



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

7 AUGUST 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>Absent</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Stephen Cary (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Madison Anthony (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 7:27pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 59 Bow Street

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 21 August 2025, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Chapter 91 – Draw Seven Park

The applicant team requested a signature for the Chapter 91 application related to the beach nourishment at Draw Seven Park. A minor modification to the previous Chapter 91 license was obtained and there is a requirement to pull a second license for the beach nourishment which will be occurring below the high tideline (HDL). The proposal is to make improvements to the vegetation and the parking lot within the main park. This will incorporate universally accessible pathways to connect to the existing Alfred Street Extension Path, and the future pedestrian bridge that will cross the Mystic River. The beach nourishment will include cleaning up debris on the beach and replacing what is removed with the appropriate grain size material to match existing site conditions. A preliminary particle size analysis was conducted during the design, and a robust sampling program is proposed, which will be the responsibility of the contractor.

The Board had no questions or comments at this time.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the signature pursuant to Chapter 91.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 379 Somerville Ave

The applicant team explained that this address was previously granted zoning relief to construct a building. Through the process, some issues have arisen through Eversource with the transformer. Associated variances were granted through the Zoning Board of Appeals last night.

The Board stated that there needs to be discussion between the applicant team and Planning Staff regarding suggested revisions to the transformer shield and other alternatives which could be presented to the Board at a later date.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 21 August 2025.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 181 Pearl Street

The applicant team explained that this site is a great opportunity for transit-oriented development. The site is zoned MR3 and is proposed to have three residential apartments. The building is proposed to be three stories, and approximately 3,600 gross s.f. The plan shows that both the Dana and Pearl Street sides are wrapped with a planter. A street tree is proposed on Pearl Street, and beneath that street tree there will be a bench built into the planter which extends the stoop culture that is seen throughout Somerville. The entrance to the site is off Pearl Street. A ramp will come off Pearl Street and lead into a small courtyard entrance into the building, where there will be a small lobby with bike parking for residents. Permeable paving will be used throughout the site, and this is proposed to be an all-electric building. The primary cladding material is an aluminum panel in a color called silversmith, which will pick up the color of the sky and the neighborhood. Balcony spaces have been carved out for each unit, using a mint green color to pick up on the surrounding plants. The site walls are proposed to have a red brick cladding on the planters. There will be a copper colored metal panel to serve as an accent. Regarding the Pearl Street edge condition, the site wall is designed to be tall when it needs to provide privacy and drop away a bit when this is not needed. The property line for 181 Pearl Street runs down the middle of the Dana Street neighbors' driveway and the clients felt it was important to allow this driveway use to be preserved. All of the proposed trees, shrubs, grasses, and perennials will be native. The building will be wrapped on three sides with plantings to soften the pedestrian experience along the streetscape. There are currently no street trees adjacent to this property and one White Oak is proposed to be planted. The target Green Score for the project was 0.3 and the plan achieves a score of 0.33.

The Board asked about the accessibility of the interior of the building. The applicant team explained that the ground floor unit is a duplex unit, and a lift will be provided. The second and third floor units are walkup units and will not be wheelchair accessible.

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

The Board asked about the unit mix. The applicant team stated that each unit is two bedrooms. The building will be single staired. The lower units will have covered balconies, and the third floor unit will have bay windows with a balcony in-between.

The Board asked if there will be a standard condition regarding residential parking stickers for the project. Staff stated that this was not listed as a condition, as Mobility did not include it. This can be added if the applicant is open to it. The Board stated that this is a standard condition for projects of this type and should be added to the list of conditions.

The Board stated that it would like for the material samples, including color samples, to be provided to Staff for final review before construction.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve, with conditions outlined in the Staff Memo and as discussed tonight, the Site Plan Approval to develop an apartment building in the Mid Rise 3 zoning district.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo and as discussed tonight, the request to establish a residential housing use in the MR3 zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 199 Elm Street

The applicant team explained that this is a good site for transit-oriented development. There is an existing two story building on the site which was previously used for commercial space. This building is proposed to be removed, and permission has been received from the Historic Preservation Commission to do so. An existing curb cut is proposed to be filled in and no significant trees will be removed. This site is in an MR4 zoning district. The proposal includes a ground floor commercial space of approximately 1,700 s.f. to help create an active streetscape. The applicant team is proposing three floors of apartments above the commercial space, with ten units total. These will all be Group 1 accessible units. The building will be approximately 15,000 gross s.f. and four stories tall. The applicant team is proposing two new street trees and two new public bike racks. As this is a transit-oriented development, there is no car parking required or proposed. There will be a large bike room in the residential lobby providing long term bike parking for residents. This project will require an electrical transformer, which can be a challenge on a relatively tight site like this, at 42' wide.

