



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 16 and 20 Medford Street, P&Z 23-011
POSTED: May 25, 2023

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (Major Amendment to Site Plan Approval and Special Permit for Household Living)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the Major Amendment application submitted for 16 and 20 Medford Street, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on March 29, 2023, and is scheduled for a public hearing on June 1, 2023. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICE

Somerville Living, LLC seeks approval of a Major Amendment to a previously approved general building in the MR4 zoning district (P&Z 21-057), which required Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit for Household Living.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Somerville Living, LLC is proposing to increase the total dwelling unit count from forty-one (41) to fifty-one (51), remove the subsurface garage and reduce parking spaces from forty-three (43) to twelve (12), change building energy goals to LEED Platinum Certifiable and Net-Zero Ready construction, relocate bike room to ground floor and increase long-term bike spaces from forty-two (42) to fifty-two (52), and revise the exterior cladding material on the façade bays facing South and Bedford Streets.

BACKGROUND

16 and 20 Medford Street is partially located on a Pedestrian Street in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in Somerville represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott. Establishing a building type in the MR4 district requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to

address any potential impacts as necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all non-variance discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR4 zoning district.

The Applicant previously received Site Plan Approval for a four (4)-story general building on August 18, 2022 (P&Z 21-057). The Applicant received a Special Permit for Household Living Use on September 8, 2022. Following the approval of those two permits, the Applicant applied for a Plan Revision in January of 2023, which the Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning deemed the revision a Major Amendment, requiring board review.

Due to the reduction in parking spaces and the property being outside a transit area, the Applicant needs to receive a Special Permit for Parking Relief from the minimum parking requirements in the MR4 district. The Applicant has applied for a Special Permit, which is being processed as a separate application (P&Z 23-012), simultaneously with this application. For Staff feedback and analysis regarding the Special Permit for Parking Relief, please see the Staff Memo for P&Z 23-012 dated May 25, 2023.

ANALYSIS

The Applicant is proposing several revisions to their previously approved Site Plan Approval for a general building and Special Permit for Household Living. The proposed revisions were significant enough to trigger the need for a Major Amendment. Zoning does not require a neighborhood meeting to be held for a Major Amendment application; however, as the Applicant is requesting a Special Permit for Parking Relief, a neighborhood meeting was held for that application, where the content of this case was discussed. Staff has determined that the feedback received at that neighborhood meeting is applicable to this case, as the content was not limited to just the Special Permit request. At the neighborhood meeting held on February 27, 2023, the following comments and concerns raised by members of the community include, but limited to:

- Removal of the underground parking garage
- Reduction in “family” sized dwelling units
- Parking impacts
- Trash collection and logistics
- Construction concerns

The Applicant has provided responses to the concerns raised in the neighborhood meeting report for the Special Permit application (P&Z 23-012). Please see the Staff Memo for the Special Permit for Parking Relief request (P&Z 23-012) for greater details on public comments raised regarding the removal of the underground parking garage and parking impacts.

Overall, Staff support the proposed revisions. The removal of the subsurface parking garage and reduction in motor vehicle parking spaces aligns with the City’s mobility and

sustainability goals including reducing the number of motor vehicle trips made, encouraging the use of alternative modes of transportation, and carbon emission reductions. The relocation of the bike room to the ground floor is a significant improvement as it will help encourage more people to bike to the site. The bike room will be accessed from three locations including the residential lobby, a rear building entrance and through the covered parking area, which is accessed off Bedford Street.

The Applicant has proposed a new energy and sustainability envelope for the building's energy profile to be LEED Platinum Certifiable and Net-Zero Ready Passive House (PHIUS+ 2021). The project previously proposed just a LEED Platinum Certifiable building. It is estimated that the project will receive 82.5 credits to achieve the LEED Platinum rating. Though it is not required, Staff recommend targeting a higher LEED score in order to create a larger buffer between LEED Platinum and LEED Gold ratings. Staff expect the Applicant to provide more detailed responses in full sentences that reflect changes as the project advances during stage 2 and 3 documentation process for all applicable sustainability documents. This will occur during the Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy phases of the development review process.

The Applicant is proposing a revision to their unit mix due to the increase in the number of dwelling units. The revision does include a decrease in the number of "family" sized dwelling units, which includes units with two (2)+ bedrooms. The unit count is as follows:

	Original Project	Proposed Project
Bedrooms	Units	Units
Studio	0	11
One	22	30
Two	17	8
Three	2	2
Total	41	51

The Applicant is proposing no new revisions to the proposed landscaping, open space, or streetscape design. The proposed commercial space on the ground floor will remain as proposed with the previous approvals. Staff recommend that the Applicant work with the Economic Development Division during the next steps of development in regard to commercial tenancy and outdoor seating possibilities.

