



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

MARCH 28, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	6:08pm
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Houde	<i>Alternate</i>	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm and adjourned at 6:39pm.

Emily Hutchings started the meeting as Co-Chair in place of Sarah Lewis.

OTHER BUSINESS: Code of Conduct for Boards and Commissions

The Commission asked if a digital signature is acceptable for the new Rules of Conduct for Board and Commission Members submitted by the Mayor's Office. Staff stated that they believe so but will communicate with the Mayor's Office to confirm. Staff encouraged the UDC members to attend one of the scheduled webinars to review the Code of Conduct and have an opportunity to ask questions.

Following a motion by Member Houde, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to take a brief recess at 6:11pm.

Staff called the meeting back to order at 6:15pm and returned responsibilities to Co-Chair Lewis and Acting-Co-Chair Kirk.

GENERAL BUSINESS: 35 McGrath Highway (P&Z 21-151) Written Recommendation

Chair Lewis provided a reminder of how Staff draft written UDC recommendations to the Planning Board and noted that she was unsure if additional items could be added to the recommendation, noting that if the Commission did not clearly discuss specific items during the meeting(s), then they most likely would not be able to be added to the recommendation.

The Commission provided comments; Chair Lewis restated that she would need to check with the Legal Department on whether anything could be added.

1. Item 1 currently reads “the penthouse should be designed to blend with the overall architectural scheme of the building”, suggested additional language of “and avoid appearing heavier than the materials below it” to address Guideline Q.; was discussed at the meeting.
2. All louvers should be shown on elevations and be integrated into the overall architecture of the building; may not have been discussed at the meeting but may be a design guideline.
3. Provide enough of a change in plane between facets so that they are legible, and facade does not appear flat, and explore using the unique orientation of front property line to generate the geometry of facets; was discussed at the meeting, particularly referencing the North side of the building.
4. Modify the geometry of the facets on the North side of building to better relate to orientation and overall form of building; was discussed at the meeting and the applicant team stated that this item wasn’t fully worked out yet.
5. Ensure adequate access is provided in and around the planting area along the North side of the site for maintenance; was discussed at the meeting and the addition of maintenance paths or access might lower the green score below the requirement.

Chair Lewis reiterated that she would need to check on the legal nature of adding items that may not have been included in the recommendation but was part of the discussion. She stated that she is uncertain about the time constraints of this particular item and suggested discussing a process if Commissioners would like to add to or edit recommendations prior to issuance. Chair Lewis also stated that following a process decision, the Rules of Policy and Procedure would need to be updated. She cautioned that edits considered after the fact, that were not discussed at the public meeting, cannot be added. Chair Lewis then reviewed the importance and process of Open Meeting Law and stated that Staff could receive comments separately, rather than in a meeting amongst the Commission.

The Commission discussed if Item 2 was discussed at the meeting or if it should be removed from the list; Staff confirmed that they will review whether the item was discussed. Chair Lewis went through options regarding the review and writing of recommendations. She suggested tabling the discussion if the Commission would like to review the process. The Commission noted that typically there is a summary of comments provided by one of the Co-Chairs after the discussion, and perhaps when reviewing, the Commission could confirm the summary. Chair Lewis noted that technical difficulties and technical terminology sometimes impact the motion. The Commission asked if it would be feasible to approach UDC recommendations like meeting minutes, typically with simple approval with occasional edits when necessary. Chair Lewis confirmed that she would review with the Legal Department and follow-up with the Commission at the next meeting regarding that process.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the recommendation for 35 McGrath Highway, with the modifications and edits discussed this evening, contingent upon review of the recording to ensure that the items were discussed at the public meeting.

RESULT:	RECOMMENDATION APPROVED
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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.