



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

1 MAY 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); Emily Hutchings (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 8:30pm.

OTHER BUSINESS: Joint Hearings 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](#)).

Staff explained that it is not supportive of the amendment the way it is written. Staff is in support of simplifying the dormer standards themselves. The amendment could lead to unintended consequences. The Board agreed that there are positive moves that could be made regarding dormer flexibility. A separate discussion regarding the dormer requirements could be broached outside of this proposed amendment. The Board discussed treating this amendment in an equitable fashion. The Board also discussed a neutral recommendation to the Land Use Committee, noting that the proponent could work with Staff to create an amendment that is agreeable for all parties.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0-1), with Member Schuster voting “present”, to make a neutral recommendation to the Land Use Committee.

- 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](#)).

The Board discussed ways to support greater density in areas without as many administrative burdens. Staff explained that this proposed amendment to the density bonus is a placeholder. The City previously had this density bonus for net zero ready buildings previously. The goal is that this update and requiring LEED platinum buildings will ensure that bonuses are not being given away for nothing.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend adoption of the proposed amendment to the Land Use Committee.

- 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](#)).

Staff explained that the intention of this amendment is to ensure that the construction of accessible means of egress, such as ramps, lifts, and elevators which allow a person who uses a wheelchair to comfortably get into their home, not be subject to a burdensome hearing process. The amendment allows the Building Official (Director of Inspectional Services) to waive dimensional requirements, such as setbacks or building width, which would otherwise prevent an elevator or ramp from being constructed. Since initially submitting this amendment to Council, Staff is recommending that Section 2 4.4 - Massing and Height, also be added to the list of dimensions that are eligible for this waiver. The purpose of this addition is to make clear that any dimension that is necessary for the construction of an elevator or ramp is eligible for a waiver.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend adoption of the proposed amendment to the Land Use Committee.

PUBLIC HEARING: 375 Harold Cohen Way

(continued from 17 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).
- 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 some questions arose from the last Board presentation including the material of the play surface at the proposed daycare covered terrace, adjustments to the proposed plantings, a refinement of the pedestrian experience along Grand Union Boulevard, and then a discussion regarding the enhancements to the green infrastructure being proposed for the stormwater design.

Regarding the daycare provider, the proposed tenant is interested in a play surface that can be hosed down. Due to this request and the location under a covered terrace, a natural grass surface is not an option. The proposed synthetic material, X-Grass, has no PFAS, meets ASTM requirements, is 100% recyclable, wheelchair accessible, and environmentally friendly. The Board asked about what might happen to this area in the future if the tenant is no longer a daycare provider. The applicant team stated that planters will surround this area. The proposed X-Grass system could be removed to allow for pavers or a similar hardscape in the future for different uses.

The applicant team explained that Grand Union Blvd was designed for pedestrians, including planters and seating along the building. A protected intersection at Foley Street is proposed, and a raised planter in that area will allow for additional plantings. These will help to separate the pedestrians from the vehicles along this street. All possible spaces have been animated with more seating and landscaping.

The applicant team reviewed the overall pre-developed drainage pattern for Assembly Row, and some of the surrounding area. Before the PUD was developed, the Assembly Row site discharged combined sewer and drainage via the 84" NWRS Somerville marginal conduit. This ultimately discharges downstream of the Amelia Earhart Dam to the tidal portion of Mystic River. This discharge never received any water quality treatment before the PUD was developed. In developing Assembly Row, there was a commitment to mitigate and improve the PUD site's stormwater infrastructure. The major mitigation item was the construction of a 72" outfall downstream of

the Amelia Earhart dam in 2012. Water quality is also provided within the PUD site prior to discharging to the outfall to ensure that stormwater is clean before it gets to the river. The drainage pattern for the proposed Master Plan of Assembly Row presents two major drainage areas. As approved during the PUD, and as part of the Notice of Intent, the entire Assembly Road development, including Block 9, was part of the 72" outfall and must meet those conditions. Block 9's design provides additional treatment beyond the initial approved stormwater design in order to meet newer city requirements. The Assembly PUD reduces runoff, flows, and volumes to the Mystic River for every major storm event. The city also requires proposed developments that the 10-year storm event flows be lower than that of the pre-development 2-year storm event flows. Block 9 is currently designed to meet these city requirements, resulting in more nutrient removal and enhanced water quality than the rest of the Assembly Row developments. As large areas of infiltration are not feasible, the proposal is for a sand filter to collect and treat the runoff from the entire roof. The sand filter designed is approximately 7,000 cubic feet large, or 78' long x 15' wide. The applicant is also proposing green infrastructure such as permeable pavers within the sidewalks and green roofs to provide peak rate attenuation and help reduce the overall impervious area of the site.

