



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

20 JULY 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), Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), and Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:13pm and adjourned at 8:48pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 32/40/44 White Street (P&Z 22-054)

The applicant requested a withdrawal without prejudice.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to accept the applicant's request for a withdrawal without prejudice.

RESULT:

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT PREJUDICE

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

(continued from 15 June 2023)

Staff explained that this application went through the Zoning Board of Appeals to receive a Hardship Variance. The applicant also applied and received a six-month extension for that Variance. That extension would have expired in June, but a second extension was applied for in May. The applicant was informed that only one six-month extension is generally allowed for a Hardship Variance. The applicant is before the Planning Board for a Site Plan Approval based on that Hardship Variance. It is Staff's opinion that the applicant needs to apply for another Hardship Variance. No final determination on this has been made. There is a legal determination to be made as to whether the original Hardship Variance is still valid in order for the Planning Board to hear the Site Plan application. The Planning Board could approve the Site Plan Approval and Special Permit, but a Building Permit would not be granted without a Hardship Variance in hand. The Planning Board could also request a continuance until a determination has been made by other departments.

There was discussion regarding that the Planning Board should potentially not hear testimony on this case until it is determined if this item should be adjudicated by the Planning Board at this time. This does not deal with the validity of the application itself. There was discussion regarding taking public testimony as close to the actual hearing for this case as possible.

The applicant team explained that there is a strong case that this application has already been heard and told.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. No one indicated they wished to speak. Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this application to the next Planning Board meeting on 3 August 2023.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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

(continued from 15 June 2023)

The applicant team stated that there has been a fourth neighborhood meeting for this project. Concerns raised have been largely addressed by the applicant. One application is a major amendment to a previously approved Special Permit; the other is for a new Special Permit related to parking relief. The applicant has come to an agreement with the Union Square Neighborhood Counsel and the applicant is comfortable with the project as it stands. The proposal has been reduced to 50 units, as two two-bedroom units were able to be added to the design. The site allows for up-to 58 units. Two additional affordable dwelling units have been added to the plan, for a total of 10. The proposal subsurface garage has been removed from the plan, reducing the parking count from 43 spaces to 12 spaces. The landscape plan has not changed since the last Board review.

There was discussion regarding a proposed redesign for nearby transit stations. The applicant team stated that the MBTA has approved the plan and will likely be moving forward with implementing it at some time in the future. Most of the existing bike routes will remain unchanged.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

City Councilor J.T. Scott - voiced his support for approval of this project.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board discussed a potential condition regarding parking permits. Staff stated that the recommendation is to restrict parking on this site to the 12 parking spaces. There would be no eligibility for off-street parking for the market-rate units, but this may not be the standard for the ADUs. Waivers to this standard could be requested.

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, the major amendment to a previously approved general building in the MR4 Zoning District, which required Site Plan approval and a Special Permit for Household Living.

RESULT:

APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS

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

(continued from 15 June 2023)

This item was addressed concurrently with the previous agenda item.

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 memorandum, a Special Permit for parking relief from the minimum parking requirements in the MR4 Zoning District.

RESULT:**APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS**

The Board went into recess at 7:33 PM and returned at 7:40 PM.

PUBLIC HEARING: 366 Broadway (P&Z 21-175)

The applicant team explained that no on-site parking is proposed for this project. The proposal is for 58 residential units, with 20% affordable units. Some of the proposed amenities include a community room, a remote work room, a fitness room, and balconies for 30% of the units. There are 58 interior bicycle parking spaces with direct street access proposed. 57% of the units will be studio units. There have been two public neighborhood meetings and there was not much discussion regarding the proposed unit mix, but most seemed amenable to the proposed mix. It was noted that the applicant is willing to enter into a Mobility Management Plan, as a potential condition of approval. Regarding the landscaping plan, three new street trees are proposed as part of this project. A common roof deck will encourage social gatherings, and a green roof area is also proposed.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Emily Lalka (99 Thurston Street) - noted that she is happy to see three (3) three-bedroom affordable units proposed. She is surprised, however, regarding the number of studio units proposed, especially with the schools nearby.

Timothy (60 Cross Street E, Apt 332) - asked why first floor retail is not being considered, as this is a major thoroughfare.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston Street) - stated that there should be a standard number of affordable larger, family-sized units included as part of this project. She questioned if this building should be a residential one, instead of commercial. The City continues to build luxury apartments, while family-sized affordable units are needed.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

There was Board discussion regarding the unit mix proposed, in an area that contains school and family neighborhoods. The Board noted that there is a crisis of family-sized housing in the City. The underlying intent of this Zoning District is to create apartment buildings sized to accommodate larger family-sized units. If there is a shift toward larger units, larger bicycle stalls could also be considered. There was also discussion regarding a redesign for the Thurston Street side of the building. The Board suggested that the applicant team consider some of the suggestions.

It was noted that this hearing will be left open for written public comment until 28 July 2023 at noon.

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 3 August 2023.

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.