with conditions.

RESULT:

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 19 May 2022 meeting minutes.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Geno, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 2 June 2022 meeting minutes.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Howitt Easton, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 16 June 2022 meeting minutes.

Vice Chair Aboff recused herself.

PUBLIC HEARING: 50 Webster Avenue – Building (P&Z 21-060)

(continued from 18 August 2022)

The applicant team briefly introduced the project and the team members. They continued by presenting the site context, below-grade parking plan, history of the site and how they used the history in their design, the design feedback they have previously received, and the loading area access. The team then presented the building's ground level experience and design, the upper levels, and the penthouse design. They shared various renderings and elevations.

Chair Capuano requested that Staff address the concerns raised in the Staff Memo regarding this application. Staff stated that they had concerns regarding Mobility, the screening of the loading zone, and project's compliance with the Coordinated Development Special Permit. However, the concerns have since been addressed through conditions made by Staff and changes made by the applicant team.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. No one indicated they wished to speak. Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Written testimony was left open until noon on 16 September 2022.

The Board requested that the applicant team present on the wind impacts at the ground level along the roadways that get significant bicycle traffic at the next meeting. The Board would also like to better understand the traffic pattern/impact in the alley, as well as if there are any concerns regarding the glare and glazing of the windows.

The Board complimented the applicant team and the Urban Design Commission on the overall design.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Geno, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the case to 22 September 2022.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 50 Webster Avenue/62 Prospect Street - Civic Space (P&Z 21-166)

(continued from 18 August 2022)

The applicant team presented their inspiration, the site context, the plan to expand the width of the sidewalks, the ADA accessibility of the space, the evolution of the design, the elevation and grade change of the site, and the proposed planting palette. The team explained that they wish to promote public use with different seating options and movable furnishings, as well as integrating accessible seating options throughout the space. The applicant team presented the programming possibilities, different sections of the civic space, and materiality of the features.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. No one indicated they wished to speak. Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Written testimony was left open until noon on 16 September 2022.

The Board requested that the applicant team present on the signage planned to ensure that the public knows that it is in fact a civic space and not just a space only for the building at the next meeting. The Board would also like to better understand how the ADA accessible ramps line up with the pedestrian crosswalks.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Geno, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the case to 22 September 2022.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 50 Webster Avenue – Thoroughfare (P&Z 22-073)

(continued from 18 August 2022)

The applicant team presented the site context, measurements, materiality, proposed raised condition, the pedestrian access plan, the vehicle circulation, loading zone access, as well as the improvements planned for the Webster and Prospect Street corridor.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. No one indicated they wished to speak. Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Written testimony was left open until noon on 16 September 2022.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Geno, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the case to 22 September 2022.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

Vice Chair Aboff rejoined the meeting.

PUBLIC HEARING: 231-249 Elm Street and 6-8 & 12 Grove Street (P&Z 21-068)

(continued from 18 August 2022)

The Acting-Director of Economic Development confirmed that a covenant has been signed between the city and the applicant team. She stated that as part of the covenant the applicant team has committed to keeping *The Burren* operational throughout the development process, as well as contribute community benefits such as considering the displacement of existing businesses. The Economic Development Division has confirmed that the applicant team has had detailed conversations with every tenant about what they would like to do regarding their future. Some of the businesses are interested in returning to the space, some are not. The applicant team is dedicated to working with the tenants to reach their business goals.

The Board and Staff discussed the committees and divisions that review the type of lab that will be allowed in this space, the Small Business Overlay District at this location, and the maintenance of the sidewalk, tree pits, and bicycle parking areas on both Grove Street and Elm Street. Staff explained that there have been discussions around the future of Elm Street and the coordination of this development and the city's goals for the area. The applicant team confirmed that they plan to save three existing street trees and that there will be a need for periodic maintenance of the proposed pavers. The Board asked for clarity on who would be responsible for the maintenance of the pavers.

The Board and Staff discussed the timeline for the redesign of Elm Street and the updated Davis Square Area Plan.

The Board discussed the possibility of imposing stronger conditions regarding the preservation of existing street trees during construction. Staff confirmed that the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division handles this. The Board had concerns about imposing a condition of this type considering their lack of expertise on the subject. The Board confirmed that they would like to add condition language that states that the applicant team will be required to not only provide a plan for the street trees, but also that best efforts will be made to maintain the trees onsite during and after construction and should anything go awry, the trees will be replaced in-kind.

The Board also discussed the possibility of imposing a condition that requires sending out public notices of the Bio-Safety Committee meeting regarding this case, so that the concerned neighbors are informed of the meeting date and have a chance to voice their opinions. Staff stated that this requirement is out of the Planning Board's purview. The applicant team stated that they do not wish to volunteer to send public notices for the Bio-Safety Committee meeting.

The Board and applicant team discussed the team's plan for further community engagement efforts following this evening's meeting, as well as following an approval. The Board strongly encouraged the applicant team to further engage with the community and direct abutters regarding their concerns on this proposal.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Geno, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the Site Plan Approval to develop a LEED Platinum four (4) story Lab Building in the Commercial Core 4 (CC4) district, with conditions.

RESULT:

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS

The Planning Board went into recess at 8:15pm due to technical difficulties. The Planning Board reconvened at 8:20pm.

The Board requested that they receive a presentation by the Bio-Safety Committee and how the public might be able to engage in their process, considering the amount of lab development going on in the city. They also requested that a member of the Fire Department be present to answer questions regarding their processes should an emergency occur at one of the lab facilities.

PUBLIC HEARING: 394 McGrath Highway (P&Z 21-122)

(continued from 18 August 2022)

The applicant team presented updates to the proposal including materiality and color options.

The Board and applicant team discussed the previous community feedback they received about the materiality of the design and how the *light grey shakes/dark grey standing seam/cedar* façade option aligns the most with what the community would like to see in this neighborhood.

The Board and applicant team also discussed deliveries, the loading zone, move-ins/outs, and bicycle lanes in front of the building. The Board expressed concerns regarding the lack of a safe loading zone and delivery area. Staff stated that the Mobility Division did review this project and they did not have specific feedback on this issue. The Board and Staff discussed the possibility of adding signage at this location regarding the rules around parking.

The Board and Staff discussed the possibility of adding a condition requiring the applicant team to work with the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division (PPZ) and the Mobility Division on updating the ramp plans to allow for larger vehicles to enter, which would alleviate some of the loading zone and delivery area concerns. If the Director of PPZ deems the Plan Revisions to be major amendments, then the applicant would be required to return to the Planning Board for further review.

The Board determined that they are uncomfortable with the unresolved issues and asked the applicant team to work with the Mobility Division to review the lack of a loading zone and possibly redesign the ramp by the next meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case to 22 September 2022.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.