



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

7 NOVEMBER 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 | Clerk | <i>Present</i> | |
| Michael McNeley | Member | <i>Present</i> | |
| Luc Schuster | Alternate | <i>Present</i> | |
| Lynn Richards | Member | <i>Present</i> | |

City staff present: Stephen Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm and adjourned at 8:34pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 3 October 2024 meeting minutes, as presented.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 17 October 2024 meeting minutes, as presented.

PUBLIC HEARING: 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029)
(continued from 17 October 2024)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 5 December 2024, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-000047)

The Board agreed to hear a presentation on the project as a whole, with the knowledge that one of the applications for the same applicant team is pending a lot merger.

The applicant team explained that this is a proposal to construct a four-story general building in an MR4 zoning district. This will include 28 residential units, five of which will be affordable. The first floor will be over 7,000 s.f. of commercial space, the new home for Lyndell's Bakery. This proposal is located on a pedestrian street within a quarter mile of a transit walkshed. No parking is generally required, but there are four spaces proposed on the site for delivery trucks, ride shares, etc. Two well received Neighborhood Meetings were held on 3 May 2023 and 12 December 2023, both of which were well attended. The applicant team also went before the Urban Design

Commission (UDC) on 27 June 2023, 8 August 2023, and 26 September 2023. The plans presented this evening were okayed by the UDC. The building is proposed to be a LEED Gold certifiable building, with Passive House certification.

The applicant team reviewed the history and evolution of Ball Square. They noted that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) wanted to develop the Broadway façade to allow the building to look like two distinct, but not completely distinct, structures. To this end, the building was designed to bring in historic brick and brick detailing with a strong parapet that grounds the top floor, as well as punched windows. The building then uses projected bays, glazing, and similar materials, in different colors to connect the two sides. Horizontal ribbons are used to connect the floor plates. The team stated that the public realm and the pedestrian way are designed to be very active with some outdoor dining for the bakery. The entry is also recessed back off the sidewalk, a nod to the existing Lyndell's building. They stated that projected bays are used to add interest and relief to the façade, but the scale becomes more residential and less commercial as you move up Willow Ave. The projected bays do not cover the entire three stories, and a garden retreat outdoor area is proposed on the landscape design. The second and third floors have a mixture of two-bedroom, one-bedroom, and studio units. The fourth floor contains a shared amenity space with the green roof and six units. The five affordable units are distributed throughout the building. Signage is proposed on the corner of both Broadway and Willow Ave. The team noted that two new street trees along Broadway are proposed, along with a new street tree on Willow Ave, while protecting the existing street tree on Willow Ave. The back garden will be heavily vegetated with a hardscaped space to sit. There is a long-term residential, locked, bike storage shown on the plan and an enclosed trash space for both the commercial and the residential use. The project has a Green Score of 0.25, meeting the target for the MR4 Zone.

Regarding the lot merger, the applicant team explained that Lots 5, 4, and 6 have to be combined to make the project zoning compliant for the density sought at 28 units. The merger is still pending at this time.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Frank Farley - stated that the utilities required for the project have not been addressed. It is unclear if the sewer system and stormwater systems are sufficient to carry the load added from this new building here. It will be important to check this for the safety of those on the same system. It is also unclear if the current electrical power distribution and power lines have sufficient capacity for the new building. He asked about these items previously but has not seen any data showing that studies have been done. He expressed concern regarding potential flooding onto neighboring properties during heavy storm events. He noted that his house is over a hundred years old and there may be issues with its structure during demolition and construction.

Eilish Brown (Union Square) – asked about the location of the five affordable units throughout the building. She asked about the tree species proposed in this location and how large the tree wells will be, as there are 12 trees proposed to be removed from Tufts Street nearby potentially due to running out of root space. She asked if the owner of Lyndell's will own the space or rent it.

Crystal Huff (Ward 5) – stated that she would like to know how many of the affordable units will also be ADA accessible. There is a huge need in the community for ADA accessible, affordable units. She echoed the concerns regarding who should be contacted if something occurs on a neighboring property during demolition or construction.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board asked for clarification on the utility concerns for the property. The applicant team stated that there will be a transformer installed as part of the project and the City requires a rigorous stormwater process. An engineer will determine the size of the transformer needed. The proposal is for a Passive House certification, which will lead to a very efficient building, with all electric heat pumps and solar performance to reduce the load consumption of the building. The applicant team stated that all City stormwater regulations will be followed, and permeable pavers are proposed. If someone has a concern during construction of the building, a construction management team will

be available. There will also be a representative from the contractor and owner associates that anyone can reach out to.

The Board asked about a space on the plan in the basement level labeled bike lounge. The applicant team explained that an elevator is available to bring bikes down. The bike storage is actually at grade level, with 32 spaces.

The Board asked about how to mitigate for light coming into 729 Broadway after construction. The applicant team stated that a shadow study was conducted, and the report shows some shadows cast from the new building. The plan thus added a garden in the back to let in additional light along with certain materials to help give texture and richness.

The Board asked about the process with the Historic Preservation Commission and the proposed design. The applicant team explained that the HPC found 722 Broadway to be Preferably Preserved. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is in place to allow for a waiver to the demolition delay, if the team works with the HPC on the design of the proposed building. The applicant team worked very closely with Staff to come up with the preferred scheme. The HPC was adamant that this look like two separate buildings but joined architecturally in a way to seem harmonized using traditional materials.

The Board asked about the rationale regarding the exclusion of three- and/or four-bedroom units within the building. The applicant team explained that some of the rationale was based on market studies. This is located very close to a transit walkshed and has no parking, making it difficult for those who typically want three- or four-bedroom units. The Board noted that this tends to exclude pedestrian-based families and developments should be inclusive for potential families. A suggestion was made to reconsider the distribution of units to consider a three- or four-bedroom, as this has historically been a family neighborhood.

