



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARDCity Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 483 Broadway, ZP25-000002 (Site Plan Approval) & ZP24-000048
(Special Permit)
POSTED: May 27, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: Conditional Approval (Site Plan Approval)
Conditional Approval (Special Permit)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the Site Plan Approval and Special Permit applications submitted for 483 Broadway, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO), and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The applications were deemed complete on April 17, 2025, and are scheduled for a public hearing on June 6, 2025. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICES

Babbitt Design proposes to develop a Commercial Building in the MR4 zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

Babbitt Design proposes alcohol sales use in the MR4 zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

Babbitt Design ("the Applicant") is proposing to construct a 2-story Commercial Building on an MR4-zoned lot. The Applicant has received six (6) Hardship Variances from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) exempting them from providing the following:

- Minimum number of stories requirement
- Story height requirement
- 12-foot curb setback requirement
- 30-foot commercial space depth requirement
- 12-foot sidewalk requirement
- 2-foot front setback requirement.

All of the above Hardship Variances are current and valid.

The Applicant's proposal will redevelop a site on a major City thoroughfare that has been unused for several years. The majority of the property is located in Medford. The Applicant's proposal includes the construction of a 2-story addition along Broadway, a small portion of which will be located within Somerville boundaries. The addition will consist of two (2) retail spaces at the street level with storage on the second story. Alcohol sales use is proposed for one of the retail spaces. The existing curb cut along Broadway will be closed and plantings and pervious material will be added to the site. A loading zone is proposed along the Broadway frontage.

BACKGROUND

483 Broadway is located in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Magoun Square neighborhood. Sited at the corner of Broadway and Strathmore, this property has two front lot lines and two side lot lines. The property is located along a Pedestrian Street (Broadway) and is in a Transit Area. The area is currently represented by Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait. However, when the Applicant first began this process, the area was represented by then-Councilor Mark Niedergang at the end of his term, and immediately after by then-Councilor Beatriz Gomez-Mouakad.

The Somerville-Medford boundary runs at an angle through the property. The existing Commercial Building on the site is located entirely on the Medford side of the lot.

Establishing a Commercial building in the MR4 district requires Site Plan Approval (SPA). Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of zoning-compliant development proposal. Site Plan Approval is performed to address any potential impacts of the project as necessary. Alcohol sales use in the MR4 zoning district requires a Special Permit. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR4 zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by then-Ward 5 Councilor Beatriz Gomez-Mouakad on March 29, 2022, via the Zoom meeting platform. The applicant team provided an overview of the project. Questions from attendees ranged in subjects including, but not limited to, the review process and landscaping.

The second neighborhood meeting was also hosted by then-Ward 5 Councilor Beatriz Gomez-Mouakad on October 3, 2022, via the Zoom meeting platform. The applicant team provided updates on the building design based on feedback from the Urban Design Commission (UDC). Discussion included, but was not limited to, items such as process, landscaping, building shadows, and treatment of trash.

A third neighborhood meeting was hosted by current Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait on April 18, 2024. Section 15.1.3.b.ii of the SZO states:

Development review applications must be submitted within one hundred and twenty (120) days of the neighborhood meeting. If an application is not submitted in this timeframe, the applicant is required to hold a new neighborhood meeting.

Because the Applicant did not meet these stipulations, they were required to hold a third neighborhood meeting, as confirmed by the Building Official (in this case the Director of ISD). Discussion topics at the third neighborhood meeting included, but were not limited to, trash, mechanical equipment, building materials, and graffiti on the extant building.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by the Somerville Urban Design Commission (UDC) via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on May 10, 2022, and June 21, 2022. The UDC provided its recommendation at the June 21, 2022 meeting. Though the UDC chose Option 2 as their preferred design option, during deliberations at their June 21, 2022, meeting, the UDC stated that the design still needed significant work in order for the Commission to be comfortable recommending it to the Planning Board.

Because of this need for additional work, the UDC voted unanimously at their June 21, 2022, meeting that the MR4 design guidelines had not been met by the Applicant's design proposal.

During the two-meeting advisory review process, the UDC advised the Applicant to center the entry doors to the retail spaces on the Broadway elevation, define the Broadway-facing building corners, take cues from area buildings to make 483 Broadway appear more commercial in nature, and redesign building elements (such as windows and cladding) to bring further symmetry to the facade.

Since the June 21, 2022, UDC meeting, the Applicant has made some modifications to their design proposal in response to the UDC's feedback and negative recommendation. Therefore, the design presented to the Planning Board differs from those presented to the UDC in May and June of 2022.

In particular, key updates made that are reflected in the current design include:

- centering the front entry doors of the retail spaces on the Broadway elevation;
- altering the first story windows to be equal in size and shape across the Broadway elevation in order to provide symmetry to this façade;
- reducing the side of the first story Broadway elevation windows to try to make the building corners more pronounced;
- cladding the building in large, dark grey panels rather than in clapboard-style material;
- changing the window style from residential to more commercial in nature.

ANALYSIS

Building/Land Use

The proposed development is for a 2-story Commercial Building, with only a small portion of the development occurring within Somerville; the remainder of the property, including the existing building on site, resides within City of Medford boundaries (see Site Plan and related plan sets). The proposed footprint for the Somerville portion of the project is roughly 700sf with a total square footage of roughly 1,400 square feet distributed across two stories.

