



City of Somerville  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**17 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 6:01pm and adjourned at 9:01pm.

**GENERAL BUSINESS**

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 6 March 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 20 March 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

**PUBLIC HEARING: 33 Mystic Avenue**

*(continued from 3 April 2025)*

- Stellamoon LLC proposes to develop a six (6) story General Building in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district, which requires Site Plan Approval (ZP24-000114).
- Stellamoon LLC seeks a waiver from the lot area dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district, which requires a Special Permit (ZP24-000115).
- Stellamoon LLC seeks a waiver from the floor area ratio (FAR) dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district, which requires a Special Permit (ZP24-000121).
- Stellamoon LLC seeks a waiver from the building height dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district, which requires a Special Permit (ZP24-000122).
- Stellamoon LLC seeks a waiver from the lot area per dwelling unit dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district, which requires a Special Permit (ZP24-000123).

The applicant team explained that this project will be required by the Specialized Energy Code to meet Passive House Standards. To meet that standard, it will need to have triple glazed windows and a continuous, unbroken air barrier for complete air tightness. It will also be required to have energy recovery ventilators. The applicant team spoke to its engineer regarding the MERV 16 filtration system, as being the standard required to filter the ultra-fine particulate matter. This will be possible with the ERV system planned for the project.

The Board stated that the applicant team has addressed the concerns raised with this information.

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 dated 28 February 2025, the Site Plan Approval to develop a six-story general building in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

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 dated 28 February 2025, a Special Permit for a waiver from the lot area dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

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 dated 28 February 2025, a Special Permit for a waiver from the floor area ratio dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

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 Memorandum dated 28 February 2025, a Special Permit for a waiver from the building height dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

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 dated 28 February 2025, a Special Permit for a waiver from the lot area per dwelling unit dimensional standard in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

**RESULT:**

**APPROVED**

### **PUBLIC HEARING: 375 Harold Cohen Way**

*(continued from 3 April 2025)*

- Street Retail, LLC, seeks a Site Plan Approval with Special Permit to develop an 8-story General Building in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District (ASMD) subject to Assembly Square Planned Unit Development-Preliminary Master Plan, Case # PB 2006-59 (as amended), and is seeking waivers for dimensions of maneuvering aisles, an updated TIS, a scale model, minimum parking requirements, and the right of first refusal (ZP24-000118 & ZP25-000034).

*The Board agreed to table discussion on this item to a later time.*

- Street Retail, LLC, seeks a Major Amendment to Assembly Square Planned Unit Development-Preliminary Master Plan, Case # PB 2006-59 (as amended), to incorporate Block 9 Design Guidelines for 375 Harold Cohen Way (ZP24-000124).

The applicant team explained that the PUD generally requires that design guidelines be submitted for each block. This is not specifically required for Block 9, but the design guidelines are from approximately 2006, and it makes sense to update them, as the site is now being developed as multifamily housing rather than a commercial building. There are five design guidelines:

- That the main entrance should be located on Harold Cohen Way to support the City's long term vision for the neighborhood. The main entrance was originally located on Grand Union Boulevard.
- For convenience, the secondary entrance should be located on the other side of the building, closer to the T Station.
- Active storefronts should be on the ground level, located on Foley Street and wrap the corners to activate the street wall façades.
- Designated significant corners should exhibit differentiation of materials and character, responding to the natural hub at the corner of Foley Street and Grand Union.

- Vehicle ingress and egress for parking, and access for service and loading, should be located along Auto Workers Way.

This design was reviewed with the Urban Design Commission (UDC). The UDC made comments on the design, which have been considered.

Chair Capuano stated that he will delay public testimony until the entire presentation is made by the applicant team.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recess this hearing, pending the conclusion of the Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee.

*The Board entered into a Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee at 6:30pm.*

### **OTHER BUSINESS: Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee**

- 15 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend the Zoning Ordinance sections 3.1.8c, 3.1.9c, 3.1.10c, 3.1.13k, 3.1.13l, 3.2.12l, and 3.2.12m (File # [25-0200](#)).
- Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2-5 and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to remove conflicts with the State Building Code (File # [25-0457](#)).
- Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 2 of the Zoning Ordinance to allow the Building Official to waive certain dimensional standards for means of egress (File # [25-0590](#)).

*The Board reconvened its meeting at 7:44pm, with a quorum present.*

### **PUBLIC HEARING: 375 Harold Cohen Way**

*(continued from 3 April 2025)*

*The Board reopened the discussion on this item.*

- Street Retail, LLC, seeks a Site Plan Approval with Special Permit to develop an 8-story General Building in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District (ASMD) subject to Assembly Square Planned Unit Development-Preliminary Master Plan, Case # PB 2006-59 (as amended), and is seeking waivers for dimensions of maneuvering aisles, an updated TIS, a scale model, minimum parking requirements, and the right of first refusal (ZP24-000118 & ZP25-000034).

The applicant team explained that the new zoning enacted in 2019 includes language that allows a previously approved PUD, such as Assembly Row, to move forward under the former zoning, which was in effect in August 2019. The proposed Special Permit is pursuant to the standards that were in place as of 2019. The purpose is to have continuation with the PUD, which was approved as part of the 2019 zoning. The Planning Board has the authority to waive certain development requirements in the Assembly Square District, and the applicant is seeking five waivers:

- To reduce the minimum one-way maneuvering aisle.
- To waive the requirement for an updated traffic study.
- To waive the submission of a 3D scale model.
- To reduce the minimum parking requirement from 349 spaces to 149 spaces.
- To waive the right of first refusal.

