

**DEVELOPMENT NARRATIVE  
FOR PLAN REVISION OF PREVIOUS SITE PLAN APPROVAL**

Property: 1 McGrath Highway  
Applicant/Owner: Somerbridge Hotel LLC  
Agent: Adam Dash, Esq.  
Zoning Designations: High-Rise (“HR”) District/Half Mile Transit Area/Not in PSD

**Summary**

The property is currently a 32,806 sf lot, of which 17,316 sf are in Somerville and known as 1 McGrath Highway, and 15,490 sf are in Cambridge and known as 263 McGrath Highway/Monsignor O’Brien Highway.

The hotel project contemplated by Somerbridge Hotel LLC will be developed and operated by Colwen Management Inc. as a Moxy brand hotel.

This proposed 145 key hotel crosses the municipal boundary of Somerville and Cambridge. 95 of the proposed keys are located within Somerville bounds.

Applicant first permitted a hotel at the property in 2017 as a 120-room extended-stay hotel. During permitting hearings, the developers discovered the site was uniquely located to provide a portion of the link necessary to accomplish a connection between the Community Path Extension and the Grand Junction Path. Due to unforeseen environmental complications, the original project did not proceed forward with the permits in a timely manner. As the environmental solution required a redesign of the project, 8’ of land along the Cambridge property line was reserved for a future ramp connection to the proposed Community Path.

Applicant then received a special permit with site plan review and variances from the Somerville Zoning Board of Appeals (“ZBA”) for the construction of a 135- room, six-story hotel at the property in case #ZBA 2018-138 on March 12, 2019. That approval was extended by the ZBA on March 25, 2020, in case # ZBA 2018-138-E1.

In 2023, Applicant obtained special permits and site plan approval from the Somerville Planning Board, and a variance from the ZBA, for the construction of a 199 room, six-story hotel at the property in cases P&Z 21-028 and P&Z 23-032, respectively. The ZBA extended said variance in 2024 in case ZP24-000011.

As part of said 2023 Planning Board and ZBA approvals, Applicant worked with the abutting lab building developer at 15 McGrath Highway to create a shared driveway for both projects and for Applicant to use parking in the lab building’s parking garage. The lab building at 15 McGrath Highway was permitted, a large pit was dug when the developer of said lab building stopped the project and is not currently looking to re-start it for, at least, several years.

As a result of the pit next-door, and there being no lab project going forward, Applicant is forced to move its proposed hotel building away from the pit for structural reasons, move the previous

shared driveway to the Cambridge side of the property, and to make other changes to the previously approved hotel project described herein.

The Applicant has demolished the commercial car wash structures in Somerville, and the commercial structure in Cambridge, and intends to begin environmental remediation at the property. The proposed six-story hotel is proposed to be a Moxy hotel brand, which is a stylish, casual brand with a playful atmosphere that focuses on younger guests.

The property is located in the HR zoning district and is in the Half Mile Transit Area. It is not located in a Pedestrian Street District. The proposed project is in the Half Mile Transit Area which requires parking for commercial uses.

The building would be a total of 62,200 sf, with 44,462 sf in Somerville and 18,138 sf in Cambridge. The Building Type would be “General Building”.

The project has 20 motor vehicle parking spaces provided on the Somerville portion of the property, plus 13 motor vehicle parking spaces provided on the Cambridge portion of the property.

There will be bicycle parking on site for 5 short-term bicycles and 10 long-term bicycles on the Somerville side of the property, which will meet the Somerville requirements, and for 1 short-term bicycles and 3 long-term bicycles on the Cambridge side of the property.

As with the version of the project approved in 2023, Applicant will continue to provide space for a 14 foot clear ramp to be built across the Cambridge portion of the property to connect the McGrath/O’Brien Highway with the Community Path Extension via a spur to be constructed on MBTA property at the rear of the site.

## **Relief Requested**

Applicant now seeks the following relief:

- Revision of the previous Site Plan Approval under Somerville Zoning Ordinance Section 5.1.6.b, 15.2.4 and 15.3.2 for the new “General Building” type structure.

