



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

2025 MAR 20 A.D. 11

DECISION

PROPERTY ADDRESS: 20-23 Cummings Street
CASE NUMBER: ZP24-000046
OWNER: 23C Property Owner, LLC
OWNER ADDRESS: One Federal Street, Suite 1804, Boston, Massachusetts, 02110
APPLICANT: Greystar Development East, LLC
APPLICANT ADDRESS: One Federal Street, Suite 1804, Boston, Massachusetts 02110
DECISION: Approved with Conditions (Master Plan Special Permit)
DATE OF VOTE: March 6, 2025
DECISION ISSUED: March 20, 2025

CITY CLERK'S OFFICE
SOMERVILLE, MA

This decision summarizes the findings made by the Planning Board (the "Board") regarding the Master Plan Special Permit application submitted for 20-23 Cummings Street.

LEGAL NOTICE

Greystar Development East, LLC proposes a Master Plan in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use (ASMD) special district, which requires a Master Plan Special Permit.

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

On December 5, 2024, the Planning Board held a public hearing advertised in accordance with M.G.L. 40A and the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. Present and sitting at the public hearing were Board Members Chair Michael Capuano, Vice-Chair Amelia Aboff, Clerk Jahan Habib, Lynn Richards, and Michael McNeley. The Applicant presented their proposal and the relief needed via special permits. The Applicant noted circulation issues for the property and discussed the transit-oriented nature of the development. The Applicant discussed comments from the Mobility Division and reviewed the landscaping plans. Chair Capuano opened public testimony. Members of the public expressed concern about people accessing the development by utilizing a underpass, skepticism the need for more lab space, and concern about the impacts of large buildings. Chair Capuano closed public testimony and left the written testimony period open. The Board deliberated on connectivity of the development to the Ten Hills neighborhood, the relationship between this project and 74 Middlesex, existing and proposed civic spaces, and the impact of highways on the proposed land uses. The Board asked to see an updated shadow study. The Board continued the public hearing.

On December 19, 2024, the Board resumed the public hearing. Present and sitting at the public hearing were Board Members Chair Michael Capuano, Vice-Chair Amelia Aboff, Clerk Jahan Habib, Lynn Richards, Michael McNeley, and Alternate Luc

Schuster. The Applicant presented updated renderings regarding how the parcels relate to adjacent neighborhoods, presented updated shadow studies, and discussed proposed parking ratios and transportation issues. The Applicant agreed to work with the Mobility Division on their concerns. The Board continued the public hearing.

On March 6, 2025, the Board resumed the public hearing. Present and sitting at the public hearing were Board Members Chair Michael Capuano, Vice-Chair Amelia Aboff, Clerk Jahan Habib, Lynn Richards, Michael McNeley, and Alternate Luc Schuster. The Applicant presented their revisions since the previous meeting. The Board discussed their concerns about shadows. The Board, Applicant, and a representative from the Mobility Division discussed the amount of proposed parking and the relevant conditions of approval. Chair Capuano closed the public hearing, and the Board moved to approve the Master Plan Special Permit application.

PLANS & DOCUMENTS

Application plans, documents, and supporting materials submitted and incorporated are identified below.

Document	Pages	Prepared By	Date	Revision Date
20-23 Cummings Street Narrative	68	VHB, 99 High Street, 13 th Floor, Boston, MA 02110	May 31, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street Figures	31	Jacobs, 120 St. James avenue, 5 th Fl. Boston, MA 02116	May 31, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street Illustrative Plat Plan	4	BSC Group, 802 Summer Street, Boston, MA 02127	November 9, 2023	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street Transportation Documentation	194	VHB, 101 Walnut Street, PO Box 9151, Watertown, MA 02471	May 31, 2024	Transportation Impact Study Follow-Up on October 23, 2024
20-23 Cummings Street Neighborhood Meeting Documentation	52	VHB, 99 High Street, 13 th Floor, Boston, MA 02110	May 31, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street Environmental Studies	36	Shadow Studies conducted by Jacobs, 120 St. James avenue, 5 th Fl. Boston, MA 02116 Civic Space Study conducted by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates Inc, 231 Concord Ave, Cambridge, MA 02138	May 31, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street – Meeting Follow Up Memo	35	Greystar Development East, LLC, One Federal Street, Suite 1804, Boston, MA 02110	November 27, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street – Planning Board Memo	1	Greystar Development East, LLC, One Federal Street, Suite 1804, Boston, MA 02110	December 13, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street – Response to Mobility Staff Memo	3	Greystar Development East, LLC, One Federal Street, Suite	December 13, 2024	n/a

