



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 59 Bow Street, ZPA-000098 (Special Permit), ZP24-000099 (SPA)
POSTED: August 1, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with conditions (Major Amendment to SP for Household Living Use)
Approve with conditions (Major Amendment to SPA)

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 Major Amendment Site Plan Approval and Special Permit Revision applications submitted for 59 – 61 Bow Street, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The applications were deemed complete on June 20, 2025, and are scheduled for a public hearing on August 7, 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 NOTICE

59-61 Bow Street LLC seeks a Major Amendment to a previously issued Special Permit (P&Z 21-017) in the MR5 zoning district.

59-61 Bow Street LLC seeks a Major Amendment to a previously issued Site Plan Approval (P&Z 21-017) in the MR5 zoning district.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

59-61 Bow Street LLC is proposing to decrease the total dwelling unit count from fifteen (15) to thirteen (13) units by removing two ground floor units and changing the approved 2-bedroom units in the basement and top-floor to one-bedroom units, remove six (6) of the twelve (12) private balconies, and install a shared roof deck. Along with these changes, the applicant has signed a new Affordable Housing Implementation Plan and is now providing two (2) ADUs and a fractional payment instead of the previously agreed upon three (3) ADUs. The applicant has also changed the number of bicycle parking spaces being provided. Previously, six (6) short-term spaces and sixteen (16)

long-term spaces were proposed. Now, six (6) short-term and fourteen (14) long-term spaces are being provided.

The proposed changes require approval for an amended Site Plan Approval and Special Permit for a Household Living Use due to substantial changes to the plans that include, but are not limited to a decrease from fifteen (15) to thirteen (13) units, the removal of six (balconies), and the addition of a roof deck.

BACKGROUND

59-61 Bow Street is located in the 0.5mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) zoning district in the Union Square neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor J.T. Scott. Establishing a general building in the MR5 district requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary.

Establishing a Household Living principal use requires a Special Permit. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR6 zoning district.

The Applicant previously received Site Plan Approval for a 5-story general building and a Special Permit for a Household Living principal use (P&Z 21-017) on February 16, 2023. The timeline of this project at the Planning Board is as follows:

- The application for Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit was first proposed for a fifteen (15) unit general building with fourteen (14) one-bedroom units, one (1) two-bedroom unit, and commercial space. It was first heard at the January 19, 2023, Planning Board hearing, and the public hearing was continued to February 2, 2023, so that the project could revise their unit mix to accommodate a more diverse mix of units.
- At the February 2, 2023, Planning Board meeting, the applicant presented revised floor plans and a revised unit-mix, that consisted of fifteen (15) units that included three (3) studio units, nine (9) one-bedroom units, and three (3) two-bedroom units. This project was then continued again, this time to the February 16, 2023, Planning Board meeting, so that the Board could wait to hear Mobility's updated comments on the project.
- The Planning Board closed the hearing and voted to approve the project at their February 16, 2023, meeting, with the updated unit mix of (3) studio units, nine (9) one-bedroom units, and three (3) two-bedroom units. The decision for the project that was approved can be found here: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/2023-03/Bow%20St%2059%20-%20Decision.pdf>
- Following that approval, the Applicant applied for a Plan Revision, which was deemed to be a Major Amendment by the Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning on June 14, 2024. The applicant's reasoning for needing to revise their plans are outlined in the narrative and described in the Analysis section below.
- The applicant then submitted amended Special Permit and Site Plan Approval applications on September 9, 2024.

- The completed materials were uploaded and the applications were deemed complete on June 11, 2024. The applications were then scheduled for public hearings.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

Neighborhood meetings are not required for applications to amend previously approved Site Plan Approval and Special Permit applications. No additional neighborhood meeting was held to discuss the amended proposal.

ANALYSIS

The Applicant is proposing several revisions to their previously approved Site Plan Approval for a general building and Special Permit for Household Living. The proposed revisions were significant enough to trigger the need for a Major Amendment. The Applicant's proposed revisions can be grouped into three categories: Revisions to unit count/mix and floor plan, exterior building design, and bicycle parking.

