

### **3.0 PROJECT NARRATIVE**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The Applicant proposes revitalize and transform an underutilized urban lot at the gateway to the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District ("ASMD"), with a pedestrian oriented, commercial development that proposes one (1) building containing up to approximately 596,000 square feet ("sf") of gross floor area ("GFA"), with approximately 351,015 SF of Research & Development or Laboratory ("lab/R&D") uses, approximately 235,070 sf of office uses (and/or lab/R&D uses), approximately 9,915 sf of active use space on the first floor containing retail/café uses in the form of Fitness Services (or other Commercial Services) and Food & Beverage Services, and up to 520 below-grade structured parking spaces (the "Project").

The Property is located within the ASMD. Pursuant to Section 7.4.5(b)-(c), the Project requires a Master Plan Special Permit and Site Plan Approval, as further described below.

##### **3.1.1 Permitting History**

The Project was originally proposed by Brickyard at Assembly LLC as the Original Applicant. The Applicant is the successor-in-interest by assignment to the Original Applicant. A summary of the Project's permitting history is provided below:

1. On November 25, 2020, the Somerville Zoning Board of Appeals (the "ZBA") issued a Hardship Variance from the requirement to provide 25% onsite civic space on the Property to facilitate the Project as proposed (Case No. MP#2020-0003). This variance was extended by the ZBA on November 17, 2021 (Case No. P&Z 21-146), reissued on August 17, 2022 (Case No. P&Z 22-056) (when extensions of the November 2020 decision were no longer possible), extended the reissuance on August 2, 2023 (Case No. P&Z 23-059), and later reissued on April 2, 2024 (Case No. ZP24-000005) (when extensions of the August 2022 decision were no longer possible). The Massachusetts Permit Extension Act extends the validity of the current Hardship Variance until April 3, 2027. A copy of the latest recorded Hardship Variance is enclosed in Section 3.0.

2. On November 30, 2020, the Original Applicant submitted an MPSP application on November 30, 2020 (the "Original MPSP Application") for approval of a 19-story laboratory principal building of up to 596,000 sf of GFA at the Property, with the following concurrent special permit applications: (a) waiver from the maximum building height to allow for 19 stories and up to a zoning height of 275 feet, (b) waiver from the Floor Area Ratio ("FAR") set by the SZO to allow the Project to exceed an FAR of 10.0, and (c) authorization of occupancy of commercial spaces over 10,000 sf by any permitted use. (collectively, the "Special Permits").
3. On April 30, 2021, the Somerville Planning Board ("Planning Board") approved the Original MPSP Application and the Special Permits in Case No. MPSP #2020-0003 (collectively, the "Original MPSP"). This Original MPSP was extended by the Planning Board on May 1, 2024 (Case No. P&Z 23-065) (the "MPSP Extension").
4. The Applicant's financial commitments, as referenced in the Original MPSP Application, were memorialized in a Development Covenant by and between the City of Somerville ("City") and the Original Applicant, dated April 29, 2021.
5. On April 11, 2025, the Planning Board approved a Major Amendment to the Master Plan Special Permit (the "MPSP Major Amendment") allowing (i) an increase of the overall building height, specifically increasing the mechanical penthouse for the Project from approximately 299 feet to approximately 307.5 feet and increasing the height of the highest building element to approximately 317.5 feet to the top of the mechanical screen; and (ii) a relocation of the Project building loading area and parking garage entrance from the westerly portion of the Property, off Cummings Street, to the northerly portion of the Property, along Middlesex Avenue. The MPSP Major Amendment allows the Applicant to adequately service the approved Project uses and improve pedestrian and bicycle safety at the Property. The Original MPSP, as amended by the MPSP Extension and the MPSP Major Amendment, are collectively referred to herein as the "MPSP."

As required by Section 15.1.2 of the SZO, a Pre-Submittal Meeting related to this application for Site Plan Approval was held on August 19, 2025. Representatives from Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division, the Inspectional Services Department, the Engineering Department, the Mobility Division, the Economic Development Division, the Office of Sustainability and Environment, and the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division. were in attendance. Furthermore, two Neighborhood Meetings were held on October 29, 2025 and March 9, 2026.

Design review comments were provided by members of the Urban Design Commission (“UDC”) during the UDC meetings on November 25, 2025 and January 13, 2026; these comments have been addressed through the current design. Copies of the Neighborhood Meeting Reports and Design Review Report are appended to Section 3.0.