The Board expressed concern for those living next door to this building and their view of the proposed cementitious material/partial brick wall. The applicant team noted that this will be of a lap-siding material instead of straight concrete. The Board asked for additional detail on this cementitious material.

The Board noted a lack of mention of car share details within the mobility plan. There was a suggestion regarding including a car share more centrally located to the building in order to better serve those interested in larger units. The Board also asked if any of the accessible units will also be the designated affordable inclusionary units. The applicant team stated that they would explore this further.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the hearing for 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-00047) to 21 November 2024.

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PUBLIC HEARING: 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-000048)

The Board heard this item concurrently with the previous agenda item.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the hearing for 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-00048) to 21 November 2024.

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PUBLIC HEARING: 35 McGrath Highway (ZP24-000049)

Vice Chair Aboff recused herself from this item and exited the meeting room.

The applicant team explained that the proposal is to revitalize an underused industrial site with the construction of a new nine-story, approximately 115,000 s.f. lab building. The building has been designed to accommodate small research and development lab companies. The building, as designed, with the relief granted, is compliant with the zoning ordinance. The proposal includes a jug handle which adds a new 90 degree intersection, and a proposed signal to help mitigate traffic. There is a typical below-grade parking level proposed, with roughly 84 parking spaces across three levels. The majority of the ground floor is back-of-house and MEP space. A nine-story lab building is then proposed, with an enclosed penthouse and an open penthouse above that. This is directly in line with what 15 McGrath Highway is proposing in terms of an approach to the sectional quality of the building. The building takes the face of 15 McGrath and builds off it with a faceted curtain wall façade that has unique angles and facets to create a gateway element. It also cants and leans back away from McGrath to be mindful of the solar impact of the building, especially on neighbors to the west. Along the west face of the building, there are fewer window openings, due to the adjacency to the property line and while being mindful of the solar and glare impacts along the face of the building.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Crystal Huff (Ward 5) – stated that she appreciates that there are native plantings proposed. She noted that it is very difficult to get across McGrath Hwy in this area and she suggested adding a coffee/sandwich shop to the first floor to be supportive of both the tenants and the neighborhood overall.

Eilish Brown (Union Square) – expressed concern regarding adequate handicap parking for the tenants around this area. She noted that snow removal may be an issue in this area. She also noted that many businesses do not allow their employees to use terraces/balconies, and this may not be the best use of the space. She asked how the tenants will deal with frequent vibrations from trains. She also questioned viability of the project due to the number of lab buildings that seem to be sitting vacant in the City.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board also expressed concern regarding previously approved lab buildings sitting empty in the City. There was a question raised as to if the proposed use will be thoughtful. The applicant team explained that they believe there is a market for this space. The larger buildings are sitting vacant as many tenants would prefer smaller spaces, such as is being proposed. This will likely be a two tenant building. The Board asked how difficult it will be to convert this space to a different use, if needed. The applicant team stated that this would then be a non-conforming residential building, and they would need to come back to the City for additional discussion.

The Board noted that this area could have the potential for flooding risk in the future. The Board asked how flooding could be mitigated for, especially in terms of reaching the hazardous waste storage areas. The applicant team explained that the building sits at finished floor level, with a raised loading dock at the rear. Any water flooding will be collected below the loading dock line. The hazardous material storage is above the finished floor level. The goal is to get the first floor level as high up as possible.

There was discussion regarding proposed traffic patterns in this area during construction. The applicant team stated that a formal construction management plan can be shared in the future.

Chair Capuano left the written comment period open until 7pm on 14 November 2024.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the hearing for 35 McGrath Hwy (ZP24-00049) to 21 November 2024.

Vice Chair Aboff rejoined the meeting and took her seat.

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendations on Zoning Amendments:

- Walter Tauro requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 282 McGrath Highway from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Small Business (SB) Overlay District. (ID #24-1080)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Member Richards abstaining, to recommend adoption of this proposed zoning amendment.

- Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Sections 2.2.1, 3.1.16, 3.2.15, 4.1.13, 4.2.13, 4.3.13, 4.4.14, 5.1.15, 6.1.11, 6.2.13, 6.3.11, 6.4.14, 9.2.6.h, 9.2.14.b.v, and Table 9.1.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to streamline the regulation of daycare services and permit additional daycare operation in the Residential, Mid-Rise, and Commercial zoning districts. (ID #24-1196)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Member Richards abstaining, to recommend adoption of this proposed zoning amendment.

- Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2-7, Articles 9-11, Article 13, and Article 15 of the Zoning Ordinance to make corrections, clarifications, and regulatory framework improvements. (ID #24-1259)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Member Richards abstaining, to recommend adoption of this proposed zoning amendment.

OTHER BUSINESS: Amendments to Rules of Policy & Procedure

Staff explained that this came about as they have recently had two businesses apply for Building Permits to update spaces. They are both small businesses, hoping to make two units into one each respectively. This is something considered in alignment with the Equity and Economic Development goals in supporting small businesses broadly.

Based on concerns raised by the Board, Staff suggested that the language could be changed to allow for combining two commercial units into one through Minor Site Plan Approval, and that the combination of more than two units may require additional review.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to adopt the amendment to the Planning Board Rules of Policy & Procedure, with the amended clarifying language.

OTHER BUSINESS: Nomination of a new Planning Board Representative on the Community Preservation Committee

The Board agreed to table the discussion on this item to a future meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: Review to Standard Conditions

The Board agreed to table the discussion on this item to a future meeting.

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 planningboard@somervillema.gov