



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

1 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: Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Greg Hanafin (Mobility Division)

The meeting was called to order at 6:04pm and adjourned at 8:35pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 16 March 2023 meeting minutes.

Member Howitt Easton and Member Habib did not attend the 18 May 2023 Planning Board meeting but stated that they reviewed the recording and submitted the appropriate affidavit. Chair Capuano also stated that he missed the 4 May 2023 meeting but reviewed the recording and submitted an affidavit.

PUBLIC HEARING: 620 Broadway (P&Z 21-145)
(continued from 18 May 2023)

Staff described the reasoning for the proposed conditions and clarified aspects of the loading zone. Staff also confirmed that Mobility Staff have proposed amending a previously proposed condition. Chair Capuano expressed his discomfort about delegating review of a loading area to Staff, as it is a significant aspect of the proposal, and it is under the purview of the Planning Board. He stated that he is not comfortable treating this application differently than others.

The Board asked why they don't yet have the Transportation Access Plan (TAP). They asked if they are remembering correctly if the broader street design is moving more slowly and what the delay would be if the Board did not move on the proposal. Staff clarified the process of restriping that section of Broadway, reviewed how the changes anticipated by the Mobility Division impacted the originally proposed loading plan, and addressed the full mobility needs for that section of the street. The Board stated that Mobility Staff's response is why they have additional concerns regarding the proposal. They described the delivery needs for the use, and how the Planning Board is tasked with considering the appropriateness of the site, including the distance between the loading area and the building access, particularly related to armored vehicles. They also cited concerns regarding safety and reiterated that without the ability to evaluate the loading zone in the context of the building, they are not properly able to consider the conditions to mitigate the potential impacts. They also noted that if there is no

appropriate loading zone when the building is ready for a Certificate of Occupancy, there will be other concerns to address.

The Board asked what the likely delay in timeline will be. Mobility Staff stated that they have been working with the applicant team to create a striping plan, and while they cannot state a specific timeframe, these types of plans can sometimes take several months to complete; the applicant team reviewed the progress made with Staff regarding the restriping plan. They reiterated that they have worked to be respectful of the city's process and noted that a request was made at the last meeting, proposing a condition that the applicant team could return to the Board to review and approve the loading plan following the approval of the requested permits. This would allow the applicant team to begin making additional progress on the project in the interim.

Chair Capuano stated that he remembers the Board asking for an updated TAP early in the hearing process, likely in March, and he is uncertain why additional progress hasn't been made.

The Board expressed concerns regarding approving the permit now and having the applicant team come back, noting that it would either strip the Board of authority, or wouldn't actually grant the permit in the first place. They stated that they do not believe the concerns can be resolved through the applicant's proposal. Chair Capuano stated that he is uncertain whether such a condition would be valid.

The Board asked about solar panels, noting the question was asked previously and has not yet been addressed. They stated that additional information should be included when the applicant team returns to the Board.

Chair Capuano stated that the Board believes there is more work to be done, and he proposed continuing the item. He suggested that if a formal recommendation by the Mobility Division cannot be made by the next Planning Board meeting, the applicant team should request another continuance.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case to 15 June 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 51 Prospect Street (P&Z 21-181)

(continued from 18 May 2023)

The applicant team presented on the concerns previously raised and reviewed the changes that have been made to the proposed plan, including to the landscaping and screening features on the site. They described how Eversource will balance needs for the site with aesthetics and stated that Eversource will be partnering with the Somerville Arts Council on a process to solicit a local artist.

The Board stated their appreciation of the applicant team's willingness to work with the Somerville Arts Council on a process to solicit a local artist. The team cites their enthusiasm to do so, and to continue to work with the neighborhood and public on this project.

The Board also stated their appreciation of the landscaping changes. They stated their preference for full dimensional brick but noted that they understand that the functionality of the utility renders this not viable on all sides. The applicant team confirmed that full dimensional brick will be used on two sides of the building.

Chair Capuano noted there was a question of whether the utility could be relocated, which is not within the purview of the Board, and that he understands the importance of the utility. Chair Capuano asked Staff if they have any additional comments prior to the Board's discussion; Staff confirmed that they did not have any comments but are available to answer questions.

