



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:** 7 Washington Street, P&Z 21-147  
**POSTED:** August 8, 2023

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve with Conditions (SP)  
Approve with Conditions (SPA)

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 Site Plan Approval and Special Permit application submitted for 7 Washington Street, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO), and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on June 8, 2023 and is scheduled for a public hearing on August 17, 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

Wash Dev2, LLC proposes to develop a four (4)-story Net-Zero Ready apartment building and establish a Household Living principle use in the Mid-Rise 4 zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval and one (1) Special Permit for the Household Living use.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Wash Dev2, LLC is proposing to construct a four (4)-story Net-Zero Ready apartment building. The proposed development will produce ten (10) dwelling units, of which two (2) will be affordable dwelling units, zero (0) motor vehicle parking spaces, ten (10) long-term bicycle parking spaces, six (6) short-term bicycle parking spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.327, exceeding the minimum required score of 0.25.

## BACKGROUND

7 Washington Street is located in the 0.5mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the East Somerville neighborhood represented by Ward 1 Councilor Matthew McLaughlin. Establishing an apartment building type 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. Establishing a Household Living Principal Use in the MR4 zoning district requires a Special Permit. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR4 zoning district.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS**

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 1 Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and the Applicant on December 8, 2021, via the Zoom meeting platform. At the meeting, there were questions from the community regarding the adjacent parking lot and setbacks.

The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by the Applicant on April 13, 2022, via the Zoom meeting platform. The Applicant team provided updates on the proposal's schematic design after design review with the Urban Design Commission (UDC).

## **DESIGN REVIEW**

The proposal was reviewed by the UDC via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on February 1, 2022 and March 1, 2022. The Commission provided its official recommendation on March 22, 2022. During design review, the UDC guided the Applicant through various design schemes and provided design recommendations including but not limited to:

- Bicycle storage should be located on the ground floor to ensure accessibility
- Materiality needs to be further explored and refined
- Requested that a mock-up should be provided to the commission
- A gate should be added at the top of the stairs, making the exterior stairs a private space

The Applicant has noted in their design review report that those recommendations were incorporated into the final building design. Staff have recommended a condition that a material board should be submitted to the UDC for review and comment prior to applying for a Building Permit.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Sustainability

As mentioned above the project will be incorporating sustainability elements into the building's energy profile with Net Zero Ready designation through the Passive House Institute US, Inc. (PHIUS) certification process. The following elements are some of what will be pursued during the design and construction processes:

- A continuous airtight layer will wrap the building to ensure airtightness on the exterior of the building

- The building will be oriented to maximize the use of shading & daylighting. High performance windows are planned to be installed to ensure maximum solar gain
- Fully electric heating & cooling systems
- On-site renewable generation & energy storage

Outside of the building's energy profile, the project will also incorporate a vegetated roof deck. The PHIUS certification process will be further studied during subsequent permitting processes.

### Parking and Mobility

The Applicant is not providing any motor vehicle parking on site as this project is within a Transit Area. Ten (10) long-term bicycle parking spaces will be located in the interior of the building close to the main entrance. There are two existing bicycle racks in the frontage area of the site that contains space for four (4) short-term bicycle parking spots. In addition to the two (2) short-term bicycle racks in the front, the Applicant has proposed one short-term rack for two (2) bicycles at the rear of the site. Zoning dictates this project must provide 0.1 short-term bicycle parking spots per dwelling unit, which equates to one (1) for this proposal.

### Site Design and Landscaping

The site is occupied almost entirely by the proposed apartment building, with a 12' paved public sidewalk along Washington Street. The rear of the property will consist of a small patio area, planted area, and a staircase. There is a retaining wall on the northwest side of the property abutting 3-5 Washington Street that could potentially be impacted during construction, as noted by PSUF Staff. Construction-related impacts will be addressed as part of the building permit stage of the development process, where the Applicant must submit a Construction Management Plan to the Engineering Department. This plan must address the standards and requirements for construction of a project, and must be reviewed and approved by Engineering

The landscape plans before the Board have been revised in response to multiple notes from the Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) Staff on compliance with the Green Score and landscape requirements, established in the SZO. Revisions include but are not limited to utility details, planting beds, paver locations, tree caliper sizes, tree well sizes, tree planting details, and species selection. The final proposed compliant green score of 0.327 is well above the minimum required score for the MR4 district.

