



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

19 JANUARY 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>Absent</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), Charlotte Leis (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 7:44pm

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

(continued from 5 January 2023)

The Board requested that Staff introduce the project; Staff stated that the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) has determined that the proposed land plat is not compliant, and that the team was instructed to comply. ISD is working with the applicant team to figure out the best path forward. Therefore, the applicant team has requested a continuance.

The Board, applicant team, and Staff discussed whether the requested continuance to the following meeting would give the applicant team enough time to address ISD's compliance concerns or if the case should be continued to the following meeting. Staff confirmed that a continuance to the 16 February 2023 meeting would give the team more time to work with ISD.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the applicant's request to continue the case to 16 February 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 59 Bow Street (P&Z 21-017)

(continued from 15 December 2022)

The applicant team gave a brief overview of the project and noted that voluntary deed restrictions were placed on this project to prohibit any tenants or owners from parking on Bow Street Place, which was a solution to neighborhood concerns raised at the second neighborhood meeting; this deed restriction is now a condition of the Special Permit. The applicant team then presented the urban context, zoning information, the massing of the building, site plan, landscaping plan including the green roof plan, sustainability strategy, and the bike parking. They also presented the floor plans, elevations, proposed materiality, and façade designs.

Chair Capuano recognized City Councilor Jake Wilson; Councilor Wilson stated that he was in attendance to listen and take in the presentation.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Seth Hurwitz (12 Maple Ave) - voiced his full support of the project and expressed his desire to see more buildings with this type of design in the future. He highlighted his support of the commercial space for small businesses, the much-needed housing units, and attention to materials and design that is compatible with the neighborhood.

Aaron Weber (32 Summit Ave) - voiced his support of the project and described how the proposal supports the goals of SomerVision 2040, such as an increase in total number of housing units, a decrease in number of vehicle miles traveled per person, and a decrease in carbon emissions.

Kim Schmähmann (1 Fitchburg St) - stated that he initially attended the meeting because of the application for 200 McGrath, but he stayed on to listen to this proposal. He shared his support of the project, particularly its design, and agreed that the building meets the goals of SomerVision 2040.

Bill Cavellini (33 Oak St) – stated that he is a member of the Union Square Neighborhood Council, although he was not speaking for the Council this evening. He stated that he has been in neighborhood meetings with individuals who were not aware of this hearing and described neighborhood concerns voiced during meetings about 55 Oak Street, another property owned by the developer. He stated that a major concern is parking, and noted the proposed conditions related to parking, which he is in support of; also noting that he believed the Union Square Neighborhood Council would also likely be in support of those conditions. The second concern was snowplowing on Bow Street Place; they have not heard from the applicant team about that concern. He stated he isn't certain the project is consistent with SomerVision 2040, because only one unit in the building has more than one bedroom.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony but left written public comment open.

Chair Capuano spoke in support of the building design and overall application. However, he raised concerns with the proposed units; only one two (2) bedroom unit is being proposed while the remaining units are all one-bedrooms. Chair Capuano commented that there is an opportunity with this project to be addressed; he would like to see at least one three (3) bedroom unit. By allowing diversity within the housing types, it allows a mixed demographic to be able to utilize the project and meet the needs of the city.

Chair Capuano requested that Staff revise the Staff Memo conditions to reflect what the Board has done in the past related to parking and make sure the condition language and the body of the Staff Memo are consistent. Staff clarified that the information was provided to aid the Board, however it seems it created slight confusion. Staff confirmed that they will provide a Supplemental Staff Memo to the Board with updated language per the Chair's request.

The Board, applicant team, and Staff discussed the loading zone plan, the plan for the current ADA parking space in front of the building, how the applicant team should work with the Mobility Division to work out a plan for deliveries that does not interfere with the bike lane, how a deed restriction cannot be imposed on a project and must be volunteered which is what the applicant team has done in regards to parking and which has been reflected in the Staff Memo, and the rationale behind the proposed one-bedroom units as well as the approach to pricing the units. Chair Capuano noted that the unit pricing is not under the purview of the Planning Board, but they would ideally like to see changes made to the unit count at the next meeting. Upon further review of SomerVision 2040 and the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO), Vice Chair Aboff stated that she believed this applicant team has adhered to directives stated within those documents by proposing more units with smaller bedroom counts. While she would like to see larger units being built, she felt that the applicant team has met the intention of the building type (general building) and the zoning district (MR5). The Board also noted that the community would greatly appreciate anything the applicant team could do to keep the pricing of the units down.

The Board, applicant team, and Staff discussed the landscaping plan, legal notices for tonight's meeting, and how the Board would like to request that the team add at least one more multi-bedroom unit.

Chair Capuano stated that the written comment period will remain open until noon on 27 January 2023.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the case to 2 February 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

The Chair took the Board into a recess at 7:25pm and reconvened at 7:30pm.

OTHER BUSINESS: Rules of Policies and Procedures

The Board discussed making a revision to “no public hearing shall be opened after 10pm” language to “9pm” to allow for more reasonable meeting lengths where the Planning Board members and members of the public can remain more focused and alert. The Board agreed that changing the language would be acceptable considering the Board can take up additional items by majority vote.

The Board also discussed the “no more than six public hearings will be scheduled per meeting” language, stating that this should include each agenda item for public hearings, as well as each agenda item for a Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee. The Board would like this language clarified in the document.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to adopt the Rules of Policies and Procedure, with the edits discussed this evening.

RESULT:

ADOPTED

Vice Chair Aboff noted that SomerVision 2040 has a suggested task that states that design guidelines for family housing and zoning requirements for minimum percentages of family of 2- and 3-bedroom units in development should be established. The Board asked Staff if this is a current OSPCD initiative or if this is something the Planning Board could take on. Staff confirmed that they will look into this and will provide the Board with a response at 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.