



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 3 Craigie St/675 Somerville Ave, ZP25-000016 (SPA), ZP25-000017 (SP)
POSTED: August 14, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (SPA)
Approve with Conditions (SP)

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 3 Craigie St/675 Somerville Ave, 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 August 1, 2025, and are scheduled for a public hearing on August 21, 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

675 Somerville, LLC seeks to develop a General Building in the MR3 zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

675 Somerville, LLC seeks to establish a residential housing use in the MR3 zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

675 Somerville, LLC is proposing to construct a 3-story Apartment Building on a MR3-zoned lot. The proposed development will produce 14,679 square feet of residential housing on an 8,476 square foot lot, fourteen (14) dwelling units (two of which are affordable, plus a fractional payment), no new motor vehicle parking spaces, 4 short-term bicycle parking spaces, 14 long-term bicycle parking spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.302.

BACKGROUND

3 Craigie St/675 Somerville Ave is located in the 0.5 mi Transit Area in the MR3 zoning district in the Porter Square neighborhood represented by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen. Establishing a General Building in the MR3 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 Residential Housing Use in the MR3 district requires a Special Permit. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all non-variance discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR3 zoning district.

To construct the proposed General Building, the applicant will have to demolish the existing gas station and garage on the site. The accessor's data indicates that the existing building was constructed in 1960 and, therefore, does not need Historic Preservation Commission Review.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and the applicant on September 11, 2024, via the Zoom meeting. The applicant team provided an overview of the project, and attendees asked a range of questions on subjects including (but not limited to) the parking, sustainability, and the impact the project will have on the 24-hour carwash across the street.

The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and the applicant team on December 16, 2024, via the Zoom meeting platform. The applicant team provided an overview of the process, including a summary of the design review process, and attendees asked a range of questions on subjects including (but not limited to) construction timing, the transformer location, and concerns from the abutting apartment building next door.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the Zoom meeting platform on November 12, 2024. The Commission provided its official recommendation on November 12, 2024. The Commission gave the following guidance and recommendations:

- Think about adding a gate behind the abutter's fire escape access to secure the site.
- Review the materiality at the entrance for durability, transition between materials, and containing water flow.
- Review the structure and thickness of the balcony elements to ensure the design and detailing come across.
- Review how the windows interact with the flooring due to the thickness of the wood construction.
- Review how the building materials meet the ground.

They also recommended the following condition of approval, which has been included in the full list of recommended conditions at the end of the memo:

- Any change in the transformer location would require the applicant to return to the UDC.

ANALYSIS

Building/Land Use

The proposed development is a 3-story General Building. Fourteen (14) residential units are proposed. The unit mix will consist of seven (7) two-bedroom units, five (5), one-bedroom units, and two (2) studio units. The applicant has designated two (2) units, a one-bedroom and a studio, as affordable dwelling units (ADUs). The proposal will result in a total of 14,679 sq. ft. of residential housing on an 8,476 sq. ft. lot.

No additional motor vehicle parking is proposed for the site. There are four (4) short-term bicycle parking spaces proposed outdoors and fourteen long-term spaces proposed indoors.

Housing

The applicant has signed an Affordable Housing Acknowledgement form, dated December 26, 2024, promising two affordable dwelling units (ADUs) and a fractional payment. In their review, The Housing Division stated that based on the unit mix from the submitted plans and in accordance with the SZO, a 2-bedroom unit and 1-bedroom unit will be selected based on the prevalence of unit types in the project. The fractional payment will likely be based on a studio unit (the next most prevalent unit in the complex) and at Tier 1. However, in their architectural plans, the applicant has stated that they will be providing a one-bedroom and a studio as their affordable units.

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). This development is proposed as an all-electric building, under 12,000 SF. Compliance has been met via HERS rating pathway per RC103 All Electric Pathway.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Division has reviewed the applicant's proposal and found that the proposed project to the property will:

- Help activate ground floor spaces and facades. The new façade will dramatically increase the visibility and attractiveness of the new ground floor commercial space;
- Improve the interplay of ground floor space and civic space by constructing a visible and attractive ground floor commercial space on the site;
- Improve the building's signage and wayfinding around the site since the new ground floor façade will include space for dedicated commercial signage;
- Enhance the potential for outdoor eating and commercial activity on the site's civic space, by enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of the ground commercial uses on the site;
- Improve access to the site by pedestrians and cyclists by providing an attractive destination, in the form of an attractive ground floor commercial space.

