



City of Somerville  
**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**13 MAY 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>Present</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Absent</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 at 6:06pm and adjourned at 7:52pm.

**GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes**

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the 28 January 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the 11 February 2025 meeting minutes, as amended.

**DESIGN RECOMMENDATION: 199 Elm Street**

There were no Commissioner questions or comments at this time.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the design recommendation for 199 Elm Street.

**RESULT:**

**RECOMMENDED**

**DESIGN REVIEW: 151 Linwood Street**

The applicant team explained that this property is located at 151 Linwood Street and has two frontages on Linwood Street and Joy Street. The existing building was constructed in 1940, and U-Haul purchased it in 1977. The property is almost completely impervious surface, except for a small open space strip along the Eversource property on the south property line. The applicant team is proposing to demolish the existing building and replace it with a state-of-the-art U-Haul facility, including four stories and a basement area. The applicant team is also proposing to provide a pedestrian connection between Joy Street and Linwood Street, with a mural wall for local artists to paint. The plan shows benches, and some shade trees along Joy Street and on Linwood Street. The Commission previously expressed concern regarding the proposed use of faux materials. These have been replaced with real materials, including thin set brick to replace the faux brick and insulated paneling. A list of proposed materials was submitted. Awnings are proposed over the entrances. Orange roll-up doors, per the company's

branding, are proposed mostly for aesthetics. The intention is to blend in with existing brick elements in the neighborhood.

The Commission asked if the applicant has reviewed the design guidelines in the adopted Neighborhood Plan. The applicant team stated that this has been shared and considered by the Corporate Office. The Commission noted that the Planning Board will not allow thin set brick. Any brick needs to be fully dimensional, architectural brick.

The Commission asked about a roof plan. The applicant team explained that Corporate is not willing to consider a green roof option at this time, as this will be a climate controlled facility. The Commission stated that the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) requires that 80% of the roof area for buildings with flat roofs in Commercial Districts have a vegetative roof.

The Commission asked about the non-operative orange roll-up doors. The applicant team explained that these are aesthetic branding pieces for U-Haul. These will not be accessible doors but installed on the surface.

The Commission asked about the proposed glazing. The applicant team explained that these will be two-view windows. The vision glass is strategically placed within the building. The smaller corner will contain spandrel glass as an aesthetic piece.

The Commission stated that there do not seem to be many changes that have been made to the plans. The plans seem to be geared toward pleasing the Corporate U-Haul Office instead of fitting into the neighborhood context or taking into consideration concerns raised previously by the Commission. The applicant team stated that U-Haul has gone out of its way to make changes. The Commission stated that this is not observable in the plans. The Commission cannot exclude one developer from the guidelines that every other applicant must follow. The community has set guidelines and an ordinance to establish a vision for the buildings in this area. The Brickbottom design guidelines speak specifically to the importance of the architectural character of buildings in the Brickbottom neighborhood, including the expression of structural bays, authenticity and materiality, even scale at the ground level, and an integrated public realm. The streetscapes on this proposal are underdeveloped. U-Haul should look at this as an opportunity to change some standards in order to accommodate the guidelines and SZO requirements.

The Commission stated that it would give a no recommendation on this plan.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to not recommend this design option.

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to accept that the design guidelines have not been met.

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

- The design guidelines in the Neighborhood Plan need to be revisited.
- This should be a building in Brickbottom, that also happens to have a U-Haul use in it.
- If the applicant team comes back in the future, it should consider precedent research, such as historic cold-storage buildings.

**RESULT:**

**NOT RECOMMENDED**

**DESIGN REVIEW: 205 Broadway**

The applicant team explained that this lot, at the intersection of Broadway and McGrath Highway, has been vacant for approximately 15 years. This proposal is fully compliant in terms of its massing, fenestration, glazing requirements, and green score in an MR5 district. The plan includes ground floor commercial area and bike parking. A landscape plan was also submitted. The plan shows a driveway entrance off Broadway, with a right turn only, onto the one-way street onto McGrath Highway. The project is intended for mainly residential use, with 26 dwelling units, and most of the site will be filled with the building. The ground level will include permeable pavers, and no residential parking is proposed for this project. A dedicated loading zone is proposed, along with dedicated trash rooms for both the commercial and residential uses. The roof will include a common roof deck, with a green roof on the front-facing side. Regarding the transformer room, the proposal is for a pad-mounted transformer within this room with adequate vertical clearance and coverage, in order to not be visible from the street. The applicant team stated that this building is intended to be built using modular construction. All the units are proposed to be one-bedroom. 4-6 of the units will be one-bedroom plus a study. The plan allocates space on the backside for solar panels in the future. The proposed design shows a mix of metals, most likely insulated panels, with cementitious cladding panels and reveals. There are also a few balconies proposed on the corner. The ground floor is proposed to be a full bed brick material.

