



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

11 FEBRUARY 2025 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>Absent</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Sarah Lewis and Estello Raganit, Acting Co-Chair, at 6:06pm and adjourned at 7:27pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the 14 January 2025 meeting minutes, as amended.

DESIGN RECOMMENDATION: 44 White Street

The Commission had no additional discussion on this recommendation at this time.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the design recommendation for 44 White Street.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

DESIGN REVIEW: 199 Elm Street

The applicant team explained that this property is located in the MR4 district. The proposal is for a four-story building, with ground floor commercial space, and three floors of residential apartments above it. The total space is approximately 15,000 s.f. This is a transit-oriented development, with no car parking required or provided. The building is proposed to be all electric and Passive House certified to meet the requirements of the specialized energy code. There are no significant trees proposed to be removed, an existing curb cut is proposed to be filled, and an existing two-story building is proposed to be demolished as part of the project.

The applicant team stated that the surrounding area has been identified for enhancement in SomerVision 2040. The surrounding sites are all in the MR4 district and there is some anticipation of development in this area. The City also seems to have some ideas that it is exploring for Davis Square.

In reviewing the proposed plans, the applicant team explained that the intention is to pull the building back to create a small entry court for both the commercial and residential entryways. There will also be a large inground transformer in the entry space. There will be a large bike room at the back of the ground floor. Most of the rest of the space is reserved for the commercial use, which is anticipated to be either a retail or restaurant tenant, with restaurant preferred. Each street facing unit is proposed to have a balcony, which will also help break down the scale of the building. The proposed roof deck has 5' setbacks from the façade walls below and no rooftop equipment is proposed. The applicant team referenced some nearby murals and noted that the intention is to reference the colorful, playful nature of these in the façade design in some way. Brick materials and sandy buff colors are also prominent in Davis Square.

The applicant team displayed three potential design options, as well as the proposed landscape design. Within the first 4.5' of the streetscape, tree pits are proposed. Tables, chairs, planters, and moveable pots are proposed in the back, along with permeable pavers. Most of the landscape area is proposed on the roof. Pockets of seating will be defined using plantings. The required green score is expected to be met.

The Commission asked the applicant team to speak with Eversource regarding if a transformer is necessary and how it can be accommodated on the site. The applicant team explained that the intent is to put it underground on the site and there have been conversations about this with Eversource.

The Commission asked about signage and the entry for the commercial space. The applicant team noted that the cornice band will likely have to get a bit thicker which will create a more prominent signage band. There can also be secondary signage in the windows. The proposed material may change in order to make the entry more prominent. A subtle material change or continued signage in this area may also help. The Commission suggested using some of the colors mentioned in nearby murals to help distinguish this area.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend the preferred massing and design option, as shown.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) that the design guidelines for the MR4 district have been met.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to recommend the additional design guidance:

- To provide more detail, possibly using color, to distinguish the retail entry
- To add depth to accommodate a larger signage band

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
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OTHER BUSINESS: Arts & Innovation District Update

The Commission discussed that a base Research & Development District is going to be adopted, which will change the base from Fabrication (FAB) to R&D. This opens the possibility for an overlay district, the Arts & Innovation Overlay District, to be written to allow some larger development. This is currently going through internal City review. Another piece of the Arts & Innovation Overlay District is an Urban Design Framework Plan, which is similar to Boynton Yards. An outdoor civic space and community center can then be considered.

OTHER BUSINESS: Design Guidelines Discussion

The Commission discussed that it would like to have design guidelines referenced when the zoning for Assembly is rewritten. The Commission could be used to assist in this process. Once a draft version of the plan is released to the public, the Commission could review and provide input. The Commission expressed desire to review the design guidelines and assess how well they are working. This could be addressed as a future agenda item.

OTHER BUSINESS: Potential Agenda Items for Planning Board & Land Use Committee

The Commission discussed talking points for future potential Planning Board and Land Use Committee joint meetings.

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.