



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: December 12, 2024

This memo is supplemental to the PPZ Staff Memo dated October 31, 2024, and provides an overview of these submitted materials, staff review and comments, and updated process requirements.

BACKGROUND

Since the Planning Board opened the public hearing for the aforementioned cases on November 7, 2024, and subsequently continued the case, the Applicant has provided updated materials including the following:

1. Architectural/landscape plan set, revision date Dec. 2, 2024 (“Updated Plans” on Reports and Decisions web page)
 - Modifications to landscape and Green Score
 - Modifications to east, west, and Broadway façades, primarily fenestration
2. Updated TAP (Transportation Access Plan) plans, dated Dec. 2024 (“12/24 TAP” on Reports and Decisions web page)
3. “Team Response to OSPCD Staff Memo 10/31/24” from Vance Stein Architecture/Interiors, dated Dec. 3, 2024 (“12/3/24 Zoning Letter” on Reports and Decisions web page)
 - Describes zoning compliance
4. Letter to Planning Board from Verdant Landscape Architecture, dated Dec. 3, 2024. (“12/3/24 Landscape Letter” on Reports and Decisions web page)
 - Describes landscape and tree planting/protection intent
5. Letter to Planning Board from GM2, dated Dec. 11, 2024. (“12/11/24 Drainage Letter” on Reports and Decisions web page)
 - Provides response to drainage concerns raised during the public hearing

ANALYSIS

Housing and unit mix

The unit mix, with units and types shown in the updated architectural plan set, has been revised in response to the Planning Board’s question regarding whether additional family-sized units could be added to the development. The previously and currently proposed unit mixes are as follows:

	Studio	1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	2+ Bedroom	Total
Original proposal	13	10	5	0	28
New proposal	13	10	3	2	28

Housing Division staff have reviewed the updated plans and commented that the Division was comfortable with the original unit mix according to the February 7, 2024 plans and prior unit selections made via the Affordable Housing Implementation Plan executed on March 21, 2024. The Housing Division would be open to a plan revision if it would achieve the goal of creating more family-sized units.

The Housing Division has further stated that it is not supportive of the revision of the 720 Broadway plans (dated December 4, 2024) as is. In terms of the differences and impacts on housing, the unit type counts are largely the same. The revised plans modified two 2-bedroom units to be 2+ bedroom units. 27 of the 28 units had an adjustment to the square footage of the units. If the plan revision intention was to create more family-sized units (larger units to accommodate families), this revision does not add bedrooms to any units. The 2+ bedroom units would be marketed as 2+ bedroom units. These units typically have an additional room that is marketed as usable for an office or a small bedroom. This additional room is likely not a bedroom according to sanitary code requirements (commonly for lacking a means of egress such as a window); otherwise, the unit would be marketed as a 3-bedroom unit. The modification of these two units to add square footage necessitated a substantial revision to the rest of the units' square footage.

The revision modified the square footage for half the units, adding square footage and decreased square footage for just about half of the units. Overall, the average square footage for studio units and 1-bedroom units was lowered. The average square footage for 2-bedroom units increased (given the modification of two 2+ bedroom units). Four out of the five of the income-restricted Affordable Dwelling Units' square footage was decreased. The Somerville Zoning Ordinance 12.1.7 ADU Development Standards b. "ADUs must be proportional to the corresponding market rate units with respect to tenure type (for-sale or rental), unit size, number of bedrooms, and size of rooms." In the original Affordable Housing Implementation Plan, Housing Division staff selected units that were closest to the average square footage according to the previous plans. Should the Planning Board approve the revised plans, the recommendation of the Housing Division is that an AHIP amendment be executed to revise the unit selection according to the new plans.

The Housing Division has also recommended a revision to the proposed condition of approval regulating the AHIP timing. The recommended revision to that condition is shown below in the Permit Conditions section of this memo.