Due to some of the proposed project revisions, several conditions included in the decision for both the previously approved SPA and SP need to be amended to reflect the proposed plan revisions.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw

conclusions for each consideration, but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

When considering a revision to a previously approved development review application that required either Site Plan Approval or a Special Permit, the Planning Board shall limit their review to the proposed changes to the previously approved application. The considerations before the Board remain the same as the previously approved application for Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit for Household Living.

Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Household Living Special Permit Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.
4. The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.
5. The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.
6. The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval + Special Permit:

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Significantly increase housing stock to keep up with demand while pursuing the goals of increasing the proportion of affordable housing and housing stock diversity.
- Minimize the overall land use in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles while encouraging alternative modes.
- Build a sustainable future through climate leadership, balanced transportation, engaging civic spaces, exceptional educational opportunities, improved health,

varied and affordable housing options, and the responsible use of our natural resources.

2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

Staff believes the proposal is consistent with the intent of the MR4 zoning district which is, in part, “[t]o create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving uses.”

Site Plan Approval:

3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Staff believe, as conditioned, the proposal does not produce any impacts that require additional mitigation.

Household Living Special Permit:

4. The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.

Staff believes the development site is highly suitable for a residential use above a ground floor commercial space due to the project’s location to the Boynton Yards neighborhood, one of the City’s transform areas. The site’s presence along a Pedestrian Street, and with the affiliated requirement to provide for an active use at the ground floor, makes it a good location for a general building, while the existing characteristics of the neighborhood make this location a less desirable to be strictly either a commercial or apartment building type.

5. The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.

The proposal includes eleven (11) studios, thirty (30) 1-bedroom units, eight (8) 2-bedroom units, and two (2) 3-bedroom units. Both of the 3-bedroom units will be ADUs, as required by the SZO, and the remaining eight (8) required ADUs will be distributed among the other unit sizes.

6. The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing AUDs.

There are no previously existing ADUs on the site.

7. The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.

The property is not located within a Transit Area; therefore, Staff find that this consideration is not applicable.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Major Amendment to a previously approved Site Plan Approval for a general building and a Special Permit for Household Living, PPZ Staff recommend most of the conditions attached to P&Z 21-057 for both the Site Plan Approval and Special Permit remain. Staff note that the plan revisions trigger the removal of some previously applied conditions, modifications to some previously applied conditions, and the addition of new conditions for the Major Amendment as follows:

New standard Conditions for Major Amendment Approval:

Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be provided to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

- One (1) digital copy of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
- A copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

Special Permit for Household Living:

Staff recommend that the following condition from the previous issued decision for a Special Permit (P&Z 21-057) dated September 8, 2022, be removed and applied to the Special Permit request for Parking Relief from the minimum parking requirements (P&Z 23-012):

- At least two (2) parking spaces must be reserved for loading and drop-off uses on the surface level parking area. The spaces should be regulated with signage with the following language:
 - Loading Zone
Monday – Saturday
8am-10pm
Commercial Plate 20 Min.
Passenger Plate 5 Min.

Staff recommend that the following conditions from the previous issued decision for a Special Permit (P&Z 21-057) dated August 18, 2022, be amended:

- At least ~~four (4)~~ **one (1)** accessory vehicular parking space must be offered annually to all ADU households as a right of first refusal until each parking space is either rented or refused.

Site Plan Approval:

Staff recommend that the following conditions from the previous issued decision for Site Plan Approval (P&Z 21-057) dated August 18, 2022, be amended:

- Traffic count data must be taken for one of the following months: September ~~2022~~ **(2023)**, or October ~~2022~~ **(2023)**. Counts must be taken at the same location as previous traffic counts and the Mobility Division must be informed when the traffic counts occur prior to data collection.
- Product details and design specifications for the ~~forty-two (42)~~ **fifty-two (52)** long-term bicycle parking spaces must be submitted to the Mobility Division to confirm compliance with Section 11.1 Bicycle Parking of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

Staff recommend the following new conditions:

Building & Site Design

- All materials specifications must be reviewed and approved by the Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning prior to applying for a Building Permit.

Sustainability

- All Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements for the subject certification program must be provided prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- All Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements for the subject certification program must be provided prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.