In addition to said relief being sought, the project will also require the following Special Permits which will be the subject of a later application:

- Special Permit under Somerville Zoning Ordinance Section 5.1.14 and 9.9.1 to establish a hotel use.

- Special Permit under Somerville Zoning Ordinance Section 9.1.7.d for a formula business use.

As opposed to the 2023 hotel approvals, Applicant no longer requires a special permit for parking relief, and no longer requires any variances.

#### **A. Revision of Previous Site Plan Approval**

Applicant seeks a revision of the Site Plan Approval for a hotel at the property which was granted by the Planning Board on May 18, 2023 in case P&Z 21-028.

Per Section 15.2.4.e of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance:

- i. The Director of Planning & Zoning may determine the proposed revision is de minimis upon finding that the revised application:*
  - a. Does not contravene the previously published public notice, any finding, or attached condition made by the review board for the original development review application;*
  - b. Does not detrimentally impact matters of substance identified in the meeting minutes of the original public meetings or public hearings;*
  - c. Features changes that are insignificant to the degree that persons familiar with the original application would not notice a substantial change in operational or built outcome.*
- ii. When considering a revision to a previously approved development review application, the review boards shall limit their review to only the changes to the previously approved application.*

Applicant proposed revisions to the hotel project as a result of the 15 McGrath Highway developer digging a large pit and then stopping work on its proposed lab building. With that situation, the Applicant is unable to build the hotel as it was approved by the Planning Board and ZBA in 2023.

A more detailed side by side comparison of changes in this request is provided in the attached preliminary plans and elevations.

Elements of the project that were necessary to modify include:

- Moving the building away from the property line of the abutter
- Relocating the driveway to Cambridge side of the property

- Removing of the roof top bar
- Reducing square footage
- Reducing room count
- Adjusting parking layout
- Reducing to a single product hotel versus dual, MOXY was chosen as more suitable for the site

Elements of our project that will remain unchanged include:

- Remaining a hotel
- Remaining the same height
- Keeping the aesthetic the same
- Keeping amenities open to the public as well as guests, such as food & beverage service and guest fitness facility
- Committing to the inclusion of the Community Path -Grand Junction Path connection remains the same

It is Applicant's contention that the project is essentially the same, being a hotel with a similar design, even though certain aspects had to be altered due to no fault of Applicant, but rather, due to the inaction of the developer at 15 McGrath Highway next door.

The revised project no longer needs the parking relief or a variance that the 2023 approved hotel project did, such that it is more compliant with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

Should the proposed revision not be considered de minimis, then Applicant requests that a Major Revision to the previous Site Plan Approval be granted, as the revised hotel project still meets the requirements, and furthers the goals, of the hotel Site Plan Approval granted in 2023.

What was true in 2023 regarding the Site Plan Approval is still true, albeit with some involuntary revisions.

Per Section 15.3.2.e of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance:

*The review board shall approve an development review application requiring Site Plan Approval upon verifying that the submitted plan conforms with the provisions of this Ordinance and demonstrates consistency to the following:*

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

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

*c). Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts*

*attributable to the proposed development.*

*d). Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Site Plan Approval.*

- a. Applicant seeks to retain the commercial use of this site, but with a cleaner and more aesthetically pleasing use and building than the old car wash which was on the Somerville portion of the site. This hotel project will be a vast improvement over the car wash, which was an eyesore, and will enhance the neighborhood while fitting into and complimenting the future of this part of McGrath Highway.

A hotel brings not just real estate taxes into the City, but also personal property, lodging, and meals taxes, which benefit the Somerville municipal budget.