The Board asked how this brownfield site was remediated. The applicant team explained that most of the material was removed from the site with State coordination. This site was not capped.

The Board expressed a bit of concern with the BMPs proposed but also noted the overall appropriateness of the proposal.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve with the conditions outlined Staff Memo, the Site Plan Approval to develop an 8-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 Staff Memo, the Special Permit for relief from the requested development standards 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 Staff Memo, the Major Amendment to an existing PUD, Case # PB 2006-59, to incorporate Block 9 design guidelines.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 74 Middlesex Avenue

The applicant team explained that Leone's Donut Shop Inc. is proposing to establish a Formula Business principle use, with the proposed business being Dunkin' Donuts. This will be located on the ground floor of the lab building at 74 Middlesex Ave. This previously was a Dunkin Donuts site but was displaced due to construction. The space will be 1,830 s.f. There will only be on-street parking available. The business will continue to provide pedestrian walkways through the development site. The addition of a Dunkin' Donuts will help spread out the concentration of the formula businesses. There was a Neighborhood Meeting on 17 December 2024 via Zoom. There were no comments or questions at that time.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – suggested a contingency of approval for a partnership between the applicant and the Mystic River Watershed.

Seeing no additional public testimony, Chair Capuano closed public testimony. It was noted that the Board could not place a contingency requirement on the applicant of the type suggested.

The Board asked about outdoor seating availability adjacent to the site. Accessibility to make the site a success was also addressed. The applicant team explained that outdoor seating in this area may not be feasible due to the businesses' location within the building. The business will be accessible by all. Staff stated that this location is connected as part of the overall Neighborhood Plan. There will be a lot of pedestrian and bicyclist traffic in this area. There will be a new park next door, which could be used for outdoor space.

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, the request to establish a Formula Business principle use in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 362-368 Mystic Avenue

The applicant team explained that this proposal is for a Special Permit for a cannabis retail sales use in the MR5 Zoning district. The project will include reoccupancy of a currently vacant building space, including the merger of two commercial units into a single unit. This will be approximately 1,250 s.f. for an adult use/recreational marijuana dispensary. There will be three points-of-sale units within the building. There was a host community agreement signed on 21 November 2023, and a Neighborhood Meeting took place on 24 June 2024.

In terms of traffic, the applicant team explained that the study area involved the intersection immediately to the north, Grant Street, and the intersection immediately to the south, Wheatland Street. Grant Street is one way in an easterly direction, unsignalized. Wheatland Street is one way in an Eastern direction but is signalized. Both the Transportation Access Plan and the Traffic Impact Study were reviewed by the city and approved. There is existing on-street, on-site parking along with parking in the rear of the site. Two of those spaces will be utilized for the dispensary employee parking. The security system and façade style for the proposed building were reviewed.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston St) – expressed concern regarding another cannabis store in the city, while noting that the proposed location seems appropriate for this use.

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

Staff explained that this business will serve a population that is not immediately served by other cannabis retailers. This will be the closest business to East Somerville and Winter Hill. There is still currently a moratorium on new host agreements for marijuana retailers which expires at the end of this month. Staff looks to extend that for at least a few months, as it is in the middle of an economic study.

The Board asked if there are any restrictions through the city regarding there being a cannabis, alcohol, or otherwise smoking use so close to a park where children play. Staff explained that Somerville does not currently have any spatial requirements related to these types of businesses. There are requirements that marijuana retailers must be a certain area away from K-12 schools. Other communities have placed limits on locations that are close to parks, daycares, childcare facilities, etc. If Somerville were to place similar limitations, it would knock out most of the existing cannabis retailers and likely many liquor stores. The Board suggested that, if the city is considering pushing family-friendly housing, it may consider further teasing out this further in the regulations.

The Board discussed the appointment-only condition. There was agreement to readdress this once the moratorium is lifted.

It was noted that this application would be continued in order to submit additional information regarding loading and site mobility concerns. The written public comment period will be left open until 9am on 9 May 2025.

Some Board members expressed concern that by approving this use via a Special Permit, this could potentially prolong the redevelopment of this location. This may not be consistent with the zoning and SomerVision, which may be looking for more than a single-story use. The Board agreed that a longer-term vision for this site could be considered at its next meeting.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 15 May 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan Adoption

The Board agreed to table the discussion on this item to a future meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: Open Space and Recreation Plan Update (2025-2032) Endorsement

Staff explained that the State requires the city to prepare an Open Space and Recreation Plan every few years. In 2017, the Planning Board sent a letter of endorsement to the State supporting the Open Space and Recreation Plan. That plan has since been updated and now runs from 2025-2032. A similar endorsement letter from the Board is being sought at this time.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to endorse the Open Space and Recreation Plan through 2032.

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