### **3.2 Existing Conditions**

The Property consists of an approximately 1.03-acre lot that can be more specifically identified as Somerville Assessor’s Map 68 Lots B-2 and B-3. The Property is bounded by the Somerville District Courthouse to the north, Middlesex Avenue with commercial development including Assembly Row to the east, Cummings Street to the south, and La Quinta Hotel and the I-93 off-ramp to the west. The Property has frontage on Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street.

The Property is currently vacant and underutilized. It was previously improved by an approximately 11,600 sf, two-story office building, an approximately 15,842 sf, two-story religious use building, and surface parking accommodating up to approximately 42 parking spaces. These improvements were demolished in March 2023, under a Demolition Permit from the Somerville Inspectional Services Department. Currently, the Property is surfaced with asphalt and gravel, and it is surrounded by chain link fence.

### **3.3 Proposed Conditions**

As noted above, the Project consists of the construction of an approximately 596,000 sf of GFA building containing lab/R&D/office space, with ground floor active use space, containing retail uses in the form of Fitness Services (or other Commercial Services) and Food & Beverage Services. This transformational development will deliver up to approximately: (i) 351,015 sf of lab/R&D use; (ii) 235,070 sf of office use (and/or lab/R&D space); (iii) 9,915 sf of retail/active use space; (iv) Project-related parking for up to 520 below-grade spaces; and (v) loading and service uses.

The proposed building rises up to 17 stories, including a mid-level mechanical floor, to a zoning height of approximately 259.5 feet from grade to the top of the structural roof. Above, there are two (2) mechanical penthouse levels, bringing the total number of levels to 19. The overall building height is approximately 307.5 feet, and mechanical screening, the highest building element, will be located atop the roof of the building to an elevation of 317.5 feet.

As the Applicant has advanced the Project from conceptual to schematic design following the issuance of the MPSP by the Planning Board, the Applicant has endeavored to create a design where the massing and articulation of the building would create visual interest with a series of interweaving, recessed glass panels connecting to exterior balconies.

At the request of City Planning, Preservation, and Zoning staff, the building's southeast corner has been chamfered, in order to create a line of sight for those on Middlesex Avenue, looking west and to facilitate the City's new vision for a pedestrianized Cummings Street with low traffic volumes. The Applicant also made the following commitments at the request of City staff: (i) once the Project has been constructed, granting a permanent easement in favor of the public across the resulting triangular area at such southeastern corner (subject to final, as-built surveying, the "Triangle"), below outdoor terrace balconies; (ii) relocating outdoor lab gas tanks from the southeast corner to the northern setback; (iii) landscaping the Triangle, as such landscaping is approved during the Site Plan Approval process; (iv) continuing to locate street-facing retail on the northern portion of the eastern facade and active uses along Cummings Street, rather than on the western or northern facades of the building; and (v) screening the loading access drive at the northern edge of the Property.

### **Interior Uses**

The ground floor of the building is proposed to contain approximately 9,915 sf of active use space to maintain an engaging street experience for pedestrians along Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street. The ground floor envisions active uses that could include Food & Beverage Services, meeting zones, café, restaurants, Fitness Services (or other Commercial Services), and retail uses. The building's pedestrian entrance and lobby will be located along Middlesex Avenue. Floors 2 through 9 and 11 through 17 will consist of lab/R&D/office space, and associated amenities. Necessary mechanical equipment will be sited on levels 10, 18 and 19.

### **Public Realm Improvements**

The Project envisions engaging the public at the ground level through an activated and inviting streetscape, as well as through connections to street level indoor activity. The ground floor will be set back approximately 12 feet from the Property boundary along Middlesex Avenue, including, in part, a covered arcade, to improve walkability and create more space and flexibility for an active pedestrian zone. This pedestrian zone will create opportunities for seating, including for outdoor dining, additional plantings, bicycle parking, and other pedestrian-oriented uses.

The proposed streetscape along Middlesex Avenue is envisioned to be approximately 28 feet wide, including an approximately eight and a half (8.5)-foot Site Furnishings zone, a five (5)-foot bikeway protected by a four (4)-foot permeable paver median, a 10-foot walkway zone with a minimum eight (8)-foot clear circulation path and a 10-foot frontage zone situated under a covered arcade. Notably, in accordance with the MPSP, the Applicant will construct a southbound curb separated, protected bikeway along the majority of the Middlesex Avenue frontage.

The proposed streetscape along Cummings Street is envisioned to be approximately 13 feet wide at a minimum accessible pedestrian zone of eight (8) feet located within the public right-of-way. These streetscapes will include seating, bicycle racks, and planting areas, as further depicted on the plans enclosed herewith.

In accordance with the requirements set forth in the MPSP, thoroughfare upgrades are proposed at the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection to mitigate transportation impacts. Specifically, the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection will be squared off to reduce crossing distance and slow turning vehicles, improving traffic flow and safety.

