



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 199 Elm St,
Site Plan Approval ZP25-000031
Special Permit ZP25-000054
Special Permit ZP25-000066
POSTED: July 29, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (SPA)
Approve with Conditions (SP for residential housing)
Approve with Conditions (SP for mechanical penthouse height)

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 two (2) Special Permit applications submitted for 199 Elm St, 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 application was deemed complete on June 30, 2025, and is 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

Picker Construction seeks to develop a General Building in the MR4 zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

Picker Construction seeks to include residential development in the MR4 zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

Picker Construction seeks to construct a mechanical penthouse that exceeds the maximum height in the MR4 District, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Applicant Pablo Picker is proposing to construct a 4-story general building. The proposed development will produce 14,875 total gross square feet with 3,462 square feet of commercial space, ten (10) dwelling units of which two (2) are affordable units,

zero (0) motor vehicle parking spaces, twelve (12) long-term bicycle parking spaces, five (5) short-term bicycle parking spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.273.

BACKGROUND

199 Elm St is located on a Pedestrian Street and in the 0.5mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Porter Square neighborhood represented by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis. Establishing a general building type in the MR4 district requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary. Residential uses in the MR4 district and mechanical penthouses that exceed the maximum height in the MR4 district require Special Permits. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all administrative and (non-variance) discretionary permits required for the MR4 zoning district. If the SPAs and SPs are granted, the proposal will be by-right.

This property was found to be Not Historically Significant by the Historical Preservation Commission on April 1, 2025.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 6 Councilor Lance Davis and the applicant team on January 27, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform. The community had questions regarding stormwater, parking, and trash pick-up.

The second neighborhood meeting was held on February 27, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform. The Applicant team provided updates on the proposal's schematic design after design review with the Urban Design Commission (UDC). The community expressed support for the project and there were questions regarding shadows, price of units, and noise levels from a potential restaurant.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by the Somerville Urban Design Commission via the Zoom meeting platform on February 11, 2025. The Commission provided its official recommendation on May 13, 2025. The main suggestion from the Commission was to better distinguish the signage band to help differentiate the residential and commercial entrances.

ANALYSIS

Sustainability

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

Building and Land Use

The proposed development is a four (4) story general building, with commercial space on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors. A total of ten (10) residential units are proposed, with a mix of four studio, four 1-bedroom, and two 2-bedroom units. Two (2) units will be affordable. All units will have access to an elevator and are Group 1 accessible. The units fronting Elm Street will have outdoor space via balconies, and all units will have access to rooftop outdoor space.

The proposed development includes 3,462 square feet of commercial space, with space for one commercial tenant. The applicant has expressed preference in the space being used as a restaurant. Economic Development staff have determined that the proposed project will help activate the ground floor façade and enhance the City's commercial base.

Landscape and Public Space

The Applicant has proposed street trees and street planters and a compliant green score of 0.273. PSUF Staff have suggested two approval conditions as part of their review noted below.

Mobility and Streetscape

No motor-vehicle parking is proposed as part of this application. Mobility staff has suggested one condition concerning the City of Somerville's Elm-Beacon Connector project. The applicant will coordinate with the City's Mobility Division to identify the location of a loading zone prior to the issuance of Certificate of Occupancy.

Infrastructure and Engineering

Engineering Staff noted that all projects must be in compliance with Engineering Site Construction Rules and Regulations. Engineering Staff also requested several conditions noted below.

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 (for both residential housing and mechanical penthouse height):

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.

Special Permit Considerations (for just mechanical penthouse height):

3. Visual impact and aesthetic quality of the proposed screening or penthouse.
4. Efforts to reduce any net shadows cast upon neighboring lots and structures.
5. Ventilation and air handling techniques to reduce the emission of odor or exhaust toward neighboring lots and structures.
6. Sound attenuation measures or operational procedures to mitigate potential noise impacts to neighboring lots and structures.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval and both Special Permits

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:

- Encourage more commercial development.
- Prioritize walking, biking, and transit options and minimize space dedicated to personal vehicles.
- Increase the housing supply.

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

Staff believes that this project support the intent of the MR4 zoning district is which 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 day.
- 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 preserve and enhance the design of Somerville's public realm.