The applicant team reviewed the various façade design options.

The Commission asked about the requirements for the transformer room. The applicant team explained that all information from Eversource seems to state that this will meet the requirements. The proposal is for a pad-mounted transformer in lieu of a vault, because vault lead times have been 18-24 months.

The Commission expressed some concern with the proposed materiality and requested clarity on this; a materials board would be helpful. There appears to be a disconnect on the corner between the ground level and the curved portion of the upper stories.

Regarding parking and access to the site, the applicant team explained that there are two parking spaces proposed for the commercial use. The Commission states that there seems to be a lot of pavement on the site for only two parking spaces. The applicant team noted that it does need to meet the façade buildout requirements, but this can be reexamined.

There was discussion regarding the access area for the trash pickup for the site. The applicant team stated that they would revise that area of the site. The Commission suggested giving extra thought to the column covers and making them part of the architecture of the building.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to continue this design review to a later meeting.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>CONTINUED</b>
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### **OTHER BUSINESS: Proposed Arts & Innovation Overlay District (Somernova) Zoning**

The Commission reviewed the proposed district. It was noted that in July of last year, the Commission discussed the proposed zoning for Somernova. Initially, this was a developer-led zoning proposal, submitted to the City within a citizen's petition. It has now become a proposal that the City is moving forward with. The Commission originally identified a number of concerns, including ones dealing with the civic space, the public realm, sidewalk widths, etc. The Commission sent a letter to the City Council at that time stating that there was not sufficient information provided to review this and highlighting some of the concerns with the proposal, such as the low amount of civic space and reduced sidewalk widths next to high rise buildings. The zoning amendment was withdrawn soon afterwards but has since been resubmitted. This proposal will have a significant impact on the

public realm and will set precedent. The existing proposal seems to have even less open space and similar concerns to the last proposal.

Staff explained that the zoning, as proposed by the developer, was not truly zoning language, but part of a much larger design proposal. In partnership with the Union Square Neighborhood Council, the development team, and representatives of the artist community, there was a public process for this zoning proposal. The next step, if the zoning gets approved, would be an urban design framework, including submitted graphics. The level of detail goes from very broad to zoomed in as each piece of the proposal comes under scrutiny.

The Commission expressed concerns with the language in the proposal. One concern is the civic space requirement. This proposal would require 10% civic space, which would be the lowest of any Master Plan district in the City, and possibly the region. The proposed zoning in this district would only reduce the required sidewalk width adjacent to tall buildings from 18' to 12'. It would also permit buildings of a much larger footprint and scale than elsewhere in the City. The Commission noted that it is not against density or height, but these items need to be balanced with open space and public realm requirements. There should be transitions in scale and a comfortable streetscape.

Staff stated that it would draft a letter with these concerns to send to the Land Use Committee and Planning Board on behalf of the Commission.

### **OTHER BUSINESS: Proposed Research & Development District Zoning**

The Commission stated that the proposed R&D district zoning would allow for 1,100 cars to be permitted across this new district. This will all be permitted above ground which will impact streetscapes and the character of this district. The proposal also carves out that all mechanical equipment on roofs should be unscreened.

Staff explained that the intent was that, prior to any large development enabled by the Arts & Innovation Overlay District, the R&D District changes would allow the uses in Greentown Labs to grow and expand, as these are currently all nonconforming in the FAB District.

The Commission stated that it would review the proposed items and discuss them further at a future meeting in order to draft a letter to the Land Use Committee and Planning Board.

### **OTHER BUSINESS: Potential agenda items for Planning Board & Land Use Committee**

The Commission discussed potential agenda items for a joint meeting with the Planning Board. Items of interest included the Urban Design Framework, a discussion regarding how to best make sure Commission comments get included in the Planning Board's design reviews such as a crossover member, and how the Commission could best help the Planning Board with design recommendations.

The Commission discussed potential agenda items for a joint meeting with the Land Use Committee. Items of interest include introductions to each of the members professionally regarding experience, a review of Master Plan submissions, and a parallel structure for the UDC involving a form of self-government.

*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](mailto:urbandesign@somervillema.gov).*