### **Aesthetics and Landscaping**

The landscape design balances enhanced aesthetics with safety through the incorporation of planter benches located between the separated bike lane and the sidewalk zone. Planting in this area will feature a diverse mix of native canopy trees to enhance ecological diversity, reduce heat effect and scale and buffering between the pedestrians and bike lane/parking/roadway to the east. The understory plant material will also be primarily a native mix of shrubs, groundcover, ornamental grasses and perennials. This planting will provide seasonal interest through color, texture and fragrance for pedestrians pausing along the streetscape, as well as food and habitat opportunities for birds and pollinators. A fully-accessible concrete sidewalk and protected bike path align with recent Middlesex Avenue improvements. Public gathering nodes are strategically distributed along the walkway, articulated by linear seat walls at the street edge, adaptable movable seating, and distinctive paving treatments that activate the recessed building frontage.

The Cummings Street streetscape is an extension of Middlesex Avenue using a mix of flowering ornamental tree species and understory plant material in linear plant beds that provide separation between pedestrians and vehicles. The plant material will enhance the pedestrian experience and provide additional pollinator resources. A publicly accessible blue bike station and visitor bike racks are also located along the Cummings Street side of the building. A gathering node near 20-23 Cummings Street respects the pedestrian desire lines and incorporates additional seating and planting strengthening the pedestrian connectivity throughout the neighborhood.

Native, upright canopy trees are proposed along the western edge of the site, introducing a strong vertical green element that softens the edge and establishes an appropriate sense of scale in relation to the proposed future open space at 20-23 Cummings Street.

### **Parking and Mobility Summary**

On-site parking is proposed to be located within a below-grade structured parking garage. This parking garage will contain five and a half below-grade levels, containing up to 520 parking spaces, or approximately 0.89 parking spaces per 1,000 sf of GFA, including 12 accessible spaces and 130 electric vehicle spaces. This represents a substantial reduction from the 629 parking spaces approved in the Original MPSP for the Project. The Applicant has committed to operating the garage as a Commercial Parking Facility (as defined in the SZO), with parking spaces available to the general public, inclusive of tenant employees. Parking rental options will include, at minimum, hourly, daily (weekday and weekend), overnight and monthly options, each at market rates.

Through the MPSP Major Amendment process, the Applicant relocated the loading area and parking garage entrance away from the westerly portion of the Property, off Cummings Street to the northerly portion of the Property, along Middlesex Avenue. This relocation aligns the Project's primary points of vehicular access with the City's desired planning outcome for a pedestrianized Cummings Street with low traffic volumes, friendly to bicycles and pedestrians. The parking garage and gated loading area will be accessed via a fully screened driveway off Middlesex Avenue. This driveway has been designed to accommodate the turning radii of a WB-40 truck, which would typically service a building that contains substantial lab/R&D space. This single point of vehicular and loading entry will improve traffic conditions at the Property by reducing the potential conflicts between trucks, pedestrians and bicyclists at the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection, while maintaining full access to the Project frontage and allowing the Project to functionally serve the lab/R&D/office tenants of the Project.

As required by the MPSP and as further detailed in Section 3.4.2 of this application, the Applicant has designed the parking garage floors such that the floors may be converted into lab/R&D storage space to the extent feasible, a flexible parking strategy that can easily adapt to future demand changes.

Bicycle parking onsite will consist of 165 long-term spaces, 34 short-term spaces, and a new 19-dock Bluebikes station along Cummings Street, which will encourage pedestrian and cyclist use of, and access to the broader Assembly Square neighborhood.

### **Sustainability Summary**

The Project has been designed to comply with the requirements of the SZO and the conditions set forth by the MPSP, including demonstration of LEED Platinum certifiability to support potential future transitions to net zero capability. Specific sustainability design components include the following:

- Vertical fins are utilized in the façade design to reduce solar heat gain from low angle sun on the east and west facades.
- The structural system utilizes a lateral system composed of diagonal bracing at the perimeter of the building that reduces the steel tonnage compared to a typical braced core design. This translates to a corresponding reduction in embodied carbon.
- Optimize energy performance resulting from not burning fossil fuels above the heating design day. In periods where the ambient temperature drops below the heating design day temperature, the fossil fuel boilers pick up the remaining heating load. This hybrid operation drastically reduces fossil fuel consumption compared to a facility without the air-to-water heat pump configuration.
- Rainwater management and indoor water use reduction; will manage the 90th percentile storm event using capture and reuse while implementing low-flow fixtures for flushing.
- Building life cycle impact reduction developed from a whole building life-cycle analysis focused on the reduction of embodied carbon in the building's structure and enclosure
- Electric vehicle chargers will be provided to serve 25% of the total parking spaces, or up to 130 parking spaces.

