



City of Somerville
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

2 APRIL 2025 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Susan Fontano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Anne Brockelman	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Ann Fullerton	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Zachary Zarembo	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Brian Cook	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	
Sisia Daglian	Alt. Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 6:37pm.

Member Cook sat as the Acting Clerk.

PUBLIC HEARING: 282 McGrath Hwy (ZP25-000024)

Member Daglian sat as a voting member for this item.

The applicant team explained that the request is a Special Permit to establish a restaurant within the Small Business Overlay District at 282 McGrath Highway. The underlying zoning district is NR and pursuant to the zoning ordinance table, 8.2.4A, a Special Permit is required for bar, restaurant, and tavern uses in the Overlay District. Historically, this building has functioned as a bar and restaurant since the 1970s. Unfortunately, due to the impact of COVID-19, the previous establishment was forced to close, and the property lost its prior non-conforming status due to inactivity. The applicant team stated that the building itself is an existing non-conforming commercial structure within a residential zoning district and the proposal does not seek to alter the building's footprint. Instead, the intention is to renovate the interior by reconfiguring the layout into a more open space. The proposed restaurant will be on the first floor and will encompass 3,865 s.f. and accommodate 50 seats per the licensing. They stated that this establishment will serve as a vital neighborhood and community-oriented business, providing a local minority-owned restaurant that will offer high quality Dominican cuisine at accessible prices. The applicant team stated that the restaurant will improve pedestrian and bicycle access by creating an inviting destination with an attractive new storefront. The location lies within the Union Square Neighborhood. By bringing a new business to this part of Union Square, the intention is to stimulate local commerce, attract visitors, and contribute to the District's economic vitality. Transitioning this property into the commercial tax base will also generate additional revenue to support essential public services and infrastructure improvements, aligning with the city's economic development goals. A neighborhood meeting was held on 5 February 2025 and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive and demonstrated strong community support for this project. SZO table 8 2.4B requires four short-term bike parking spaces and one long-term bike parking space. These have been preliminarily incorporated into the site plan, and compliance with these zoning requirements will be finalized at the Building Permit stage. Additionally, all signage will be reviewed separately to ensure zoning compliance under a separate Building Permit.

Chair Fontano opened public testimony.

Jessica Eshleman (Executive Director of Union Square Main Streets, 366 Somerville Avenue) – spoke in favor of the proposal. She expressed excitement about the connectivity that this restaurant will serve in terms of helping to bridge East Somerville to Union Square.

Chair Fontano closed public testimony.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Brockelman, seconded by Member Fullerton, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve a Special Permit for 282 McGrath Hwy (ZP25-000024), with the conditions as stated in the Staff Memo, dated 21 March 2025, to establish a restaurant use in the Small Business Overlay District, in an underlying NR zoning district, with the findings as follows:

1. The project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the city's comprehensive master plan.
2. The project meets the intent of the Small Business Overlay zoning district which is in part to create, maintain, and enhance locations appropriate for neighborhood and community serving businesses.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 10 Washington St (ZP25-000023)

Member Cook sat as a voting member for this item.

The applicant team explained that this is an application for a Special Permit for a revision under the old Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) Section 4 4.1. This is a three-story mixed-use building originally permitted by the ZBA in 2017. The request seeks the relevant revisions to the left side setback, which went from the approved 1.8' to 1.0', and the rear setback, which is actually the right side, which went from 1.7' to 2.1'. As the rear setback, which is actually the right side, got 0.4' larger than was approved, additional relief is not required. However, as the left side setback got 0.8' smaller, a Special Permit under the old SZO, 4.4.1 is required. The applicant team is unsure how this small discrepancy occurred. They stated that this is too small a discrepancy to readily notice. The old SZO Section 4 4.1 requires that the discrepancy not be substantially detrimental to the neighborhood. Also, under the old zoning, the Board is to look just at the revision being sought. They stated that the change is so small, it is not detrimental at all, substantial or otherwise, and is not even readily noticeable.

Chair Fontano opened public testimony. Seeing no public comments at this time, Chair Fontano closed public testimony.

Following a motion by Member Cook, seconded by Member Zaremba, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve a Major Amendment to a previously issued Special Permit, ZBA 2017-54, under prior SZO Sections 4.4.1 and 5.3.8, for 10 Washington St (ZP25-000023), with the conditions as stated in the Staff Memo, dated 21 March 2025, with the findings as follows:

1. The information provided by the applicant conforms to the requirements of 2017 SZO Section 5.1.2 and allows for an analysis of the project with respect to the required Major Amendment to the Special Permit.
2. The project, as amended, is not substantially more detrimental to the neighborhood than the existing nonconforming structure.
3. The amended project continues to be consistent with the general purposes and specific provisions and objectives of the prior Somerville Zoning Ordinance, as determined in the previously issued Special Permit.
4. The changes maintain the project's compatibility with the site and surrounding area

RESULT:

APPROVED

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 ZoningBoard@somervillema.gov