



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 44 White Street, ZP25-000038 (SPA), ZP25-000039 (SP for Residential Use), & ZP25-000077 (SP to Exceed Parking Maximum)
POSTED: October 9, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: Site Plan Approval: None
Special Permit – Residential Use: Approve with Conditions
Special Permit – Exceed Parking Maximum: Denial

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 application submitted for 44 White 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 application was deemed complete on September 12, 2025, and is scheduled for a public hearing on October 16, 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

The Law Office of Richard G. DiGirolamo seeks to develop a three (3) story Apartment Building in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR-4) zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

The Law Office of Richard G. DiGirolamo seeks to establish a Residential Housing Use in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR-4) zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

The Law Office of Richard G. DiGirolamo seeks to exceed the parking maximum in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR-4) zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

NOTE

As discussed below, the proposed three (3) parking spaces are in excess of the allowed one (1) space and require a Special Permit. The Board would need to grant this Special Permit **before the site plan can be approved.**

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Law Office of Richard G. DiGirolamo is proposing to construct a three (3) story Apartment Building type. The proposed development will produce three (3) dwelling units of which none are affordable units, three (3) motor vehicle parking spaces (which are in excess of the allowed one space and necessitates relief), two (2) short term bike

spaces and four (4) long term bike spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.25.

BACKGROUND

44 White Street is located in the 0.25mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Porter Square neighborhood represented by Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait. Establishing an Apartment 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. 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 Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait and the applicant on November 19, 2024, via the Zoom meeting platform. Much of the discussion was focused around the proposal being a 3-story 3-unit building in a 4-story zoning district and the amount of parking provided in a designated transit area.

The second neighborhood meeting was held via the Zoom meeting platform on March 18, 2025. The attendees asked questions about the extent of landscaping and whether the building could be set back further to increase beautification for pedestrians. There were also questions of construction timeline – unknown at that time – and potential disruption to the neighborhood. The Applicant and staff confirmed that a construction management plan will be shared at the building permit stage.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the Zoom meeting platform on January 14, 2025, and January 28, 2025. The Commission provided its official recommendation on February 4, 2025. The Commission recommended better integration of the elevator headhouse with the pergola and changing the materials to a darker color, that the balcony railings should not be glass, the garage door should be opaque but vented, and plantings should be included in the required 12' setback from the curb with a street tree added.

ANALYSIS

Site Plan Approval

Building/Land Use

The proposed building is a three (3) story Apartment Building with a floor plate area of 2,106 SF on a lot that is 3,212 SF. It is proposed to have three (3) three-bedroom units and three (3) parking spaces on the ground story. There is a proposed ground story bicycle parking room with four (4) bicycle parking spaces and a proposed 140 SF green roof and a “solar-ready zone” on the roof.

The basement unit spans the basement and ground story has access to a below-grade courtyard amenity space at the rear. The second and third floor units span their respective stories, and have balconies at the front of the building and an outdoor deck at the rear. The third floor unit has access to a roof deck.

Landscaping

The plan proposes concrete at the front of the building to create the required 12 FT sidewalk width and permeable pavers at the rear of the building where the proposed parking extends out from the ground story. There is mulch proposed along the northern edge of the building and native plantings including two hornbeam trees and reed grass at the northern rear corner of the building. There is also a proposed 140 SF green roof on the roof of the building abutting the roof deck.

PSUF has confirmed that the plan meets the minimum Green Score and are comfortable with the lack of street trees, given the driveway location, the powerlines, and the overhang of the building. They do note that additional landscaping, particularly between the building and the parking lot behind it, would be preferable.

Surrounding Context

Abutting the proposed building to the northeast on White Street is a one-story children's toy store (46 White Street), followed by a three-story Detached House (50 White Street) and a two-story Detached House (56 White Street). To the southwest on White Street is a one-story concrete block garage (40 White Street) and a Cottage (32 White Street) – these buildings are both expected to be demolished in anticipation of a proposed four-story Apartment Building with 29 dwelling units, currently in the pre-application phase of Site Plan Approval. Other anticipated development is an under-construction four-story Apartment Building with 25 dwelling units at 14 White Street Place, which is just to the southeast of the development site.

Mobility and Streetscape

The proposed parking spaces have access via an existing curb cut on White Street. Parked vehicles protrude out from under second story at the rear and are screened from the rear abutting parcel by fencing. Accessing the parking area will require vehicles to back in over the sidewalk (as there is not enough room in the parking area to turn the vehicle around) so that they can pull out forward in compliance with SZO 11.2.1.e.i. At the Mobility Division's recommendation, staff has added a recommended condition of approval that an appropriate mechanism to alert approaching pedestrians be installed prior to grant of a Certificate of Occupancy.

The Mobility Division also notes that their approval of the Applicant's Transportation Access Plan (TAP) is conditional upon the Planning Board's decision on the Applicant's request for a Special Permit to exceed the motor vehicle parking maximum (ZP25-000077). If the Special Permit is denied, the submitted TAP will not be zoning compliant and will need to be revised and resubmitted for review.

