



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 152-158 Broadway, ZP25-000099
POSTED: November 26, 2025

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions

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 Special Permit for a Formula Business application submitted for 152-158 Broadway, 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 November 17th, 2025, and is scheduled for a public hearing on December 4, 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

The Law Offices of Michael LaRosa seeks to establish Formula Business principal use, a Btone Pilates studio, in the Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) district, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

The Law Offices of Micael LaRosa is proposing to construct a Btone Fitness Pilates studio in a commercial unit located at 152-158 Broadway. The boutique Pilates studio is being proposed in an approximately 2,100 square feet space of a vacant newly constructed ground floor commercial development along a Pedestrian Street.

BACKGROUND

152-158 Broadway is located on a Pedestrian Street and in the Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) zoning district in the East Somerville neighborhood represented by Ward 1 Councilor Matthew McLaughlin. Establishing a formula business on a Pedestrian Street in the MR5 district requires a Special Permit. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR5 zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

A neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 1 Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and the applicant on October 6th, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform. The applicant, Michael LaRosa on behalf of Btone Fitness, gave an overview of the project and introduced the business owners Kara and Williams Bates. Kara and William Bates narrated a presentation explaining the franchise and gave an overview of the fitness classes given at the businesses. There were no comments during the meeting from the public, but there was a written comment from a community member stating they were looking forward to the proposed business.

ANALYSIS

Somerville's Zoning Ordinance (SZO) defines Formula Business as the following:

- "Any business, regardless of ownership or location worldwide, that chooses or is required as a franchise to maintain two (2) or more of a standardized menu, standardized merchandise, a standardized facade, a standardized decor or color scheme, a standardized employee uniform, a standardized sign or signage, or a trademark or a service mark along with nine (9) or more other businesses."

The applicant is proposing the establishment of a formula business on Broadway in East Somerville and intends to lease the unit for the operation of a Btone Fitness Studio. The proposal requires a Special Permit under SZO Section 9.1.7 to establish a formula business. The purpose of the Special Permit designation for this type of use is to provide the Board an opportunity to make sure the proposal's "formulaic" aspects do not detract from the uniqueness of Somerville's neighborhoods. The Applicant provides an overview of the project in their Narrative.

Upon analysis of the material submitted by the Applicant, PPZ Staff do not believe that the granting of the requested Special Permit for a formula business would cause a substantial detriment to the public good or nullify or substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of the MR5 District, copied here:

Intent:

- a. To implement the objectives of the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Somerville.
- b. To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for moderate scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood- and community-serving uses.

Purpose:

- a. To permit the development of multi-unit and mixed-use buildings that do not exceed five (5) stories in height.
- b. To provide quality commercial spaces and permit small and medium scale, neighborhood- and community- serving commercial uses.

Staff do not propose any conditions to address impacts related to the business' formulaic aspects, but do recommend a condition that, if approved, the Special Permit be attached to the Applicant and not the property. This will ensure that if the Applicant

should leave the space in the future, the Special Permit process would need to be undertaken again if there was another Formula Business proposal. Use proposals permitted by-right in the Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) district do not need to go through a discretionary review process to be established (e.g., a café or food establishment that does not meet the definition of a Formula Business).

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.

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.
3. The existing concentration of Formula Businesses within the neighborhood.
4. The availability of other similar uses and the maintenance of a diverse blend of uses within the neighborhood.
5. The compatibility of the proposed Formula Business with the existing architectural and aesthetic character of the neighborhood.
6. The proposed use's contribution to the nationwide trend of standardized offerings that detracts from the uniqueness of Somerville's neighborhoods.
7. The existing non-residential vacancy rates within the neighborhood.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

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:

- "Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency."

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

The intent of the MR5 zoning district is, in part: "To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for moderate scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood- and community-serving uses."

3. The existing concentration of Formula Businesses within the neighborhood.

Staff believe the proposed use is appropriate for general buildings like the subject property. Larger formula business franchises exist in nearby Assembly Square.

4. The availability of other similar uses and the maintenance of a diverse blend of uses within the neighborhood.

Staff believe the proposed use maintains a diverse blend of uses within the neighborhood. The proposed Formula Business is a Btone Pilates Studio, which is a specific form of Pilates done on a reformer. The only similar business in the neighborhood is a Pilates Rx, which does not utilize the same equipment or class type.

5. The compatibility of the proposed Formula Business with the existing architectural and aesthetic character of the neighborhood.

152-158 Broadway is an existing commercial general building and the applicant does not intend to change the façade of the building except for signage.

6. The proposed use's contribution to the nationwide trend of standardized offerings that detracts from the uniqueness of Somerville's neighborhoods.

Staff believe the proposed use will not detract from the uniqueness of Somerville's neighborhoods, as it replaces one formula business with another in a building where formula businesses are the norm. The proposed use is a formula business but will not be changing anything architecturally or aesthetically.

7. The existing non-residential vacancy rates within the neighborhood.

The existing non-residential vacancy rate in the East Somerville neighborhood is approximately 20%, which is considered high. The subject property is currently an unoccupied commercial unit.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit for a formula business in accordance with Special Permit under SZO Section 9.1.7.d, Per Section 15.2.1.e & 4.3.13.b.i.b. of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, PPZ 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 provided to the Inspectional Services

Department at least ten (1) working days in advance of a request for final inspection.

3. Approval is limited to Michael LaRosa on behalf of Btone Fitness, and is not transferable to any successor in interest.

Public Record

4. Digital copies of all required application material 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.
5. 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.