



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

5 FEBRUARY 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>Present</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Alvaro Esparza (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Justin Schreiber (Mobility Division); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:04pm and adjourned at 7:00pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 18 December 2025 meeting minutes.

PUBLIC HEARING: 379 Somerville Ave

(continued from 15 January 2026)

The applicant team explained that this is related to a transformer on the front of the building which deviated from the approved plans. The applicant team has worked with Staff to beautify this situation and try to make the best of it. Unfortunately, the transformer takes away frontage along the entire street where there was glazing and a storefront to activate it. The current proposal is to extend the storefront frame and treat the area behind it as an art installation. The applicant team noted that when they presented the proposal to Staff, they seemed happy with the direction and asked the applicant team to speak with a local artist and a metal fabricator. The local artist came forth with many creative ideas that would be eye-catching. While access to the transformer must be maintained, the proposal is to paint all three sides and potentially the ceiling as well. The proposal is to create the illusion of a fish tank.

The Board noted how well thought out this proposal has been and noted that the applicant team has worked well with Staff to come up with a creative solution.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the Major Amendment to a previously granted Site Plan Approval and Special Permit (CZ20-000104) to construct an apartment building in the Mid Rise 5 (MR5) zoning district which required Site Plan Approval.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 44 White Street

(continued from 18 December 2025)

The applicant team explained that they were previously waiting for a review from the Mobility Division, which was received in November or December. At the last Board meeting there was a presentation on Mobility's position. The hope is to move toward final approval at this time.

The Board discussed that the Special Permit for parking relief is a request for two additional spaces. This site has close proximity to the nearby Porter Square T stop. The applicant team is proposing family-sized housing, which is something that the Board has pushed for a long time. The requested two spaces are likely not a huge ask, particularly as the street is not in Somerville, but in Cambridge. It would be nice to give people the flexibility to have a car if they need one. It was noted that the applicant team has worked well with the Board and shown some unique aspects of the project which could be benefits for consideration.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (5-1), with Member McNeley opposed, to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the request to exceed the parking maximum in the Mid Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district as described in the memo dated 9 October 2025.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo dated 9 October 2025, the request to create a residential housing use in the Mid Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted (4-2), with Members McNeley and Richards opposed, to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo dated 9 October 2025, the Site Plan Approval to develop a three-story apartment building in the Mid Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

The Board asked Staff for a count of the vote and it was stated that three (3) members were in favor and three (3) members were opposed. The Board noted that the motion thus failed, and the Site Plan Approval was denied.

RESULT:

DENIED

PUBLIC HEARING: 366 Broadway

(continued from 15 January 2026)

Staff explained that the Board previously requested a representative from the Mobility Division be present at this meeting. To Staff's previous understanding, the applicant team would return to the Planning Board through a Plan Revision should Mobility and the applicant team agree that the loading zone would be located on Broadway instead of Thurston Street. Based on discussions since the last meeting, the physical location of the loading zone will be decided by the Traffic Commission. Pending that no physical changes to the building would occur as part of the loading zone change, this application would not come back to the Planning Board and would thus move to the Traffic Commission for approval of the loading zone and signage. At this time, the Planning Board should determine if the condition language could be changed from 'prior to Building Permit' to 'prior to Certificate of Occupancy'.

The applicant team explained that they are amenable to the loading dock being at either location but would like to start building vertical on the project.

The Board discussed that a neighbor brought up concerns regarding the number of pedestrian interactions in this area, including a crosswalk across Broadway and a bike lane. The Board noted that it would be better to not create an opportunity for someone to park in one of the bus spots, however this falls more on enforcement than design. Mobility explained that there is no project planned on Broadway at this time. There is a crosswalk in this area which is set back from the parking and there may be concern with cars entering/existing close to that crosswalk. There is existing parking in this area. There is reason to not want a loading zone so close to that crosswalk. Broadway is part of the priority bike network vision, and the City will work on a project there at some point in the not too distant future.

The Board expressed concern regarding moving the loading zone to Broadway despite many competing uses for that location out of a sense of inevitability that delivery vehicles would be pulling into that area regardless. The Board spends time considering proposed layouts and proposed entrance locations and how they interact with other initiatives that the City has underway. One of the Board's primary functions is to ensure that a site plan is appropriate and responsive to conditions of the area. There was discussion regarding if it is best practice for Mobility to state that a traffic pattern will happen regardless and thus prioritizing the routing of Amazon vehicles over the bike network plan. This seems to run counter to the Board's remit. This could be an opportunity to improve the process either on the Board's end or on the enforcement end. Mobility stated that a connection to the bike network plan is not clearly obvious. The proposal is a better use of the existing parking area to service the building. This is a large apartment building with no parking on site and so there will be a demand for delivery services. Enforcement of bus lanes must be done by the Police Department. The Mobility Division is trying to create conditions that do not require enforcement. The Board stated that constant turnover is a potential conflict with the bike network plan. Frequent access to an area that is trying to be held as a dedicated two-way bike lane on Broadway does not seem prudent. Mobility agreed that this is a conflict but there is not currently a project design for Broadway. The location of the proposed loading zone may have to be reconsidered in the future based on plans at that time. This does not seem to be a reason to disallow the loading zone in this area at this time.

The Board discussed the reality of the site and where people will go versus where they are told to go. People can be told to park on Thurston, but they will likely still use Broadway. When there is a chaotic situation, the safest thing is to foster it and not create specific lanes. It may not be appropriate to simply state that there are not future plans for Broadway and so looking past this for now. It was noted that the applicant team is waiting to move this project forward and should receive guidance.

The Board asked if the redesign of Broadway to build out separated bike lanes would potentially lead to the loading zone being moved to Thurston via signage. Mobility stated that signage would be the change. The applicant team stated that Amazon vans can create havoc on the streets and will likely not turn down Thurston unless there are other deliveries to be made down that street anyway.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the request to change a condition of a previously issued Special Permit (P&Z21-175) in the Mid Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administrative Open Discussion

The Board discussed future agenda topics, such as how other communities handle the 40B process and the Board's potential role in 40B applications.

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.](#)