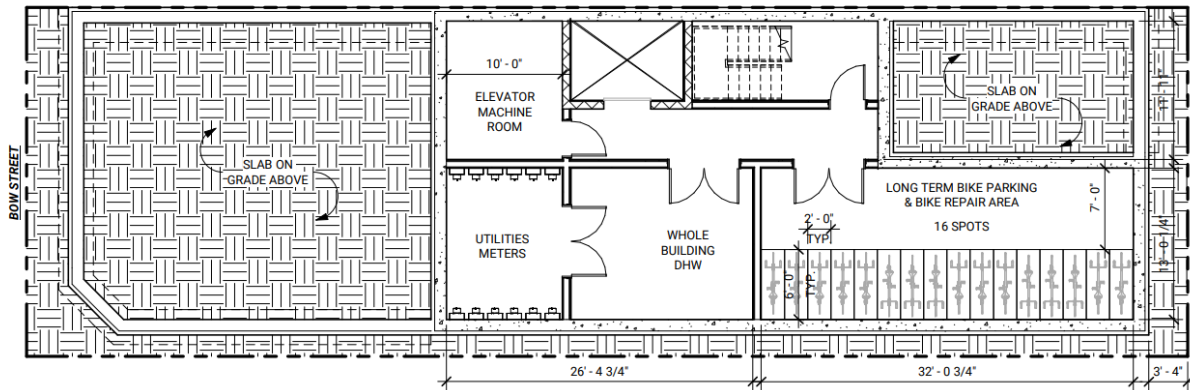
Unit Count and Floor Plan

The Applicant is proposing a revision to the number of units and unit-mix in the building. The revised unit count is as follows:

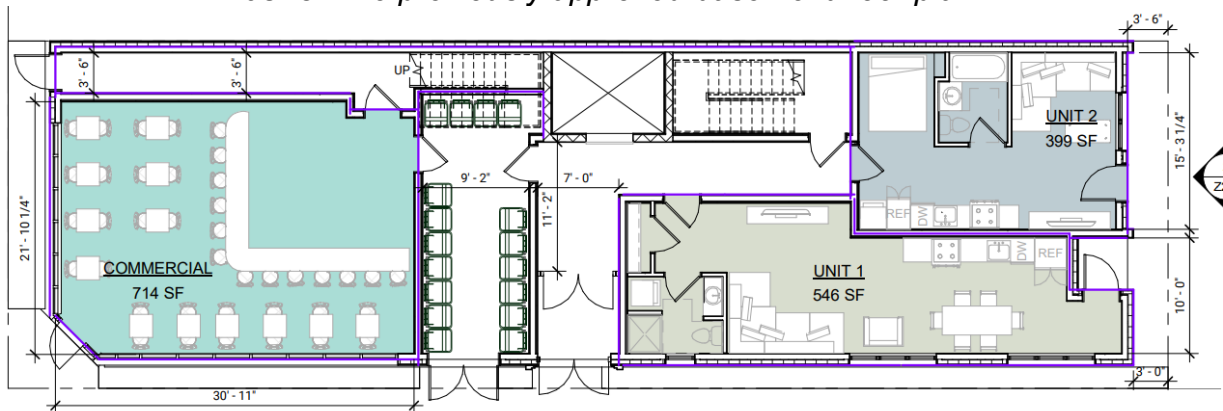
	Original Approved Project (1/23/23)	Proposed Amended Project (3/25/24)
Bedrooms	Units	Units
Studio	3	2
One	9	9
Two	3	2
Total	15	13

As depicted above, the result is a decrease in both the number of studio and two-bedroom units by one (1). In a memo put together by the applicant, they describe their reasoning (summarized below) for the changes in the unit counts.

