



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

SEPTEMBER 27, 2022 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present – Arrived at 6:33pm</i>
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Absent</i>
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present – Left at 6:46pm</i>
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>
Tim Houde	Member	<i>Absent</i>
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Present</i>

City staff present: Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm and adjourned at 8:23pm.

PUBLIC MEETING: 299 Broadway – Civic Spaces (P&Z 22-092)

(continued from 13 September 2022)

The applicant team presented the updates made to the pocket plaza and pocket park based on the feedback received at the last design review meeting, including the streetscape sections along Broadway, the width and overall quality of the public realm along Temple Street, park programming, and the dimensions of the mews. The team noted that they reviewed the neighborhood plans for the area to determine what kind of civic spaces would be best for this space.

The team presented the site context and analysis for the pocket plaza, multi-generational programming, seating options, “playable” art possibilities, and their desire for open site lines and lush plantings throughout the space.

The applicant team then presented the site context for the pocket park, stacked seating, opportunities for lush edges that provide canopies and buffers, local park comparisons, the plan to create an open and accessible “play space” that can be experienced by people of all ages, how native plants will be used, multiple programming opportunities, and how the community room is only accessible from the pocket park. The team briefly touched upon the indoor/outdoor programming possibilities of the community room. They also spoke about how the edges of the Temple Street passage have been expanded at each end, the opportunity for a mural, the narrowed path in the middle to allow for plantings on both sides, the streetscape along Broadway, and how the grade change of the site drove the design.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the ongoing maintenance of the civic spaces, how the team handled the grade change between Building A and B, the Honey Locust tree that they are trying to preserve, the materiality possibilities, and the accessible routes through different areas of the plaza.

They continued the discussion with the need to integrate the streetscape and civic spaces in a more natural way, the need for more information on the streetscape including the planting plan and furnishing details, how the programming for the pocket park does not seem appropriate for the size and the need to work further with PSUF to develop a plan that can be a true community asset, and the need for context for the Temple Street passage planting strip and ramp.

Member Arbaugh left the meeting.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the community room and the connectivity to it, possible adjustments to the edges of the amphitheater to make the space more of a gathering place rather than a throughway, programming that is multi-generational but is especially attractive and discoverable for the young children that will be living in the buildings, the possibility of integrating a creative zig-zag ramp through the terraced seating to provide an accessible pathway that is fun, and how the intent was to plan a space that works well for many people as well as just a few people at a time. They also discussed possible programming in the space such as movie nights, birthday parties, a “bring your own hammock” infrastructure, installed swings, and a small-scale merry-go-round. The Commission made a note that bicycle parking will be necessary at all entry points, that for this project they have not reviewed the streetscapes since those details are still being worked out between the applicant team and the city, and how they would like to see the street trees and a planting strip at the curb and the bus stop condition.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the design guidelines have been met for a Pocket Plaza for Civic Space A (Pocket Plaza).

Following a motion by Member Ruane, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to incorporate the additional design guidance into the design for Civic Space A (Pocket Plaza).

Additional design guidance for the Pocket Plaza:

- Look more in depth at the streetscape
- Review the connection of the plaza to the streetscape, specifically how the public realm can be expanded along the edge of Broadway
- Update the precedence images and inspiration to better address the needs of this plaza
- Recommendation to complete the plan for the street and the street trees

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the design guidelines have been met for a Pocket Park for Civic Space B (Pocket Park).

Following a motion by Member Ruane, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to incorporate the additional design guidance into the design for Civic Space A (Pocket Park).

Additional design guidance for the Pocket Park:

- Update the precedence images and inspiration to better address the needs of this park
- More consideration should be given to the programming – consider the after-school crowd, birthday parties rather than yoga, realization that the space might be used by many children which will cause a lot of wear and tear, look for thoughtful design in that direction
- Opportunities to connect the community room to the park in a symbiotic relationship
- Terraces could present additional opportunities for programming or accessibility
- Think about the edge conditions and streetscape along Sewell Street
- Consider bike parking at all entrances

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
----------------	--------------------

The Commission, Staff, and applicant team quickly discussed how the mews is considered the public space affiliated with the buildings rather than the civic spaces, how the zoning ordinance doesn't reference anything like the mews space, and why it is called the mews. Staff confirmed that if the Commission has comments on the mews, their comments can be incorporated into the Commission's recommendation. The Commission agreed that they will discuss the mews during the buildings design review.

PUBLIC MEETING: 299 Broadway – Buildings (P&Z 22-092)

(continued from 13 September 2022)

The applicant team started by giving an overview of what will be presented, the site plan, and the two courtyard spaces.

The applicant team reviewed the feedback they received from the UDC at the previous meeting on Building A, with option 1 materiality and option 3 massing being preferred. The team provided views with the preferred massing and materiality, Broadway elevations with increased step backs, changes made to the materiality, and condition of the corner where Broadway meets the Civic Plaza. They also provided views from Temple Street, an updated entrance, how they updated the color palette to complement the Northwest corner, and how they changed that corner to create an openness at the ground floor. The team showed a rear elevation of Building A to show volume changes, “moments of surprise” at the community room with a mural or other ways to connect the community room with the landscape, and the updated corner condition over the community room.

