



City of Somerville
URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

26 MARCH 2024 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	6:12pm
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Luisa Olivera	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Houde	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:09pm and adjourned at 7:31pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Houde, seconded by Member Talun, the Board voted unanimously (3-0) to continue review of the 27 February 2024 meeting minutes to the next meeting.

DESIGN REVIEW: 246 Broadway

The applicant team stated that 246 Broadway is located in the MR5 Zoning District. It is on a pedestrian street and is in the half-mile transit area. The applicant seeks to demolish the existing structure, which the Historic Preservation Commission found not Preferably Preserved, and to construct a new five story general building that is mixed-use with first floor commercial, with ten residential units, of which two will be affordable. There will be no parking, and none is required. The building proposed is dimensionally compliant. A Site Plan Approval for the building is needed, along with a Special Permit for residential use.

The applicant team reviewed the proposed building design. The lot area is 3,660 s.f., which requires 1,500 s.f. of residential gross s.f. per dwelling unit. It also is a pedestrian street, leading to a requirement for commercial space on the ground floor. The existing sidewalk is approximately 15' wide, so the front of the building adheres to the 2' required setback. The proposed vestibule into the commercial area has been assigned for an Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) space. An existing curb cut will be closed. Windows are primarily set on the front and back facades of the building. On the 5th floor, the building is set back 10' from the lower portion of the building to meet the 10' step back requirement of the MR5 district. The rear façade is setback 10' from the rear lot line. There is a small outdoor space allowing for larger windows into the basement. Green wall material on the right side of the building is proposed to match a nearby abutter's deck.

The applicant team presented two alternative designs and a shadow study. The landscape plan focuses on two main goals: supporting residential living and making improvements to the public realm. A new street tree, bike rack, and bench are all proposed. The increased setback allows for wider canopy trees, and the roof deck will have shared access for residents with an extensive green roof system. The plan also includes permeable unit paving,

privacy fencing, and a transformer vault covered with unit pavers. The proposed green score has increased from 0.3 to 0.405.

The Commission asked about the proposed green wall. The applicant team explained that this includes vines planted on a green screen/trellis system attached to the building. This is not being counted as a green wall in the green score.

The Commission discussed the building's materials, including the use of fiber cement board, corrugated aluminum, and a new artificial wood product made from rice. There was discussion regarding the egress paths from the basement unit and the need for functional and accessible paths in case of emergencies. There were concerns expressed regarding the north side of the building and the plantings proposed in the 2' wide area. The Commission agreed on the need for architectural articulation to soften the building's north side and improve its overall appearance.

The Commission reviewed the alternate proposals. The Commission discussed simplifying the material palette and use of the artificial wood product, along with refinement of the detail around the window openings. It was noted how important bike parking will be for this building and that it would be nice for it to be more accessible. There was discussion regarding including a gate to the privacy fence along the walkway.

There was discussion regarding projects which do not propose parking, then including shared car services as part of the plan. If parking is not required or provided for this building, its residents will not be able to access on-street parking permits. There was discussion regarding making the back space more usable. There were concerns expressed regarding the number of caliper inches of trees proposed to be lost and not replaced on the site. It was recommended that the applicant team reach out to the city's arborist regarding the tree removal.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Houde, the Board voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the preferred massing option to move forward.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Houde, the Board voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the preferred façade option to move forward, with the conditions that the corrugated aluminum material be eliminated and replaced with the wood-look paneling, and that the north wall be further architecturally articulated with varied materials or metal screening.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Houde, the Board voted unanimously (3-0) that the design guidelines have been met, with the exception of the horizontal clapboard siding which the Commission finds is acceptable if well-detailed to be further discussed with the material palette.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Houde, the Board voted unanimously (3-0) that the additional recommendations and design guidance be incorporated.

Additional design guidance:

- That there is a stone base at the water table along the commercial space facing Broadway.
- That the material palette will be reviewed by the Commission prior to a Building Permit being issued.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at urbandesign@somervillema.gov.