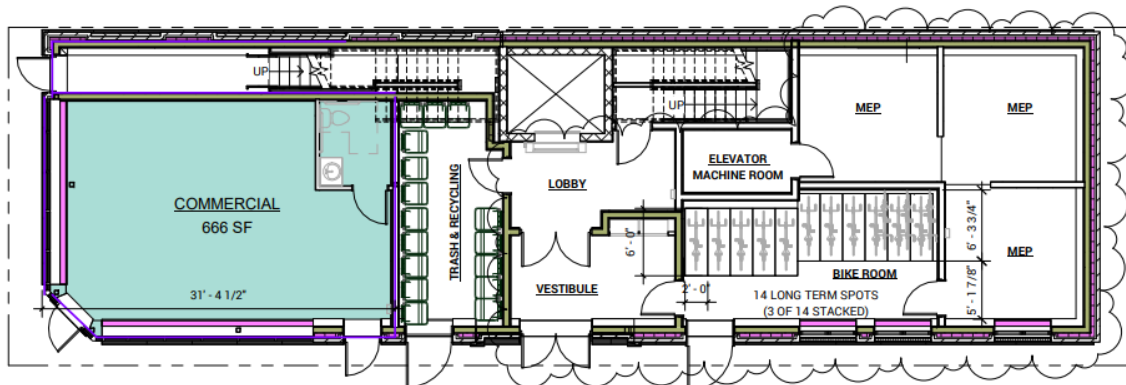
Initially, the previously approved plans had bike storage and mechanical equipment in the basement. However, the applicant is stating that unsuitable ground-level water levels and the difficulty of shoring the foundation due to a neighboring building has made this initial plan infeasible. Because of this, they are abandoning their plans for the basement floor plan and propose to move what was previously the basement program to the ground floor. As a result, the two ground floor residential units have been removed to make space for bike parking and mechanical equipment. Comparisons of the approved basement and ground-story floor plans compared to the amended ground-story floor plans are shown below for reference.



