



City of Somerville  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**6 FEBRUARY 2025 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>Absent</i>	
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Absent</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 6:00pm and adjourned at 8:02pm.

**GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the 16 January 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

**PUBLIC HEARING: 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000046)**  
*(continued from 16 January 2025)*

*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 (4-0) to continue the hearing for 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000046) to 20 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

**PUBLIC HEARING: 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000085)**  
*(continued from 16 January 2025)*

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the hearing for 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000085) to 20 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

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

*(continued from 16 January 2025)*

*The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.*

The Board asked if the applicant team has seen the response from the Housing Division regarding the 2+ unit change, which was made as a response to the Board's request for family-sized housing. The Housing Division's response was that the applicant's proposal does not actually create a family-sized unit. The Board previously asked the applicant team to come back with a plan that included at least one three-bedroom unit. The applicant team agreed and noted that it tried to work within the constraints of the square footage available while not reducing the unit count, which would then change the affordable unit count in the building. This led to the creation of a proposed flex space (2+ bedrooms) which could be used as a nursery or a home office. This solution seems to be the best compromise between what the Board requested and also not reducing the affordable units and the unit count within the building. Staff stated that the Housing Division has not expressed support of the 2+ bedroom units. The Division seems more in support of the larger 1-bedroom units, larger studios, and retaining the existing 2 bedroom units as 2 bedroom units, not 2+ units.

The Board requested that Staff gather market information regarding how many 3-bedroom, 2-bedroom, studio units, etc., currently exist. Staff agreed to look into this.

The applicant team addressed the west facing elevation. There is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for this section of the project, and the team will continue to work through the proposed changes with the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). The revised plan shows that the corner on the first floor has been pulled back, allowing for more transparency and giving more relief to 726 Broadway. It also creates a more pedestrian-friendly corner. Some of the trims in this elevation have been scaled down. The precast detail along the second floor is continued along this area and some trim detail has been included on the third and fourth floors. A recess in this area has been widened to allow for even more relief and greenery along the corner.

The applicant team explained that the 2+ bedroom unit created was originally a 2-bedroom unit. The square footage of 1-bedroom unit was slightly reduced to create an additional flex space, 8'x10', within the unit. In adding the two 2+ bedroom units, there are still 28 units proposed, but instead of five 2-bedroom units, there are now three 2-bedrooms and two 2+ bedrooms.

The applicant team noted that they spoke to various commercial neighbors regarding the proposed project, and they were all enthusiastic. The owner of Lyndell's Bakery expressed support for the project, as this will allow for an expanded customer base and could lead to the introduction of new products.

The Board noted that it has historically pushed for larger family-sized units, understanding that there is a lot of demand for these in the City, and to align with one of the SomerVision goals to expand and preserve family-sized housing in the City. It appears the applicant's design team has done their best to accommodate that ask without losing one of the affordable units, which is another of the City's priorities. It was noted that there are currently three affordable units being provided and that these do not overlap with the accessible ADA units. A suggestion was made to build out the affordable units, as ADA units as well. This would be in addition to be accessible units already required by code, bringing the total number of accessible units in the building to six. The applicant team agreed to look into making the affordable units also fully accessible. Staff stated that this could likely be approved conditionally.

The Board asked what will happen to Lyndell's Bakery during construction of this project. The applicant team explained that Lyndell's is not expected to be closed at all, as the bakery will reopen down the street during construction of the building.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Francis Farley (Willow Avenue) – stated that he sent a letter to the Board regarding this project, outlining his concerns. It seems the issues raised are not ones the Board cares about.

Aaron Weber (32 Summit Avenue) – stated that the State of Massachusetts recently released a report that it is in a severe housing shortage, and that the State needs at least 500,000 more homes in the next decade. The latest year in which details were available, suggests that only 11,000 permits were issued in 2023. He encouraged the Board to move this proposal forward promptly, because delay helps nobody. The City is badly in need of housing of all sizes.

Carol Rego (Lexington Avenue) – stated that the conceptual vision for this building is very nice. She asked why so many studio apartments are proposed, when the City needs more family apartments. She also asked if there will be an elevator in the proposed building. The applicant team stated that an elevator is proposed.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board reiterated that they previously asked the applicant team to review the plans and come back with a scheme that included additional larger units that were appropriately sized for families. The applicant team did their best but were unable to accommodate the request without a meaningful reduction to the total unit count in the building, which would in turn reduce the number of affordable units constructed as part of this project. The Board then suggested a compromise that, in addition to the ADA accessible units to be built in a number of the market rate units, that the affordable units included in this project also be built out to be ADA accessible units. This area, similar to family housing, is a need of the City's. Pending approval from the Housing Division, it appears that the applicant has agreed that this would be a feasible change to make to the existing units that have been designated as affordable units. The Board also proposed a condition to deal with the plot plan issue.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve, with the conditions as amended this evening, the Special Permit to establish a residential housing principal use in a general building in the MR4 zoning district, with the recommended conditions listed in the Staff Memos, dated 31 October 2024 and 12 December 2024, and as amended this evening.

