



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

3 APRIL 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>Present</i>	

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

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 9:13pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 375 Harold Cohen Way (ZP24-000118 & ZP25-000034)
(continued from 20 March 2025)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the hearings for 375 Harold Cohen Way (ZP24-000118, ZP25-000034, ZP24-000124) to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 375 Harold Cohen Way (ZP24-000124)
(continued from 20 March 2025)

This item was discussed concurrently with the previous item and continued to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendations to the City Council

- John Fragione and Agostino Feola, Trustees of Frala Realty Trust, requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 295-297 Medford Street and 93 Walnut Street from Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) (File # [25-0269](#)).

The Board noted that this is at least the second time that an applicant at this address has come to the Planning Board and Land Use Committee seeking to upzone this parcel. The most recent time prior to this, there was fairly substantial pushback from a wide swath of people, including members on the Planning Board. The nature of this project seems much different. The applicant is proposing to build a project with 100% affordable units.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend the adoption of 25-0269, which is 295-297 Medford Street being upzoned from MR3 to MR4.

RESULT:**RECOMMENDED**

- Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 3-6, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for arts and creative enterprise, office, and residential uses (File # [25-0129](#)).
- Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings (File # [24-1460](#)).
- Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 6, 9, and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Research & Development zoning district (File # [25-0128](#)).
- Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 8 and 12 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Arts & Innovation sub-area of the Master Planned Development Overlay District (File # [25-0131](#)).

Staff explained that the two items that deal with uses, regarding the lab amendments and the ACE Space amendments, effectively impact the city overall. The other items, regarding the R&D base district and the Arts & Innovation overlay district, only apply to the Somernova area. In terms of the Arts & Innovation overlay, Staff explained that the item was a combination of a compromise proposal between the city, the development team, and neighborhood representatives, including the Union Square Neighborhood Council, a significant population of the Arts community and other immediate abutters.

Board members noted that they may not feel comfortable making a positive recommendation on the proposed overlay district. It seems that this may have been driven by a developer and that this is a 60% more compromise than the Comprehensive Plan directs. It was noted that there is not much enthusiasm from the city on this, and there do not seem to be overwhelming community benefits to justify the community impacts that this will bring. There was concern expressed from the Board regarding the process for this proposal.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend the adoption of an amendment to Articles 2, 3-6, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for arts and creative enterprise, office, and residential uses (File # 25-0 129), incorporating all considerations and suggestions made by the Planning Board.

RESULT:**RECOMMENDED**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend the adoption of an amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings (File # 24-1460), incorporating all considerations and suggestions made by the Planning Board.

RESULT:**RECOMMENDED**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (5-1), with Vice Chair Aboff against, to recommend the adoption of an amendment to Articles 6, 9, and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Research & Development zoning district (File # 25-0128), incorporating all considerations and suggestions made by the Planning Board.

RESULT:**RECOMMENDED**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted (5-1), with Vice Chair Aboff against, to recommend the adoption of an amendment to Articles 8 and 12 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a

new Arts & Innovation sub-area of the Master Planned Development Overlay District (File # 25-0131), incorporating all considerations and suggestions made by the Planning Board.

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
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PUBLIC HEARING: 120 Middlesex Avenue (ZP24-000108)

(continued from 20 March 2025)

The applicant team explained that this is request for a Major Amendment of a previously approved Master Plan Special Permit. The project was approved with an economic development package that the applicant was asked to comply with. The applicant, supported by Staff, received a civic space variance and made a commitment to pay \$5,200,000 for acquisition for open space. That variance is still ongoing. The applicant team stated that the total contribution of non-taxable benefits is approximately \$21M, the estimated annual taxes are approximately \$9M, and the project will generate Building Permit fees of approximately \$10M. One of the proposed amendments to the plan includes a change to where parking will egress to improve the conditions along Cummings Street. Also, rooftop mechanical needs for life science uses have increased in terms of sustainability measures and building layouts. To respond to this, the applicant team reduced the zoning height of the building, but the top of the penthouse mechanical is still higher than what was originally proposed.

The applicant team explained that the proposed LEED Platinum certified building with 19 floors, a total of 596,000 gross floor area (GFA), accommodating commercial lab and office floor plates of 35,000 GFA and 520 underground parking spaces, reduced from its original permitted 629, will anchor 120 Middlesex at this life science development area as the Assembly gateway to world class life science tenants. The building plans were amended to reconfigure the shape of the building in order to accommodate a pedestrian priority. The applicant team reviewed the shadow study for the proposed building.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Wig Zamore (Highland Avenue) – spoke in favor of the proposal, especially in terms of the proposed change in access.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston Street) – stated that she is in favor of this proposal, though she is skeptical of payments-in-lieu without a targeted area to use it for civic or green spaces.

