



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:** 394 McGrath Hwy, ZP23-000036  
**POSTED:** August 31, 2023

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve with Conditions (Major Amendment to a Site Plan Approval)

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 development review application submitted for 394 McGrath Hwy, 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 August 21, 2023, and is scheduled for a public hearing on September 7, 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

Sugarloaf Development seeks a Major Amendment to a previously granted Site Plan Approval (P&Z 21-122) for an Apartment Building in the MR4 zoning district.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Sugarloaf Development is proposing to amend their previously approved proposal, a four (4)-story, Net-Zero Ready Apartment Building with 15 dwelling units, by revising their site plan and the ground floor of the proposed building to remove the vehicular entryway and all parking, expanding amenity space on the site and ground floor, and providing subsequent (minor) changes to the eastern and northern façades and one unit on the second floor.

## BACKGROUND

394 McGrath Hwy is located in the ¼-mile Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Prospect Hill neighborhood represented by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen. Establishing an Apartment Building 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 proposed development previously received Site Plan Approval for a four (4)-story Apartment Building and a Special Permit for Household Living (both under permit # P&Z 21-122) on October 22, 2022. Following this approval, the Applicant applied for a Plan Revision in July 2023. The Director of Planning, Preservation, & Zoning determined that the Plan Revision was a Major Amendment which required board review and approval.

This application is for a Major Amendment to the previously granted Site Plan Approval. No amendment or board review is required for the previously granted Special Permit for Household Living.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Building and Site Design**

The Applicant is proposing minimal changes to the exterior design of the building, including updated fenestration, as well as a landing and stairs on the rear elevation. The Applicant is proposing to keep the building footprint the same and to replace the parking spaces at the rear of the property with amenity space. The interior of the building on the first floor will see the most changes: the Applicant is proposing to reorganize the bicycle parking and trash room and add amenity space for resident use. Due to these changes, the Gross Floor Area has increased. The site remains zoning compliant.

### **Mobility**

The Applicant is proposing to remove all vehicular parking, and to relocate and update the bicycle parking area. The Mobility Division has reviewed the application and provided comments. Mobility has noted they are supportive of the removal of parking and the implementation of a larger bike room with closer access to the street, particularly due to the site's location in a ¼-mile transit area.

the Mobility Division has requested an updated Transportation Access Plan (TAP) that reflects the updated site plan and that demonstrate how loading, delivery, pick-up, and drop-off activities will be safely conducted on the site. Vehicles are not permitted to back out of a loading or parking area onto the McGrath Highway ramp that fronts the property. Given existing vehicle volumes and speeds on the ramp, the Mobility Division considers any vehicle movements backing up onto or from the McGrath Highway ramp to be unsafe and; they have stated they would not be supportive of a loading plan that requires either of these movements. Staff have recommended conditions of approval to mitigate potential impacts, including conditions that prevent vehicular ingress and egress to the site. As Staff do not perceive any solutions for vehicular loading/delivery/pick-up/drop-off to occur safely on site, and as multiple conditions have been proposed to prohibit such activities, Staff have recommended an additional condition to require an updated TAP to be submitted following board approval.

## 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.

### 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.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

### Site Plan Approval

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

Staff believes that the proposal continues to support the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Facilitate transit-oriented, neighborhood infill development when it enhances the lively, human-scaled and walkable character of Somerville blocks and neighborhoods.

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

Staff believes the proposal continues to be 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 commercial uses."

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

As conditioned, Staff believes the proposal does not produce any impacts that require mitigation.

## PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Major Amendment to a previously granted Site Plan Approval for the 4-story Apartment Building, PPZ Staff recommends the following conditions:

#### Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. 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

3. If the Board requires any changes to the submitted plans, digital copies of all applicable application materials reflecting those changes 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.
4. A digital 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.

#### Construction Documents

5. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.

#### Mobility

6. The Applicant must submit an updated Transportation Access Plan (TAP) to the Mobility Division prior to the issuance of a Building Permit. The TAP must reflect the updated Site Plan and provide a detailed loading and delivery plan.
7. Vehicular loading, delivery, pick-up, and drop-off activities are not permitted within the frontage of the property.
8. Permanent signage that establishes the prohibition of vehicular loading, delivery, pick-up, and drop-off activities must be installed prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy. The design and location of such signage must be submitted to the Mobility Division for review and comment prior to installation.
9. Permanent barriers must be installed in the driveway area of the site to prevent vehicular entry and exit. This condition shall be considered moot if the curb cut is closed at the time of application for a Certificate of Occupancy.

Additionally, PPZ Staff recommend that the following condition of approval be removed from the previously granted Site Plan Approval (P&Z 21-122), due to the fact that it is no longer relevant:

- At least [20% rounded up] accessory vehicular parking spaces must be offered annually to all ADU households as a right of first refusal until each parking space is either rented or leased.