		1804, Boston, MA 02110		
20-23 Cummings Street – Response to Planning Board Comments from Meeting #1 Memo	13	Greystar Development East, LLC, One Federal Street, Suite 1804, Boston, MA 02110	December 13, 2024	n/a
20-23 Cummings Street – Planning Board Hearings Memo	6	Greystar Development East, LLC, One Federal Street, Suite 1804, Boston, MA 02110	February 26, 2025	n/a

MASTER PLAN SPECIAL PERMIT FINDINGS

In accordance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Board approved the Master Plan Special Permit upon making findings considering the following:

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City

The Board finds that the proposal will help to achieve the following from SomerVision 2040 which is the comprehensive Master Plan for the City of Somerville:

- Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, [] and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- Minimize the overall land use in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles while encouraging alternative modes.
- Ensure Somerville civic spaces are for the entire community. They should be welcoming and easily accessible, and people should feel empowered to enjoy them and improve them.

2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

The Board finds that the proposed Master Plan is consistent with the Assembly Square Mixed-Use (ASMD) special zoning district which, is in, part [t]o redevelop underutilized areas within close walking distance to the Assembly Square T-station with mixed-use, mid-rise and high-rise, transit-oriented development that will support the transformation of Assembly Square into an urban commerce center.

3. The proposed alignment and connectivity of the thoroughfare network.

The Board finds that the proposed alignment and connectivity of the proposed thoroughfare network is consistent with the future planned network for the neighborhood.

4. The gross floor area allocated to different use categories.

The Board finds that the gross floor area allocated to different use categories is consistent with the goals of SomerVision 2040 around developing new commercial spaces for employment opportunities and the ASQ Plan for research and development uses in the Assembly Square neighborhood. Ground floor retail and food & beverage uses will complement the proposed commercial uses along with new civic spaces in the Master Plan area.

5. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any adverse impacts on utility infrastructure.

The Board finds that the proposed Master Plan does not create any adverse impacts on existing utilities and that proposed improvements are in accordance with all City standards and will be reviewed further via subsequent permitting processes.

6. Proposed development phasing.

The Board finds that phasing is appropriate for this proposed Master Plan as it consists of multiple buildings, civic spaces, and thoroughfares. Further staff believes that the applicants proposed phasing plan (including the possibility of building 3 being moved from phase 3 to phases 1 or 2) is a logical order of development.

7. Proposed on-street parking to address demand by customers of Retail sales, Food & Beverage, or Commercial Services principal uses.

The Board finds that the proposed Master Plan is providing enough on-street parking to address demand by customers or Retail sales, Food & Beverage, or Commercial Services principle uses.

8. Consistency with the ASQ Plan.

The Board finds that the proposed Master Plan is consistent with the ASQ Plan specifically related to the plan's goal of generating a high amount of commercial office and research and development uses.

The Board finds that this proposed Master Plan is consistent with the publicly available draft ASQ Plan update including but not limited to the plans goals to make Middlesex Avenue a "research corridor" and developing taller buildings close to I-93 and away from the core of the neighborhood and a creating a pedestrian oriented connection at Fellsway into the Assembly Square Neighborhood.