Special Permit for Residential Housing Use

While this proposal increases the number of units on this lot from the original single-family house, there are only three units proposed in a four-story district (MR4). Maximizing the density on this lot or adding the fourth story would increase the unit count so the 4th unit would trigger the inclusionary housing requirement and would need to be permanently affordable.

All three proposed units have three bedrooms and are intended to attract families, per the Applicant's narrative.

Special Permit to Exceed Parking Maximum

The development site is in the ¼-mile Transit Area of the Porter Square Red Line MBTA station. Within a ¼ mile of the proposed development is a grocery store and all of the businesses of the Porter Square Shopping Center – it has a WalkScore of 97/100, indicating that daily errands do not require a car.¹

The Mobility Division recommends **denial** of this Special Permit, noting that the motor vehicle parking maximums for projects in transit areas have been established by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to facilitate transit-oriented development.

The Applicant has provided a parking utilization study examining on-street parking availability on White Street and the nearby section of Elm Street – however because this is a new development in a transit area, residents would not be eligible for on-street parking permits, per Somerville Traffic Commission policy. Mobility's position is therefore that the study is not appropriate for demonstrating on-site parking need. This policy exempts future residents that may be "choice limited," including persons with disabilities, occupants of affordable dwelling units, and residents with extenuating circumstances, through a waiver application.

The Applicant notes in their narrative that the units, being 3-bedrooms, are intended to attract families who are more likely to need a vehicle for daily trips.

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 and Special Permits

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

¹ <https://www.walkscore.com/score/44-white-st-somerville-ma-02144>

Staff believes that this proposed building and residential use support the following goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan:

"Increase the housing supply: a significant increase in the supply of housing is critical for the city to keep up with the increase in demand. Importantly, in building new housing the city must additionally pursue the goals of increasing affordability and housing stock diversity. The housing should be contextual to the existing or burgeoning neighborhood or serve as a transition to new building types. There are several other steps Somerville should consider taking to contain housing costs."

Notably, the proposal is a three-unit apartment building rather than building the fourth story (and fourth unit) that is permitted in the MR4 district. All three units, however, are proposed to be three-bedroom units, the production of which is an expressed concern of the community as reflected in the 2021 Housing Needs Assessment.²

Staff believe that the proposed parking does not support the following goal:

"Prioritize walking, biking, and transit access: cities are more enjoyable, safer, and more economically prosperous when more space is dedicated to people than cars. Use reclaimed space to create new public spaces, safe infrastructure for sustainable mode users, and other community uses."

By exceeding the permitted parking spaces in a development adjacent to the transit hub of Porter Square, this project would add more cars to the city and discourage the use of alternative modes of transportation.

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

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 uses." The Apartment Building type is permitted but does not include any mix of uses.

Site Plan Approval Specific

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

Staff believe the proposed conditions, including the installation a pedestrian warning mechanism, mitigate any significant impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Special Permit for Exceeding Maximum Parking Specific

4. The supply and demand of on-street parking in the neighborhood, as determined through a parking study.

² <https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/housing-needs-assessment-2021.pdf>

The Applicant received a waiver of the requirement to submit a parking study (Transportation Impact Study). The Applicant elected to prepare a parking utilization study examining on-street parking availability on White Street (entirety) and Elm Street (between Cherry Street and Burnside Avenue). These units, however, will not be eligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, which is a regulation of the Somerville Traffic Commission to which all development within transit areas are subject.

5. Mobility management programs and services provided by the applicant to reduce the demand for parking.

The Applicant is providing two (2) short term bike spaces and four (4) long term bike spaces; no programs or services are otherwise specified in their application.

6. That parking provided in excess of any maximum permitted does not result in the increase in impervious lot area.

The proposed parking spaces are on the ground story and are partially underneath the second story, but extend out into the rear of the lot. The applicant proposes pervious pavers on the portion of the parking surface that extends out, so there is a slight increase in *impervious* lot area, based on the runoff coefficient of the pervious pavers chosen.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Site Plan Approval for the three (3) story Apartment Building type, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends 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 facade 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 much as possible.
12. Modification of the existing requires the Applicant to 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. Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
19. Prior to Certificate of Occupancy, the Applicant shall coordinate with the Mobility Division to determine an appropriate warning mechanism to alert approaching pedestrians that vehicles are exiting the garage and approaching the public sidewalk along White Street.

Public Space and Urban Forestry

20. The removal of trees on private property is subject to the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance. Most trees eight (8) or more inches in diameter will require a private tree removal permit.
21. The removal of any public shade trees or private trees is subject to the Tree Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 12, Article VI) of the Somerville Code of Ordinances.
22. The Applicant and all contractors shall take all necessary precautions to avoid damaging any trees 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.

23. 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.

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish Residential Housing Use, Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff recommends 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.

Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff **recommends denial** of the required Special Permit to exceed maximum parking in a Transit Area and, as such, does not recommend any conditions.