



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 720-722 Broadway, ZP24-000047 (Special Permit) & ZP24-000048 (Site Plan Approval)
POSTED: October 31, 2024

RECOMMENDATION: No recommendation (SP for Residential Housing)
No recommendation (SPA)

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 and Site Plan Approval applications submitted for 720 Broadway, 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 4, 2024, and is scheduled for a public hearing on November 7, 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

DiCamillo Associates, LLC, seeks to develop residential housing in a General Building in the MR4 zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

DiCamillo Associates, LLC, seeks to develop a 4-story mixed-use General Building in the MR4 zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

DiCamillo Associates, LLC is proposing to construct a 4-story General Building. The proposed development will produce nearly 7,000 square feet of commercial space, 28 dwelling units of which 5 are affordable units, 4 motor vehicle parking spaces, 8 short-term bicycle parking spaces, 32 long-term bicycle parking spaces¹, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.258.

¹ Although the application Narrative describes 35 long-term bicycle parking spaces, the Transportation Access Plan submitted with the application shows a plan with 38 long-term spaces. Mobility Staff have clarified that the proposed bicycle room had insufficient space for 38 long-term spaces that were compliant with zoning; the number of bicycle spaces was therefore reduced to 32 long-term spaces. Mobility staff have confirmed that 32 long-term spaces are compliant with zoning, as is the spacing.

BACKGROUND

720-722 Broadway is located on a Pedestrian Street and in the 0.25mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Ball Square neighborhood represented by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis. Establishing a General Building in the MR4 district requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR4 zoning district.

There are currently two principal buildings on the site: one single-story commercial building located at 720 Broadway (which currently houses Lyndell's Bakery) and one multi-family detached house at 722 Broadway. The building at 722 Broadway was required to undergo the Demolition Review process and was deemed Preferably Preserved by the Historic Preservation Commission on March 15, 2022. The property owner signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on September 6, 2022. This MOA establishes exterior design requirements for the western portion of the development site (at 722 Broadway).

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis and the applicant team on May 3, 2023, via the Zoom meeting platform. The applicant team provided an overview of the project, and attendees asked a range of questions on subjects including (but not limited to) the review process, the unit mix, and parking.

The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis and the applicant team on December 12, 2023, via the Zoom meeting platform. The applicant team provided an overview of the process, including a summary of the design review process, and attendees asked a range of questions on subjects including (but not limited to) parking, demolition, and construction.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by the Somerville Urban Design Commission (UDC) via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on June 27, August 8, and September 26, 2023. The Commission provided its official recommendation on October 4, 2023. During design review, updates to the design were made, including added shade trees and revised green space. The UDC provided additional recommendations related to utility equipment location, landscaping, and the use of brick material from the Broadway façade to the west elevation. The full UDC recommendation is provided as part of the application.

ANALYSIS

Building/Land Use

The proposed development is a 4-story General Building, designed to appear as two buildings, with commercial space on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors. The building is designed to appear as two semi-detached buildings, emphasizing fit with the neighborhood context. As noted above, the western portion of the site (at 722 Broadway, noted in the plans) is subject to a Memorandum of Agreement with the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) as part of the Demolition Review process. The design of that portion of the building cannot be changed without a revision to that Memorandum of Agreement.

A total of 28 residential units are proposed, including thirteen (13) studio units, ten (10) one-bedroom units, and five (5) two-bedroom units. Five (5) of the units will be affordable dwelling units (ADUs). The Applicant has completed and signed an Affordable Housing Acknowledgement (AHA) form, included in the application. The AHA acknowledges a fractional buyout equivalent to 0.6 ADUs, pursuant to Section 12.3 Buyouts & Payments of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

The proposed development includes almost 7,000 square feet of commercial space. The Applicant has been collaborating with Lyndell's Bakery to design a commercial space so the business can remain onsite, albeit at a different location during construction. Economic Development Staff note that the development will further activate the ground level of the site and improve the interplay of ground floor space and public space through façade design (including the significant use of windows on the ground floor and increased transparency), signage, space available for outdoor dining/seating along the Broadway frontage, and an improved experience for pedestrians and bicyclists. Engineering Staff note that Site Plan Approval does not approve the layout of any outdoor dining area, and that the Applicant must apply for an Outdoor Seating License pursuant to Somerville Ordinances.

The proposed development is being designed to be LEED Gold certifiable, and Passive House certification through PHIUS CORE 2021 is being pursued. The building is being designed to be Net-Zero Ready and PV-ready (although solar is not being proposed at this time), and will be fully electric, using heat pumps for heating and cooling.

Landscape and Public Space

The site design includes two shared amenity spaces with green space – one on the ground level at the rear of the site, and one on the roof of the building. These areas will be private amenity spaces but will contribute to the Green Score and greening the site. The site design also includes the addition of three (3) new street trees, plus the removal and replacement of one existing street tree. The removal of an existing street tree requires a public hearing and review under the Somerville Tree Preservation Ordinance. PSUF Staff noted that additional design work is required related to the driveway curb cut on Willow Ave to preserve existing street trees to the extent possible.

