



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

5 DECEMBER 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>Absent</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Stephen Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:49pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 7 November 2024 meeting minutes, as amended.

PUBLIC HEARING: 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029)

(continued from 7 November 2024)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing for 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029) to 19 December 2024, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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

(continued from 21 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 (5-0) to continue the hearing for 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-00047) to 19 December 2024, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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

(continued from 21 November 2024)

The Board heard this item concurrently with the previous agenda item and continued it to 19 December 2024.

PUBLIC HEARING: 71-72 Union Square (ZP24-000059)

(continued from 21 November 2024)

The Board discussed cases involving cannabis facilities, the uniform conditions, and the potential disruption of pedestrian flow in switching to walk-in versus appointment-only. The applicant team explained that the potential concern has not been seen in other places.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve, with the conditions in the original application as well as amended this evening, the Major Amendment to the previously issued Special Permit (CZC2020-0039) for a Cannabis Retail Special Permit in the Commercial Core District.

RESULT:

APPROVED

The Board recessed at 6:26pm to enter a Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee.

OTHER BUSINESS: Joint Hearings with the Land Use Committee:

- Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 3.2.6 Building Types of the Zoning Ordinance to allow the building types permitted in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) zoning district to also be permitted in the Urban Residence (UR) zoning district (File # 24-1447).
- Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Sections 2.1 and 11.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to improve the regulation of bicycle parking (File # 24-1448).

The Board reconvened at 6:58PM.

PUBLIC HEARING: 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000046)

The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.

The applicant team explained that the request is for a Master Plan Special Permit. Also, the applicant is seeking Special Permits for dimensional relief for maximum building heights on all three buildings. Buildings #1 and #2 have a height of up to 290' and Building #3 has a height of up to 200'. The FAR allowed in the district is 10 and the applicant is requesting 11.1 for Building #1, 13.2 for Building #2, and 15.6 for Building #3. There is also a Special Permit requirement for commercial space over 10,000 s.f. and all three buildings require that Special Permit. The applicant is seeking a Special Permit for access points to a subsurface garage and also a special circumstances setback Special Permit for 20 Cummings Street, which is allowed at 5' and being requested at up to 25'.

The applicant team highlighted two circulation issues for the property, including an existing crosswalk across the Fellsway West offramp into the Assembly Square neighborhood and Cummings Road which is a public road that dead ends into the site.

The applicant team reviewed the proposed site plan. The plan shows three principal buildings, totaling 1.4M square feet. Building #1 and Building #2 are 18 story commercial lab office buildings, and Building #3 is a hospitality building of approximately 200 keys. Three thoroughfares are also proposed to be introduced. Thoroughfare #1 is

primarily a drop off for Building #1, Thoroughfare #2 is proposed as an extension of Cummings Street, and Thoroughfare #3 is an alley connection to allow for service vehicles and other connection points into service components of the project. Two civic spaces are proposed totaling just under 30,000 square feet. The primary goals of the Master Plan for the project are to fulfill the desired uses and intensity for the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District; to create porosity through the development site and connectivity to adjacent roadways, to create accessible open spaces along Middlesex Avenue as a welcoming gateway into the development site, to include ground floor retail, daycare, and a hotel to activate the public realm, to improve site circulation, and to add linkage fees to the City.

The applicant team stated that this is a transit-oriented development. There are multiple bus routes, both existing and future, within Assembly Square. It is important for the site to be bikeable, walkable, and to tie in with Middlesex Avenue and the surrounding areas. In terms of minimizing traffic impacts, two underground parking facilities are proposed to serve the three buildings, with a total of 935 spaces on day one. Approximately 197 of those spaces will be valet or tandem operation, with the hope to phase those out over time, most likely at the end of five years. There will be parking spaces per 1,000 s.f. of approximately 0.65. Once the interim spaces are eliminated, this will reduce to 0.51. This is much lower than other developments within Assembly Square, and also lower than other developments in the surrounding area. The contents of a Transportation Management Plan have already been approved in the form of a Mobility Management Plan for the City.

