



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 201B Highland Avenue, ZP25-000107
POSTED: January 9, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (SP for Recreational Services)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the development review application submitted for 201B Highland Avenue, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO), and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed completed on December 6, 2025, and is scheduled for a public hearing on December 29, 2025. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICE

Allan Knowles, owner of Danger Wizard LLC proposes to establish a Recreational Services use in the MR3 zoning district, which requires a Special Permit (ZP25-000107)

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Danger Wizard LLC is proposing to establish a tabletop role-playing game business at 201B Highland Ave., which is in the Recreational Services use category under the SZO. The proposed development will not include any modifications to the building and is only a change of use from the prior establishment that operated it in this commercial space.

BACKGROUND

201B Highland Ave. is located in the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district and 0.5 mi Transit Area of the Spring Hill neighborhood represented by Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait. Uses from the Recreational Services use category require a Special Permit in the MR3 zoning district. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the Mid-Rise 3 zoning district.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The required neighborhood meeting was hosted by the Applicant with Ward 5 Councilor Naima Sait on October 29, 2025, via Zoom meeting platform. Discussion subjects included the general overview of the business, and its day-to-day operations. The applicant explained to the public that there will be no changes to the existing layout of business or to façade. Various meeting attendees shared their previous experience working with the applicant and showed support for the proposed business establishment.

ANALYSIS

Site Overview and Building

Recreational Services uses are allowed by Special Permit in commercial and mid-rise zoning districts, with specific considerations and findings required related to mobility and the capacity of local thoroughfare networks and the design of the principal storefront. The proposed business location is an existing storefront on Highland Avenue.

The existing building is a single-story commercial building with multiple commercial units. The proposed business will make no changes to the existing building and will re-utilize the existing layout of the former business. At the moment the applicant does not propose any signage or changes to the existing façade and their sign will be vinyl stickers adhered to the windows.

Mobility

The site has access to on-street parking accessible from Highland Ave. The Applicant received a waiver from the Mobility Division for the required Transportation Impact Study (TIS). The Applicant explained that most of its clientele uses public transportation, walking and biking as their form of transportation. Furthermore, Danger Wizard caps the number of participants at their events, controlling the influx on traffic volume. Based on this information the Mobility Department provided the TIS waiver to the Applicant, this communication is attached to the application package.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw conclusions for each consideration but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

Recreational Use Special Permit Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Special Permit.
4. The maintenance of a diverse blend of commercial uses within the neighborhood.

5. The existing concentration of uses from the same use category within the neighborhood.
6. The availability of the same services within the neighborhood.
7. The availability of comparable commercial spaces within the neighborhood.

Information relating to the required considerations is provided below:

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
 - a. Staff believes that this proposed use supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:
 - "Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency."
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
 - a. The intent of the MR3 zoning district is, in part: "To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving commercial uses."
3. Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Special Permit.
 - a. Considerations indicated in 4-7 below.
4. The maintenance of a diverse blend of commercial uses within the neighborhood.
 - a. Staff believe that this business establishment would provide a unique 3rd place for community members to gather, diversify the commercial uses in the area, and would associate well with the other existing commercial uses in the neighborhood and city
5. The existing concentration of uses from the same use category within the neighborhood.
 - a. Staff do not find there to be a high concentration of recreational services uses in the neighborhood.
6. The availability of the same services within the neighborhood.

- a. There are no other tabletop role-playing game businesses in the neighborhood.
7. The availability of comparable commercial spaces within the neighborhood.
 - a. Staff believe that this is a good commercial space for a tabletop role-playing game business.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit for a Recreational Service use in accordance with Special Permit under SZO 15.2.1 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, Staff recommend the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Public Record

2. A copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.