Site Plan Approval Specific

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

Staff believe the proposed conditions mitigate any significant impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Special Permit Specific (mechanical penthouse height only):

4. Visual impact and aesthetic quality of the proposed screening or penthouse.

Staff believes that the proposed screening reduces the visual impact and aesthetic quality of the mechanical penthouse.

5. Efforts to reduce any net shadows cast upon neighboring lots and structures.

Staff believe that, as located and designed, the mechanical penthouse will have a minimal impact on the shadows cast by the building.

6. Ventilation and air handling techniques to reduce the emission of odor or exhaust toward neighboring lots and structures.

Staff believe that the ventilation and air handling techniques will reduce the impact on neighboring lots and structures, and allow the outdoor rooftop space to be useable for the residents of the building.

7. Sound attenuation measures or operational procedures to mitigate potential noise impacts to neighboring lots and structures.

Staff believe that the mechanical equipment will mitigate noise for the residents using the outdoor space on the rooftop and neighboring lots and structures.

PERMIT CONDITIONS**Site Plan Approval**

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the 4-story general building in the MR4 zoning district, Planning, Preservation & Zoning 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.

Site and Building Design:

3. Utility and mechanical equipment is not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.
4. Electrical transformers and other mechanical equipment are not permitted above ground within the frontage area of any lot.
5. 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.

Public Record:

6. 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.
7. 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.

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 10.6 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.

Infrastructure and Engineering:

11. The Applicant or their successor must consider utility conflicts with proposed tree plantings when designing civil plan. Building utilities must be routed to avoid tree drip lines, as possible.
12. The Applicant or their successor must infill the existing curb cut as part of this project, and must apply for a Sidewalk Reconstruction Permit prior to executing the work.
13. The Applicant or their successor must apply for an Address Modification Permit to establish addresses for new units on this parcel as proposed in the drawings.
14. The 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.
15. Inflow and 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.
16. 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.
17. This project must be in compliance with the Engineering Site Construction Rules and Regulations and implement stormwater management BMPs to meet runoff requirements as necessary. Any piped, direct connection to the City sewer and drainage system will automatically classify this project as a Large Project Review per the regulations.

Mobility

18. Given the ongoing design of the City's Elm-Beacon Connector project adjacent to the property, the Applicant shall coordinate with the Mobility Division on the final streetscape design prior to issuance of Building Permit.

Public Space and Urban Forestry

19. Intensive green roofs with a planting medium depth in excess of 6" that include tree or shrub species shall have an irrigation system, as stated in the GreenScore guide. Please coordinate irrigation permits, compliance, and approvals with ISD and Water & Sewer.
20. The Applicant and all contractors shall take all necessary precautions to avoid damaging any tree to remain, including trees on abutting properties. This includes the tree structural roots (roots 2 inches in diameter or greater). Tree roots extend to at least the dripline of the tree, and damage to the root system may result in tree instability and/or death. To preserve the structural integrity and health of any trees to remain (including trees on abutting properties), the Applicant or their successor shall establish a Tree Protection Zone at the dripline of each tree at a minimum (the dripline is the outside edge of the tree branch tips). The Tree Protection Zone will be established using a chain-link, wire-mesh, or wooden fence, which must be installed prior to any work and must be maintained throughout construction. The fencing will be 4-6 feet high and solidly anchored to the ground. This fencing shall be clearly marked with signs stating that this area is a Tree Protection Zone and that no one is allowed to enter or disturb this area without authorization from a specified certified arborist. Signs must be posted in English AND in native language(s) of the workers on site. If at all possible, NO WORK should occur within the Tree Protection Zone. If any work must occur within the Tree Protection Zone, it must be done carefully and by hand, and shall be overseen by a Massachusetts Certified Arborist (MCA) or International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist or equivalent.

Special Permit:

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Residential Use in the MR4 zoning district, OSPCD Staff recommend the following conditions:

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. Digital copies of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
3. A copy of the recorded Decision by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record.
4. 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.

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to allow the mechanical equipment to exceed the maximum height in the MR4 District, OSPCD Staff recommend the following conditions:

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. Digital copies of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
3. A copy of the recorded Decision by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record.
4. 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.