



City of Somerville
PLANNING BOARD
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

16 JANUARY 2025 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation via Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Michael McNeley	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Absent</i>	

City staff present: Stephen Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Justin Schreiber (Mobility Division)

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm and adjourned at 8:17pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 5 December 2024 meeting minutes, as presented.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 19 December 2024 meeting minutes, as presented.

PUBLIC HEARING: 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029)
(continued from 19 December 2024)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to accept the request to withdrawal without prejudice for 45 Mystic Avenue (P&Z 22-029).

RESULT:	WITHDRAWN WITHOUT PREJUDICE
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PUBLIC HEARING: 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-000047)
(continued from 19 December 2024)

The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the hearing for 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-00047) to 6 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:	CONTINUED
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PUBLIC HEARING: 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-000048)

(continued from 19 December 2024)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue the hearing for 720-722 Broadway (ZP24-00048) to 6 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000046)

(continued from 19 December 2024)

The Board addressed this and the following agenda item concurrently.

The Board explained that additional materials have been submitted by the applicant and formal feedback from the Mobility Division was also received. Mobility Staff stated that they are comfortable with the conditions as proposed.

The Board asked if the City is considering a central parking facility that would serve the broader Assembly Square district. Mobility Staff explained that there are a large number of commercially available spaces in close proximity to the site in question. The recommendation is not based on that; it is based on the particulars of the site itself. The Board expressed concern with placing a cap for parking on this site as this seems to be in contrast with the guidance that Mobility provided in support of the zoning amendment that a recommendation was recently made on to remove minimum parking requirements throughout the City. Mobility Staff stated that most of the concern is based on the traffic analysis submitted which showed 3/4-mile-long queues from project traffic on a street which is only 200' long. The Board asked if there is another avenue in which the concerns regarding queuing can be mitigated. If the valet spaces will have a disproportionate impact, considerations could be requested of the applicant regarding their garage design. Mobility Staff stated that the recommendation to not permit the valet spaces was based on the applicant's proposal that those spaces would be removed at some point in the future. The recommendation is based on a desire to reduce the amount of parking, to reduce the trip generation, and to reduce the travel demand on the site.

The Board asked if the traffic study is likely on the high end of the estimate of the amount of traffic that would actually happen. Mobility Staff acknowledged that this is a conservative analysis. The intent of many of the proposed conditions for promoting alternative modes of transportation and reducing parking is to make sure that the analysis does not actually come to fruition.

The applicant team agreed that the concern is not so much the valet operation, but the traffic generated by the garage. As this is proposed as a commercial garage, the concern is not only this project but the area as a whole. A new signal at the McGrath Highway/Middlesex Avenue intersection could be considered to help with queues. This will also allow for bicycles and pedestrians to cross this area under signalized control. A second signalized intersection could also be considered at Cummings Street, if needed. There seem to be some inflated queue results, but the intention is to mitigate for them.

The Board expressed concern regarding additional idling created by vehicles being stuck in traffic in a neighborhood that is already very sensitive to this development, especially given the existing air pollution from McGrath Highway. It is important not to create a situation which doubles down on that in order to accommodate additional vehicles.

The applicant team explained that the goal of the utilization review is to allow the City to have a mechanism to reduce parking. The applicant is open to conversations regarding the valet proposal and the methodology for it. The Board noted that it would like to hear the idea for this neighborhood as it relates to available parking facilities

local to this site, such that this applicant may not have to bear the entire burden. Staff explained that the draft Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan does not focus on parking. The plan focuses more on design and outcome rather than parking numbers. Most of the mobility-related elements of the Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan deal with more pedestrianization, bike lanes, and road design rather than parking items.

The Board suggested that the applicant could consider working with neighbors to find the necessary parking. The applicant team reviewed the proposed Transportation Demand Management measures, including a hotel shuttle that was expanded to lab and other tenants, 2.5% of spaces reserved for exclusive tenant use within the commercial garages, tenants subsidizing 100% of the cost of MBTA transit passes, and that the project will be subject to provide three new Bluebike stations.

The Board suggested an automatic reduction of the space count after a certain period of time in order to help get the building financed but then determine what the potential impact has been. The applicant team expressed concern with getting through the first lease period before making changes that could be competitively disadvantageous to the lease. The Board noted that it is attempting to come up with creative solutions for this concern, as there seems to be clear direction from the experts that the proposal will be impactful on the surrounding community. If it is determined that the surrounding neighborhood is not being impacted, an extension could be considered.

The Board discussed how a 290' building will fit 700 +/- parking spaces. Currently the site is allowed to be permitted at 125'. The Board often hears concerns from neighbors regarding shadows and other impacts. In reviewing the applicant's shadow studies, at 125' there could be impacts on a couple of homes nearby. But the 290' could have a significant impact on homes in the Ten Hills neighborhood. A 290' tall building, as requested, could be almost one of, if not the, largest building in the City. There is concern regarding building a 290' building and there being difficulty finding lab tenants. The applicant team stated that they do not believe the building will sit empty; there was interest in a tenant that was seeking 7,000 s.f. of space who chose to go elsewhere. The Board asked about reducing the proposed height for the northernmost building, even at the expense of adding height to Building 2. There was interest in seeing a shadow study that tries to concentrate the height on the south side of the site, in the hope of mitigating some of the impacts to the neighborhood. Some Board Members stated that, while they appreciate the concerns expressed, they feel comfortable with the proposed building height. It is not only the nearby residents that have a stake in this development. Reducing height could help with some of the ratio issues, but it is unclear if what is allowable by-right should be capped for this site.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 6 February 2025, at the request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 20-23 Cummings Street (ZP24-000085)

(continued from 19 December 2024)

The Board heard this item concurrently with the previous agenda item and continued it to 6 February 2025.

OTHER BUSINESS: Amendments to Rules of Procedure & Policy

The Board reviewed the proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure & Policy. There was agreement to change the proposed deadline for written testimony to Fridays prior to a meeting at 9am. There was discussion regarding creating alternate ways for the public to communicate and engage with the Board. There was agreement to add this to a future agenda.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the first amendment to the Rules of Procedure & Policy, regarding the Chair being able to sign, and/or delegate a signature, for subdivision approval plans on behalf of the Board.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to adopt the second amendment to the Rules of Procedure & Policy, regarding the deadline for written testimony being the Friday prior to a meeting at 9am.

OTHER BUSINESS: Annual Elections

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (4-0-1), with Chair Capuano abstaining, to nominate Michael Capuano as Chair of the Planning Board for the next term.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (4-0-1), with Vice Chair Aboff abstaining, to nominate Amelia Aboff as Vice Chair of the Planning Board for the next term.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (4-0-1), with Clerk Habib abstaining, to nominate Jahan Habib as Clerk of the Planning Board for the next term.

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 PlanningBoard@somervillema.gov