The Economic Development Division has no objections or conditions to the applicant's proposal in its current form.

Mobility and Streetscape

As noted earlier, no motor vehicle parking spaces are proposed, while four (4) short-term and fourteen (14) indoor long-term bicycle parking spaces are proposed. The proposed bicycle parking complies with the dimensional and spacing standards of the SZO. The Mobility Division has reviewed the applicant's Transportation Access Plan and confirmed that they are in compliance with their requirements.

Infrastructure and Engineering

Engineering Staff noted that all projects must be in compliance with Engineering Site Construction Rules and Regulations. These regulations address stormwater and groundwater management best practices. Projects must also address inflow and infiltration sewer mitigation as part of the project to manage wastewater. Engineering staff has requested nine additional conditions be added so that this project is in compliance with these practices, including closing all of the unused curb cuts in sidewalk and completing the sidewalk work prior to issuance of Certificate of Occupancy. The additional conditions are listed below and include in the list of all conditions at the end of the memo:

- 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 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.
- The applicant or their successor must consider utility conflicts with proposed tree plantings when designing civil plan. Building utilities (water, sewer, drain, electric, etc.) must be routed to avoid tree drip lines, as possible.
- The applicant or their successor must comply with city Inflow and Infiltration standards.

- The applicant or their successor 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.
- The project must be in compliance with 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.
- The 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.
- New sewer service must be connected to dedicated sanitary sewer located in the Somerville Avenue sidewalk. Any work within the MWRA easement will require a MWRA 8(m) permit for state facility encroachment.
- The applicant must provide records of proper abandonment of any underground storage tanks prior to issuance of main Building Permit.
- The applicant must close all unused curb cuts in sidewalk. Sidewalk work must be complete prior to issuance of Certificate of Occupancy.

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:

- Increase the housing supply, including housing that is contextual to the existing neighborhood.
- Prioritize walking, biking, and transit options and minimize space dedicated to personal vehicles
- Ensure the diversity of housing stock

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

The intent of the MR3 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 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.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Special Permit

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Residential Housing 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 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.

Mobility

5. Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
6. The property owner(s) and applicable future tenants must comply with the Mobility Management Plan dated January 2024, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility's Final Approval dated April 9, 2025.

Housing

7. The Developer shall agree to and sign a Memorandum of Understanding for the monitoring of compliance to the provisions of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, all legal agreements, and other standards established by the Director of Housing for rental ADUs prior to the issuance of any Certificate of Occupancy for the Property.

Site Plan Approval

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the 3-story General 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. 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 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. The applicant must return to the UDC for additional review if there is any change in the transformer location.

Construction Documents

6. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
7. 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.
8. 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

9. The applicant or their successor shall coordinate with the Mobility Division on the final streetscape design, prior to issuance of Building Permit.

Engineering

10. 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 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.
11. The applicant or their successor must consider utility conflicts with proposed tree plantings when designing civil plan. Building utilities (water, sewer, drain, electric, etc.) must be routed to avoid tree drip lines, as possible.
12. The applicant or their successor must comply with city Inflow and Infiltration standards.

13. The applicant or their successor 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.
14. The project must be in compliance with 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.
15. The 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.
16. New sewer service must be connected to dedicated sanitary sewer located in the Somerville Avenue sidewalk. Any work within the MWRA easement will require a MWRA 8(m) permit for state facility encroachment.
17. The applicant must provide records of proper abandonment of any underground storage tanks prior to issuance of main Building Permit.
18. The applicant must close all unused curb cuts in sidewalk. Sidewalk work must be complete prior to issuance of Certificate of Occupancy.

Maintenance

19. 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.

Legal Agreements

20. A public right-of-way or pedestrian access easement must be provided in perpetuity by a covenant or other deed restriction for the full area of the sidewalk provided within the frontage area of the lot. Final easement language must be approved by the City Solicitor. The easement must be recorded at the Middlesex Registry of Deeds prior to application for a Certificate of Occupancy.

Landscape/Trees

21. Any landscaping required by the Zoning Ordinance must be completed prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy by the building official. If seasonal or abnormally inclement weather conditions preclude complete installation, the building official may grant a Certificate of Occupancy if the applicant provides letter of commitment to complete installation by the next planting season.
22. All vegetation must be maintained in healthy, growing condition at all times by the property owner(s) or their designated agent(s).