



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

JANUARY 5, 2023 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: Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:34pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 200 McGrath Highway (P&Z 22-097)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the applicant's request to continue the case to 19 January 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: 299 Broadway (P&Z 22-093)

(continued from 15 December 2022)

Chair Capuano stated that the Board previously heard a presentation by the applicant team, heard from the Ward Councilor and Councilor-At-Large regarding this proposal, and had left written comment open until 30 December 2022. Following tonight's presentation, the Board will make a recommendation to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA), as they are the permit granting authority on this proposal.

The applicant team introduced the team members and explained that they do not have an additional presentation but are available for any questions the Board may have.

The Board reviewed questions regarding the waivers that were asked at the previous meeting related to stormwater runoff, loading, and parking.

The applicant team reviewed how storm water will be addressed, citing environmental concerns and the likelihood that infiltration will not be allowed on the site.

The applicant team reviewed the possible locations of the loading areas for move-ins/outs as well as retail loading zones, which are all on pedestrian streets. They noted the challenges with the site and the need to use existing curb cuts, which will be narrowed. The team reviewed the related waivers that were requested, including a waiver for curb cuts, as well as waivers for screening the loading facilities. The applicant team is also seeking a waiver to obtain approval of loading facilities from the Director of Mobility, and instead are requesting that the ZBA approve the loading facilities as shown on the proposed plans. The Board and applicant team discussed if the loading facilities are sufficient for the intended uses. The applicant team stated that they have had extensive conversations with the

Mobility Division regarding this matter and the waivers are for screening and process, rather than function; they are related to the architectural treatment requirements rather than substance. The team also noted that creating loading areas as required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) would have impacted Sewall Park.

The Board and Applicants began to review parking; Chair Capuano stated that the parking waivers appear to be the biggest concern of the neighborhood. Chair Capuano noted that most of the parking waivers the Planning Board sees are related to applicants who wish to not provide onsite parking, and how, in that case, the Planning Board usually limits the ability of new residents to apply for on-street parking permits. He stated his concerns and said that he is in favor of making a recommendation to the ZBA in support of the application, but also recommending that they make a condition similar to those projects that request waivers from onsite parking. The applicant team clarified that there is more than one parking waiver being requested, one to not provide parking onsite, and the other to allow 50% of the market rate units to be allowed to apply for on-street parking permits. They noted that they have been working with the Mobility Division on multiple mitigation measures to disincentivize parking and car ownership and incentivize alternative modes of transportation. Staff confirmed that the applicant team has been working diligently with the Mobility Division to find solutions to mitigate the parking concerns. Staff also noted that the applicant team is proposing a “phasing out” process over the next 15-20 years of the ability of the market rate units being able to obtain on-street parking permits, as another mitigation strategy. Staff strongly feels that with all of the mitigation measures in place, there will be a limited impact on the neighborhood. Staff stated that the city is in support of a recommendation, with conditions, of this project.

The applicant team shared how the project has progressed, their goal of making a positive impact and engaging the community, and other priorities. They reviewed how the transportation demand management plans have progressed and noted the increase in the affordable housing units, but also explained that the need for a waiver for on-street parking is linked to financing needs. They reviewed the broader benefits of the project, and how they hope it can be an example that others can follow in the future.

Chair Capuano noted that under these circumstances and after further explanation from the applicant team and Staff, he would like to propose a positive recommendation to the ZBA and strongly encourage the ZBA to review any proposed conditions from the Mobility Division and Staff, as well as engage with them to confirm transportation mitigation efforts.

The Board, applicant team, and Staff further discussed the phasing out of the on-street parking allowance for market rate units and how the language would relate to and include language describing the condition being data dependent, who would be collecting the data, and who would be following-up and taking responsibility for enforcement.

The Board and applicant team discussed how the project could be better aligned with SomerVision 2040, the possibility of additional transportation mitigation measures such as increasing the cost of parking passes, the Winter Hill Community Advisory Committee’s (CAC) letter of support and lack of endorsement in regards to parking, how the Mobility Division will be issuing their final approval of the Mobility Management Plan soon, and how the team has heard from many people in the neighborhood that the parking waiver is a compromise that they are willing to make to get the project built.

They also discussed how the ZBA could ask the team to go back to the CAC for an updated letter, the percentage of affordable units that will be accessible and whether there are any plans to go beyond the basic requirements, and the SomerVision 2040’s goals to support those with mobility challenges and seniors aging in place. The applicant team confirmed that all the units in the affordable building are type 1 or type 2 accessible, which go through a rigorous review process that the market rate units don’t go through. They also stated that the other units could be examined to determine whether they could be made into fully ADA accessible units, although there may be dimensional issues. The Board suggested that the team meet with the city’s ADA Coordinator to review the project; the team noted that the mix of units is being reviewed and assessed by the city’s Housing Division.

They continued the discussion by noting that residents of both buildings will have access to the amenities in each building and that the development will be considered a single community with two buildings; the separation of affordable units was dictated by financing needs, but their goal is to provide equal access to all the residents. They spoke about how a lack of community garden space has been noted in the city, especially ADA accessible garden space, and adding this type of space in Sewall Park could be a possibility. The team noted a list of comments they received from the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division (PSUF) and their recommendations prioritize play space and accessible activity space for families on the site.

Chair Capuano stated that the proposed open space runs through privately-owned buildings and is somewhat confined, albeit with multiple points of access. He noted regret about a past project where open space was designed in a manner that did not actually provide an engaging and public space for the community. He doesn't believe this will be the case with this project due to the accessibility, but wanted to flag in the recommendation to the ZBA that it should be clearly identified as publicly accessible open space to ensure that others in the neighborhood do not feel excluded. The applicant team stated that the connection through the site is already used by the community, so they are trying to keep that same connection, and make it fully accessible. They will also be using the city's signage plan, with a clear lighting strategy, as well as other landscaping strategies to reinforce the community connectivity.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) that the Planning Board recommend approval to the Zoning Board of Appeals, with the comments and recommendations made through the course of the meetings included.

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
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The Board asked about the updated Rules of Policy and Procedure. Staff noted that due to holiday schedules and Staff vacations, the discussion on the Rules of Policy and Procedure will be on the agenda for the next Planning Board meeting.

Staff encouraged the Board to email their comments on the draft to the Board liaison before the next meeting.

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.