



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

10 SEPTEMBER 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>	<i>Exited 7:30pm</i>
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Vacant	Alternate	<i>Absent</i>	

City staff present: Sarah Lewis (Planning Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:07pm and adjourned at 8:30pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the 23 July 2024 and 13 August 2024 meeting minutes.

DESIGN REVIEW: 181 Pearl St
(continued from 13 August 2024)

The Commission noted that the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) approved the Hardship Variance for the façade build out on this project.

The applicant team explained that the project is in the MR3 zoning district. The proposal is for three residential apartments, approximately 3,500 s.f. gross. The proposed project is three stories tall and about 34'. This is a transit-oriented development, with no car parking required nor proposed. Bike parking is proposed inside the residential lobby. This is an all-electric building. The applicant team reviewed three façade options, with the preferred being a vertical anodized aluminum panel with triangulated ribbed profile. The massing of this option uses the provision of a bay window to create a contemporary bay, which gives a dynamic presence on this corner. The massing will allow for outdoor spaces for each unit. A ramp is provided for a zero-step entry into the building and screen wall options are being considered between this and neighboring properties.

The landscaping plan was reviewed, and it was noted that the project meets the Green Score requirement with a score of 0.355. The Commission noted that the public right of way does not count towards the Green Score and so the streetscape planter proposed cannot be used toward this calculation.

The Commission asked the applicant team about the relationship between the materiality of this building and its context. The applicant team explained that the material palette was examined when the project scale shifted. The triangular ribbed profile is a nod to the clapboard siding seen elsewhere in the neighborhood.

The Commission asked about the roof. The applicant team explained that the building code prevents an occupiable fourth story, due to this being a single stair building. Preparing the roof for a future PV array could be considered.

The Commission asked if the applicant team has spoken with Eversource. The applicant team explained that Eversource felt that the load was low enough that the building would not need a transformer. Also, due to the area of this project and number of units, Eversource would not require a transformer.

The Commission noted a concern that the reflective finish intended to add visual interest could instead cause glare for adjacent properties and passersby. The contemporary interpretation of the bay window, although intended to add depth and character, might come across as overly simplistic and out of place compared with the more intricate traditional bays in the neighborhood. The Commission stated that there needs to be more coordination between the renderings and the landscape. The siting of the front door and backyard is a bit confusing for such a noticeable building. The city has a lovely stoop-culture that this design seems to abandon. The applicant team explained that the proposed design is a balance with the zoning code requirements. The balconies are also proposed to speak to the surrounding ways.

The Commission asked about having different materiality between the first and upper two floors. The applicant team explained that this was explored in some of the façade options, but not the metal panel one. The Commission suggested a different metal to bring in some distinguishing features. The height of the water course could also be considered. They noted that the city's green roof ordinance should also be considered.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted (3-1), with Member Arbaugh against, to recommend option 1 as the preferred massing and façade choice.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue 181 Pearl St to the next meeting on 24 September 2024.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

DESIGN REVIEW: 33 Mystic Ave

(continued from 13 August 2024)

The applicant team reviewed comments previously made by the Commission. Regarding the brick and glass colors, the darker colored brick is still preferred to be Endicott's Manganese Iron Spot, although a few backup options were also proposed. A visual mockup will be produced on site to confirm the preferred option. Regarding a previous comment, instead of the spherical vents previously shown, a series of narrow, louvered panels that match the color of the windows will allow for both the supply and return vents for the Efficia unit with a separate ERV return and exhaust air above it. The supplies for the standalone ERV will be on the Mystic Ave façade. The lot line walls have been amended to include openings in some areas. The primary scheme entrance has been widened a bit on North Union Street. The curving language has been brought into the parapet design on the Mystic Ave side with a small cantilever that creates balconies off the primary suite of the upper floors. The landscape plan now shows five street trees, and a sculptural bench that interrupts the planters and creates an interest in the streetscape. Mystic Ave will contain a two-way elevated cycle track with a 3' buffer between the traffic and cyclists. The roof space is proposed to contain a wild pollinator green area.

