



City of Somerville  
**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**9 APRIL 2024 MEETING MINUTES**

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	6:31pm
Luisa Olivera	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Houde	Alternate	<i>Absent</i>	

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:19pm and adjourned at 7:41pm.

**GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes**

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to table the approval of the 27 February 2024 meeting minutes to the next meeting.

**UDC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVIEW: 382 McGrath Hwy**

There were no concerns or questions from the Commission at this time.

**DESIGN REVIEW: 52 Elm Street**

This item was before the Commission at the election of the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Department to get input on an issue that impacts the public realm.

The applicant team explained that this is a two-family residential structure in the NR Zone. 52A Elm Street was a former storefront. The impetus for this project is the intention to expand the structure for the owners to age in place and bring in their parents to do the same. These changes include adding an elevator for ADA access, which the applicant claims necessitates increasing the structure from 2 ½ stories to 3 stories, triggering a variance request for the number of stories on the property. All other dimensions are either improved or unchanged. The plan shows that a considerable amount of the lot has already been de-paved, which is reflected in the Green Score. The proposal is to build a second and third floor above the existing, nonconforming 52A Elm Street property. Additionally, the proposal is to add an elevator shaft on the back on the building to service the third story. This floor would be entirely accessible, including an accessible bathroom, two bedrooms, an office, and a porch. The height is proposed to be increased by 7' in order to accommodate the full third story.

The applicant team presented three proposed façade plans. All of these options use cementitious siding, likely via a Hardie product. The owners are avid gardeners, and the lot will be changed to allow access to the elevator and outdoor living spaces. A 4' walkway of existing pavement will be maintained, and the path will be extended using pervious pavers. Rainwater capture will continue to be used for the majority of the watering of the gardens.

The Commission discussed the proposed façade options. Concerns were raised regarding the proposed scale in this district. The proposal is for a 41'6" tall building with an 18'7" third floor with a lofted ceiling, making it essentially a 3 ½ story building. The applicant team explained that only the porch is exposed and lofted on the third floor. The fourth story attic area will not be habitable. The Commission expressed concern regarding the precedence this may set in the NR District. The applicant team noted that this property abuts the MR3 District.

The applicant team explained that the corner was the only place on the property to place an elevator in order to access the third story. All other bathrooms in the unit are not easily accessible. This drives the proposed height. The purpose is for the third floor to be fully accessible with as little impact as possible.

The Commission suggested a Zoning District change instead of a variance request. The applicant team explained that this was discussed with staff, and it was suggested that the variance process be explored. The hardship is the ADA requirement for the owner. The pitch of the roof could be decreased if that makes the Commission more comfortable, but the intention was to match it with nearby roof pitches.

The Commission discussed the large volume to the proposed structure and how to make it fit better with the neighborhood. It was noted that the proposed design in volume is not consistent with the character and aspiration of the NR district. The applicant team stated that one of the purposes in the NR district is to permit the adaptive reuse of certain existing, nonconforming buildings to create dwelling unit types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for larger households and houses. The intention was to create extra space for a nuclear family without tearing down an existing structure.

The Commission asked if other building components could be added to the existing structure. The applicant team explained that a full height corridor is needed on the third story for elevator access.

Regarding an accessibility accommodation route, the applicant team explained that this only applies to when a certain person who needs it lives in the property. Once this is no longer the case, the building component must be torn down, which seems to be a waste.

There was comment from the Commission regarding revising the roofscape in order to bring the building in character with the scale and proportions of the neighborhood.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted (1-3), with Members Talun, Fennick, and Ruane voting against, that the massing and scale as proposed are appropriate to the NR District.

There was discussion regarding continuing the hearing, with the applicant team to come back with 3D imagery provided, showing the surroundings, and further breakdown of the roof line to reduce the massing. The applicant team noted that extensive renderings may be cost prohibitive to the homeowner. The Commission suggested that additional renderings could be brought to the Planning Board to continue this process.

There was also discussion regarding the design guidelines in the NR District. These state that a ground story dwelling unit should be elevated above the grade of any adjacent sidewalk, so that the windowsills of the dwelling unit are at or above eye level of passing pedestrians. This elevation change maintains privacy for occupants, while also encouraging open blinds or curtains to allow natural daylight into the unit. The dormer and side wall window locations should break the direct line of sight between neighboring properties to every extent practical. Translucent glass on the bottom half of windows, or strategically placed landscape elements, should be utilized if it is not practical to offset windows in such a way as to minimize privacy impacts. Outdoor amenity spaces that are

elevated, such as roof decks, fully projecting balconies, and upper story rear porches, should provide site obscuring visual screening at the sides to increase privacy, security, and to limit views of abutting properties from elevated vantage points. The applicant team stated that they believe the guidelines are met through this proposal.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Ruane, the Commission voted (0-3-1), with Member Talun abstaining, that this project meets the design guidelines as specified in the NR District.

The Commission discussed additional design guidance that the roof line should be further broken down to reduce the massing, to reduce the overall height of the building, and to provide additional views of the building in context.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) that the project needs to provide views of the building in context, and to reduce the overall height, specifically to see the roof line broken down to reduce the massing.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>DESIGN GUIDELINES NOT MET</b>
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### **OTHER BUSINESS: 152-158 Broadway (Material Palette Review)**

The Commission discussed the proposed material palette. It was noted that the general color palette of the field of fiber cement panels was acceptable. The brick and precast water table at the base is acceptable. The metal panel bands proposed on the building are different tones. There also seemed to be a missing material. The metal band at the jam of each window was not present and has a potential to be a prominent part of the building. Whatever color is chosen for this should not overwhelm the color palette of the fiber cement panels.

It was noted that the applicant team was not available to attend this meeting and that these comments would be passed along via Staff.

*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](mailto:urbandesign@somervillema.gov).*