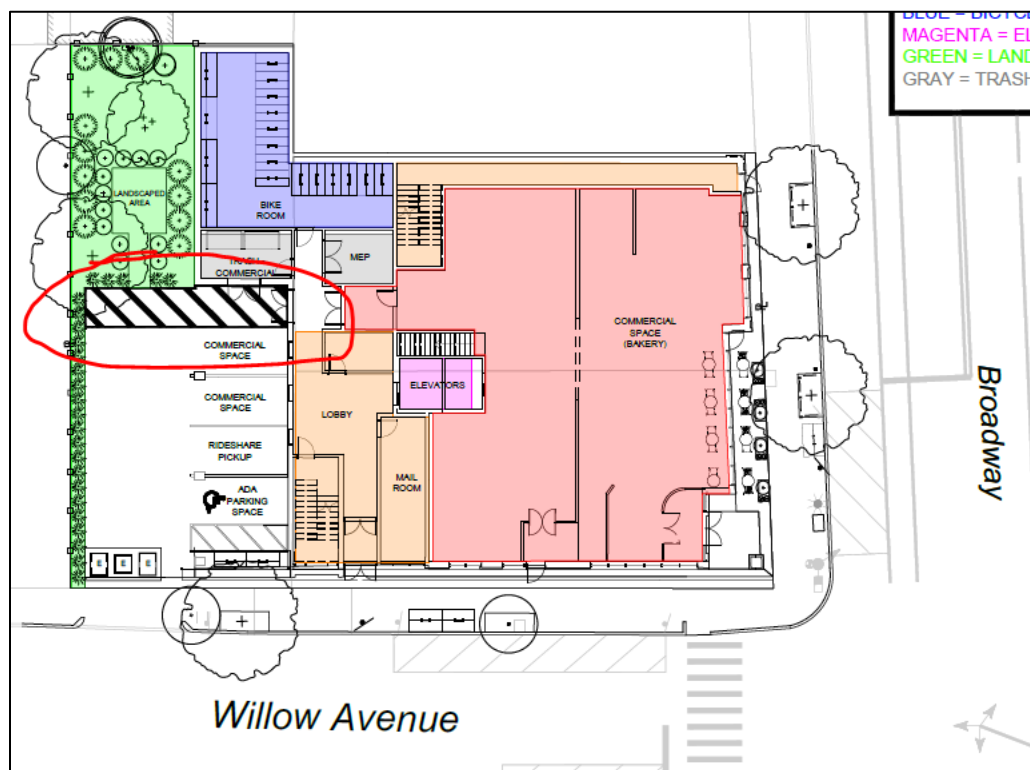
Design and HPC MOA

Several of the façade modifications, including the ground floor façade at the northwest corner and the west elevation (as identified on the updated architectural plans) require an amendment to the Applicant's Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The Applicant has submitted an application to amend the existing MOA, but the amendment process is not yet complete.

Mobility and TAP

Mobility Staff have reviewed the updated Transportation Access Plan (TAP) plans, amendment date November 2024. Staff have commented that the amended plans and secondary entrance off Broadway are acceptable.

Mobility Staff have also commented that the previously approved TAP showed a hatched area in the parking lot between the door and the landscaped area, which the Mobility Division have requested be re-added to emphasize that the space should be kept clear of vehicles to maintain pedestrian access to the landscaped area. (The image below is a portion of the Illustrative Site Plan provided as part of the previously submitted TAP.)



Landscape and Public Space

Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) Staff have reviewed the updated landscape plans and letter from Verdant Landscape Architecture. PSUF Staff have provided the following comments related to public street tree removal and planting (edited for clarity):

- Applying for a public street tree removal does not guarantee approval. Not receiving approval may result in revisions to the plan.

- The proposed street tree plantings along Broadway may not be possible due to utilities buried under the sidewalk. These trees will then not count towards mitigation of tree removal.

Zoning Compliance

ISD Zoning Review Staff have reviewed the amended plans and provided updated comments. Several comments from the original staff memo have been addressed; those comments are not referenced in this supplemental memo.

