



City of Somerville  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**7 DECEMBER 2023 MEETING MINUTES**

This meeting was conducted via remote participation via Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<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: Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Stephen Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Wendy Sczechowicz (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division); and Sarah Lewis (Director of Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:04pm and adjourned at 9:27pm. It was noted that the Board would be moving into a Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee at 6:30pm. The Board agreed to address the quicker items on its agenda prior to the Joint Hearing and then reconvene when the Joint Hearing was complete.

**PUBLIC HEARING: 2-4 Alpine Street (P&Z 21-119)**

Member Habib opened this case. The Board agreed that it would hear this case if there was time this evening after the Joint Hearing.

**GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 16 November 2023 meeting minutes.

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

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this application to 21 December 2023.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

**PUBLIC HEARING: 32 Prospect Street (P&Z 23-064)**

*(continued from 16 November 2023)*

It was noted that the applicant seems to have the support of most of the Board and the community.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the Special Permit to establish a Formula Business Principal Use along the pedestrian street in the High-Rise District.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS</b>
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The Board agreed to continue the other items on the agenda until after the Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee, depending on timing. The Board recessed at 6:28pm.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

- Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee:
  - Councilor Pineda Neufeld proposes amending Section 7.2.7 of the Zoning Ordinances to add Shared Workspace & Arts Education to Table 7.2.7 Permitted Uses.
  - Charles Zammuto requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 563-565 Broadway from Urban Residence (UR) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4).

The Board reconvened at 6:54pm.

### **PUBLIC HEARING: 28-44 Broadway (P&Z 23-061)**

*(continued from 16 November 2023)*

The applicant team addressed minor modifications to the project, including adding an additional parking space and dividing the blue bike station into three pads. The potential implications of these changes were discussed, along with concerns about access to the transformers and electrical equipment. The applicant team explained that regular maintenance will be needed at least once a year, twice at most, during working hours.

The Board discussed parking relief along with a previously discussed condition that the applicant would then provide a one-year MBTA pass to residents. There were concerns raised regarding the city's intent to increase family sized housing and that the applicant's proposed reduction in family-sized units is contradictory to this. The applicant team explained that it took over a year to find any other investor willing to come in to bet on multi-family housing in Somerville. The applicant team stated that 84 units is better than no units and that having more smaller units takes pressure off existing 3-bedroom units. The Board stated that it was not prepared to deny the project on this basis and wants to work with the applicant. The applicant team asked what it is about the project that justifies a 12-fold increase in the TDM burden, when it is intended to mitigate against the same level of impact as other projects. The Board explained that this is a common condition they have included in the past, but they are not bound to precedence and are able to consider each project individually. The applicant team stated that for anything beyond Staff's recommendation, the team will withdraw the application with prejudice and will not be able to proceed with the project.

The Board discussed potential options, such as a reduction or sunseting of the condition over time, or creative solutions for community benefits in place of a full year of blue bikes that may not have the same financial drag on the project. The applicant team stated that this would require working through other solutions with the Mobility Department. The team noted that they have agreed to a one-year pass provision for all affordable units at the turnover of leases, but one month only for all other units. The Board agreed to continue this item in order for the applicant team to have discussions regarding additional considerations amongst themselves and with Staff.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this application to 21 December 2023.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

### **PUBLIC HEARING: 2-4 Alpine Street (P&Z 21-119)**

The applicant team explained that the proposal is for a 4-story general building with 26 residential units and a commercial space under 1,400 s.f. on the first floor. Of the 26 units, five will be affordable. There will be no motor vehicle parking, as the property is within a half mile of a transit area. There will be 30 long term and 8 short term bicycle parking spots. At the Neighborhood Meeting in March 2022, there were concerns regarding construction impacts and parking, and the applicant has worked with the neighborhood to make amendments to the plan. There has not been any negative feedback about the project since that time.

The applicant team explained that there are three existing curb cuts on the property which will be eliminated. The hope is to find a 20-30 seat restaurant to go into the ground floor commercial space, as this is located on a residential street and is visible from the bike path. There is a common roof deck that faces the bike path, proposed on the top level, along with a green roof area. The elevations and materials for the proposed building were reviewed. This is a sustainability-focused project, including plans to install solar panels and use natural gas for hot water heating. The project's intent is to be as electric as possible, with the ability to upgrade to this in the future.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Scott Nowakowski (49 Morrison Ave) – expressed support for the proposed project and the potential amenities that could be included.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – asked if the applicant could provide additional 2-bedroom units, especially if they are affordable. She also requested indigenous plants, such as coral honeysuckle, and biosolar vegetation under the solar panels on the property.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Written public testimony was left open until noon on 15 December 2023.

