



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

24 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	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Cheri Ruane	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Houde	Alternate	<i>Absent</i>	

City staff present: n/a

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm and adjourned at 7:15pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted (3-0-1), with Member Fennick abstaining, to approve the 26 August 2024 meeting minutes.

DESIGN REVIEW: ASQ Block 9

Member Valdes recused himself from this item

The Commission noted that the development is subject to any previously approved Planned Unit Development (PUD) of the Assembly Square Mixed-Use zoning district and must provide the following: conceptual landscape plans and pedestrian perspectives for any public realm, including the sidewalk; public realm improvements; frontage area; landscaping and publicly accessible on-site open space; axonometric and perspective massing diagrams; and architectural elevations, including details of the building base.

The applicant team explained that when the PUD was originally approved in 2006, there were design guidelines across the entire development. As the project has progressed over the last nearly two decades, amendments to the PUD require a submittal of updated guidelines for each block. The key design guidelines that were developed in conversation with the city for this building included that the main entrance should be located on Harold Cohen Way to support the city's long-term vision for the neighborhood. Secondly, a second entrance should be located on the other side of the building, closer to the T station and bus stop to support transportation access. Third, the active storefronts on the ground level are to be located on Foley Street and wrap the corners. Fourth, designated significant corners should exhibit differentiation of materials and character, responding to the natural hub at the corner of Foley Street and Grand Union Boulevard. Finally, vehicle ingress and egress for parking and access for service and loading should be located along the utilitarian corridor of Auto Workers Way.

The applicant team reviewed the six items of feedback previously heard regarding the site. The first was for the design team to clarify and improve on the building's volumetric relief. In response to this, the renderings were

updated to show the recesses more accurately, and the recesses were increased where possible. The recesses were enhanced at the significant corners and the secondary façade language was pulled out to exaggerate the frame. The second entry presence was expanded by stretching the awning out and adding wood pattern siding and a planter to better define the entry zone. Secondly, in terms of studying the presence of the entrance on Grand Union Boulevard, the language of the entry on Harold Cohen Way was brought over for consistency. Regarding the third point of feedback, a proposed high planter near the proposed park was removed, in order to allow for additional open space and connectivity. The fourth item was to present design solutions to residential unit vent and louver design conditions. If the mechanical systems are changed from the currently proposed systems, this will be considered in the schematic designs. The fifth item was to propose possible retail signage locations. In reviewing precedence around Assembly Square, there seems to be a wide variety. All options are available for this building, but the signage solution will largely depend on the type and quantity of tenants for the building. Consistency is important. The final item was to enliven the sidewalk and bus stop experience on Grand Union Boulevard. This goes along with the proposed enhanced entry presence. Benches, and/or movable planters, are also proposed adjacent to the transformer doors.

Staff noted that Assembly Square has an entire set of signage guidelines and standards to meet this consistency.

The applicant team explained that it considered options with and without a bus stop. There have been conversations with the Assembly Connect TMA, including representatives from the city and the MBTA, regarding moving the bus stop north of Foley Street. The Commission noted that the character of the ground floor of the building along Grant Union seems to create a long expanse of inactivated façade which is not typical elsewhere in Assembly Square. A more active use along the façade would be preferred.

There was discussion regarding the proposed benches shown on the plan and their overall utility. There was concern expressed from the Commission regarding the proposed transformer alcove as shown on the plan. It would be preferred for the transformers to be placed to face Auto Worker's Way. The applicant team stated that the frontage for the transformers is required due to this being an all-electric building. The Commission noted that the original design guidelines for this block anticipated parking on upper stories, but not parking on the ground level, as is proposed.

The discussion continued with the proposed materials and colors for the building. The Commission suggested finding ways to relate the proposed colors to one another. It was noted that this is one of the first buildings of this scale that the Commission has seen designed to comply with Passive House standards, leading to additional areas of solid walls.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend the proposed massing and façade of the ASQ Block 9.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend that the design guidelines for the ASQ Block 9 have been met, with the conditions that the applicant team address the Commission's comments made during the meeting, including:

- To investigate reorganizing the plan, especially where the alcoves and parking are on Grand Union Boulevard, to emphasize a safe pedestrian realm.
- To incorporate benches into the building design and possibly flip the locations of the drop off areas and the pollinator planters with the Eversource vault locations.
- The standard conditions, including review of a material palette prior to Building Permit issuance and to investigate an on-site mockup panel prior to vertical construction.
- To reconsider the proposed roll up doors in order to support a more interesting public realm.
- To continue to refine the material selection and application on the building to create overall harmony.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to incorporate the additional design guidance as described.

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED WITH CONDITIONS
----------------	------------------------------------

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.