The applicant team explained that the proposal is to step the building back and create a small courtyard to provide access to the building and create a sense of place. The intention is to build off the energy and color of nearby murals along Elm Street. The commercial space is shown with folding windows that can be opened up in fair weather. The building steps back twice more at the upper floors to create space for balconies; there will be one balcony per front facing unit. The material palette proposed includes a precast concrete at the base, in a charcoal color, similar to Revival next door. This will complement the buff colored brick above. The stair towers will be used to break down the massing and will be clad in a bright blue glazed brick. The building requires a commercial elevator to meet code. The building is proposed to have a roof deck with a green roof and amenity space. The applicant is required by code to provide accessible access to the roof deck. The minimum height of an elevator, at 15' above the roof deck, is being proposed.

The applicant team explained that two street trees are proposed on Elm Street. There are overhead wires on this part of the street and so hedge maples have been selected. Permeable pavers are proposed for the back of the site, where there will be a patio for the ground floor tenant, ideally a restaurant. The applicant would also like to see planters in that area. Those planters would not count towards the Green Score. The planting portion of the Green Score is accounted for by the rooftop planters. Those will be 42" high, as they will also act as a guardrail and will be vegetable planters available for use by the occupants of the building. The roof will not hold any rooftop HVAC equipment, as the intention is to use an integrated heat pump. The project exceeds the targeted Green Score. The unit count within the building includes two 2-bedrooms, three 1-bedrooms, and three studios. Two of the units, one studio and one 1-bedroom, will be affordable. The applicant team noted that they have decided not to bring gas into the building.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Crystal Huff (Ward 5) – expressed support for the project including the proposed accessibility and compatibility with the existing streetscape.

David Hossack (16 Windom Street) – expressed concern regarding trash storage for the proposed units and commercial space. There are already issues with rats in this area. He would like to see the trash stored internally to the building. He also expressed concern regarding the lack of parking proposed for the project. It is frustrating to see the Board consider allowing for height restrictions to be exceeded for the proposed building.

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

The applicant team stated that they are committed to storing the trash in the basement for both the commercial and residential units. This will be a Passive House Certified building, meaning that it will be very tight and there will be no rats getting into the basement to pull trash out. Regarding the question about the building being Group 1 accessible, this refers to an adaptable unit. In Massachusetts there are two levels of accessibility. Group 1 requires a fully accessible entrance with kitchens and bathrooms that would not be fully accessible on day one. However, these are designed dimensionally to be modified to be fully accessible.

The Board stated that the design of the entrance to the building is beautifully done. However, the sides of the building are simply blank walls. There was a question regarding if there are plans to commission murals on one or both of these walls. The applicant team stated that the intention was to accent the building with the colors of the staircases. The applicant would like to commission murals, but it is unclear when the nearby buildings will be built up around the proposed building's height. The Board discussed that it may include the commissioning of murals as a condition of approval.

The Board expressed a bit of concern regarding the proposed unit mix. In the past, the Board has considered making one of the affordable units into a Group 2 accessible unit, if larger units were not able to be included in a project.

The Board noted that this was the Urban Design Commission's preferred option but asked about finding a detail to define the cornice line. The applicant team stated that they would consider this in keeping with the building while reviewing other details around Davis Square. There was discussion regarding a condition on materials approval by Staff, limited to the accent color for the stair tower.

There was also discussion regarding confirmation from Eversource about the transformer location. The applicant team stated that confirmation has not been received from Eversource yet, but the proposed location was recommended by the Engineer. Staff noted that any changes to the proposed transformer location would need to come before the Board for a Plan Revision.

The Board asked about other potential commercial uses, if a restaurant tenant does not work out. The applicant team stated that a yoga studio could be a potential use.

The Board stated that the standard condition regarding residential parking stickers should be added for this project. The Board asked that the hearing be continued in order to hear additional details, as mentioned during the meeting, with the written comment period to close at 9am on 15 August 2025.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 21 August 2025.

RESULT:	CONTINUED
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OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration

Staff explained that this agenda item is included to allow Board members time to address any additional questions or comments.

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