The Board discussed the proposed unit mix. The applicant team stated that there are five affordable units proposed. The 2 bedroom and 1-bedroom units are proposed to be scattered throughout the building. The Board noted the city's interest in creating more family sized housing units. The applicant team stated that there are a few 3-bedroom units proposed in some of the best locations in the building. The water table in this area is so high that the originally proposed underground parking area had to be removed, and the unit mix was amended to remove some of the 3-bedroom units.

Staff noted that there is a proposed condition that, as parking is not proposed on this site, residents do not receive resident parking stickers or guest passes, with the exclusion that those in the affordable units can request a waiver from this.

The applicant team addressed some of the neighborhood concerns heard in March 2022, including that there was not enough bike parking, pedestrian safety, and a larger restaurant was requested. These items have been addressed through the plan.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this application to 21 December 2023.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

## **PUBLIC HEARING: 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029)**

*(continued from 16 November 2023)*

The applicant team explained that the proposal is to create a 10-story, approximately 50,000 s.f. building with a primary function as an incubator laboratory. The ground floor will contain a large loading facility, along with makerspace and a gallery for local artists to display their works. This aligns well with the SomerVision Plan. The building will also have a LEED Platinum grade. The intention of this project is to bring much-needed incubator lab inventory to Somerville. The most important thing these startups need is bench space to launch their operations. There is an extreme lack of small lab floorplate inventory in the city, and it is preventing startup prosperity and growth within this sector. The proposal is to build nine floors of small laboratory space solely for small startup companies.

The applicant team explained that the property currently exists as an auto repair facility. The proposal is to build a 125' tall structure with a 6.0 FAR. In terms of mobility, this project went through a detailed transportation review and thorough vetting with the Mobility Department and received an approved with conditions Mobility Master Plan last December. There are currently two curb cuts on the site, but only one, 17' wide, is proposed to be kept. All loading access will be front-in and front-out for the site. The maximum vehicle allowed on the site will be a 23' in length box truck. The site has been redesigned to have the least impact on Mystic Avenue as possible. There is no parking proposed on site, and all parking will occur within the Assembly District. The plan proposes seven bike racks on the site with 14 spaces for visitors, per zoning requirements, and 18 secure basement spaces for employees, including bike repair and showers.

The applicant team explained that a civic pocket park is proposed to span the southeastern portion of the site. The pocket park will provide various scattered areas for both users of the office lab and pedestrians from the neighborhood. Plantings will predominantly consist of native plant species to enhance the biodiversity of the neighborhood. There was discussion regarding the project's path to LEED Platinum status, including sustainable design and construction guidelines, and the challenge of incorporating solar panels due to the building's all-electric design.

The Board noted that there was a no recommendation made regarding this project from Staff. Staff explained that, while this project at the Master Plan Special Permit level meets the zoning requirements, there is an unfortunate timing issue between a new Master Plan and the potential for future zoning overlays to revise the Assembly Square District. This particular site, under the draft Neighborhood Plan, known as the Assembly Point Micro District, was intended to be a smaller scale building, with more local makerspace area. Staff has to consider comprehensive neighborhood plans, as well as zoning, as part of their findings. While this plan has not yet been adopted, it is the intent of the neighborhood, and the proposal does not meet the future vision of this area. Ideally, this site would be consolidated to allow for shared access, such as the loading and potentially an alley structure. It is unclear what else could be on this site at this time.

The Board suggested that the applicant revisit other options with Staff. There was concern expressed regarding the location of this site to the flood zone and the proposal to store chemicals in the basement.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – noted that the applicant seems to be proposing no parking on the site. She suggested that the types of uses envisioned for this building could be located behind the proposal or within it in order to screen that use from the highway. She would like to see a solution that could be beneficial in terms of this developer that seems to support the arts and creative economy.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony. Written public testimony was left open until noon on 15 December 2023.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this application to 21 December 2023.

<b>RESULT:</b>
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<b>CONTINUED</b>
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*NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at [planning@somervillema.gov](mailto:planning@somervillema.gov).*