



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

**13 AUGUST 2024 MEETING MINUTES**

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Luisa Olivera	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</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>Absent</i>	

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm and adjourned at 8:33pm.

**GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes**

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the 27 February 2024, 26 March 2024, 9 April 2024, and 14 May 2024 meeting minutes, with amendments included.

**DESIGN REVIEW: 33 Mystic Ave**

*(continued from 23 July 2024)*

The applicant team explained that the proposal is for a transit-oriented project with no off-street car parking. The proposed building is six floors with eight residential apartments and ground floor commercial space. The Neighborhood Plan encourages the development of the parcels into smaller footprint, unique buildings. At the same time, the Neighborhood Plan calls for taller buildings along the raised highway, Interstate 93, that borders the neighborhood to the southwest. The proposed building achieves the desired character by varying material and texture to break down the scale of the façade, and by using materials familiar within the industrial setting, such as brick and metal. The project looks to create an active streetscape with ground floor commercial space and a continuous entry canopy combined with landscape elements, such as street trees, benches, and planters to create a sense of place along the sidewalk. The building will be all-electric and passive house certified to meet the requirements of the Specialized Energy Code. The project seeks several Special Permits through Site Plan Approval, including lot area, floor area ratio, building height, and lot area per dwelling unit.

The applicant team reviewed three façade and massing options. The dark brick option is the applicant's preferred scheme. The applicant team explained that the streetscape area is approximately 15' and will be used for landscape plantings, a 6' wide sidewalk, street trees, seating areas, and a bus stop. The roof includes a large, proposed amenity deck and a green roof area. The HVAC equipment for the building includes a built-in heat pump, meaning that there will be no rooftop equipment needed.

The Commission suggested that the applicant team do additional research on the proposed HVAC system. There was discussion regarding if a green roof is required for this project. The Commission noted that the City is working on a Bicycle Network Plan, which includes the Mystic Ave area, and the applicant team may want to consider how the proposed streetscape fits in with the plans. Some concerns were expressed regarding the darkness of the proposed materials. These can make the building feel monolithic. There was a suggestion to highlight the patterns of the windows on the building as it goes around the curve. The Commission agreed to approve façade option 1, while requesting that the applicant team come back with a revised plan based on the guidance given.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve preferred façade option 1, as presented.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue 33 Mystic Avenue to the next meeting.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

### **DESIGN REVIEW: 181 Pearl St**

The Commission discussed that this project is currently proceeding at risk. It is seeking a Hardship Variance for façade buildout which has not yet been heard by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). This is on the agenda for tomorrow evening's ZBA meeting. Staff explained that this project is a part of a larger Site Plan Approval and, in order to construct the building, the applicant will eventually need a variance for the current design. The applicant needs to go before the UDC for Site Plan Approval and requested to speak to the UDC tonight, even though Staff recommended they wait until the variance is approved. The applicant team explained that, without the Hardship Variance for façade buildout, the site is not buildable. There are conflicting requirements in the MR3 district of the Zoning Ordinance, in this case for the side yard setback and the façade buildout requirement. The applicant team requested to move forward this evening knowing that the application is being presented at risk.

The Commission discussed that it would be best to continue this hearing until the next meeting, in hopes that a decision will be made by the ZBA regarding the variance request.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue 181 Pearl Street to the next meeting.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

### **DESIGN REVIEW: 151 Linwood St**

The Commission discussed that this is in the Brickbottom area, in the CI District. The CI District was intended to be a holding pattern in the zoning until new zoning could be adopted. The Brickbottom area has mostly been auto-oriented uses, and the intention was for the zoning to allow those uses to continue until the neighborhood could agree on a new Neighborhood Plan. The Neighborhood Plan is currently in front of the Planning Board. There are very few design guidelines for this area.