**RESULT:**

**APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS**

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

*(continued from 16 January 2025)*

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve, with the conditions as amended this evening, the Site Plan Approval to develop a four-story mixed use general building in the MR4 zoning district, with the recommended conditions listed in the Staff Memos, dated 31 October 2024 and 12 December 2024, and as amended this evening.

**RESULT:**

**APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS**

**PUBLIC HEARING: 53 Chester Street (ZP24-000054)**

*The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.*

The applicant team explained that this proposal is within the MR4 district. This is a four-story building, and it is proposed to have three 3-bedroom condo units, with each unit having one parking space. The intention is to bring

family units to Davis Square. A small, less than 800 s.f., commercial space is proposed on the main level. This property is within a quarter mile of a transit walkshed. Two Neighborhood Meetings were previously held, and the applicant team also went before the Urban Design Commission (UDC). The UDC made recommendations related to the balcony handrails materiality, windows, and the ground floor façade. These items were addressed by the applicant team and presented at the second Neighborhood Meeting.

The applicant team walked through the plan for the proposed building and reviewed the proposed landscape plan. The intention is for public realm improvements, primarily around the sidewalk system for two sides of the building. Currently, the sidewalks are approximately 6' wide and dominated by utility poles. The intention is to widen the sidewalks to the required 12' depths, at a minimum of 6' wide, with 3' wide tree wells. Small trees are proposed to be planted in the streetscape, as there are none currently.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. He noted that written public testimony will be left open until 9:00am on Friday, 14 February 2025.

Brendan Ritter (31 Chester Street) – stated that those who live nearby can likely agree that the existing building and grounds could be generously described as unfortunate. He expressed support for the project but stated that he would rather see an additional unit in the building rather than more parking. However, he understands what may be required for commercial viability.

Kevin Fowler (51 Chester Street) – expressed support for this project. There was a request made to have the building be a color other than gray.

Aaron Weber (32 Summit Avenue) – expressed support for this project. He stated that, for a property located so closely to the train, there is too much parking proposed. Developments elsewhere have been proposing parking ratios below 1:1 and housing for people is more important than storage for cars. The applicant has no legal requirement to build parking, and he recommended they build less.

It was noted that, due to technical difficulties, there was one member of the public trying to address the Board on this item. The Board agreed to close the public testimony portion of the meeting at this time but reopen it if that member of the public was later able to access the meeting.

Chair Capuano reopened public testimony, as the member of the public was able to access the meeting.

Rob Gregory (55 and 39 Chester Street) – spoke in favor of the proposal. He has reviewed the plans with the developer and believes the neighborhood will appreciate the proposal. The property has been in disrepair for some time, and it will be nice to see it enlivened.

Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board noted that this property is bordered by a single-story building, and a no-story lot. Two sides of the building are proposed to have somewhat plain gray faces. The Board has a historic practice of not allowing blank sides of buildings. The Board likes for new buildings to respect all four of its sides, irrespective of what may later come around it. The applicant team stated that it likes the idea of vines on the west side of the building that will face the lab space. The team was also open to considering varying metal panel colors and textures to create visual interest on the east side. A mural could also be considered. The Board asked that these options be reviewed and presented at a future meeting.

The Board asked how some of the proposed flower beds shown on the plan will be maintained. The applicant team explained that most of the container plants shown do not require maintenance.

Some Board members expressed concern that this is proposed to be a mixed-use building, while the property is surrounded by many buildings that are empty and boarded up. The location of this building is very close to Elm

Street and a commercial use may not be the most appropriate one in this area. A smaller residential unit may be a better use of the space. There was also concern expressed regarding the number of parking spaces proposed for the project. The applicant team stated that this property is located in an MR4 district, and typically a commercial space is required in a mixed-use building. The right commercial tenant could be utilized by the residential tenants, hopefully families. The building is also located on a pedestrian street which, per the Zoning Ordinance, requires a commercial use on the ground floor. The team noted that this property is located within a transit walkshed but to gear the property toward families, a parking space is generally useful. There was discussion regarding whether the market should dictate required parking for a project.

The Board noted that the Neighborhood Meetings seemed to indicate a commitment that the commercial space would not be a restaurant, coffee shop, or similar type of use. While this may be the commitment in this moment, the space is still a commercial one on a pedestrian street which is difficult to design for, and there is no guarantee that the current developer will remain the owner, or that the use will not change over time. The Board asked the applicant team to consider modifications to the ground floor in order to accommodate all uses that are permitted in this location.

The Board also noted that the façade design seems to be non-contextual and jarring. The roof line and cornices seem to resolve the top of the building in an awkward way. The front corner sunroom architecture is also a bit confusing. The applicant team explained that some neighbors suggested an art gallery for the commercial space, but the developer cannot tie themselves to that use. The intention is to stay away from a restaurant-type use, but any use allowed in a pedestrian walkway would be welcome. There is no intention to constrain the commercial space use. The applicant team agreed to bring the designs that were presented to the UDC to the Board at a future meeting for a more detailed review.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the hearing for 53 Chester Street (ZP24-000054) to 20 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

<b>RESULT:</b>
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### **PUBLIC HEARING: 53 Chester Street (ZP24-000055)**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue the hearing for 53 Chester Street (ZP24-000055) to 20 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

<b>RESULT:</b>
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*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](mailto:PlanningBoard@somervillema.gov)*