



City of Somerville

## **URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION**

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

### **DESIGN REVIEW RECOMMENDATION**

**32 Webster Ave**

**August 12, 2025**

The Urban Design Commission (UDC) met virtually via Zoom on July 22, 2025, and August 12, 2025, to review an Apartment Building proposed at 32 Webster Ave in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district of the Union Square neighborhood of Somerville. The purpose of design review, as established by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, is for peers in the professional design community to provide advice and recommendations during the schematic design phase of the architectural design process. In accordance with the UDC's adopted Rules of Procedure and Policy and Section 15.1.4 Design Review of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, this recommendation includes, at least, the following:

1. Identification of the preferred schematic design option
2. Identification if applicable design guidelines are satisfied
3. Guidance and recommended modifications to address any design issues or concerns

Design review was conducted over the course of two meetings, and the Commission guided the Applicant through various recommendations and suggestions to the applicants preferred façade design concepts. At the meeting on July 22, 2025, Deborah Fennick, Tim Talun, and Martin Pavlinic were present.

At the meeting on August 12, 2025, Deborah Fennick, Tim Talun, Frank Valdes, and Martin Pavlinic were present. Frank Valdes, having not been present at the July 22, 2025 meeting, submitted an affidavit certifying that he had reviewed the materials and evidence from the meeting and was eligible to participate in motions and voting on the design review for 32 Webster Avenue

At the meeting on August 12, 2025, recommendations that were incorporated into the design through the review process included feasibility of the transformer location, and to look at individual design elements such as the overhangs and cornices.

Following a presentation by the Applicant and review of the design guidelines for the MR4 district, the Commission provided the following final guidance and recommended modifications:

1. Confirm the feasibility of a below-ground transformer with Eversource, and if it is not accepted the UDC will want to see alternate transformer options.
2. Review and confirm there is adequate clearance for the second-floor balcony design.
3. Look at alternate options for the color and treatment of the cornice.

4. Define and differentiate the treatment of the ground floor along the street and corner.
5. Explore fencing options.

Commissioner Tim Talun made a motion to recommend approving façade option A, incorporating the guidance and modifications listed above. Frank Valdes seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (4-0).

Commissioner Frank Valdes made a motion that the design guidelines for (MR4) district have been met. Martin Pavlinic seconded. The motion was approved unanimously (4-0).

Attest, by the voting membership:

Deborah Fennick  
Martin Pavlinic  
Tim Talun  
Frank Valdes

Attest, by the meeting Co-Chairs:

Sarah Lewis  
Estello Raganit

**Preferred façade option (Option 3A):**



**Applicable Design Guidelines:**

<b>MR4– Mid-Rise 4</b>			
<b><u>LANGUAGE</u></b>	<b><u>SATISFIED?</u></b>	<b><u>PRIORITY?</u></b>	<b><u>NOTES</u></b>
Facades should be visually divided into a series of architectural bays that are derived, in general, from the building's structural bay spacing.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Piers, pilasters, or other features defining each architectural bay should either extend all the way to the ground or terminate at any horizontal articulation defining the base of the building.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Architectural bays should align, in general, with individual or groups of storefronts and lobby entrances.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Piers, pilasters, or other features defining each architectural bay should always project forward and be uninterrupted by any horizontal articulation, excluding any horizontal articulation used to differentiate the base of the building.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Vents, exhausts, and other utility features on building facades should be architecturally integrated into the design of the building and should be located to minimize adverse effects on pedestrian comfort along sidewalks and within open spaces.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Buildings at terminated vistas should be articulated with design features that function as focal points.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Fenestration glazing should be inset from the plane of exterior wall surfaces.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Ribbon windows should be avoided.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Monotonous and repetitive storefront or lobby systems, awnings, canopies, sign types, colors, or designs should be avoided.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Storefronts and lobby entrances should include awnings or canopies to provide weather protection for pedestrians and reduce glare for storefront display areas. Awnings should be open-ended and operable.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Lobby entrances for upper story uses should be optimally located, well defined, clearly visible, and separate from the entrance for other ground story uses.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Lobbies should be limited in both width and total area to preserve floor space and frontage for other ground story uses. Buildings should use any combination of	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		

facade articulation, a double-height ceiling, a distinctive doorway, a change in wall material, a change in paving material within the frontage area, or some other architectural element(s) to make lobbies visual and materially distinctive.			
The selection of materials, fenestration, and ornamentation should result in a consistent and harmonious composition that appears as a unified whole rather than a collection of unrelated parts.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
The type and color of materials should be kept to a minimum, preferably three (3) or fewer.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Two (2) or more wall materials should be combined only one above the other, except for bay windows.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Wall materials appearing heavier in weight should be used below wall materials appearing lighter in weight (wood and metal above brick, and all three above stone)	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Horizontal or vertical board siding or shingles, regardless of material, should be avoided.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Architectural details and finish materials for the base of a building should be constructed of architectural concrete or pre-cast cementitious panels, natural or cast stone, heavy gauge metal panels, glazed or unglazed architectural terracotta, or brick.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		
Exterior Insulation and Finish Systems (EIFS) should be avoided.	<u>YES</u> <u>(4-0)</u>		