The Board and application team discussed maintenance, monitoring procedures, and how the location could be a good opportunity for graffiti-like art. The Board asked about the project in relation to the Green Line Extension. Staff reviewed the site in relation to the Green Line and how if the MBTA move forward with the proposed extension to Porter Square, the bridge will need to be widened but that should not impact this site. Mobility Staff stated that they could return to the Board at a later date with more information regarding this topic, if requested. The applicant team provided a map showing the site in relation to the MBTA tracks and described the bridge. The Board noted that the original Staff Memo stated that the project would not impact the anticipated Green Line Extension.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, a Special Permit for a Minor Utility Use.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 16-20 Medford Street (P&Z 23-011 and P&Z 23-012)

The applicant team presented the project, describing the timeline and how the team has returned for a Major Amendment and additional Special Permit. They summarized the proposed changes, including additional units, sustainability level, change in program from for-sale condominiums to rental units, removal of subsurface garage, updated materiality, and relocation of the bike room.

Chair Capuano asked Staff why this is not considered an entirely new application; Staff replied that they cannot speak on behalf of Director Lewis but reviewed the process. Senior Staff further reviewed the difference between a completely new application versus a Major Amendment.

The applicant team continued the presentation, describing the details of the project and location. They reviewed the building design, noting there was one material change on the base, but the other materials remain the same, the elevations, and the color changes. They also reviewed the updates to the site plan, landscape plan, traffic conditions and how those will change with the proposed site. They reviewed the proposed vehicular and bicycle parking, and connections to transit stations, noting that the proposed changes are substantial, but the team believes that the changes are in line with the community's goals.

The Board asked what happened in recent months to necessitate the proposed changes. The applicant team stated that they have been working on construction drawings for a building permit, and since approval there have been economic changes as well as a geo-technical evaluation that determined changes to the program were needed. They described the very high water table on site, as well as how the economic impacts established that the approved subsurface garage was not feasible. They determined to change the program and be a long-term partner on the site, changing the building to Net Zero-Ready for-lease apartments.

The Board and applicant team discussed the unit mix and sizes and how more in-depth grading and groundwater table studies were not conducted until further into the construction drawing stage.

Capuano opened public testimony.

Mark Truant (32 Warren Street, Cambridge) - stated that he understands reducing parking, and thinks the proposal is a good effort. He voiced concern about the project and another nearby project related to the Warren St/Medford St intersection, as well as concerns about emergency services getting through the area, and noted specific concerns about the project across the street. He stated that he looks at these projects together, as they will have a significant impact. He voiced additional concerns about parking impacts and subsequent traffic impacts.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) - stated that the applicant team have reached out to the Union Square Neighborhood Council, but the USNC hasn't had a chance to schedule a time to meet, and thus they haven't had a chance to negotiate a CBA. She reviewed the neighborhood meeting schedule. She asked if the applicant team has met with the UDC again and stated that the process should start again as a new application. She voiced concern about the proposed changes and asked about the revenue gained from the proposed changes. She stated the USNC would request certain changes, including more affordable 2-bedroom units. She asked for clarification about the mix of affordable units. She also stated she believes there should be another neighborhood meeting.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

Chair Capuano suggested the application would benefit from another Neighborhood Meeting to address the concerns raised.

The Board and applicant team discussed the Special Permit for parking relief and the drop-off location for rideshares. The Board requested that the applicant team discuss how the bus network will be impacted by the proposed changes and how the project will be served by transit in the future; Staff confirmed that they will also review the bus routes with Mobility Staff. Staff also clarified a proposed condition.

The Board stated that concerns may be reviewed at a Neighborhood Meeting, where a report could be provided on what the community still has concerns about and what has already been addressed. The applicant team stated that they have no objection to an additional Neighborhood Meeting. Chair Capuano stated there were concerns raised by the Board, Staff, and the public, and recommended that the applicant team coordinate with the Ward Councilor to hold one additional Neighborhood Meeting prior to returning to the Planning Board for a decision. The Board stated that a better understanding of the outcome of the February Neighborhood Meeting, as well as the upcoming meeting, would help understand the concerns. The Board also noted that on the question of unit mix and size, they would also like to hear the community feedback.

The Board was generally supportive of the parking waiver but stated that residents should not be able to receive on-street parking permits. They recommended a robust Mobility Management Plan, addressing space for bicycles, particularly for families.

The Board asked Staff about Warren Street and stated that they would like to better understand the Mobility goals for that area.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the case(s) to 15 June 2023.

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| RESULT: | CONTINUED |
|----------------|------------------|

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.