



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:** 120 Beacon Street (ZP24-000096)  
**POSTED:** October 8, 2024

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

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 Special Permit application submitted for 120 Beacon Street, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on September 27, 2024, and is scheduled for a public hearing on October 17, 2024. 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

Animal Care Innovations Ltd. seeks to establish a Veterinarian Use on a Pedestrian Street in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) district, which requires a Special Permit.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Applicant is proposing to open a veterinary practice at 120 Beacon Street. The property is an existing mixed-use four-story Commercial Building, and the Veterinarian Use is proposed on the ground floor, formerly a retail establishment. There are 15 existing surface parking spaces associated with the building as well as 80 spaces within a subterranean parking garage beneath the building. The Applicant is not proposing any landscaping or changes to the exterior of the building aside from signage.

## BACKGROUND

120 Beacon Street is located in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district along a Pedestrian Street at the corner of Beacon and Washington Streets, represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott. Establishing a Veterinarian Use along a Pedestrian Street in the MR4 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.

The proposal is to establish a new use within an existing Commercial Building in the MR4 district. The actual design and fit-out of the interior of the first floor of the building will be permitted by-right through the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) after the Special Permit decision.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING**

A neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the Applicant on September 9, 2024. It was hybrid in format, held at PRB Boulangerie at 118 Beacon Street with virtual participation through Zoom. At the neighborhood meeting, there was no opposition voiced for this proposal, but concern was expressed about parking availability and waste disposal.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Neighborhood and Site Context:

120 Beacon Street is located at the intersection of Beacon and Washington, very near (approximately 200') the municipal boundary with Cambridge. The area is largely residential in nature, primarily zoned Neighborhood Residential and comprised of detached dwellings. Commercial development in the neighborhood is located along Beacon Street, with a clustering of commercial land uses at the corner of Beacon and Washington Street where this veterinarian clinic is proposed. These include a dentist's office, multiple restaurants, a day care, a specialty foods store, and a gallery space.

Within 120 Beacon Street, an existing mixed-use four-story Commercial Building, there is a bakery and an Indian bistro on the ground story and a federal government office and a research and development firm on the upper stories. The Applicant proposes to occupy a vacant portion of the ground story with a façade along Beacon Street (formerly occupied by a Comcast Xfinity retail store).

The space is a total of 4900 SF, which includes a waiting/reception area, eight (8) exam rooms, various treatments rooms including x-ray and surgery, bathrooms, and a staff lounge. The building façade is proposed to remain the same aside from a change in signage. As mentioned above, all interior renovations to the building will be permitted through ISD following the Special Permit decision.

### Planning Context

The property is included within the study area of the Union Square Neighborhood Plan (2016), located along the southern boundary of the Duck Village sub-neighborhood. The neighborhood plan does not make a specific recommendation for this intersection, but does note that Beacon Street is a recognized biking corridor for both Somerville and Cambridge residents, and that Washington Street serves as a connector between Union Square and Harvard.

In the comprehensive plan of Somerville, SomerVision 2040, the corridor along Beacon Street (and the 120 Beacon Street parcel specifically) is designated as an “Enhance” area (neither “Conserve” nor “Transform”).

### Landscaping

There are no landscaping changes or improvements proposed. The existing parking lot and pedestrian access to the buildings are to remain as-is.

### Use Impacts

Staff believes the use will not have any negative impacts on abutting properties and the neighborhood as a whole. The site itself would remain commercial and no changes are proposed to the actual building other than signage. Staff do not anticipate any major impacts to traffic and parking demand – the Applicant has stated that employees will utilize the underground parking while customers will use the surface parking lot.

### Economic Development Division Comments

The City of Somerville Economic Development Division has not recommended any additions or alterations be made to the Applicant’s special permit application. For the complete comments, see attachment.