The applicant team explained that Block 9 is a 318-unit, mixed-income, residential building with ground floor retail, residential amenities, and back of house space. The second floor is the parking level, with residential units on floors 3-8. This is an eight-story structure. It will be a Passive House building, all electric, and designed to be LEED Gold. The plan complies with the affordable housing requirement and includes 150 bike parking spaces, where 111 are required. On the ground floor retail level, a daycare user is being sought along Foley Street. There is significant car travel and visibility along Grand Union Boulevard and Foley Street, creating a natural hub at the northeast corner of the site. A second significant corner is proposed across from the future planned park, where there is ample sun exposure. These corners are delineated by recessed notches on each side that provide relief from the façade.

Regarding materiality, the applicant team explained that the pattern of the materials relates back to the massing at the significant corners. The intent is to vary the texture of the primary cladding material and cementitious panels, to enrich the façade. There will be formed metal panels at the parking areas and service areas. There will be curtain walls at the entries and amenity areas, with formed metal panels above the curtain wall, with louvers. There will be metal panels and wood pattern siding accents at the entrances, and a stone base along most of the façade.

The applicant team explained that Grand Union Boulevard is located on the east side of the site. This street acts as the main thoroughfare for Assembly Row. There is an existing MBTA bus stop, sidewalks, and some landscaping. The project proposes maintaining the bus stop and providing improved sidewalks and landscaping. Within the street there are protected painted bicycle lanes, which will be maintained. Auto Workers Way is used primarily for loading and garage access for the Alta Revolution building, which is directly south of the site. Block 9 will also be using this street for its loading and garage access. There is an existing temporary sidewalk on the Block 9 side of the street, which the project proposes to replace with an improved sidewalk connection. West of the site is Harold Cohen Way which is the main pedestrian street that connects Block 9 to the Assembly Innovation Park development, located west of the site, and also Revolution to the south. There is a raised street starting at the intersection of Harold Cohen Way and Auto Workers Way that continues south towards Revolution Drive on the Block 9 side. There is an existing temporary sidewalk that will be replaced as part of the project. On the north side of the project is Foley Street. This is the other main vehicular thoroughfare connecting Middlesex Avenue to Grand Union Boulevard. This street has sidewalk connections to both Assembly Innovation Park and Assembly Row. There is a separated bicycle path alongside Assembly Innovation Park and a protected, painted bicycle path that will be replaced with a raised separated bike path, with a protected intersection at Foley Street and Grand Union Boulevard.

The applicant team explained that each street has a various function, and the streetscapes were designed to accommodate the function of the building, as well as tie into the Assembly Row needs and functions, and to accommodate many City needs. Each streetscape has similar zones, including a furniture zone at the edge of the building with permeable paving, a 5' accessible walk, and raised planters. The planting design includes tree species selected off the Somerville street tree list, and a majority of plantings, native or non-native, that are approved on that pollinator plant list.

The Board asked how about the permeability at the street level of the building. The applicant team stated that there will be alcoves, trees, and planters along Grand Union Blvd, though it will be primarily vehicle-dominated. There will be some opaque areas and some transparent areas. Foley Street will all be transparent. Harold Cohen Way will also have some opaque areas and some transparent areas. The Board asked the applicant to consider the pedestrian experience and the permeability of the building.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – stated that she hopes the parking is underground for the project. She supports the proposed reduction in parking spaces but would like to see another transit plan instead of a waiver granted on this item. She expressed concern with the synthetic turf play area. She noted that there is a native plant ordinance,

requiring 50% of native plantings in public spaces. She asked the applicant to come before the Urban Forestry Committee to work on the planting plan.

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

The Board asked if the applicant team plans to place astroturf on the property. The applicant team explained that this is specific to a level one courtyard in order to secure a daycare operator. This would be the play yard required by that operator. The Board suggested something more environmentally friendly. The applicant team agreed to work through this with potential operators.

The Board asked about the utility plan. Regarding stormwater, this area is prone to flooding. It is important for projects of this type to find ways to prevent stormwater runoff, either through catch basins or submerged plantings. The applicant team explained that they are looking into providing further stormwater improvements than what is typical in Assembly Row. This project will address some of those new nutrient removal requirements, including a sand filter to collect, treat, and help detain the stormwater generated by the roof. This will discharge out to the existing drainage infrastructure on Grand Union. The project also considered different ways to treat phosphorus within the sidewalk, including use of permeable pavers or retention basins. The site will be graded to be above the existing elevation, particularly at the existing parking lot. The Board stated that the outfall to separate the combined sewer in this area is helpful, but including functional landscaping could help attenuate the flow, thereby mitigating even further the amount of runoff going into the Mystic River. The proposal is to build upon existing impervious cover, thus not creating any new impervious cover. The request is to create some functional landscaping to attenuate the flow. The applicant team noted that there are very poor soils on the site; there are not great infiltration rates.

The Board stated that it has expressed a clear desire to see the proposed landscaping reflect a more active management of water on the site. The applicant team should also consider how to mitigate for the pedestrian experience through the landscaping. The Board asked the applicant team to come back with a revised plan to address these concerns. The written comment period was left open until 9am on 25 April 2025.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this application to 1 May 2025.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>CONTINUED</b>
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### **OTHER BUSINESS: Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan**

This item will be addressed at a future 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](mailto:PlanningBoard@somervillema.gov)*