



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

15 JUNE 2023 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Erin Geno	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Michael McNeley	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Debbie Howitt Easton	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Tom Galligani (Executive Director of OSPCD), William Blackmer (Economic Development), Morena Zelaya (Housing), Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Dan Bartman (Deputy Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning), and Wendy Szechowicz (Planning, Preservation & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:37pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the minutes from 6 April 2023.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the minutes from 20 April 2023.

PUBLIC HEARING: 620 Broadway (P&Z 21-145)

The applicant requested a continuance to 20 July 2023.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the proposal to the next Planning Board meeting on 20 July 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 16-20 Medford Street (P&Z 23-011)

The applicant requested a continuance to 20 July 2023.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the proposal to the next Planning Board meeting on 20 July 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 16-20 Medford Street (P&Z 23-012)

The applicant requested a continuance to 20 July 2023.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the proposal to the next Planning Board meeting on 20 July 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Zoning Recommendations to the City Council

Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 8.1, Affordable Housing, of the Zoning Ordinances to remove errant text and amend the dimensional standards

The Board discussed the number of parcels impacted by this item, many of which are along main corridors. There was discussion regarding if there is a high overlap between affected parcels and the Enhanced District. Deputy Director Bartman confirmed this.

The Board asked if there are any significant urban environment repercussions from this change. Deputy Director Bartman stated that this version of upper story setbacks was favored, and that these changes favor a better urban design.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to recommend adoption of this item, specific to Section 8.1, Affordable Housing, by the Land Use Committee and the City Council.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 12.2 of the Zoning Ordinances to reflect the recommendations in the 2022 Somerville Linkage Nexus Study

The Board discussed that this item was previously studied and recommended under different economic circumstances. There has been a decline in the stability of the economy since that time. Some Board members were not in support of recommending this item for adoption at this time but proposed that the Planning Board may be inclined to revisit this item in a different economic landscape. Other members noted that the higher linkage fee proposal had enough of a buffer to accommodate for changing economic conditions. Staff explained that the study consultant found there was a legal justification to raise the fee as high as \$58.28 to address the Affordable Housing funding cap. However, raising the fee by \$10-\$20, as per this proposal, would not have a significant impact on the attractiveness of development opportunities. Executive Director Galligani discussed which projects may be impacted by this change.

Certain Board member voiced support for this proposal, as it allows for support for affordable housing, potentially with a phased approach. There was discussion regarding there being merit to the increased linkage fees proposed. Executive Director Galligani stated that Boston recently passed a change to its linkage ordinance with a two-year phased approach. A phased approach was not considered for Somerville at this time, as it does not seem to change the rules for any existing projects within the pipeline. Phasing upon adoption could be considered.

There was discussion that the author of the study conceded that the economic conditions since the study may merit reconsideration of the proposal.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (4-0-1), with Vice Chair Aboff abstaining, as to a no recommendation on this item to the Land Use Committee, including the narrative from this evening.

RESULT:

NO RECOMMENDATION WITH NARRATIVE

Union Square One Development, LLC requesting the adoption of a Zoning Text Amendment to Section 8.17. g. iii to permit variations to build out regulations by special permit in the CC5 District, USQ sub-area

The Board discussed that approving this text amendment could create a compliance issue, preventing something that the Board may actually want to promote. Certain Board members expressed concern regarding changing zoning for a specific project and that this change may be misaligned with planning documents that the Board uses to assure projects adhere to.

There was Board discussion regarding being responsive to changes in the environment and additional public engagement on topics. It is worth considering examining new ways of permitting parcels, though not necessarily by changing the ordinance, as proposed.

There was discussion that the stakeholder group for this neighborhood seems to like the new direction.

There was discussion that the narrative should be worded strongly enough to allow there to be due consideration that the mechanism being proposed is not favored by the Board, even if the proposed project may be of interest.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) as to a no recommendation on this item to the Land Use Committee, including the narrative from this evening.

RESULT:

NO RECOMMENDATION WITH NARRATIVE

The Board discussed the rules for public testimony submitted to the Planning Board. The Planning Board has its own rules and regulations, including that written public comment and testimony is accepted by noon to the Planning Department email prior to the next meeting. This allows staff time to accumulate this information and send it to the Planning Board in a timely fashion. The Planning Board agreed to implement this as a body. The Planning Board does not consider testimony received after this time, as it would be against the rules and unfair to others.

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.