Jane Bestor (Ibbetson Street) – stated that she endorsed the concern to minimize parking on this site. Open space in Assembly Square and the greater city as a whole should also be considered. She asked about air quality in terms of the proposed balconies on the plan. Also, she asked about the neighbors' thoughts on the shadow study for the proposed building.

Seeing no additional public comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board asked about the multi-use path proposed on the plan connecting to other surrounding paths. Staff explained that this could be considered as a condition. However, the applicant needs to coordinate with the intent of the new neighborhood plan, which has not yet been adopted, so this needs to be further examined.

The Board asked about Staff's recommendation on the proposed parking ratio. The applicant team explained that there was a previously approved Master Plan Special Permit with a number allowed of parking spaces. The requested parking has since been reduced voluntarily from that number. The applicant team would like to make sure there is enough parking on the site to be competitive in the lab market. A parking ratio of 0.87 will allow the building to be competitive in the market. The team is not comfortable with Mobility Staff's proposed additional reduction to a 0.7 ratio, reducing the number of spaces from 520 to 417. If Cummings Street is made a one-way,

which is currently being pursued, this may compound Mobility's concerns with Middlesex Avenue. The Board noted that it believed the applicant's proposed parking ratio, including the voluntary reduction, was appropriate.

The Board asked about the proposed street-facing retail space. The applicant team explained that the intention is to make Assembly Square a premiere life science location. The intention is to allow for a fitness use along Cummings Street with a potential juice bar use off the lobby. An active café use could be included which could open other opportunities. The intention is to activate the facades and let the public enjoy the space.

The Board asked about the triangular space being proposed by the applicant. Staff explained that this is currently a holding spot to consider open space and a shared path. This is proposed to be a continuous flow-through connection area.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, and amended by discussion of the Board this evening including the applicant's proposed parking ratio, the application for 120 Middlesex Avenue (ZP24-000108).

RESULT:

APPROVED

The Board recessed for approximately ten minutes, until 8:26pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 33 Mystic Avenue (ZP24-000114)

(continued from 20 March 2025)

This item was discussed concurrently with all applications for the same address.

The applicant team reviewed the proposed development project, including its proximity to transit services and amenities. There was discussion regarding the various contexts the project will address, including the raised highway and development along Mystic Avenue. The applicant team noted the planning context of the area, which identifies Assembly Point as an area where smaller parcels should be prioritized and developed into unique mixed-use buildings. A sidewalk along North Union Street is proposed to be expanded, allowing for additional seating. There will be ground floor commercial space and a bike room in this location as well. The team noted that above the commercial space is five floors of residential apartments are proposed in a mix of sizes including studios, one-bedrooms, and two-bedrooms. Each unit will have a private balcony and share a roof deck. The applicant team also reviewed the proposed landscape plan.

The team explained that this is a forward-looking development proposal for the site, one that reflects the goals of the Assembly Square Plan and SomerVision 2040, the city's Comprehensive Plan. It anticipates an emerging, vibrant, mixed-use neighborhood.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston Street) – expressed some concern regarding the decision-making regarding civic spaces so close to the highway. Regarding the planting plan, she asked that there be something blooming at all times between March through October, as part of the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan.

Wig Zamore (13 Highland Ave) – stated that research in Somerville has found very high cardiovascular inflammation in a majority of residents within 100 meters of I93, and significantly high cardiovascular inflammation in residents 100-400 meters away from I93. He expressed concern regarding ultrafine particles in this area.

Seeing no additional public comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony. The written public testimony period was left open until 9am on Friday, 11 April 2025.

The Board asked why green space and roof decks are being proposed for this location next to the highway while a development down the street, also next to the highway, is considering a payment-in-lieu, where open space by the highway is being discouraged; this seems incongruous. The city needs to holistically consider developments next to I93. Staff explained that there is no longer support for projects with payments-in-lieu for civic spaces. There is now more consideration regarding the need for open space in these areas.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue the hearings for 33 Mystic Avenue (ZP24-000114, ZP24-000115, ZP24-000121, ZP24-000122, ZP24-000123) to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 33 Mystic Avenue (ZP24-000115)

(continued from 20 March 2025)

This item was discussed concurrently with the previous item and continued to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 33 Mystic Avenue (ZP24-000121)

(continued from 20 March 2025)

This item was discussed concurrently with the previous item and continued to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 33 Mystic Avenue (ZP24-000122)

(continued from 20 March 2025)

This item was discussed concurrently with the previous item and continued to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 33 Mystic Avenue (ZP24-000123)

(continued from 20 March 2025)

This item was discussed concurrently with the previous item and continued to 17 April 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan Adoption

This item was not addressed at this meeting.

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