The Applicant met with representatives from the Office of Sustainability and Environment on October 11, 2022 to discuss the required materials related to the Project. LEED Certifiability documentation including LEED credit narrative, an affidavit signed by a LEED Accredited Professional (LEED-AP), and the Sustainable & Resilient Development Questionnaire are included in Section 9.0 of this application. While a Green Score Calculation is not required within Special Districts, a copy has also been provided for informational purposes in Section 6.0.

## **3.4 Compliance with Site Plan Approval Criteria**

### **3.4.1 SZO Section 15.3.2.e: Review Criteria**

- a). *The Comprehensive Plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

The Planning Board issued a finding in their MPSP Major Amendment decision that the Project will help achieve the following goals of Somerville's Comprehensive Plan 2010-2040 ("SomerVision"):

- *Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is accessible, inviting and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders.*

As further detailed in Section 3.3 of this application, the Project proposes enlivened and inviting streetscapes of approximately 28 feet in width along Middlesex Avenue and approximately 13 feet in width along Cummings Street, with seating, bicycle racks, planting areas a separated, protected bike lane, and other pedestrian and cyclist amenities.

- *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.*

As further described in Section 3.3 of this application, the Project will completely transform an underutilized, vacant site within an existing commercial corridor and within walking distance to the MBTA Assembly Station into a building containing lab/R&D uses, office uses, and a host of ground floor public uses that generates significant social and economic benefits to the City. Among them, the Project will generate over 1,900 permanent, on-site jobs relating to these lab/R&D/office, retail, and parking uses, and approximately 300-400 temporary construction jobs in a variety of trades. Additionally, the Project proposes an enlivened and inviting streetscape that will draw activity to the Property throughout the day. Further, the Project will contribute over \$8.5 million in community benefits contributions, including, but not limited to, contributions to the affordable housing trust and jobs creation and retention, with over \$9 million generated annually in new real estate tax revenues for the City upon building stabilization, and significant state sales and tax revenue to the Commonwealth. These goals are consistent with SomerVision's goals for commercial development within the Assembly Square area.

- *Minimize the overall land use in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles while encouraging alternative modes*

During the MPSP Major Amendment process, the Applicant committed to significantly reducing the number of proposed vehicle parking spaces from what was approved in the Original MPSP, from 629 parking spaces to 520 parking spaces, which is aligned with SomerVision's goal of minimizing the overall space dedicated to personal vehicles. Furthermore, the Project promotes multi-modal transportation to the Property, with a southbound curb separated, protected bikeway along the majority of the Middlesex Avenue frontage, large amounts of long-term and short-term parking, and a new, 19-dock Bluebikes station. The single point of vehicular and loading access promotes pedestrian and cyclist safety. Lastly, the Project's proximity to the MBTA Assembly Station provides accessibility from public transit.

- b). *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*

The ASMD consists of high-density residential uses, big-box retailers, and large commercial uses that draw customers and employees from the Greater Boston metropolitan area. The intent of the ASMD includes: "[t]o implement recommendations of SomerVision for transformational development; "[t]o implement the Assembly Square Plan . . ."; "[t]o redevelop underutilized areas within close walking distance to the Assembly Square T-station with mixed-use, mid-rise and high-rise, transit-oriented development that will support the transformation of Assembly Square into an urban commerce center[]"; "[t]o improve the Mystic River waterfront and create new civic space within the Assembly Square district[]"; and "[t]o improve utility infrastructure, thoroughfares, off-street pedestrian and bicycle paths, and physical connections to surrounding areas, including East Somerville, Ten Hills, and Sullivan Square."

As detailed in this Section 3.4.1 and Section 3.4.2 of the application, respectively, the Project implements SomerVision recommendations for transformational development and the Assembly Square District Plan ("ASQ Plan"). Additionally, the Project will revitalize the currently vacant Property, located within walking distance to the MBTA Assembly Station, with the construction of a thoughtfully designed, high-rise, mixed-use building containing lab/R&D/office uses and inviting active uses in the ASMD, enhancing Assembly Square's character as an urban commerce center.

Further, the Project will provide a substantial payment in lieu of civic space that will allow the City to support existing civic space, or to create new civic space on a more suitable lot elsewhere within the ASMD. Finally, as described in Section 3.3 of this application, the Project will improve physical connections to surrounding areas, with a southbound curb separated, protected bikeway along the majority of the Middlesex Avenue frontage, long-term and short-term parking, a new, 19-dock Bluebikes station, and thoroughfare upgrades at the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection that mitigate transportation impacts and enhance pedestrian and cyclist safety.

