



City of Somerville
URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

12 AUGUST 2025 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>	6:40pm
Luisa Olivera	Co-Chair	<i>Absent</i>	
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Martin Pavlinic	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Estello Raganit (Public Space & Urban Forestry)

Estello Raganit, Acting Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:10pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

The 13 May 2025 meeting minutes were tabled to a future meeting due to the members available.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted (2-0), with Members Valdes and Pavlinic abstaining, to approve the 24 June 2025 meeting minutes.

RESULT:

APPROVED

DESIGN RECOMMENDATION: 1 Myrtle Street

The Commission reviewed the written recommendation regarding this case and expressed no concerns or questions with the proposed design recommendation. No vote was required.

DESIGN REVIEW: 32 Webster Street

The applicant team explained that of the three options presented to the Commission originally, the option that included a mix of fiber cement panels, with a resin panel in the middle, and the entrance on Webster Street, was explored further. One proposal uses soffit balconies with angles to create a rugged geometry along the building. Another option introduces Juliette balconies. The third option changes the material and fenestration patterns on the corner and introduces a stronger cornice. A transformer vault was explored, along with a 6' high horizontal slat fence or a metal fence.

The Commission discussed an alternate transformer design option in case the manhole option does not end up working out with Eversource, as these have been rejected in the past.

The Commission discussed the level of interest created with the soffit balcony option. They stated that the green color at the cornice could instead allow the coping to fade back into the building. The ground floor unit could be altered so that it does not appear to be an entry point to the building.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend Option A as the preferred design option.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Pavlinic, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) that the design guidelines have been met for the district.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Valdes, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend the additional design guidance including:

- Confirmation of the feasibility of a below-ground transformer with Eversource and a potential alternative option if not accepted by Eversource
- Review of the height of the overhanging bays
- The treatment and color of the cornice
- Defining the ground unit treatment
- Defining the fence options and the landscape area around the transformer

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
----------------	--------------------

DESIGN REVIEW: 1 Washington Street

The applicant team explained that this is approximately a 3,400 s.f. lot zoned in the MR4 district, abutting NR districts to the north and east of the site. The goal for this project was to build everything by-right, with no special variances needed. There is a 12' curb setback around Washington Street and Crescent Street, and a 30' top floor setback where the building abuts the NR districts. Most of the area directly abutting those lots will be landscaped and hardscaped to create buffers between the buildings and allow for some outdoor space. There are three existing trees on the back of the site, which are invasive species; these will be removed and replaced. In addition to creating a new 10-unit multifamily building, the project looks to improve the character of the street, allow for additional greenery and outdoor space, improve the existing curb cut along Crescent Street, and create a better intersection at Washington Street. At the Neighborhood Meeting, concerns were heard regarding the intersection at Washington Street and Crescent Street. The building will stay within the 4-story and under the 50' height requirement by the zoning code. The basement will hold the building services, such as a trash room, unit storage, bike storage, and utilities, along with two additional bedrooms for the ground floor duplex unit at the rear of the building. The ground floor will contain two one-bedroom units with space for mail and packages at the front, and a small common area. The entry will be slightly set back to allow a buffer from the curb and provide shade at the entrance. The second floor will have a mix of one-bedroom and two-bedroom units. The third floor will contain one-bedroom units stacked with the bottom of the two duplex units located at the front of the building. The top floor contains the remainder of the duplex units from the floor below, and a public patio at the back of the site.

The applicant team reviewed three options for exterior elevations, which use different materiality and cladding, but consistent fenestration. Option 1 shows a traditional red brick at the ground floor, with the top floor mostly designed with a light Hardie panel. Wood panel-like siding at the bay window bump-outs will provide some accent to the building and break up the large massing. The side elevation will match the Hardie paneling throughout but will not include any openings. Option 2 implements some tones, using black board and batten siding. The darker tone at the top will make the building feel smaller and not as daunting. Option 3 uses a large format tile throughout and black board and batten as an accent. Regarding the shadows cast across Crescent Street, the study showed that the proposed shadows are not dissimilar from the existing building. The preferred option for the applicant team is Option 1.

The Commission asked about the proposed mechanical systems. The applicant team stated that these will likely be mini splits. There is a space on the roof designated for the mechanicals. The washers and dryers will be ventless. The bathroom and kitchen vents will need to be allocated for on the façade.

The Commission requested clarification on the wood panel-like siding proposed but leaned toward Option 1 at this time. Regarding fenestration and window openings, there seems to be a wide range proposed to be utilized. The composition could feel a bit more unified.

The Commission asked for more information as to how this proposal fits into the existing context and how others will experience it.

Following a motion by Member Pavlinic, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to continue 1 Washington Street to the next meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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.