1. The lot lines adjacent to the rear lot line for 8 Lowden Ave and the rear lot line for 726 Broadway that are shown as side lot lines on the plans would be considered rear lot lines per SZO 2.1 - glossary. Please revise the plans to provide compliant rear setbacks. This comment was not addressed. This means that the structure is encroaching on the rear setback with these property lines. The lot lines are the 20 ft long lot line abutting 726 Broadway, and the 41 ft long lot line abutting 8 Lowden.
2. Provide measurements on the plans to confirm it is meeting 12 ft curb setback at all points, as required by SZO 4.2.8.b. This does not appear to have been totally addressed. There appear to be projections on the ground story along Willow Ave where the columns supports are that are less than 12 ft from the face of the curb. This also appears to be the case for the curved part of the sidewalk at the corner of Willow and Broadway where the large column supporting the floor above is. The curb setback is measured at all points and is measured in towards the property, starting at the face of the curbs on both Broadway and Willow Ave.
3. Provide measurements on plans for confirmation that 12 ft sidewalks being provided per SZO 4.2.16.a.i. This does not appear to have been totally addressed. There appear to be projections on the ground story along Willow Ave where the columns supports are that are less than 12 ft of sidewalk. This also appears to be the case for the curved part of the sidewalk at the corner of Willow and Broadway where the large column supporting the floor above is. The sidewalk measurement is measured at all points and is measured in towards the property starting at the face of the curb of the sidewalk along Broadway and Willow Ave.
4. The Residential entrance on Willow Ave needs to meet the requirements of a lobby entrance from SZO 4.2.10.g. Please provide measurements and accompanying diagram to confirm. The width of the entrance appears compliant, but it is not clear if it is meeting the 80 percent of ground story height requirement.
5. Provide measurements on the floor plans to prove the retail space is meeting commercial space depth requirements from SZO 4.2.8.d at all points. It appears that a small portion of the elevator for the residential use may be less than 30 ft in from the Willow Ave facade, making this small portion less than the compliant commercial space depth. Please revise or provide a measurement showing it is compliant.

6. Fenestration diagrams for each facade are needed to ensure meeting fenestration minimums from SZO 4.2.8.d. The Broadway facade is compliant, but no diagram was provided for the Willow Ave facade.
7. Please provide a proposed lot coverage calculation, calculated in accordance with SZO 2.4.2.c.i. Please also include an accompanying dimensioned site plan that includes materiality. Lot coverage includes the footprint of the structure, any ground story building components, accessory structures, and any paved surfaces on site. Permeable pavers count toward lots coverage based on the runoff coefficient from their manufacturer. If one cannot be found, then .33 can be used. This was not fully addressed. Please provide an accompanying dimensioned site plan showing materiality. The footprint of the ground story of the structure would count as lot coverage, as well as the paved parking spaces, trash area, and the columns supporting the 2nd story. Permeable pavers count toward lot coverage based on the runoff coefficient from their manufacturer. If one cannot be found, then .33 can be used.
8. Provide measurements to confirm the ground story entrance spacing maximum from SZO 4.2.8.d is being met. The two entrances on Broadway appear compliant, but measurements are now needed for the revised entrance into the residential space on the Broadway facade, and measurements for entrances on the Willow Ave facade.

ISD Zoning Review Staff have also reiterated that the existing lighting plan does not provide sufficient details to confirm compliance; to that end, PPZ staff have proposed including a standard condition requiring updated plans at the time of building permit (noted in the original staff memo). ISD Zoning Review Staff have also noted that signage must be compliant with zoning; signage is reviewed for compliance at the building permit level.

The proposed development continues to require 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. The Applicant has submitted a Minor Site Plan Approval application for this land plat, which is currently under review.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Household Living Use, OSPCD Staff recommend updating the language and timing of the following (previously recommended) condition:

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 Building Permit~~.

OSPCD Staff recommend all other previously proposed conditions remain included with the same language and timing.