The proposed hotel is uniquely located to create a gateway arrival to Somerville. The location is also unique as it is the only site that can feasibly provide a pedestrian/cyclist ramp link between the McGrath/O'Brien Highway corridor and the Community Path, ultimately linking the Community Path and the Grand Junction Path and reinforcing the connectivity between Cambridge Crossing and Somerville's newly created HR zoning district and beyond to Boynton Yards. This project is particularly in line with the City's strategic goals by reducing the need for people to drive, promoting physical fitness, and allowing access for bicyclists and pedestrians to all of the commercial uses in the surrounding neighborhood.

The Applicant will also provide landscaping on a property which has essentially none at the present, which will improve the look and feel along the McGrath/O'Brien Highway corridor, as well as improve the environment in general.

The project will comply with the goals of the SomerVision strategic plan because it will "facilitate transit-oriented neighborhood in-fill development", create a "healthier, more prosperous and more attractive place to live, work, play and raise a family" and "preserve and enhance the character of Somerville's neighborhoods". This will ensure that "properties can adapt and change to meet the needs of residents, while respecting the character of the neighborhood".

- b. Per Section 5.1.2.b of the SZO, the purpose of the HR district is "to accommodate the development of areas appropriate for an intense mix of multi-story multi-unit, mixed-use, and commercial buildings; neighborhood-, community-, and region-serving uses; and a wide variety of employment opportunities." The HR zoning district allows hotel uses by special permit. This shows that the policy plans and standards as established by the City favor the creation of hotel uses, in general and in this particular area, and that Applicant has met such policy plans and standards.

The building will be entirely commercial and entirely occupied by the owner, as is intended in the HR zoning district, and will be a "General Building" type, which is permitted in the HR zoning district.

The hotel use will serve the neighborhoods nearby including Cambridge Crossing, Twin City Plaza, Brickbottom and beyond to Boynton Yards, as well as the community and the region.

The proposed building meets all of the dimensional requirements for a General Building type in the HR zoning district.

- c. This hotel will not be a negative impact on transportation capacity along the McGrath/O'Brien Highway corridor, and will actually be an improvement, for a number of reasons.

First, it will reduce the existing number of curb cuts at the property by two, thereby improving pedestrian safety and reducing vehicular conflicts.

Second, it is planned that the hotel will have a single right-turn only entrance, and right-turn only exit onto the McGrath Highway, which will also improve pedestrian safety, and reduce vehicular conflicts.

Third, the intent is that Mass. DOT will remove one cycle from the traffic light at the intersection of the McGrath/O'Brien Highway and Rufo Road, thereby reducing delays on the McGrath/O'Brien Highway for vehicles, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Fourth, by allowing a ramp across the property to connect the McGrath/O'Brien Highway with the to be built Community Path spur behind the property, this hotel project provides ways for the public to reach the area without having to drive a motor vehicle. It also provides easier and safer access to the new Green Line stations constructed nearby.

Fifth, the proposed hotel will allow for a wider, compliant sidewalk on the Somerville portion of the property for better pedestrian access and circulation.

The bicycle parking meets the bicycle parking requirement in both Somerville and Cambridge. There are only 20 motor vehicle parking spaces provided on the Somerville portion of the property, and 13 motor vehicle parking spaces provided on the Cambridge portion of the property, which would reduce the amount of traffic at the property.

In short, this hotel project does not negatively impact the capacity of the local road network, and actually improves the situation in a number of ways, thereby mitigating any impact of the improvements being proposed.

- d. Applicant's proposal meets the requirements for a hotel as set forth in Section 9.2.9.b of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. This increase in commercial space in a key commercial corridor such as this location is a better use of the Property, and is better for the area, than the prior motor vehicle-oriented car wash structure.

The building component being proposed for this new “General Building” type structure, being a lobby entrance, enhances the public’s engagement with the building and is needed for the function of a hotel use. The pedestrian entrance on the hotel’s façade on the McGrath/O’Brien Highway will be a full height glass storefront door and window system to encourage the public to come inside.

## **Conclusion**

Applicant/Owner respectfully asks for approval of the requested relief on the grounds that its proposal meets all of the grounds set forth in the SZO, while providing additional benefits to the communities of both Somerville and Cambridge, much as the previously approved hotel did.