



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

OCTOBER 25, 2022 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Late – Arrived at 7:00pm</i>
Tim Houde	Member	<i>Present</i>
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Present</i>

City staff present: Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm and adjourned at 8:43pm.

OTHER BUSINESS: 2023 UDC Meeting Schedule

The Commission discussed if there was another night besides Tuesday that could work for Urban Design Commission meetings. Co-Chair Lewis noted that changing the night of the meeting is difficult, considering that the City Council Chambers have been reserved in case in-person meetings are required to resume. It is unclear if the Open Meeting Law will change in 2023, but everyone will need to be prepared to at least have hybrid meetings.

Should any Commission members be unable to attend meetings, there is an alternate member that can step in and vote. Co-Chair Lewis asked the Commission members to work with Staff if they need to miss a meeting, so that there are not any quorum issues.

PUBLIC MEETING: 32-44 White Street (P&Z 22-124)

The applicant team started by explaining that the Historic Preservation Commission has reviewed the current buildings on these sites and found them to not be historically significant nor did they impose a demolition delay on this project. The team then presented the project's urban context, existing conditions which are located right near the Somerville/Cambridge municipal boundary, and three façade options with façade 2 being the preferred scheme. The team presented the massing views from various points around the neighborhood and the landscape plan including public realm improvements, the buffer zones, and the green roof. The applicant team then reviewed the materiality of each of the three façade options.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the lack of programming of the ground floor, how they plan to activate the sidewalk, the materiality of façade option 2, the opportunity for a nod to the past in a mural at the base of the building, and they touched on the shadow studies. They discussed the vehicular access around the site including the location of the loading zone, the underground parking, the location of the entrances, how the tress on the abutting property could experience some strain due to this development which could be problematic, and how the scaling of the windows and building as a whole need additional exploration considering its location. They continued the discussion with the green roof, the challenge of the placement and sizing of the bioswales and its curbing, the plan for wider sidewalks, how the team should consult with the Public Space and Urban Forestry

Division (PSUF) on which tree species would be best for this site, the need for further development of the gravel path at the rear of the building, and the type and placement of the shrubs and planting areas.

Member Talun joined the meeting.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted (4-0-1), with Member Talun abstaining, to continue the design review to a future meeting,

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC MEETING: 8 Medford Street (P&Z 21-013)

The applicant team presented the urban context, existing conditions, landscaping plan, and façade options for a 4-story general building.

The Commission and applicant team discussed how the team should have a streetscape discussion with the relevant city departments so that this project coordinates with the recently approved development nearby, and how the landscape should also coordinate with the adjacent properties. They discussed the materiality and design elements of each façade option and massing and pointed out ways that the team could further develop the design. The Commission noted that in option 1 and 2 the corner is overhanging too much and generally feels too heavy due to the materiality choices, how the first floors could be recessed back more, the possibility of the line at the corner extending all the way down to the ground, and how they should look at finding a complimentary color to the brick used in the historic building across the street to help keep in line with the neighboring buildings.

The Commission agreed that they would like to see all three façade options again, with reduced materiality palates. The Commission requested that the applicant team present the building within the urban context to better understand the details and how it would fit within the neighborhood.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the design review to a future meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

Member Arbaugh recused himself.

PUBLIC MEETING: 12—132 Middlesex Ave (Building) (P&Z 22-087)

The applicant team gave a brief overview of the project, noted that they have signed a development covenant with the city, and reviewed the project's site plan. They presented three massing options and three façade options for a lab building in the urban context, as well as the ground floor plan, landscape plan, and proposed public realm improvements.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the landscaping specifics along Middlesex Ave, how the team should coordinate with relevant city departments on the streetscape design to achieve a level of consistency across all proposed projects in the area, how the loading area location has been changed from what was permitted in the Master Plan Special Permit, and how there was an overall public realm plan that was also approved as part of the Master Plan Special Permit. They also discussed the curb condition at the drop off area, how the building feels heavy on top of the active ground story along Middlesex Ave and how the proportion of that detailing should be explored further, the dynamic design of façade option 1 (preferred option), the need to set the penthouse back even further if possible, if a wind study has been conducted and how wind impacts will be mitigated, bike parking,

and the materiality and sustainability aspects of the penthouse. They briefly spoke about the dimensions of the curve of the building, how the materials will be handled to fit the curve, the proportions of the ground story, and the height of the penthouse and rooftop mechanicals screening.

Co-Chair Lewis stated that it appears that the changes presented this evening may constitute a new Master Plan. She recommended that the UDC pause on the design review so that Staff can internally review and discuss the correct next steps for the applicant team, as it looks like the Site Plan Approval process is not yet ready to proceed.

The Commission did not vote on a preferred façade and massing option but recommended that the applicant team proceed with massing option 1 and façade option 1. The vote is pending a thorough wind study on all massing options, ground floor configuration, and clarification on permitting direction by Staff.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Houde, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the design review to a future meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. A recording of these proceedings can be accessed at any time by using the registration link at the top of the meeting agenda.