



City of Somerville

# PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**TO:** Planning Board  
**FROM:** OSPCD Staff  
**SUBJECT:** 51 Prospect Street, P&Z 21-181  
**POSTED:** May 11, 2023

**RECOMMENDATION:** No change

This memo is supplemental to the PPZ Staff Memo dated April 26, 2023.

This memo is meant to provide additional information to the Board regarding the Application for a Special Permit for a Minor Utility Facilities use at 51 Prospect Street. The memo will discuss recommended objectives of the Union Square Neighborhood Plan (USNP) and text revisions to several Staff recommended conditions to be consistent with appropriate development procedures following the decision for a Special Permit.

## ANALYSIS

The USNP, adopted in 2016 by the Planning Board, is the official policy document for the physical development of Union Square. The plan recommends an array of implementation objectives for the broader neighborhood including the Eversource Substation. The plan recommends that the substation be screened with public art to act as a “showpiece” to welcome riders from the Union Square T Station to Union Square. Specifically, the timeline for development matrix (pg. 288) within the USNP recommends the specific objective:

“[C]ollaborate with Eversource to screen the electric distribution substation on Prospect Street with public art.”

OSPCD Staff is aware of the longer-term concerns associated with the existing substation at 51 Prospect Street. Many members of the community at previous neighborhood meetings discussed their desires for this substation to be either undergrounded or moved to a different location. Staff will note that neither the USNP nor any other policy document currently envisions this utility use to be undergrounded or moved, nor do they propose having the site developed to another use. The site is currently envisioned to have an art installed to help screen the substation. City Staff continue to have regular meetings with Eversource on the City’s broader energy needs, and understand future planning process may bring new opportunities and policy directions.

PPZ Staff have confirmed with Inspectional Services that, following a decision for the Special Permit for a Minor Utility Facilities use, the Applicant will need to apply for a Building Permit and then a final inspection, rather than a Certificate of Occupancy. In the Staff Memo dated April 26, 2023, Staff recommend two (2) conditions that include

their completion prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy. As that process is not applicable for this development proposal, Staff have revised proposed conditions to reflect the appropriate permitting process.

## PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Minor Utility Facility use, PPZ Staff recommends the revised following conditions to address the appropriate permitting steps and desired mitigation:

### Site Design

- An art installation must be incorporated onto the screening of the new transformer.
- The Applicants must work with the Somerville Arts Council on a process to solicit a local artist(s) prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- The art installation must be installed in advance of a request for a final inspection.

### Landscaping

- All newly planted species must be native species in conformance with the City's Native Species Ordinance. Final species selection must be reviewed by Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) Staff, to confirm an appropriate range of species prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- All newly planted species must be inspected by PSUF at final inspection.

Staff have recommended these conditions to replace the following previously proposed conditions:

### Site Design

- An art installation must be incorporated onto the screening of the new transformer. Applicant must work with the Somerville Arts Council on a process to solicit a local artist(s) prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.

### Landscaping

- All newly planted species must be native species in conformance with the City's Native Species Ordinance. Final species selection must be reviewed by Public Space and Urban Forestry Staff, to confirm an appropriate range of species prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy