



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

4 JANUARY 2024 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: Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm and adjourned at 6:55pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029)
(continued from 21 December 2023)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this application to 1 February 2024.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendations to the City Council

Recommendation to the City Council on the following amendments:

- 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.

The Board reviewed the proposed recommendation. Staff explained that this Special District was added a few years ago and Councilor Pineda Neufeld wants to introduce a shared workspace and arts education use to the district. This use was not originally added as the developer did not consider it but there has since been some interest from businesses to add this type of use to the area. There are already a few arts uses allowed in the district. Staff supports this proposal.

The Board noted that future iterations of the use categories should clarify potentially unclear language regarding the distinction between a coworking space and an arts and shared space.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend for adoption by the City Council the amendment proposed by Councilor Pineda Neufeld.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

Recommendation to the City Council on the following amendments:

- 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 discussed that this proposal involves adding a restaurant use to this space. The block already has uses similar to the proposed ground use commercial use. Staff explained that this was brought forward by a petitioner, but it is unclear as to why this use was not previously allowed. The Board noted that some of the development on the block may have occurred prior to the current zoning code.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend for adoption by the City Council this proposed zoning amendment.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

OTHER BUSINESS: Rules of Policies & Procedures Amendments

Staff explained that this is a way to make sure that our policies and procedures actually align with what the ordinance currently allows. This includes a proposal to add a sixth applicability under Minor Site Plan approvals which allows for the modification of parking lots limited only to zoning compliant pavement markings and zoning compliant landscaping. This is being proposed due to Staff recently receiving many applications that would require such a small scope of work that it would be onerous to go through the entire Site Plan Approval process. Other changes are only minor.

The Board discussed potential changes to the meeting process policy. There was discussion regarding eliminating the distinction between those testifying in support and those in opposition of a project to encourage mixed feelings and avoid a binary perspective. It was explained that this segregation is likely required by Open Meeting Law and is also practical for compiling meeting minutes. It may be beneficial to consider people who do not have a clear opinion either way. The Board requested a review by Staff to ensure compliance with State law. The discussion also touched upon the topic of required vote thresholds for decisions, which are regulated by State law.

The Board also discussed camera use during Zoom meetings. There was support for members of applicant teams turning on their cameras while speaking. The Board agreed to address these topics further at a future meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to adopt the redline amendments as presented to the Board's Rules of Policies and Procedures.

RESULT:

ADOPTED

OTHER BUSINESS: 2024 Meeting Dates

The Board discussed the proposed 2024 meeting dates.

OTHER BUSINESS: Planning Board Election

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Chair Capuano abstaining, to elect Michael Capuano as Chair of the Planning Board.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Vice Chair Aboff abstaining, to elect Amelia Aboff as Vice Chair of the Planning Board.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Member Habib abstaining, to elect Jahan Habib as Clerk of the Planning Board.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

The Board tabled discussion on the 7 December 2023 meeting minutes to a later date.

The Board discussed a policy-focused subcommittee. It was agreed that this should be discussed with Staff before further discussion among the Board.

The Board also discussed having additional time for other business items and updates during meetings.

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.