The applicant team presented the mews-facing elevation, the ground floor and height changes based on the UDC’s feedback, and the updated corners. The team noted that the corner improvements are understated as opposed to more expressive to ensure the design did not become cheesy, how the private patios are addressed, and how awnings will be used for the ground floor.

The applicant team then reviewed the feedback they received from the UDC on Building B, with option 3 materiality and massing being preferred. They showed views along Broadway, reviewed massing and materiality for different sections of the building, and discussed how the entrances and ground floor were highlighted. The team shared the buildings in context of the neighborhood and confirmed the use of full dimensional brick. The Commission and applicant team discussed the transition of brick colors from the ground floor to the upper floors and the possibility of including a cornice or a slight projection, so the different color bricks are not coplanar.

The applicant team explained the public realm waivers that they are seeking and requested the endorsement from the UDC; 1) they have a step-back higher than what is permitted, starting at the 5th story along the Broadway, Civic Plaza, and Temple Street facades (SZO 2.4.4.z.x, 4.4.8) and 2) horizontal divisions may not shift up or down across the width of the façade in the buildings with five or more stories that have been visually divided into tripartite reading (SZO 4.4.13.e).

The Commission, Staff, and the applicant team discussed endorsing the waivers that were presented, the Comprehensive Permit process and waivers, other waivers that will be pursued including one that has to do with story height in the buildings due to the topography changes across the site, the location of the entrances, and how the streetscapes need to be thoughtful of the entries and drop-off zones. They continued the discussion with a review of the mews, the success of the updated terra cotta materiality, and the scarce landscaping in that space.

They also discussed the penthouse on top of the Temple Street portion of Building A, the concern about small windows that are often associated with affordable housing, the opportunity to really integrate art at the base of the community room as part of the façade and space as opposed to just applying it to a piece of plywood and installing it, how the team has a meeting set up with the Mobility Division to discuss the bus stop and how the street furniture will be integrated as they need to respect the MBTA’s purview, and the possibility of incorporating exterior outdoor space for individual units such as balconies. They also spoke about the connection into the courtyard for Building B, how the different spaces are integrated, the scale of the ground floor entrances, and how the team is exploring the idea of mural walls to create a sense of discovery from the courtyards.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the design guidelines have been met for Building A.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the additional design guidance be incorporated into the design for Building A.

Additional design guidance for Building A:

- Windows on 5th and 6th floors, particularly facing Temple Street, should be increased in size and articulated in greater detail
- Art at community room should be integral rather than applied
- Balconies should be explored, if feasible

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the design guidelines have been met for Building B.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the additional design guidance be incorporated into the design for Building B.

Additional design guidance for Building B:

- Enrich the landscape to allow the mews to feel more intimate, with the use of transparent canopy trees

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to support the waiver from SZO 2.4.4.a.x, 4.4.8 to have a step-back higher than what is permitted, starting at the 5th story along the Broadway, Civic Plaza, and Temple Street facades.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to support the waiver from SZO 4.4.13.e to allow horizontal divisions may not shift up or down across the width of the façade in the buildings with five or more stories that have been visually divided into tripartite reading.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to note additional guidance for the Zoning Board of Appeals that streetscapes were not presented or reviewed by the Urban Design Commission.

The Commission noted that parking was not reviewed at this meeting but is integral to the feasibility of the site design, that if no onsite parking is being proposed the applicant team should provide a robust Mobility Management Plan, how they do not support approval of additional on-street parking permits, the need for onsite bicycle parking, and the potential for Bluebike stations. The team should also look closely at their retail strategy to ensure they are providing the right type of amenities to the residents of the buildings, including possibly a convenience store, pharmacy, and a daycare.

Staff provided an overview of the Comprehensive Permit process, adding that significant additional mobility information will be submitted as part of the application such as a Mobility Management Plan, Transportation Impact Study, and a Transportation Access Plan, and the UDC members will have the opportunity to attend the Zoning Board of Appeals hearing(s) to review information that is presented and make comments.

The applicant team reviewed discussions had with the Mobility Division, the Somerville Redevelopment Authority, the Winter Hill Civic Advisory Committee, and the neighborhood regarding how parking is being analyzed and the need for a certain percentage of the units to have access to parking to finance the project more so than the actual need for parking.

Staff suggested that the UDC make a motion to recommend that the Mobility Management Plan be aggressive to balance the reduced parking by providing more features to support bicycling and transit use. The Commission stated that they would also like rideshare and careshare information to be included, as well as the retail strategy focusing on providing goods and services targeting the residents of the building. The applicant team clarified that no parking spaces will be provided onsite, so finding space for carshares may be difficult. Staff noted that the

Commission can include those items in the recommendation, but ultimately the scope of the study will be determined by the Mobility and Engineering Divisions.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the Mobility Management Plan be aggressive to enable residents to live without a car, that the retail strategy be tailored to resident and neighborhood uses, and that the rideshare and carshare spaces be addressed.

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
----------------	--------------------

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Ruane, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue the approval of 10 May 2022, 24 May 2022, 7 June 2022, and 21 June 2022 meeting minutes.

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.