



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

15 JANUARY 2026 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>Absent</i>	

City staff present: Alvaro Esparza (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:13pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 379 Somerville Ave

(continued from 4 December 2025)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue this hearing to 5 February 2026, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 44 White Street

(continued from 18 December 2025)

This item was previously continued to 5 February 2026, at request of the applicant.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the 6 November 2025 meeting minutes.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the 20 November 2025 meeting minutes.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the 4 December 2025 meeting minutes.

PUBLIC HEARING: 152-158 Broadway

The applicant team explained that this item was previously approved by the Board as a Formula Business. The use of a Pilates studio falls into a Fitness Service and because this location fronts on a pedestrian street, a second Special Permit is needed under Section 4.3.13.B.1.B. The use is otherwise allowed in an Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) zoning district, but an additional Special Permit is needed due to the location along a pedestrian street.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. Seeing none, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

There was no Board comments at this time.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve, with the conditions laid out in the Staff Memo, the request to establish a Fitness Services Use in the ground-story commercial space fronting on a pedestrian street in the Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 366 Broadway

The applicant team explained that when this project initially went through the Special Permit process, the Board placed a condition on the approval which states that signage must be provided to direct loading and unloading activities along Thurston Street. A site plan showing the location of the signage and proposed signage language was submitted to the relevant City departments for review. The applicant team went through the permitting process, and the Mobility Division prefers that the loading and unloading occur on Broadway instead of Thurston Street. The applicant is requesting to change the timing of the condition, as recommended by Staff, to before the Certificate of Occupancy. The intention is to go through the construction process and work with the Mobility Division to determine the best location for the loading zone. The applicant team will then come back before the Board to amend the condition language itself.

The Board stated that this appears to be a backwards process. Delegations to various City departments are usually somewhat ministerial and not substantive. The applicant team noted that the Staff Memo mentions that the loading zone change requires Traffic Commission approval, and it is best practice for that approval to occur shortly before the building is occupied, rather than prior to construction. The Board stated that, when it reviewed the application, it has certain information that guided its position on the application and the conditions. This seems to be more than a ministerial change.

Staff explained that this will allow the applicant more time to coordinate with the Mobility Division while allowing the project to move forward. A statement from Mobility Staff reads that short-term parking needs for deliveries or rideshare vehicles tend to park in the most convenient location for their destination and for continuing onto their next destination. Turning onto a one-way street away from Broadway would be significantly less convenient than parking on Broadway in front of the destination address. There is parking on Broadway today in front of 366 Broadway, but it is for longer-term parking, and, if occupied for deliveries or rideshare vehicles, could result in vehicles double parking in the bus lane rather than turning onto Thurston Street. They have not found signage directing vehicles to a loading zone to be particularly effective, especially when space is available in front of the destination address, even if it is not a legal parking space. They acknowledge that a loading zone here could present challenges with future Bicycle Network Plan implementation. However, there is a parking lane in this area today and it should be responsive to the adjacent land uses. Mobility will resolve any conflicts with future Bicycle Network Plan implementation at the time that it becomes an active project in a comprehensive way that accounts for parking and loading needs at this site.

The Board expressed frustration with this proposal. The original condition was included due to a concern that vehicles would stop along Broadway for deliveries and drop offs, given the size of the building and its residential nature. The access points at that time were planned for along Thurston Street and the addition of signage was

discussed in the hopes that delivery vehicles would adhere to it. There was reluctance to move forward with this change without a more robust discussion. Mobility seems to want to have the loading zone on Broadway because delivery vehicles do not respect what they are asked to do. Enforcement of these types of problems should be discussed. Allowing delivery vehicles more convenience is low on the list of priorities for the City, while creating safe pedestrian and bike infrastructure is high on the top priorities that this Board is charged with.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Emily Ann Lalka (Thurston Street) – stated that she would prefer this loading zone to be located on Thurston Street. There is an existing crosswalk before turning onto Thurston and if large vehicles are parked there or cars are double parked, it will block the visibility for people using the crosswalk. As a cyclist, taking the turn from Broadway onto Thurston is safer if a vehicle is not double parked or trying to back across the lanes.

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

The Board agreed that it would like to have further discussion with the Mobility Division. The applicant team agreed that this is a valid conversation, but there is interest in being able to move the project forward. The Board stated that the project needs to be reviewed holistically.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to continue this hearing to 5 February 2026, at request of the applicant.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 201 B Highland Avenue

The applicant team explained that his business is a professional Dungeon Master service. It has been operating in Somerville for almost three years. The business allows for school programs during out-of-school and after-school times, along with events for adults. The storefront had been vacant for a bit, and he entered into a sublease with the owner. He has had a very positive response from the community, the parents, and the families, and he would like to remain long-term in the location. This is a 900 s.f. space with two points of egress. There is no intention to install anything on the brick or marble façade. Some vinyl stickers may be added, if approved, with the business name. There have been no complaints from abutters. There is bus service, the Green line, and street parking available nearby.

The Board stated that there have not been many substantial projects presented to the Board to support after-school children, families, and the community. This is one of the best applications seen for this goal. The Board asked about any potential kitchen use of the building. The applicant team explained that this is currently used for storage and washing of paintbrushes. No food or drink is served at this time, and none is planned.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Emily Ann Lalka (Thurston Street) – stated that she is very excited for the space to be added to the community.

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

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the request to establish a Recreational Service Use in the Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 248 Elm Street

The applicant team explained that this application is for a Special Permit for a Formula Business. Somerville BBQ Inc. is looking to take over the restaurant space currently occupied by the Boston Halal Restaurant located in the Davis Square section of the City Central Business (CCB) zoning district. Somerville BBQ is a franchise, and this would be the applicant's 8th or 9th location in Massachusetts, though there are no other spaces in Somerville. It is governed by the franchise agreement in terms of color, menu, logo, design choice, etc. This location was the former Diva Lounge and that applicant applied for a Special Permit before the Board, which was granted in 2004. Subsequently, another entity, the Amsterdam Falafel Shop, also applied for a Special Permit, and this was granted in 2012. Nothing has changed in terms of the parking. The space is 1,200 s.f. and the front dimension is the same, with approximately a 15' entryway. The only thing proposed to change would be signage in the front and the interior, pursuant to what the franchisor requires. The franchisor is located out of South Korea, with over a thousand locations throughout the world.

The Board asked how long the other franchise locations have been in existence. The applicant team stated that, during his time with the project, he remembers the Kenmore Square location opening approximately five years ago.

The Board asked about potential reconfigurations of the space. The applicant team stated that most of the changes will be cosmetic. The layout will otherwise remain the same.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. Seeing none, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (4-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the request to establish a Formula Business Principle Use in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

GENERAL BUSINESS: Annual Elections – Chair, Vice Chair, and Clerk

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member McNeley, the Board voted unanimously (3-0-1), with Member Habib abstaining, to nominate Jahan Habib as Clerk of the Somerville Planning Board for 2026.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Clerk Habib, the Board voted unanimously (3-0-1), with Vice Chair Aboff abstaining, to nominate Amelia Aboff as Vice Chair of the Somerville Planning Board for 2026.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Member McNeley, the Board voted unanimously (3-0-1), with Chair Capuano abstaining, to nominate Michael Capuano as Chair of the Somerville Planning Board for 2026.

OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration Open Discussion

The Board discussed a potential upcoming 40B project in Davis Square. The Board asked Staff for a presentation on 40B Comprehensive Permits at an upcoming meeting.

The Board asked for a potential update regarding an update to the Davis Square Neighborhood Plan .

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. A recording of these proceedings can be found online here: [Agendas, Minutes, & More.](#)