



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

19 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>Present</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 6:60pm and adjourned at 7:48pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 21 November 2024 meeting minutes, as presented.

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

(continued from 5 December 2024)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing for 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029) to 16 January 2025, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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

(continued from 5 December 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 16 January 2025, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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

(continued from 5 December 2024)

The Board heard this item concurrently with the previous agenda item and continued it to 16 January 2025.

OTHER BUSINESS: 50 Webster Street (P&Z 22-067-R1)

The applicant team explained that they are seeking final subdivision plan approval to facilitate the redevelopment of one of the blocks within the Union Square Revitalization, D3.1, block into a commercial building, a civic space, and a thoroughfare. The final plan submitted is substantively the same as the preliminary plat plan which was part of the subdivision plan approval for 50 Webster Street, which the Planning Board unanimously approved in August 2022. The property is proposed to be split into three lots: one for a commercial building per its approval, one for the approved civic space, and one for the approved thoroughfare.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-0-1), with Member McNeley abstaining, to find that the final plat plan for 50 Webster Street (P&Z 22-067-R1) is substantially the same as the preliminary plan, and is sufficient to be signed by the Planning Board, and then submitted to the appropriate entity.

RESULT:

APPROVED

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendations on Zoning Amendments

- 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).

Staff stated that they believe this amendment will do more good than harm in the context of existing homeowners and existing housing. However, they will continue to explore other mechanisms to reduce the possibilities of density reduction for these types of buildings.

The Board suggested a request that the City Council support Staff's continued efforts to come up with a mechanism that would fine tune this item.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend this proposed zoning amendment to the Land Use Committee for adoption, with the suggested request.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

- 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).

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend this proposed zoning amendment to the Land Use Committee for adoption.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

The Board took a brief recess and reconvened at 6:36pm.

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

(continued from 5 December 2024)

The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.

The applicant team explained that the Board previously requested better renderings and perspectives regarding how the parcels relate to the adjacent neighborhoods. These were presented and reviewed. The applicant team explained that they submitted a draft Economic Development Covenant, which includes financial commitments to pedestrian crossing and underpass items as infrastructure projects that would be covered in the additional linkage payments that they've committed to. The applicant team also reviewed the shadow studies completed for this project. The currently proposed parking ratio is tenuous and likely requires additional discussion. The proposal is to have a utilization study within three years after buildout and then have reductions to meet the utilization. The request is for some flexibility, subject to Staff's review, regarding phasing and the ability to move forward with Site Plan Approval.

Staff stated that conditions related to removing items later, or having studies conducted related to removing items, in this case for parking, are hard to enforce on ISD's end. Regarding Cummings Street becoming a one-way street, and the applicant's recommendations for an alternative, have not been reviewed by the Mobility Division.

The Board discussed not considering parking for each individual lab building developed, as they are part of the broader redevelopment of Assembly Square. Instead, there could be consideration to create a parking district for Assembly Square. This would provide assurance to developers that the parking numbers would work for their tenants, while also considering the entire area holistically. Staff noted that Assembly Square does have a Transportation Management Association, which this applicant is willing to participate in.

There was discussion regarding utilizing shuttles or other third party transportation services as part of the solution for this area. Other solutions should be considered, such as reducing the height or number of tenants, in order to reduce the demand and the proposed ratio. If the applicant and City cannot come to a solution that creates a building that is felt to be commercially viable by the applicant team, and a traffic situation that is felt to be aligned with the neighborhood and City planning principles of the Mobility Division, it is unclear if the commercial use should proceed as proposed. The remit of the Board is to adhere to the planning principles and support this development as a neighborhood. The applicant team agreed to work further with Mobility on these concerns.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 16 January 2025, 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 16 January 2025.

OTHER BUSINESS: Review of Standard Conditions

The Board agreed to address this matter at a future meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: Amendments to Rules of Procedure & Policy

The Board agreed to address this matter at 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