



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

12 NOVEMBER 2024 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Luisa Olivera	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Estello Raganit	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</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>	
VACANT	Alternate		
VACANT	Alternate		

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:09pm and adjourned at 7:01pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the 8 October 2024 meeting minutes.

DESIGN REVIEW: 675 Somerville Avenue

The applicant team explained that this property is known as both 675 Somerville Ave and 3 Craigie St. This is a gas station and auto shop. The proposal is to demolish the existing structures and build a new three-story, 14-unit rental building with commercial space on the first floor. The site will be dimensionally compliant in the MR3 district, and no car parking is being proposed. The site is within the half mile transit area map. The team noted that the project will comply with Green Score requirements and promote a building with natural cross ventilation and self-shading. The project will commit to the standards of the specialized energy code. The applicant team stated that the proposed massing is broken down into two parts, joined by a common terrace. On the ground level, there are two main access points, a residential one on Craigie St, and a service one on Somerville Ave. There are two trash zones proposed, both of which will be covered and screened. There are 14 long term bicycle parking spaces proposed indoors, and four short term bicycle parking spaces proposed outdoors under a canopy. There will also be outdoor amenities, including three dedicated private outdoor amenities for those on the ground floor.

The applicant team stated that there is one massing and three façade options for the building. The three façade options all include brick material which reinforces the massing, gives a cohesive reading to the whole building, is durable, and is low maintenance. The applicant team's preferred façade option is the pleated one. The primary material is a face brick, and the secondary material is a fiber cement board. The color palette is three colors. The awning is proposed to be a thin metal extrusion.

The applicant team explained that the ground floor strategy is a series of smaller unit terraces that come off the backside and are directly accessed from the units. These include pervious pavers. The shared unit terraces in the back would have peastone paving around, and small, thin native trees to create a bit of a grove in the back of the site. There is not a green roof strategy yet, but the applicant team is interested in discussing this further. There is a pollinator informed design as part of this project.

The Commission asked if there is an accessible way to access the second floor. The applicant team stated that there is not. There are three ADA accessible units on the ground floor, as required. As this is not a building with an elevator, accessibility to the second floor is not required.

The Commission asked about the transformer and its proposed location. The applicant team explained that it is shown 10' from the curb line, per Eversource requirements, but it may need to be set back 12' instead.

The Commission asked about the depth of the bricks along the pier features between the balconies. The applicant team explained that these are a face brick material currently and the walls are 14" total. There could likely be two face bricks and some structure in between the two balcony areas. The applicant team explained that 14" is the targeted dimension for both the vertical and horizontal reading of spandrel, and also the vertical wall.

The Commission noted that the open space proposed seems meaningful and useful to those who live in the building. The plant palette is lovely. There was a question regarding the transformer location and the offsets to the terrace location. There was some concern regarding much of the building not being accessible to those with disabilities. This does not feel in the spirit of the inclusive community that the City hopes to create. The applicant team agreed but noted that the intention is to be able to create affordable walk-up housing for the City.

There was discussion regarding placing a gate on the property to create security and egress. There was also discussion regarding the durability of the materiality proposed for the main entrance.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend option 3 as the preferred façade option.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) that the Design Guidelines have been satisfied.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the conditions as discussed, including transformer location, addition of a gate, materiality of the building, the structure of the flooring, thickness of the balcony, as well as the material and how it meets the ground.

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.