PSUF Staff have noted for the record that they have reminded the Applicant that the removal of any existing trees on private property is subject to the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance. To ensure compliance, Staff have recommended a standard condition to address this item. PSUF Staff have also reminded the Applicant that per section 10.5.1.a.ii of the SZO, fencing along the rear property line requires consent from the abutting property owner. PSUF Staff have also noted that any lighting must be specified on plans; Staff have proposed a standard condition related to this lighting

requirement. Further, PSUF Staff have reminded the Applicant of construction and tree protection requirements following zoning approvals. Staff have recommended a condition that a street tree protection plan is submitted to PSUF Staff for their review and approval prior to the Applicant applying for a Building Permit.

PSUF Staff have provided the following final comments that have not been resolved regarding the Applicant's proposed landscaping:

- Tree Planting Detail: Maintaining the original grade of root flare after transplanting as existed at the nursey is not acceptable, as the root flare is often buried at the nursey. The soil should be carefully removed from the top of the root ball to expose root flare, and the tree should be set so that the root flare is at finishing grade.
- The planting bed for the proposed southwestern Beacon Oak may not be large enough to fit a 3.5"-4" caliper tree. PSUF Staff recommend that the Applicant further consult with their division to resolve any potential issue at the planting stage.
- The proposed Liriope spicata has shown invasive tendencies in other states. PSUF Staff recommend that the Applicant considers using an alternative native species in its place.

Staff have recommended a condition that a revised landscape, incorporating points above, must be submitted to PSUF Staff for their review and approval prior to the Applicant applying for a Building Permit.

### Housing

The proposal includes a mix of dwelling unit types ranging from studios to one (1) 3-bedroom unit. The proposal is about evenly balanced between individual units to family sized units (2+ bedrooms). The proposed 3-bedroom unit will connect to the basement via an interior staircase. This unit will also be able to accommodate an elevator, if necessary.

## **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.

**Special Permit 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. The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.
4. The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.
5. The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.
6. The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

**Site Plan Approval + Special Permit:**

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

Staff believe the proposal will help to achieve the following goals from SomerVision, the comprehensive Master Plan of the City of Somerville:

- Significantly increase housing stock to keep up with demand while pursuing the goals of increasing the proportion of affordable housing and housing stock diversity.
- Minimize the overall land use in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles while encouraging alternative modes.

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

Staff believe the proposal is 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 uses.”

**Site Plan Approval:**

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

Staff believe, as conditioned, the proposal does not produce any impacts that require additional mitigation.

**Household Living Special Permit:**

4. *The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.*

Staff believes the development site is highly suitable for a residential use as it within the 0.25 mile transit area, close to multiple bus stops, and located along a major corridor that contains many districts zoned for mixed-use development and high-density residential development.

5. *The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.*

The proposal is comprised of a range of dwelling types including one (1) studio unit, three (3) 1-bedroom units, five (5) 2-bedroom units, and one (1) 3-bedroom unit.

6. *The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.*

There are no previously existing ADUs on the site.

7. *The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.*

No motor vehicle parking is proposed for this development; thus Staff believe this finding is not applicable.

## PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required **Site Plan Approval for the apartment building type**, Planning, Preservation & Zoning 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 submitted 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 copy of the Recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted for the public record.

### Sustainability

- 5) All Stage 2 documentation required by the Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- 6) All Stage 3 documentation required by the Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.

#### Building and Site Design

- 7) The Applicant shall submit a material palette to the Urban Design Commission for their review and comment prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- 8) The Applicant must submit a revised landscape plan that includes updated tree planting details, a larger planting bed for the proposed southwestern Beacon Oak tree, and a new proposed native species to replace the proposed Liriope spicata, to be reviewed and approved by PSUF prior to applying for a Building Permit.

#### Construction Documents

- 9) Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
- 10) Utility meters are not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.
- 11) Materials specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
- 12) An updated outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.7 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaries; total site lumen limit tale (calculations form the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lam type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaries; and notation of nay timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.
- 13) Detailed plans for protecting street trees intended to remain during construction must be approved by PSUF prior to applying for a Building Permit.

Should the Board approve the required **Special Permit to establish a Household Living Principal use**, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

#### Housing

- 14) An Affordable Housing Implementation Plan (AHIP) must be submitted and approved by the Director of Housing prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- 15) All 3-bedroom affordable dwelling units must comply with the Director of Housing's quality standards for 3-bedroom ADU's.
- 16) A deed restriction limiting the sale or rental of all affordable dwelling units to eligible households in perpetuity must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Parking

- 17) Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
- 18) All buyers, grantees, lessees, renters, and tenants must be notified in writing prior to sale or lease of any dwelling unit that the residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
- 19) Formal acknowledgement that residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission, must be filed with this decision.