DECISION

Following public testimony, review of the submitted plans, and discussion of the statutorily required considerations, Chair Capuano moved to approve Master Plan Special Permit with the conditions included in the staff memo and as amended during the hearing. Vice-Chair Aboff seconded the motion. The Board voted **5-0-1** (McNeley abstained) to approve the permit, subject to the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. This MPSP certifies that development may proceed in accordance with the standards of the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district.
3. Applying for development review for any proposed thoroughfare, civic space, or building identified in the submitted Master Plan constitutes substantial use of this MPSP for the purpose of subsequent development entitlement.
4. All approvals are for property located outside the public right-of-way, which is at the discretion of the City.

Public Record

5. A digital copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.
6. One (1) digital copy of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.

Legal Agreements

7. The property owner(s) and all applicable future tenants must comply with the Master Mobility Management Plan dated February 29, 2024.
8. Thoroughfare lots must be dedicated to the public by a covenant or other deed restriction following completion of construction. Satisfaction of this condition must be approved by the City Solicitor.
9. Civic Space lots must be dedicated to the public by a covenant or other deed restriction following completion of construction. Satisfaction of this condition must be approved by the City Solicitor.

Development Permitting

10. Development must proceed as identified in Phase 1 (Section 1.10.1; Figure 1.14a Phasing Plan – Phase 1), Phase 2 (Section 1.10.2; Figure 1.14b Phasing Plan – Phase 2), and Phase 3 (Section 1.10.3; Figure 1.14c Phasing Plan – Phase 3) of the approved plan except that buildings 1, 2, or 3 may swap phases

as a di minimis plan revision to be reviewed and approved by the Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning.

11. Land platting must result in a number and general configuration of lots and rights-of-way that is substantially equivalent to Figure 1.6 – Proposed Lot Plan of the approved Master Plan.
12. Greystar Development East, LLC must post a performance bond for one hundred and twenty five percent (125%) of the total estimated costs to design and construct Civic Space 1, Civic Space 2, and all conditioned transportation impact mitigation prior to applying for any building permit, streetscape construction permit, or civic space permit for development subject to the approved Master Plan.
13. Except as approved in writing by the Director of Planning, Preservation, & Zoning, Greystar Development East, LLC may not apply for Site Plan Approval of any thoroughfare, civic space, or building in a succeeding phase until all thoroughfares, civic spaces, or buildings have received a construction permit (BP, CSP, or SCP) for the proceeding phase.
14. If a period of one (1) year lapses between the Site Plan Approval required for any thoroughfare, civic space, or building types and the date of decision of the in the same phase, the Greystar Development East, LLC must update the Planning Board.

Plan Revisions

15. Changes to the number or general configuration of lots; thoroughfares, civic spaces, or buildings; development phases; and the percentages of commercial floor area is a major amendment to the previously approved Master Plan and is permitted only as a revision to this MPSP except that Buildings 1, 2, or 3 may swap phases as a di minimis plan revision to be reviewed and approved by the Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning.

Thoroughfares

16. The general alignment, connectivity, right-of-way, and geometry of thoroughfares must be substantially equivalent to the thoroughfares shown in the approved Master Plan.

Civic Spaces

17. Civic Space 1 must include active recreational elements as part of the Civic Space programming.

Transportation Mitigation

18. To mitigate transportation impacts, the Applicant may be required to construct up to two (2) signalized intersections: at the intersection of Cummings Street and Middlesex Avenue and at the intersection of McGrath Highway and Middlesex

Avenue. Final designs must be approved by relevant City Departments prior to applying for a Site Plan Approval for any of the proposed Thoroughfares. The Director of Mobility may waive this requirement at one or both intersections based on findings of additional analysis and final traffic circulation pattern.