Current zoning in Medford limits development on this site to two (2) stories. In addition to zoning relief from Medford, the Applicant has received multiple Hardship Variances (see list at outset of report) from the Somerville ZBA including a Hardship Variance to construct two-stories in a zoning district where a minimum of three (3) stories is required. The purpose of keeping the Somerville portion of the development at two (2) stories is to create a visual harmony between the Somerville and Medford portions of the building.

The Applicant proposes two (2) commercial spaces on the street level, one of which will be occupied by Woody's Liquors, a long-standing Somerville business currently located further down on Broadway opposite Trum Field. No plans/proposals have been submitted at this time regarding specific use in the second commercial unit. When the Applicant or building owner has identified a tenant, the owner/tenant will work with ISD to determine necessary permits and if any zoning relief is. The second story of the building will serve as storage space for the commercial units below.

No additional parking (motor vehicle or bike) is proposed for the site. The existing curb cut along Broadway will be closed and a loading zone proposed.

Landscape and Public Space

The proposal includes permanent planters as well as some in-ground plantings and permeable pavers. Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) has confirmed compliance with the Green Score.

Sustainability & Environment

The Applicant completed the sustainable building questionnaire required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment and were issued a Certificate of Received Materials (CRM) by same.

Mobility and Streetscape

As noted earlier, no motor vehicle parking spaces nor bike parking are proposed for this site. The existing curb cut to the site will be closed. As this is a Pedestrian Street, this will help improve pedestrian safety. In addition, closing the curb cut will provide additional safety for cyclists as there is a bike lane that runs along this side of Broadway and past this site.

Following the feedback provided by Mobility, a loading zone is proposed in front of the

property on Broadway. Mobility has provided two (2) approval conditions for this project

Infrastructure and Engineering

Engineering Staff provided approval conditions requiring submission of a Construction Management Plan, submission of a Streetscape Construction Permit application, and submission of an application to establish a unique address for the additional commercial unit on the site.

Zoning Compliance

ISD has completed their review of the plans submitted for Board Review and has added an approval condition relative to commercial signage.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw conclusions for each consideration but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Special Permit Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval and Special Permit

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

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Continue to support small businesses, and fight displacement by coordinating with an existing local business to remain in Somerville.
- Prioritize walking, biking, and transit options and minimize space dedicated to personal vehicles

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

Staff believe that this project meets the intent of the MR4 zoning district is, in part: "To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-

use buildings and neighborhood serving commercial uses.”

Staff also believe that this project meets the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including the following:

- To develop and maintain complete, mixed-use, walkable, transit-oriented, and environmentally sustainable neighborhoods that foster a strong sense of community throughout the city.
- To provide opportunities for businesses to remain in Somerville as they develop and grow.
- To protect and promote a diverse mix of businesses.
- To encourage contemporary architectural design for new construction that compliments the established character of existing buildings.
- To encourage the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking in lieu of motor vehicle use when a choice of travel mode exists.

Site Plan Approval Specific

3. *Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

Staff believe as conditioned, the proposal does not produce any impacts that require additional mitigation.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Special Permit

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit for Alcohol Sales use, OSPCD Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be provided to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

3. Digital copies 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.
4. A 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.

Site Plan Approval

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the 2-story Commercial Building, OSPCD Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

3. If the Board requires any changes to the submitted plans, digital copies of all applicable application materials reflecting those changes 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.
4. 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.

Site and Building Design

5. Utility and mechanical equipment is not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.
6. Electrical transformers and other mechanical equipment are not permitted above ground within the frontage area of any lot.
7. A Digital Massing Model of only the building's massing, in SketchUp format (.skp), that is to scale and properly geo-located and oriented for use in placing and viewing the project within the City's digital model of existing buildings in the city must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division prior to the issuance of a Building Permit. The model should be the main mass only and

should not include any detailed architectural features of the proposed building, including building components or materiality.

8. Any Commercial Signage will need to meet requirements of SZO 10.8 or SZO 14.1.8, as applicable.

Construction Documents

9. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
10. Material specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
11. An outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.6 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaires; total site lumen limit table (calculations from the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lamp type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of any timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.

Mobility

12. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall coordinate with the City's Engineering Division on requirements for curb ramp reconstruction to ensure compliance with accessibility standards.
13. All changes to curbside regulations are subject to approval by the Somerville Traffic Commission. Prior to issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy, the Applicant or their successor in interest shall coordinate with relevant City Departments to submit the proposed loading zone on Broadway for Traffic Commission review.

Engineering

14. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall submit a Construction Management Plan (CMP) for Engineering and Mobility Division review and comment twenty-one (21) days prior to submission of the Building Permit.
15. Streetscape design will be reviewed and approved as part of Applicant's forthcoming Streetscape Construction Permit (sub-type of ESC Permit). Apply via Citizenserve concurrently with main Building Permit Application.
16. Addition of Commercial Unit will require an Address Modification Permit to establish unique, permanent address. Apply via Citizenserve concurrently with main Building Permit Application.

Maintenance

17. The property owner is responsible for all of the regular and long-term maintenance, replacement, insurance, and other applicable costs associated with all on-site sidewalk improvements.