



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

JANUARY 24, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Luisa Oliveira	Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	Present	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	Present	
Cheri Ruane	Member	Present	
Tim Talun	Member	Present	6:04pm
Tim Houde	Alternate Member	Present	

City staff present: Daniel Bartman (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 7:14pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 27 September 2022 meeting minutes.

OTHER BUSINESS: Review of UDC's Draft Rules of Policy & Procedure

The Commission went through the draft document section by section.

Section 1:

No comments.

Section 2:

The Commission and Staff discussed the reappointment process with the Appointments Advisory Committee, what the intent was for Co-Chairs of the UDC to be City Staffers, how that can be changed in the future through City Council legislative amendments, and how the orientation process works for new UDC members.

Section 3:

The Commission and Staff discussed the possibility of in-person meetings, how that would work, and who makes that decision. The Commission would like to ensure that Staff follows up on this. They also suggested revising the language in bullet point 3 to read "The Commission may hold meetings in-person, in a hybrid format, or remotely in accordance with relevant state laws and city policy."

The Commission suggested an edit to the Standard of Conduct section to read "Notwithstanding emergency situations, any member unable to attend a meeting shall notify the Co-Chairs and Staff at least two (2) weeks prior to the meeting" rather than "at least three (3) weeks". Staff noted that the other Boards and Commissions adopted their Rules of Policy & Procedure (RPP) with this section written as "at least three (3) weeks"; the UDC confirmed that they will leave the language as is to keep consistent with the other Boards/Commissions.

Section 4:

The Commission requested that “UDC Recommendations” be added to the General Business section so that the UDC will have time carved out to review written recommendations during each meeting. Staff clarified the timeline that the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) lays out regarding UDC Recommendations.

The Commission requested minor grammatical edits to this section.

The Commission and Staff discussed the process of requesting “special meetings”.

The Commission requested that when they review thoroughfares, they reference the City of Somerville’s Complete Streets Ordinance, rather than NACTO’s design standards and guidelines. Staff stated that the SZO cites the NACTO standards and guidelines specifically. The Commission also noted that they are tasked with assisting the Mobility Division in achieving their goals, but they have no idea what those goals are. Staff noted that if there are Commission changes in the future, it is a possibility to engage the Mobility Division, as well as the Engineering Division in a more meaningful way by inviting members of those divisions to become members of the UDC, similar to how there has been a representative from the PSUF and Planning Division since the beginning. The Commission requested that the Complete Streets Ordinance be included in the section regarding the Mobility Division’s goals, since that is a city-wide policy that drives the Mobility Division’s work.

The Commission requested that they add another option in the “motions” section that allows the UDC to deem a submission incomplete. Staff clarified that they review applications to ensure completeness prior to applicants presenting to the Commission. The Commission stated that in the past there have been times when they feel they have not received all the information that they feel they need to review, as well as some information that has not been fully complete, which can create an argument during a meeting with the applicant. Acting Co-Chair Kirk reminded the Commission that they have the ability to vote “no” on any given application, if they feel that they have not been provided with enough or accurate information, rather than adding another motion option. The UDC also noted that they can be more proactive by continuing a case before having a discussion by stating how the applicant has not provided specific information that the UDC needs to review to be able to provide a positive recommendation. The UDC and Staff agreed that adding a motion that states “no recommendation can be provided due to a lack of necessary information” would be a good compromise due to many factors, including the applicant’s right to appear before the Commission in a timely manner.

Section 5:

The Commission and Staff discussed how sometimes there is a difference between what they are sent for review and what the applicant presents. The UDC stated that it would be beneficial if the applicant highlighted any new or different information in their presentation; Staff suggested that this request be included in the Submittal Requirements rather than the Commission’s Rules of Policy & Procedure.

Section 6:

No comments.

Acting Co-Chair Kirk noted that Member Ruane had left at some point during the meeting.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the Urban Design Commission’s amended Rules of Policy & Procedure, with edits discussed this evening.

RESULT:	ADOPTED
----------------	----------------

The Commission raised concerns about how it has been 14 months since they requested a meeting with the Planning Board, to no avail. Staff confirmed that they will look into facilitating this meeting through the Mayor’s

office and will follow up; they noted that there is some nuance and coordination considering that the Planning Board is charged with setting their own meetings and agendas.

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.