19. Any signalized intersections construction must be coordinated with the existing signalized intersection at Middlesex Avenue and Foley Street.
20. The Applicant will prepare a signal warrant analyses and study multiple traffic control, intersection design, and street circulation options for Cummings Street, Middlesex Avenue, and McGrath Highway to be approved by relevant City Departments prior to applying for Site Plan Approval for Thoroughfare 1 and 2. Any street directional changes are subject to the approval of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
21. To mitigate transportation impacts, the Applicant must construct a 12-foot multi-use path from the existing crosswalk across Fellsway West up to and across Middlesex Avenue. Final alignment and design of the path portions located on Thoroughfare 1 must be reviewed during Site Plan Approval for Thoroughfare 1.
22. Final alignment and design of the 12-foot multi-use path portions located on Cummings Street or other publicly accessible property must be approved by relevant City Departments prior to applying for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
23. To mitigate transportation impacts, the Applicant must reconstruct Cummings Street to incorporate any directional change to the street and any shared alignment with the proposed twelve (12) foot multi-use path. Final design shall be approved by the relevant City Departments prior to applying for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
24. To mitigate transportation impacts, Applicant must reconstruct McGrath Highway from the edge of the development site to the centerline of the roadway. Reconstruction must incorporate any directional change to the street. Final design and scope shall be approved by the relevant City Departments prior to applying for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
25. To mitigate transportation impacts, the west side of Middlesex Avenue along the frontage of the site must be improve with a curb separated bike facility. This bike facility must be connected to adjacent bike facilities on the west side of Middlesex Avenue to the north and south of the site frontage. Final design shall be approved by the relevant City departments prior to applying for a Streetscape Construction Permit.
26. The Applicant must identify three locations for Bluebikes bike share stations required by their approved Mobility Management Plan via site plan with each Site Plan Approval application for buildings 1, 2, and 3.
27. The underground structured parking must be operated as a Commercial Parking facility principal use.

28. To mitigate transportation impacts, a maximum parking ratio of 0.7 per 1000 square feet of below-grade vehicular parking spaces is permitted as part of Building 1 and phase 1, inclusive of both self-park and valet parking spaces.
29. To mitigate transportation impacts, a maximum parking ratio of 0.7 per 1000 square feet of below-grade vehicular parking spaces is permitted as part of Building 2 and phase 2, inclusive of both self-park and valet parking spaces.
30. The proposed twelve (12) foot multi-use path that is adjacent to Building 1, Thoroughfare 1, and Cummings Street must be constructed during phase 1 of development.

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

Any appeal of this decision must be filed within twenty days after the date this notice is filed in the Office of the City Clerk, and must be filed in accordance with M.G.L. c. 40A, sec. 17 and SZO sec. 15.5.3.

In accordance with M.G.L. c. 40 A, sec. 11, no variance shall take effect until a copy of the decision bearing the certification of the City Clerk that twenty days have elapsed after the decision has been filed in the Office of the City Clerk and no appeal has been filed, or that if such appeal has been filed, that it has been dismissed or denied, is recorded in the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds and indexed in the grantor index under the name of the owner of record or is recorded and noted on the owner's certificate of title.

Also in accordance with M.G.L. c. 40 A, sec. 11, a special permit shall not take effect until a copy of the decision bearing the certification of the City Clerk that twenty days have elapsed after the decision has been filed in the Office of the City Clerk and either that no appeal has been filed or the appeal has been filed within such time, is recorded in the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds and indexed in the grantor index under the name of the owner of record or is recorded and noted on the owner's certificate of title. The person exercising rights under a duly appealed Special Permit does so at risk that a court will reverse the permit and that any construction performed under the permit may be ordered undone.

The owner or applicant shall pay the fee for recording or registering. Furthermore, a permit from the Division of Inspectional Services shall be required in order to proceed with any project favorably decided upon by this decision, and upon request, the Applicant shall present evidence to the Building Official that this decision is properly recorded.

This is a true and correct copy of the decision filed on _____ in the Office of the City Clerk, and twenty days have elapsed, and

FOR VARIANCE(S) WITHIN

_____ there have been no appeals filed in the Office of the City Clerk, or
 _____ any appeals that were filed have been finally dismissed or denied.

FOR SPECIAL PERMIT(S) WITHIN

_____ there have been no appeals filed in the Office of the City Clerk, or
 _____ there has been an appeal filed.

FOR SITE PLAN APPROVAL(S) WITHIN

_____ there have been no appeals filed in the Office of the City Clerk, or
 _____ there has been an appeal filed.

Signed _____ City Clerk Date _____