



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 51 Prospect Street, P&Z 21-181
POSTED: May 25, 2023

RECOMMENDATION: No change

This memo is supplemental to the PPZ Staff Memo dated April 26, 2023 and Staff Memo dated May 10, 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.

BACKGROUND

51 Prospect Street was first heard at the May 4, 2023 Planning Board meeting and subsequently continued to the May 18, 2023 Planning Board meeting. Between those two meetings, the Applicant was able to provide Staff with a revised landscape plan that reflected all native species and a memo to the Board with responses to several Board inquiries. Those documents were submitted to Staff after the deadline to get documents to the Board and a supplemental Staff Memo was published online. Due to that timing, Staff were unable to provide staff feedback and analysis to the Board regarding those documents prior to the May 18 meeting. The case was not discussed at the May 18, 2023 meeting and continued to the June 1, 2023 meeting.

The April 26, 2023 Staff Memo addressed the need for the expansion of Substation #402. However, it should also be noted that this facility is part of a much larger connected regional network. A major transmission line (referred to as S-15) will run through Boynton Yards and under the Union Square Station Plaza to connect the new equipment into the larger supply network. The Applicant has been coordinating intensively with City Staff (Engineering, OSPCD, and the Office of Sustainability and Environment primarily) on the considerable power demands needed by forecasted growth across the city.

ANALYSIS

The Applicant revised their proposed landscape plan to include all native tree species in response to the Board's request that all species proposed be in conformance with the City's Native Species Ordinance. Staff can confirm that the list of species proposed in the revised landscape plan are all native species. In addition to those changes, Staff recommended in the Staff Memo dated April 26, 2023 that the landscape plan be revised to incorporate a tree in the proposed planting bed that abuts Prospect Street. The Applicant was also able to incorporate that recommendation into the revised landscape plan. As the Applicant has been able to show compliance with recommended and suggested revisions to the proposed landscaping, Staff recommend that the

conditions relating to landscaping as identified below not be applied to the Special Permit request.

At the May 4, 2023, Planning Board meeting, the Board suggested the use of dimensional brick for the entirety of the enclosure around the new proposed transformer. In their memo, dated May 17, 2023, the Applicant discusses the difficulties of providing dimensional brick on the Prospect Street side of the enclosure due to the required accessibility standards to provide for operations and maintenance of the transformer (i.e., the walls need to be removable). The Applicant suggests using precast concrete and applying a brick paneling system to both the wall sections and pilasters on the Prospect side of the enclosure. The remaining two sides of the enclosure would incorporate the use of real brick. The Applicant also suggests that if it's the preference of the Board for consistency reasons, the brick paneling system can be used on all three sides of the walled enclosure.

Staff recommend the Applicant's approach with using brick paneling on the Prospect Street side of the enclosure, with the remaining walls incorporating full brick. Due to the feasibility issues of incorporating full brick around the entire walled structure, Staff recommend a condition from the April 26, 2023 Staff Memo not be incorporated to the Special Permit request as it references the use of full brick.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Minor Utility Facility use, PPZ Staff recommends the following Staff recommended conditions be voided:

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.

Site Design

- Screening of the new transformer must use full dimension architectural brick on the projecting pilasters.