Above: The previously approved basement floor plan

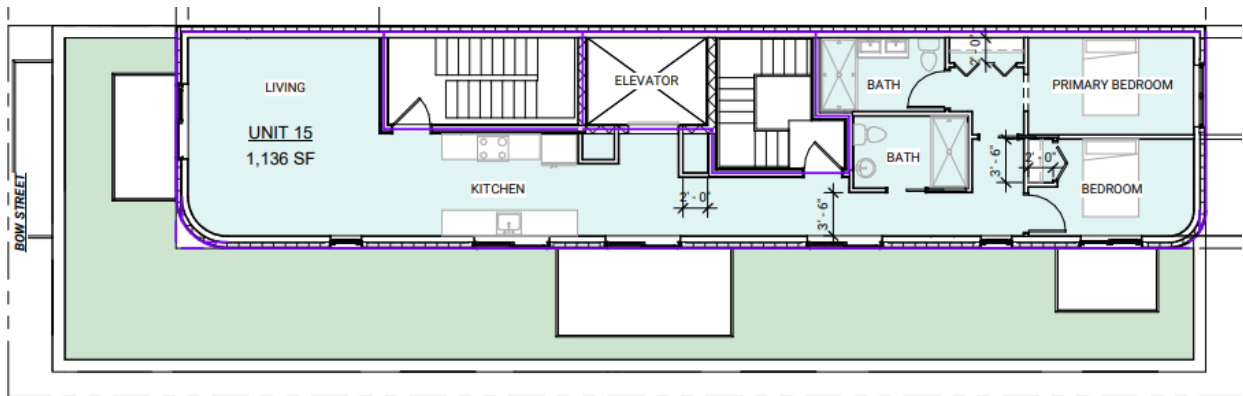


Above: The previously approved ground-story floor plan

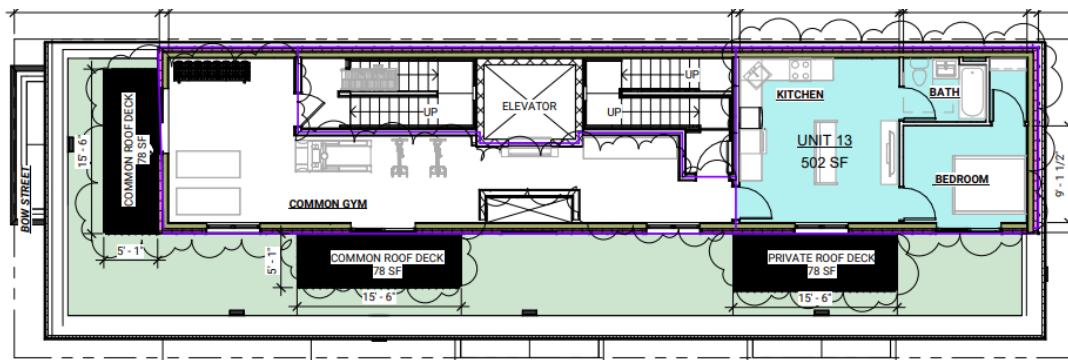


Above: The amended ground-story floor plan

Changes were also made to the fifth-story floor plan. The applicant has proposed to alter the fifth-story internal layout to allow shared access to a proposed common roof deck. This requires reducing the proposed 2-bedroom unit to a 1-bedroom unit, creating a common roof deck amenity, and a common fitness center, off which the roof deck can be accessed. The roof deck is proposed to compensate for the elimination of six (6) balconies, which will be discussed in the next section below. The comparison between the approved fifth-story floor plan and amended fifth-story floor plan is displayed below.



Above: The previously approved fifth-story floor plan



Above: the amended fifth-story floor plan

The applicant is also proposing to amend the amount of ADUs allowed. In the previously approved application, the applicant agreed to provide three (3) Affordable Dwelling Units (ADUs), which included two (2) one-bedroom units to be rented to households at or below 50% of the AMI and one (1) one-bedroom unit to be rented to households at or below 80% of the AMI. This was the required amount for a fifteen (15) unit building.

In the amended application, the applicant has promised one (1) one-bedroom, one-bathroom unit to be rented to households at or below 50% of the AMI, one (1) one-bathroom unit to be rented to households at or below 80% of the AMI, and a fractional fee for the partial unit that will not be provided. This change is compliant with the amended unit count. The applicant has submitted an amended Affordable Housing Implementation Plan (AHIP) to the Housing Division for review and the document approved and signed on September 13, 2024.

Exterior Building Design

The plans approved by the Planning Board on February 16, 2023, for this project had twelve (12) private balconies. In their narrative, the applicant states that Eversource determined that the existing overhead utility lines were too close to six (6) of the proposed balconies along Bow Street Place. Because of this, the applicant is proposing

to remove six (6) of the private balconies and replace them with the previously described roof deck. A comparison between the approved and amended exterior building designs is displayed below.



Above: the previously approved exterior design



Above: The amended exterior design

Bicycle Parking

The previously approved plans (according to the TAP amended November 2022) included sixteen (16) long-term bicycle parking spaces provided in the basement of the proposed building and six (6) short-term bicycle parking spaces will be located outside of the commercial/retail space. In the amended plans, fourteen (14) long-term indoor bicycle parking spaces are proposed, and six (6) short-term bicycle parking spaces located outside of the commercial/retail space are proposed.

There will be no changes to the vehicle parking in the amended proposal, meaning there will still be zero (0) vehicle parking spaces provided, and dwelling units are still expected to be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.

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.

When considering a revision to a previously approved development review application that required either Site Plan Approval or a Special Permit, the Planning Board shall limit their review to the proposed changes to the previously

approved application. The considerations before the Board remain the same as the previously approved application for Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit for Household Living.

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 Considerations¹

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. The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.¹
4. The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.¹
5. The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.¹
6. The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.¹

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:

- Significantly increase housing stock to keep up with demand while pursuing the goals of increasing the proportion of affordable housing and housing stock diversity.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is accessible, inviting, and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

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

¹ Special Permit Considerations 3-6 are no longer required for new Special Permits. However, because this is an amendment to a project that was approved by the Planning Board in 2023, when they were still required, they must be taken into consideration here.

The intent of the MR5 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 believes 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 a range of housing types, unit sizes, and price points to accommodate the diverse household sizes and life stages of Somerville residents at all income levels.
- 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.

Household Living Use Special Permit Specific

4. The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.

The site is in the heart of Union Square, providing a suitable location for both residential use and commercial space that can provide housing and service(s) both for the neighborhood and the wider public. The property is within a ¼-mile walkshed of the Union Square Green Line T Station.