The Commission discussed lining the entry way in wood or a wood product. The Commission stated that it would like to see details on the materiality, especially for the exhausts and the brick.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) that the design guidelines have been met.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the additional design guidance for 33 Mystic Avenue as follows:

- Consider alternate patterning on the side elevation near the elevation and stairs where the concrete and white brick are shown.
- Incorporate the HVAC intake and exhaust that are clustered behind the louvered panels the window openings they are adjacent to.
- Be cautious regarding the weathering of real wood, in terms of the material selection.
- Recommend to the Planning Board that material samples be viewed in person and be submitted prior to the issuance of a Building Permit.
- Provide a mockup panel onsite, especially to see the brickwork, and how the vents work with the brickwork.
- Refine the intersection of the dark and white brick above the lobby entry.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

DESIGN REVIEW: Assembly Square Block 9

Member Valdes recused himself from this project and exited the meeting at 7:30pm.

The applicant team explained that the proposal is for 318 rental apartment units over ground floor retail space, in an eight-story building. The total square footage in the building is approximately 370,000. The rental units will range in bedroom count from studios to two bedrooms. The project intends to comply with the current zoning requirement for 20% affordability. The intention is to park the project at just under half, in terms of the count of overall parking spaces to units and the overall bike parking spaces to units. The ground floor retail space will be primarily located along Grand Union Blvd and Foley St, and as the property turns down Harold Cohen Way the hope is to find a daycare provider use. This use has been largely sought in Assembly Square. The building is designed to be LEED Gold certified and to meet Passive House standards. The height is proposed to be 85'. The block will be located squarely outside the 300' and 500' buffer zones to the highway.

The applicant team explained that the current Block 9 site is surrounded by buildings of varying heights from 85' to 250'. The design considers massing to anchor the block and to also express the entrance of the building. The design also shows how stairs and various elements can be used to divide the plot and create rhythm in the building. The main entrance of the building is proposed to be on Harold Cohen Way. Some of the landscape features and systems that the design integrates from the neighborhood include the bus and vehicular drop-offs on Grand Union Blvd and Harold Cohen Way, along with the parking garage and loading dock entries on Auto Worker Way, the bikeway along Foley Street, and integrating the pedestrian connector along Harold Cohen Way. The team stated that the landscape plan shows tree belts along the edge of the street with raised planters to provide protection between the pedestrian and the vehicular movement, along with raised planters against the building to provide pedestrian zones with some seating and lighting.

The Commission discussed additional relief and architectural integrity for the project. It was noted that the solid wall on Grand Union Blvd could be a chance to enliven the street.

The Commission asked about the cladding of the parking levels. The applicant team explained that they are considering skinning the parking area in a metal panel, potentially a perforated metal panel, to give additional availability for animating the facades. There is also the potential to introduce polycarbonate to allow light into the parking garage. The garage will be enclosed and unconditioned.

The Commission asked if the parking proposed on the ground level of the Grand Union Blvd side of the building could be reduced, in order to allow for a different active use. They noted that the entry ways could also be better denoted and the bus stop area could be made more friendly. The applicant team noted that there is a potential to

move this bus stop down Grand Union Blvd, which would allow for more to be done in this area in terms of the landscape and hardscape items.

The Commission asked about the area for the potential play space and if it meets the requirements. Due to the lack of play areas currently within Assembly, it was asked that this be considered elsewhere on site, if the proposed area does not meet the requirements. The applicant team expressed an interest in expanding this area if possible.

The Commission recommended adding some depth to the façade. They noted that, based on conversations had regarding the HVAC vents on previous projects, this item should be added to the details to discuss at a future meeting.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue ASQ Block 9 to the next meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Somernova Update

Staff explained that the public comment letter was submitted to the City Council and will be shared with the Land Use Committee. The Planning Board voted to make a no recommendation to the City Council due to this being a significant project and there not having been enough public process to determine the scale and density for the project.

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.