The landscape design shows a Green Score of 0.258, which has been confirmed by PSUF Staff.

Mobility and Streetscape

The proposed development will include four (4) motor vehicle parking spaces, one of which will be a designated ADA space and one of which will be dedicated for short-term use (rideshare). The remaining two (2) vehicle parking spaces will be reserved for commercial use for employees of the bakery. The entrance to this parking area is from a curb cut off Willow Ave. Mobility Staff also confirmed that final design of the driveway curb cut should be coordinated with relevant City Departments to preserve the existing street trees to the extent possible, and that such a design should be completed prior to any tree removal hearing. A condition of approval has been proposed related to these comments.

Loading and trash pickup will occur within the motor vehicle parking area accessed from the curb cut off Willow Ave. The Transportation Access Plan (TAP) provides additional details on motor vehicle parking and loading. The TAP notes that an SU-30 truck was used to show movement, and that this type of vehicle is expected to be the largest vehicle to access the area.

No vehicular parking for residents is required for this project. The development is under a quarter mile from the Ball Square Green Line Extension station, and bus services are available along Broadway (site-adjacent), College Ave (less than a quarter mile away), and Highland Ave (less than a half mile away). The site is also less than a half mile away from the Somerville Community Path.

The application Narrative states the proposed development includes eight (8) short-term bicycle parking spaces and 35 long-term bicycle parking spaces. The long-term bicycle parking spaces will be accessible on the first floor of the building, and at least one bicycle repair facility with air pumps will be provided. Please note that although the Narrative describes 35 long-term bicycle parking spaces, the Transportation Access Plan submitted with the application shows a plan with 38 long-term spaces. Mobility Staff have clarified that the proposed bicycle room had insufficient space for 38 long-term spaces that were compliant with zoning; the number of bicycle spaces was therefore reduced to 32 long-term spaces. Mobility staff have confirmed that this number is compliant with zoning, as is the spacing.

The submitted Mobility Management Plan (MMP) provides additional details on access to the site and establishes financial incentives to reduce the use of private occupancy vehicles (including rideshare). Incentives include up to two (2) one-month MBTA passes for adult household members during the first month of initial occupancy of each new household, and up to two (2) one-month BlueBike memberships for adult household members during the first month of initial occupancy of each new household. The Applicant has also committed to monitoring and annual reporting for travel methods.

The Director of Mobility issued an MMP Final Approval letter for the project on June 24, 2024, which has been signed by the Applicant. This letter is included in the application Mobility Documents, beginning on page 68. The letter reviews the commitments made by the Applicant in the approved MMP, and provides ten (10) approval conditions, agreed to by the Applicant, related to reducing vehicle trips, supporting non-vehicular mobility access, and other mobility priorities.

The proposed development includes reconstruction of streetscape elements (including but not limited to sidewalks and crosswalks) that will be impacted by and during construction. Mobility and Engineering Staff recommend additional conditions of approval related to redesign and reconstruction of streetscape elements. Engineering Staff note that public property design elements, including sidewalk and street layout, are not considered or approved for construction under the board review process, and that designs are reviewed when an applicant applies for a Streetscape Construction Permit.

Infrastructure and Engineering

Engineering Staff noted that all projects must be in compliance with Engineering Site Construction Rules and Regulations. These regulations address stormwater and groundwater management best practices. Projects must also address inflow and infiltration sewer mitigation as part of the project to manage wastewater.

Zoning Compliance

ISD has completed their initial review and requested updated plans to confirm zoning compliance. These plans have not yet been provided. Additional information on the following is necessary to confirm zoning compliance:

1. Revised lot lines definitions (side vs. rear lot lines) to confirm compliant rear setbacks.
2. Measurements of the width of the front lot lines and facades on all floors to confirm compliant façade buildout.
3. Measurements to confirm compliant curb setbacks.
4. Measurements to confirm compliant sidewalk widths.
5. Measurements and window definition to confirm compliant bays and windows.
6. Measurements to confirm compliant lobby entrance.
7. Confirmation that the proposed commercial space will comprise a single unit (or clarification on the number of commercial units).
8. Measurements and diagrams to confirm compliant storefront.
9. Measurements to confirm compliant commercial space depth.
10. Measurements to confirm parking setbacks.
11. Fenestration diagrams for each façade to confirm compliance with fenestration minimums.
12. Lot coverage calculation and accompanying dimensioned site plan that includes materiality.
13. Plan and calculation to show adherence to open space requirements.
14. Measurements of ground story entrance spacing.
15. Calculation to show that the proposed unit count is compliant with the density factor.

In addition to additional information necessary to confirm zoning compliance, the proposed development also requires a land plat prior in order to be zoning compliant. The site is currently three separate parcels, which must be merged for the proposed development to be compliant.

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.

Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Special Permit Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval and Special Permit

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

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Increase the housing supply, including housing that is contextual to the existing neighborhood.
- Increase the proportion of affordable housing.
- Continue to support small businesses, and fight displacement by coordinating with an existing local business to remain in Somerville.
- Prioritize walking, biking, and transit options and minimize space dedicated to personal vehicles
- Provide development that limits greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

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

Staff believe that this project meets the intent of the MR4 zoning district is, in part: “To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving commercial uses.”