5. The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.

The amended proposal is for thirteen (13) dwelling units, which consist of two (2) studio units, nine (9) one-bedroom units, and two (2) two-bedroom units.

6. The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.

There were no previously issued ADUs on this site before the initial approval of this project. The amended proposal will reduce the three (3) previously issued ADUs to two

(2). This number, along with the fractional payment described in the amended AHIP, is in compliance with the amended number of total units.

7. The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.

No vehicular parking spaces will be provided on-site. Under current regulations, no residential parking permits will be issued by the City for this address with the possible exception of the 2 affordable dwelling units.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required amendment to a Special Permit to establish a Household Living use, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions²:

1. This decision must be recorded with the Middlesex 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. 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.
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.

Housing

5. An affordable housing implementation plan (AHIP) must be submitted to the Director of Housing prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.
6. A deed restriction limiting the sale or rental of all affordable dwelling units to eligible households in perpetuity must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

² Special Permit Conditions 116 are all carried over from the original decision. They are listed for reference and will be listed on the new decision as well.

Should the Board approve the required amendment to a Site Plan Approval, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions³:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Alterations to the design or location of the transformer vault is a major amendment to the approved plans and is permitted only as a Plan Revision in accordance with Article 15 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

Public Record

5. Digital copies of all development review submittal materials, permitted by the Planning Board, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning (PPZ) Division for the public record.

Site & Building Design

6. Full, solid brick shall be used on the exterior of the building, not brick veneer.
7. Utility meters and electrical equipment are not permitted on the facade or within the frontage area of the lot.

Construction Documents

8. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
9. 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.
10. An outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.7 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.

³ Site Plan Approval Conditions 1-17 are all carried over from the original decision. They are listed for reference and will be listed on the new decision as well. Site Plan Approval Conditions 18-25 are new conditions recommended by various divisions as part of this application's review.

Sustainability

11. All Step 2 documentation required by the Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.
12. All Step 3 documentation required by the Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.
13. All Step 2 documentation required by the LEED Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.
14. All Step 3 documentation required by the LEED Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.

Parking

15. Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
16. All buyers, grantees, lessees, renters, and tenants must be notified in writing prior to sale or lease of any dwelling unit that the residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
17. Formal acknowledgement that residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission, must be filed with this Decision.

ISD

18. Balconies projecting over the sidewalk require a grant of location license from the City and must comply with all relevant City Ordinances, per SZO 4.3.10.k.ii.b

Mobility

19. The Applicant shall coordinate with relevant City Departments to ensure a compliant Motor Vehicle Movement Plan prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.

Engineering

20. Inflow & Infiltration sewer mitigation is required for all projects that increase sewer flows to the City wastewater system. By City ordinance & policy, the City only accepts I&I mitigation via fee. This program is managed by the Engineering Division. See Somerville's Sewer, Drain, and Infiltration/Inflow Policy for more information.
21. Project must be in compliance with Engineering Site Construction Rules and Regulations (available at <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/departments-infrastructure-and-asset-management-iam/engineering>) and implement stormwater management BMPs to meet runoff requirements as necessary. Current proposal appears to meet the requirements of a Medium Project Review.

22. This application does not include proposed groundwater management best practices. Final design will need to eliminate groundwater dewatering for permanent conditions; if minor dewatering is required, calculations must show that they can be discharged onsite, without entering the City storm drainage system. Construction dewatering may be required. and will be acceptable to the City in compliance with all state & federal requirements
23. The Applicant shall submit a Construction Management Plan (CMP) for Engineering and Mobility Division review and comment twenty-one (21) days prior to submission of the Foundation Permit. Zero lot line construction on an Urban Principal Arterial street will require engineered site logistic plans to minimize construction impacts to the high-volume public right of way.
24. Upper floor balconies overhang the public right of way. Overhang requires a Section 12-14 license with the City Council via the clerk's office. License must be secured prior to issuance of main Building Permit.
25. Bow Street is under the 5-year street pavement moratorium; trench patches are not permitted. Provide mill & overlay from curb to curb and 12 feet on each side of utility trench.