



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

21 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), Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Justin Schreiber (Mobility Division), Brad Rawson (Director of Mobility)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:41pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 71-72 Union Square (ZP24-000059)
(continued from 19 September 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)
(continued from 7 November 2024)

The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.

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 5 December 2024.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-000048)
(continued from 7 November 2024)

The Board heard this item concurrently with the previous agenda item and continued it to 5 December 2024.

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 5 December 2024.

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendations on Zoning Amendments

- Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Sections 1.1.4, 2.1.1, 3.1.18, 3.2.17, 4.1.15, 4.2.15, 4.3.15, 4.4.16, 5.1.17, 6.1.13, 6.2.15, 6.3.13, 6.4.16, 7.2.9, 7.3.9, 8.2.4.c, 9.2.3, 9.2.6, 11.2.4, 11.2.5, 11.2.6, 11.3, 12.1.7, 15.2.1, and Table 9.1.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to address various parking requirements. (ID # 24-1197)

Mobility Staff presented the proposed amendment and answered questions from the Planning Board. The Board asked about the extent to which this was an initiative of the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning (PPZ) Department versus an initiative of the City Council. Staff explained that the City Council passed a resolution requesting that the administration prepare this type of regulatory reform for the Planning Board's and the City Council's consideration. The administration prepared these recommendations and submitted them in the fall. This is an example of harmony between the elected leadership and technical staff.

The Board suggested making a recommendation to the City Council that this go into effect on a delay to allow time for the Mobility Division to develop more explicit submission requirements. This could also allow time to accommodate the feedback received with a fairhanded, even approach.

Some Board members expressed concern with recommending this, as written. There was concern expressed that it would not effectively reduce car usage. The City has been stagnant in reducing car usage despite various initiatives, and the proposed amendment would not address the issue in a meaningful way. The City could consider capping the number of parking stickers per household. If new units are not restricted from having stickers, particularly in the 30% of the City included in this amendment, it is almost inevitable that this will add to the registered number of vehicles in the City. There is a need for thoughtful zoning, and the needs of all residents should be considered. Other Board members agreed that this may only have a marginal effect and there could be additional ways to address these concerns.

There was discussion regarding restricting stickers to addresses versus units, in order for developers to consider this more holistically. The recommendation on this item could encompass this conversation with respect to limiting resident parking stickers based off a set number. Concern was raised regarding those with mobility issues.

The Board discussed asking Staff to draft a recommendation that includes the topics of discussion from this evening or making a no recommendation vote at this time. The Board agreed to a recommendation vote, including all comments made this evening.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend consideration, with all the comments, considerations, and proposed edits discussed this evening, for adoption of the proposed amendment.

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendations on Zoning Amendments

- Charles DeCecca requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 501 Mystic Valley Parkway from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Urban Residence (UR). (ID # 24-1367)

The Board noted that the project that was presented is not something that will be codified in this map change. This is for a map change only. Some members stated that they were not in support of going back on exactly what was previously thoughtfully considered three years ago. This particular zone does not fit what the neighborhood has wanted, it does not fit what was overall intentionally done in the zoning, and the Board does not generally look at owner-driven zoning amendments in a positive light. It was noted that all of the comments from the immediate neighborhood were in opposition to this, and the comments from residents farther away were more likely to be in support of density in this location. Some Board members were inclined to support the proposal in order to consider additional density, with the acknowledgement that there would be tradeoffs, such as potential increased traffic. The Board discussed that a Comprehensive Neighborhood Plan could be considered for this area in the future.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (4-2), with Members Richards and Schuster against, to not recommend adoption of this proposed zoning amendment with the suggestion that the City move forward with a Neighborhood Plan for this area.

RESULT:

NOT RECOMMENDED

PUBLIC HEARING: 35 McGrath Highway (ZP24-000049)

(continued from 7 November 2024)

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

The Board asked about the handling of hazardous materials and chemicals on this site. The applicant team explained that the type of lab would be tenant-based, and State regulated. The building is flexible for a myriad of tenants. There is not an anticipation that there will be tenants of this building that would have a use of heavy level hazardous materials. Any types of chemicals that could be used are dictated by the Building Code.

The Board asked if the building design could consider increased pedestrian access across McGrath Hwy. The applicant team explained that there is a three phase development plan for McGrath Hwy in this location and there are proposals for increased mobility and pedestrian amenities. There was also discussion regarding the variances that have been received for the building's façade design.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the request for Site Plan Approval to develop a nine-story lab building in the High Rise District.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Vice Chair Aboff rejoined the meeting and took her seat.

OTHER BUSINESS: Community Preservation Committee Planning Board Representative

The Board reviewed the nomination of a new Planning Board representative on the Community Preservation Committee (CPC).

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Member McNeley abstaining, to nominate Michael McNeley to be the Planning Board's representative on the CPC for the upcoming term.

OTHER BUSINESS: Review Standard Conditions

The Board agreed to table 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