



City of Somerville
URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

FEBRUARY 28, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Arrived late</i>	6:16pm
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Houde	Alternate	<i>Absent</i>	

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:11pm and adjourned at 7:23pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Ruane, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the 25 October 2022, 22 November 2022, and 13 December 2022 meeting minutes.

Member Arbaugh joined the meeting.

PUBLIC MEETING: 35 McGrath (P&Z 21-151)

The applicant team presented an overview of the site context, spoke about the community engagement process with the neighborhood and more specifically the Brickbottom Artist Building community, and shared the approved design of the neighboring 15 McGrath Highway project. They reviewed three massing options, three façade options, and the site plan. The team then reviewed the variances they previously received from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and the landscape plan.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the precedent images shown for landscaping versus the number of plantings shown in the site plan, the depth of soil for the landscaping at the back of the building, how the road in front of the property connects to the wider street network, changes to the street in front of the property required by MassDOT, and how the loading dock will be accessed.

The Commission and applicant team also discussed the size of the penthouse, how the massing and façade of the building was designed to relate but not duplicate the 15 McGrath building design, how due to the variances granted by the ZBA the massing of the building is generally set, how the Commission would have liked to see the shadow studies in the presentation, and how it feels like there's a missed opportunity to integrate the penthouse into the massing & materiality of the building considering that the penthouse feels like a large box sitting on top of the building.

The Commission agreed that massing concept C is the most successful compared to the others, as it starts to carve out a unique identity related to the neighboring building, and it keeps with the broader goals of creating variety. Although they felt that concept C still needs further development.

The Commission agreed to continue the discussion for another 20 minutes.

The Commission noted that discussing façade options was not exactly relevant since those presented only seem to address massing concept A.

The Commission and applicant team discussed next steps, such as abandoning massing concept B and further developing massing concepts A and C with façade options. The Commission would like to see views from a distance; from Brickbottom and the McGrath Highway overpass. The Commission also suggested including a planting list, using as many native plants as possible.

The Commission and applicant team discussed how one of the variances allows for the first story to have a greater setback, not the first and second story, which may make the base of massing concepts B and C not possible, how to approach integrating the penthouse, how the Commission would like to see more creativity in the landscaping, how the Commission would like more useful open space added to the plan with the possibility of roof terraces or balconies, and the plan for maintaining the pervious pavement and overall landscaping.

The Commission stated that the design intention for the front of the building is clearly intended for cars. There are small moves that can be made that can improve the public realm and make the space more welcoming and comfortable for pedestrians such as widening the sidewalks and enhancing the plantings. It is unfortunate that most of the landscaping will be at the back of the building, where it might not be seen by anyone. This project would benefit from more attention to the pedestrian experience. The applicant team noted that they are not allowed to have terraces on this type of building based on the zoning ordinance.

Acting Co-Chair Kirk confirmed that the Commission would like the applicant team to further develop massing and façade concepts A and C, as well as the landscape plan.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the design review to the next meeting.

RESULT:	CONTINUED
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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.