## **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.

### *Section 15.2.1.e*

- i) The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
- ii) The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

### *Section 4.2.13.b.i.b)*

- i) The maintenance of a diverse blend of commercial uses within the neighborhood.
- ii) The existing concentration of uses from the same use category within the neighborhood.
- iii) The availability of the same services within the neighborhood.
- iv) The availability of comparable commercial spaces within the neighborhood.

Information relating to the required considerations is provided below:

### Special Permit

*Section 15.2.1.e*

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

Staff believe the proposal is compatible with the values of SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including:

- Protect and foster the diversity of our people, culture, and economy.
- Create an environment that enables existing small businesses to thrive and produce entrepreneurial opportunities for new ones. Ensure that the regulatory environment supports the innovative business models necessary for businesses to adapt.

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

Staff believes the proposal is consistent with the intent of the MR4 zoning district which is, in part, "To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multiuse and mixed-use buildings, and **neighborhood serving uses.**" (emphasis added).

*Section 4.2.13.b.i.b)*

- i. The maintenance of a diverse blend of commercial uses within the neighborhood.*

See the Abutting Context Analysis submitted by the Applicant for a complete list of businesses within 300' of the proposed site -- they include a dentist's office, multiple restaurants, a day care, a specialty foods store, and a gallery space.

- ii. The existing concentration of uses from the same use category within the neighborhood.*

Animal Services is a Commercial Use Category; these services include Commercial Kennels, Pet Grooming, Pet Day Care or Training, and Veterinarian. There are few of these existing businesses in the vicinity -- RiverDog Daycare is located in Union Square one half mile to the east, and Huron Veterinarian Hospital is temporarily (according to their website) located on Beacon Street one quarter mile to the south.

- iii. The availability of the same services within the neighborhood.*

The nearest similar business is Huron Veterinarian Hospital at 70 Beacon Street, which according to their website is in the process of moving to another location in Union Square.

- iv. The availability of comparable commercial spaces within the neighborhood.*

Based on available information, the structure at 120 Beacon Street appears to be the only commercial building with adequate available floor space in the neighborhood for a veterinary office of this scale.

## PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required **Special Permit to establish a Veterinarian Use on a Pedestrian Street**, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

### Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be provided to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

### Public Record

- One (1) digital copy of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, 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.
- A digital copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

Economic Development Division Comments – October 7, 2024

The Somerville Economic Development Division has reviewed Animal Care Innovation Ltd's application for a Special Permit (Permit #ZP24-000096) to convert a vacant 4857 SF retail space on the ground floor of 120 Beacon Street (Map 66, Block E, Lot 1) into a veterinary practice. This parcels lies in a Mid Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Union Square neighborhood, and is occupied by a four-story commercial building with ground floor storefronts. Economic Development makes the following determinations about the Applicant's proposal:

1. The project, as proposed, will HELP activate ground floor spaces and facades by:  
Re-using a vacant storefront in an existing building with a commercial service space supported by neighborhood residents.
2. The project, as proposed, will IMPROVE the interplay of ground floor space and civic space by:  
Locating improved lighting and signage by the public sidewalk along Beacon Street and the plaza area by the main entry to the new premises.
3. The project, as proposed, will IMPROVE the building's signage and wayfinding around the site by:  
Installing new facelit signs on the existing ground floor facade.
4. The project, as proposed, will NOT IMPROVE the potential for outdoor dining and commercial activity on the site's civic space:  
The applicant's proposal does not mention the presence of any ground-floor food or beverage space for humans or animals.
5. The project, as proposed, will NOT IMPROVE or DEGRADE ground floor layouts for ACE and retail space by changing windows and increasing light transmission:  
The applicant's reuse of the existing storefront will not replace or upgrade the large existing plate glass windows in the current building. The proposed use will be visible through said windows to users of the Beacon Street sidewalk.
6. The project, as proposed, will NOT IMPROVE access to the site to pedestrians and bicyclists:  
The applicant's proposal will not change existing sidewalks along the Beacon Street frontage of the site while or provide new bicycle parking spaces.

Economic Development Division recommends no additions or alterations be made to the Applicant's Special Permit application (Permit #ZP24-000096).