The applicant team explained that this proposal is the redevelopment of the existing facility located at 151 Linwood Street, in the Brickbottom District. The site consists of an existing two story "S" shaped U-Haul facility that has self-storage, vehicle sharing, and a retail store for moving supplies. The property was constructed in 1940 and was obtained by U-Haul in 1977. It should be noted that U-Haul owns two facilities within the City of Somerville

and has been in operation since 1978. The project spans between Linwood Street to the south and Joy Street to the north. The applicant is requesting to demolish the existing facility and construct a new, four story, state of the art self-storage facility to better meet the needs of the neighborhood. This facility proposes to bring parking inside for the existing U-Haul vehicles and includes a U-Box facility. It will also have a recycling and trash facility inside to help customers have a way to dump products. The project is proposing to significantly decrease the impervious coverage of the site by adding landscaping around the building, including a significant number of trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowering plants. There will be a recessed loading dock and a concrete area adjacent to it for bike storage racks and public seating. 12 new off-street exterior parking stalls for customer use are proposed off Linwood Street. There will be one new main driveway onto the site. Stormwater improvements to the site are also proposed. The building will feature green building practices and sustainable development, such as energy efficient roofs, windows, and materials, energy efficient and motion sensor lighting, and energy efficient HVAC units and plumbing devices.

The applicant team discussed three proposed design options, and it was noted that additional details would be provided at a future meeting. The proposed landscape plan includes installation of a grass strip on either side of the property that will also act as a stormwater conveyance system. Street trees are proposed. A stormwater infiltration area is not proposed, but instead the proposal is to design a roof drain system that will discharge to conveyance swales within the grass area to the north and south of the building. A catch basin and drain manhole are also proposed.

The Commission discussed that this district has a Green Score requirement of 0.2. The applicant team explained that the current Green Score on the property is 0.01. The new improvements would calculate to a Green Score of 0.24.

Staff explained that the neighborhood meeting mostly focused on concerns regarding operations of the current U-Haul building and the landscaping. The applicant team explained that the proposed landscaping and new store design will address the concerns heard.

The Brickbottom Neighborhood Plan was discussed and how the existing owners in this area can become part of the plan. The applicant team explained that the business would like to work with the City to achieve the vision while allowing the business to continue.

The Commission noted that there is a large artistic community in this area that may want a building design that enhances the neighborhood. The renderings seem flat without articulation, and there are too many materials proposed. There was discussion regarding a needed pedestrian connection between Linwood Street and Joy Street. Connection to the nearby T Station should also be considered. A plan of the building in a larger context should be presented at a future meeting.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue 151 Linwood Street to the next meeting.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>CONTINUED</b>
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### **OTHER BUSINESS: Electrical Transformers**

The Commission discussed issues related to electrical transformers in the City, with a focus on problems with project approvals and compliance. The Commission reviewed a case study of a recent project to highlight how the addition of a large transformer alcove significantly altered the approved façade design. The Commission discussed the importance of early discussions with stakeholders, such as Eversource, to make sure that projects will comply and match approvals.

The Commission discussed adding the siting of building electrical equipment, transformer, and switch gear to the Submittal Requirements for the UDC. Also, load letters as a requirement for project submittals.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Board voted unanimously (3-0) to add the size and siting of transformers or large electrical equipment to the Submittal Requirements for the UDC.

**RESULT:**

**APPROVED ADDITIONAL UDC REQUIREMENTS**

### **OTHER BUSINESS: Discussion of Topics for Future Meetings**

The Commission discussed the proposed redevelopment of SomerNova. The proposal is a redevelopment of the seven-acre campus and an associated zoning amendment that would allow a significantly large development in the area. The proposal is currently before the City Council to consider the proposed zoning amendment. There does not seem to be an existing process to review this proposal. The Commission discussed writing a comment letter to the City Council, Land Use Committee, and Planning Board to provide input on the urban design implications of this proposal. The Commission scheduled a special meeting on Monday, August 26 to discuss drafting this letter.

*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).*