



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

16 OCTOBER 2025 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation via Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Absent</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: Alvaro Esparza (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:15pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 4 September 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the 18 September 2025 meeting minutes, as presented.

PUBLIC HEARING: 379 Somerville Ave

(continued from 2 October 2025)

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 6 November 2025, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 1 Myrtle Street

It was noted that the applicant team was not present for the meeting.

Vice Chair Aboff opened public testimony. Seeing none, Vice Chair Aboff closed public testimony.

The Board discussed that it seems to be an accident of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) that this is in front of the Board for Site Plan Approval.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve, with the conditions identified in the Staff Memo dated 2 October 2025, the request for Site Plan Approval.

PUBLIC HEARING: 44 White Street

The applicant team explained that this is a proposal for three family-sized, 3-bedroom units, each designated to have one parking space. There have been two Neighborhood Meetings, one on 19 November 2024, and a second on 18 March 2025. There were questions regarding construction times. The developer assured the public that he would be heavily involved in the project. The applicant team has been before the Urban Design Commission (UDC) three times, and recommendations were given on 4 February 2026. The applicant team is requesting relief for additional parking for the site.

The applicant team explained that, per code, the plans include an increase to the sidewalk area to 12' and the front setback would be 12' from the curb. The plans propose three parking spaces, which are concealed from the front of the site by a garage door. Next to that is a bike parking area, which is also secure, and shows two regular-sized spaces and one oversized space that can accommodate a cargo bike. This is in an Mid Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district, but a three-story building fits in nicely with the site size. The three parking spaces in the rear have pervious pavers. Adjacent to that area, there is a landscaped and outdoor amenity space for the ground floor unit. The applicant team is proposing a building that complies with all dimensional standards of the SZO, aside from the one Special Permit being sought for vehicle parking.

The applicant team explained that the fenestration calculation meets the SZO. The plans show three larger sized units. Unit 1 is a duplex, totaling approximately 1,854 s.f., unit 2 is on the second floor at 1,828 s.f., and unit 3 is the top floor unit at 2,002 s.f. Every unit has an outdoor space, with unit 1 having a patio, and units 2 and 3 having multiple decks, and balconies. Unit 3 also has a roof deck area. The roof deck will allow for additional outdoor amenity space with a green roof. Concealed behind the stairs is the mechanical units. The roof area is also solar-ready.

The applicant team explained that they worked closely with the UDC on the exterior design. The proposed scheme is a khaki brown and bronze, providing a warm façade. The plan shows different balconies on the front. The materials include a mixture of panel and lap siding, with a metal railing system. The applicant team and UDC discussed concealing the foundation, as this is a walkable street. The decision was made to include an insulated panel, clad with concrete. The shadow study does not show much impact, as all the surrounding buildings are close together, with little or no windows on the sides. The proposed building would likely only shadow their roof.

In terms of the traffic aspects, the applicant team explained that they coordinated with the Mobility Division throughout. The applicant team submitted a parking utilization study, which is required per the SZO for a Special Permit. This was submitted in June 2025. A transportation impact study waiver request was submitted in August 2025 and was granted in August 2025. The applicant team also submitted trip generation and vehicle ownership studies. The studies found that on-street parking is at or above full utilization along both White Street and Elm Street. The site is estimated to generate minimal vehicle traffic, even with the on-site parking spaces. Given that the 44 White Street development is geared toward families, and it is expected that families would own at least one vehicle, the request for one parking space per unit is very important.

The applicant team reviewed letters received in support of the project.

Vice Chair Aboff opened public testimony.

Elaine Severino – explained that she lived at this property for 40 years. She is in support of the applicant's request for one parking space per unit. These are larger, family-sized units. She noted that White Street belongs to Cambridge, not Somerville. Parking permits along this street would not be able to be obtained for these units.

Mary Kay Severino – stated that it would be valuable and important to have parking spaces for families as part of this development. There are other units on White Street which are larger, with 3-4 bedrooms, but do not have parking. Most of those units are occupied by young professionals or graduate students. It is unclear if families would live in these units if they did have parking.

Seeing no additional public comments, Vice Chair Aboff closed public testimony. The Board stated that written comment on this case will be left open until 9AM on Friday, 31 October 2026.

The Board noted that cars are not a necessity for families in Somerville and this location would be a good one for walkability. This is a uniquely transit-oriented site. However, it is nice to know that there would be a portion of the housing stock available for families. A for-sale approach for these units is more likely to require parking in terms of marketing purposes.

The Board asked about the potential to add a fourth floor to the building. The applicant team explained that this is a small lot in an MR4 zoning district. A four story building would require two sets of stairs and an elevator, eating up much of the footprint. This would be an additional investment for the applicant.

The applicant team noted that no on-street parking permits are allowed when within a quarter mile of the transit walkshed.

The Board noted that Mobility's position is that the study submitted is not appropriate for demonstrating an on-site parking need. There was a question regarding the differences between Mobility's opinion in the Staff Memo and the statements made by the applicant team this evening regarding securing parking through a waiver process. Other Board members explained that there are specific exemptions in the language regarding the general prohibition for on-street permit parking for affordable units that are managed by the City as affordable housing stock, as well as units occupied by persons that are eligible for a handicap permit. Additional information on this is needed.

The Board noted that the elimination of the parking maximum was passed by this Board and the City. Then, a month later, the Board took up a development that is almost identical to this one on Chester Street. The development was three stories with large units, geared for families, and located the same distance from Porter Square as this proposal is to Davis Square. The Board asked Staff to comment on how these two buildings are different. The Board also noted that these proposed units will be condos between 1,800 s.f.-2,000 s.f. These will not be affordable units for young couples or families, and it seems disingenuous to state otherwise.

The Board expressed interest in hearing a timeline regarding the applicant consulting with the city, the application moving forward, and any changes to the SZO. It will be important to know if the goalposts moved on the applicant at time of application.

The Board noted that feedback was received from Mobility regarding access via the curb cut. It was noted that this could be challenging for cars to be able to turn around in the garage area. There was a recommendation for some type of mitigation plan to communicate to pedestrians that cars would be entering or exiting. The applicant team explained that backing out onto White Street was never raised as much of a concern during discussions with Mobility. There may be signage or some type of warning system, though the design of this is not yet known. The Board asked for additional information for this and interactions with pedestrians on the sidewalk.

The Board asked about the proposal for one bike parking space per unit, where multiple bikes would be likely for a family. Additional spots may be reasonable for the Board to require, especially if the applicant is requesting relief in other areas. The applicant team stated that the SZO dictated the number of spaces required.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (5-0) to continue this hearing to 6 November 2025, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Chapter 91 Approval – Pedestrian Bridge at Draw Seven Park

This item was tabled to a future meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration Open Discussion

The Board discussed a potential future agenda item regarding how to empower Staff for certain administrative items. Staff noted that this is being discussed as part of potential changes to the SZO.

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