The applicant team reviewed comments from the Mobility Division. They raised concerns regarding Middlesex Avenue immediately next to the site. Currently the proposal is for both McGrath Highway and Cummings Street to have single lanes entering and exiting under stop sign control. After discussions with the Division, a traffic signal at the McGrath Highway intersection with Middlesex Avenue is proposed that would be paid for and installed by this project. It would be incorporated into the adaptive signal system being implemented within Assembly Square as a whole. This will help to maintain both full access and egress, both at McGrath under signal control, and Cummings Street further to the north.

The applicant team reviewed the landscape concept plan. Civic Space #1, which is next to Building #1, is meant to be an immersive landscape, meaning it is designed to provide a high dose of nature. Civic Space #2 has been dubbed a gateway, open to Middlesex Ave and the Assembly Square neighborhood in general.

The applicant team explained that the current proposed retail master plan calls for approximately 16,000 s.f. of retail space spread across the three buildings, including space specifically set aside for a daycare use. Combined with the building next door, there will be approximately 21,000 s.f. of new retail space delivered to the Assembly Square neighborhood, noting that there will be a prominent retail space at the corner of Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street.

The applicant team also reviewed the memos received from the City thus far. The applicant team stated that they are amenable to almost all of the conditions suggested and discussions on these items will continue.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Eilish Brown (Bow Street) – stated that, if the applicant team is proposing lab space that is biomedical or basic biology, it will tend to skew very heavily toward those female and also those that are young. There could be a large number of people working in this area that live in East Somerville. These people will probably be walking across the underpass into this space. She urged the applicant to consider lighting and additional safety measures due to this potential demographic of workers. She noted that there is a lot of open lab space in the City, and it is unclear if this space is needed.

Wendy Ammirato (14 Ten Hills) – stated that she did not see any pictures or discussion of the impact from this project on the existing and historic Ten Hills neighborhood. These new buildings will have an impact on sunlight, air quality, and general disposition for those living nearby. There are health concerns that should be considered.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board echoed the sentiment that there was no presentation regarding connectivity of the site to the Ten Hills neighborhood. Pedestrian connectivity under Route 93 to Foss Park should be considered. The applicant team agreed to further consider these items.

The Board asked about the proposed plan in relation to 74 Middlesex. The applicant team explained that these opportunities arose directly adjacent to each other and a more cohesive planning effort was thus considered. There is a strategic effort to attract tenants to this area of the City. The Board asked about green space within the proposed civic space for the daycare use. The applicant team explained that the civic space must be public space and so any use of it by the daycare must integrate with the public's use. The Board encouraged the applicant team to consider this with any potential daycare tenants.

The Board asked about phasing for the project. The applicant team explained that the existing hotel is still in operation at this time. Site access and construction logistics need to be considered. There is interest in developing multiple phases at once, if possible. Much of this will come down to market conditions and construction logistics.

The Board asked about hazardous materials or deliveries of materials to the site, with regard to the proposed hotel and daycare uses on the site. The applicant team stated that loading areas for the buildings were considered intentionally. There will be hazardous material treatment plans associated with the buildings.

The Board recommended that the applicant team continue to work with the Mobility Division on its memo. There was discussion regarding utilities for the site and making sure that the development will not additionally tax the nearby area. Air shielding should be considered in terms of pollution from the nearby highways.

The Board noted issues during the permitting of 74 Middlesex in terms of the proposed civic space and air quality concerns due to the proximity to the highways. The applicant team explained that the proposed buildings and civic spaces for this project are positioned in a way to create a barrier to the highways to block the pollution. The Board stated that having a daycare use next to a highway does not necessarily seem appropriate and asking about considering civic space offsite instead. The applicant team explained that the daycare use should be shielded by the buildings.

There was discussion regarding the proposed lab use and oversupply concerns for this type of use. The applicant team explained that their vision is for a long-term planning effort for this area to bring a mixed-use community.

The Board agreed that it would like to see a shadow study regarding the proposed building heights to the Ten Hills neighborhood versus what would be allowed by-right.

In response to a question from the Board, Staff stated that the updated Assembly Square Plan has not yet been adopted. However, the draft document should be used by the Board when examining this development proposal.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 19 December 2024, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000085)

The Board heard this item concurrently with the previous agenda item and continued it to 19 December 2024.

OTHER BUSINESS: Review of Standard Conditions

The Board agreed to table the discussion on this topic 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