The Planning Board found in the MPSP Major Amendment decision that the Project is consistent with the ASMD's intent.

*c). Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

As described in Section 3.3 of this application, the Applicant proposes thoroughfare upgrades to the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection to mitigate transportation impacts. These upgrades include squaring off the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection and the construction of a four (4)-foot permeable paver median that protects a new bikeway along the majority of the Middlesex Avenue frontage.

The infiltration and inflow ("I/I") mitigation provided by the Project will be equal to four (4) times the amount of wastewater generated by the Project minus the wastewater generated by previously-existing building(s) on the Property.

The Project includes ample landscaped areas and, improved streetscapes with, permeable pavers to mitigate any increase in impervious area on the Property.

*d). Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Site Plan Approval.*

Refer to Section 3.4.2 of this application for a discussion of the Site Plan Approval criteria specific to the ASMD.

### **3.4.2 SZO Section 7.4.5: Site Plan Approval**

In addition to the review criteria for all Site Plan Approval applications specified in Section 15.3.2.e. (Review Criteria) of the SZO, the Project is subject to the following additional review criteria for the ASMD:

a). *Consistency with the ASQ Plan*

The ASQ Plan identifies the "Middlesex Corridor" as an area suitable for siting high-rise life science and workplace uses, to serve as a physical barrier between I-93 and the rest of the Assembly Square neighborhood. The Project proposes such uses on the Property, which is in close proximity to I-93. Furthermore, one of the ASQ Plan's major goals is to create safe, comfortable, and interesting streets with increased transit availability. The Project includes upgrades to the Middlesex Avenue and Cummings Street intersection that will enhance safety for cyclists and pedestrians.

The Planning Board found in their MPSP Major Amendment decision that the Project is consistent with the ASQ Plan's goal of "generating a high amount of commercial office and [R&D] uses[.]" as well as making "Middlesex Avenue a 'research corridor' and developing taller buildings close to I-93 and away from the core of the [Assembly Square] neighborhood."

b). *Conformance with an approved Master Plan Special Permit and any other Special Permits applicable to the subject lot.*

This Site Plan Approval application complies with the following applicable conditions of the MPSP:

6. *[A]pplicant shall demonstrate that parking levels in the garage have been designed to allow for future conversion to habitable area, in the event that the need for parking is reduced. Additional detailed floor plans, including parking layouts, are required as part of the application for Site Plan Approval.*

The P1 level of the proposed garage has been designed with an 11'-6" floor-to-floor height to better accommodate potential future conversion. As an underground parking garage, converting all floors to habitable space may be challenging.

7. *Digital copies of all required application materials reflecting any physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.*

The required application materials are submitted herewith in digital format for the public record.

8. *A copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division for the public record.*

A copy of the recorded MPSP Major Amendment decision is enclosed in Section 3.0 of this application.

9. *The applicant shall submit detailed information on the design and landscaping for the "Triangle" open space and coordination with the civic space on the adjacent property.*

Detailed design and landscaping information are depicted on the enclosed plans.

10. *The applicant must identify the location for the proposed Bluebikes station required by their approved Mobility Management Plan on a site plan*

The new 19-dock Bluebikes station is located along Cummings Street as depicted on the enclosed plans.

11. *The applicant shall provide updated information to demonstrate LEED Platinum certifiability, detailing efforts to utilize building systems technology, to every extent practicable, to reduce the building's energy use intensity and support a potential future transition to net zero capability.*

Refer to Section 9.0 of this application for LEED Certifiability documentation.

12. *The applicant shall provide updated information detailing potential flood risk on the site (due to both sea level rise and as a result of precipitation) and documenting how the potential for flooding will be managed within the underground parking structure, including how electric vehicle charging equipment and other electrical infrastructure will be protected from damage.*

Based on a review of the Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding Viewer, the Property has a 0.2% exceedance probability in 2030, a 5.5% exceedance probability in 2050, and a 32.8% chance of probability in 2070. The projected depth of the 100-year flood on the Property is 2.3 feet in 2050 and 3.9 feet in 2070.

The project will continuously monitor evolving flood risks and implement mitigation measures as required. To ensure long-term protection, the Applicant proposes to install a trench at the garage entrance for future automatic flood gates. The use of portable barriers around the building perimeter will be evaluated as necessary.

The Applicant will comply with the remaining conditions of the MPSP prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.