Staff also believe that this project meets the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including the following:

- To develop and maintain complete, mixed-use, walkable, transit-oriented, and environmentally sustainable neighborhoods that foster a strong sense of community throughout the city.
- To provide and protect housing that is affordable to households with low and moderate incomes.
- To provide opportunities for businesses to remain in Somerville as they develop and grow.
- To protect and promote a diverse mix of businesses.
- To encourage contemporary architectural design for new construction that compliments the established character of existing buildings.
- To encourage the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking in lieu of motor vehicle use when a choice of travel mode exists.

Site Plan Approval Specific

3. *Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

Staff believe as conditioned, the proposal does not produce any impacts that require additional mitigation.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Special Permit

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Household Living use, OSPCD Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. 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

3. Digital copies 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.

4. A 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.

Housing

5. Any 3-bedroom affordable dwelling units must comply with the Director of Housing's quality standards for 3-bedroom ADUs.
6. A deed restriction limiting the sale or rental of all affordable dwelling units to eligible households in perpetuity must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
7. An affordable housing implementation plan (AHIP) must be submitted to the Director of Housing for review and approval prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.

Site Plan Approval

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the 4-story General Building, OSPCD Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

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

Public Record

3. If the Board requires any changes to the submitted plans, digital copies of all applicable application materials reflecting those changes 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.
4. 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.

Site and Building Design

5. Utility and mechanical equipment is not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.
6. Electrical transformers and other mechanical equipment are not permitted above ground within the frontage area of any lot.
7. A Digital Massing Model of only the building's massing, in SketchUp format (.skp), that is to scale and properly geo-located and oriented for use in placing and viewing the project within the City's digital model of existing buildings in the city must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division prior to the issuance of a Building Permit. The model should be the main mass only and

should not include any detailed architectural features of the proposed building, including building components or materiality.

Preservation

8. The Applicant or their successor shall follow the recorded Memorandum of Agreement established by and with the Historic Preservation Commission dated September 6, 2022.

Construction Documents

9. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
10. Material specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
11. An outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.6 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaires; total site lumen limit table (calculations from the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lamp type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of any timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.

Mobility

12. The property owner(s) and applicable future tenants must comply with the Mobility Management Plan dated January 2024, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility's Final Approval dated June 24, 2024.
13. Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
14. All buyers, grantees, lessees, renters, and tenants must be notified in writing prior to sale or lease of any dwelling unit that the residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
15. Formal acknowledgement that residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission, must be filed with this Decision and forwarded to the Somerville Traffic Commission.
16. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall reconstruct and repour sidewalks on Broadway and Willow Ave along the frontage of the project, with final designs to be provided at the time of application for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
17. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall relocate the crosswalk across Willow Ave so that it is more in line with the pedestrian path of travel on Broadway. Final streetscape design is subject to review by relevant City departments at the time of application for a Streetscape Construction Permit.

18. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall reconstruct the curb ramps on both sides of Willow Ave to facilitate the crosswalk relocation. Final streetscape design is subject to review by relevant City departments at the time of application for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
19. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall maintain an 8' minimum pedestrian clear path on the Broadway sidewalk along the frontage of the project, to the extent possible. Final streetscape design is subject to review by relevant City departments at the time of application for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
20. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall work with relevant City Departments to determine the relocation of the traffic controller cabinet prior to the issuance of a full Building Permit.

Engineering

21. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall submit a Construction Management Plan (CMP) for Engineering and Mobility Division review and comment twenty-one (21) days prior to submission of the Foundation Permit. Zero lot line construction on an Urban Principal Arterial street will require engineered site logistic plans to minimize construction impacts to the high-volume public right of way.

Maintenance

22. The property owner is responsible for all of the regular and long-term maintenance, replacement, insurance, and other applicable costs associated with all on-site sidewalk improvements.

Legal Agreements

23. A public right-of-way or pedestrian access easement must be provided in perpetuity by a covenant or other deed restriction for the full area of the sidewalk provided within the frontage area of the lot. Final easement language must be approved by the City Solicitor. The easement must be recorded at the Middlesex Registry of Deeds prior to application for a Certificate of Occupancy.

Landscape/Trees

24. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit a Tree Protection Plan with tree protection details to the Tree Warden for review and approval, and must meet with the Tree Warden to discuss proper tree protection responsibilities and construction operations plans. The Tree Protection Plan must include strategies to be executed and maintained through the duration of the project to ensure the protection of the existing public shade tree adjacent to the site on Willow Ave to be maintained. The Applicant or their successor must follow the approved plans.
25. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit final details for street tree planting, including tree species and related maintenance, to Public Space and Urban Forestry for review and approval.
26. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall work with relevant City Departments to design driveway curb cut on Willow Ave to preserve existing

street trees to the extent possible. Driveway design must be approved by relevant City Departments prior to any tree removal hearing.

Sustainability

27. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit all Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements for the subject certification program.
28. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit all Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.
29. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit all Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements for the subject certification program.
30. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit all Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.