



City of Somerville

# PLANNING BOARD

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

**TO:** Planning Board  
**FROM:** OSPCD Staff  
**SUBJECT:** 32 Webster Ave, Site Plan Approval, Special Permit for Residential Housing and Mechanical Penthouse Exceeding Maximum Height  
**POSTED:** May 13, 2026

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve with Conditions (SPA)  
Approve with Conditions (Special Permit for Residential Housing)  
Approve with Conditions (Special Permit for Penthouse Height)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the Site Plan Review and Special Permit applications submitted for 32 Webster Avenue, identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The applications were deemed complete on April 20, 2026 and is scheduled for a public hearing on May 21, 2026. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

## LEGAL NOTICE

### **ZP25-000097**

32 Webster Holdings LLC/Kinvarra Capital proposes to develop an Apartment Building in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district, which requires Site Plan Approval.

### **ZP25-000108**

32 Webster Holdings LLC/Kinvarra Capital proposes to establish residential housing in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

### **ZP26-000040**

32 Webster Holdings LLC/Kinvarra Capital seeks to construct a mechanical penthouse that exceeds the maximum height in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) District, which requires a Special Permit.

## **SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL**

Kinvarra Capital/32 Webster LLC is proposing to construct a 4-story LEED Certified Apartment Building. The proposed development will produce 29 dwelling units of which 5 are affordable units, 29 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 4 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.26. No vehicle parking is provided on-site.

## **BACKGROUND**

32 Webster Street is located in the 0.25mi Transit Area in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district in the Union Square neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott. Establishing an Apartment Building in the MR4 district requires Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as necessary. In the MR4 district, Special Permits are needed for mechanical equipment exceeding the maximum height and establishing a residential use. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR4 zoning district.

*Note: this property is subject to a regulatory land taking by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) in conjunction with the Webster Avenue Bridge Project. As such, Planning Staff suggest condition #8 in the event that this property undergoes physical changes, and the current design is no longer feasible.*

## **NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS**

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the applicant on May 27, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform and at Aeronaut Brewery (21 Properzi Way) at 6:00 PM. Community members had questions about parking/loading, design, Greenscore, and the construction process.

The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott and the applicant on September 29, 2025, via the Zoom meeting platform and at Aeronaut Brewery (21 Properzi Way). The applicant presented updates from the last neighborhood meeting and the Urban Design Commission. Community members had questions about the application process, affordability of units, landscaping and bicycle storage.

## **DESIGN REVIEW**

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission (UDC) via the Zoom meeting platform on July 22, 2025. The Commission provided its official recommendation on August 12, 2025. The UDC requested that the applicant confirm the feasibility of the proposed transformer location and explore individual design elements such as the overhangs, cornices, fencing, and ground-floor treatment.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Building/Land Use

The proposed Apartment Building is a four (4) story residential building. A total of twenty-nine (29) residential units are proposed, with a mix of studio, 1- and 2- bedroom units. All units will have access to an elevator. There is a common roof deck on the roof. The applicant has signed an Affordable Housing Acknowledgement (AHA). There will be five (5) affordable dwelling units and a 0.8 fractional payout.

### Mobility

No motor vehicle parking is proposed as part of this application. Mobility Staff have worked with the applicant to ensure that all bicycle parking is compliant with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. As this property is in the .25-mile walkshed to an MBTA Rapid Transit Station (Union Square), tenants in this building are not eligible for on-street parking passes.

### Public Space and Urban Forestry

The Greenscore proposed by the applicant is 0.26, where the minimum is 0.25. Open Space for the residents is proposed on the roof, enclosed within the green roof. A green roof is also proposed on a portion of the fourth-floor roof neighboring the fourth-floor roof decks. PSUF Staff has proposed conditions relating to tree removal and protection, noted below.

### Sustainability

The applicant completed the Sustainable Building Questionnaire required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment and was issued a Certificate of Required Materials. The building is proposed to be Passive House Certified and Certified LEED Platinum. This proposal was designed using the Net-Zero Density Bonus.

## **CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS**

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw conclusions for each consideration but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

### Site Plan Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.

3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

Special Permit Considerations (Residential Use and Mechanical Penthouse)

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. *Insert any other criteria that are cited in the SZO*

Special Permit Considerations (Penthouse Height Specific)

1. Visual Impact and aesthetic quality of the proposed screening or penthouse.
2. Efforts to reduce any net shadows cast upon neighboring lots and structures.
3. Ventilation and air handling techniques to reduce the emission of odor or exhaust toward neighboring lots and structures.
4. Sound attenuation measures or operational procedures to mitigate potential noise impacts to neighboring lots and structures.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Site Plan Approval and Special Permit

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

Staff believes that this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City’s Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

- Increase the Housing Supply.
- Prioritize walking, biking, and transit options and minimize space dedicated to personal vehicles.

2. *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*

Staff believes that this project meets the intent of the MR4 zoning district is, in part: “To create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use, and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving uses”

Staff believes this project also meets the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including the following:

- To develop and maintain complete, mixed-use, walkable, transit-oriented, and environmentally sustainable neighborhoods that foster a strong sense of community throughout the day.
- To provide a range of housing types, unit sizes, and price points to accommodate the diverse household sizes and life stages of Somerville residents at all income levels.
- To preserve and enhance the design of Somerville’s public realm.

- To encourage the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking in lieu of motor vehicle use when a choice of travel mode exists.

### Site Plan Approval Specific

3. *Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*

Staff believe the proposed conditions mitigate any significant impacts attributable to the proposed development.

### Mechanical Penthouse Height Special Permit Specific

4. *Visual impact and aesthetic quality of the proposed screening or penthouse.*

Staff believe that the current design reduces the visual impact of the roof mounted mechanical equipment.

5. *Efforts to reduce any net shadows cast upon neighboring lots and structures.*

Staff believe that as located and designed, the mechanical penthouse will have a minimal impact on neighboring lots and structures.

6. *Ventilation and air handling techniques to reduce the emission of odor or exhaust toward neighboring lots and structures.*

Staff believe that the ventilation and air handling techniques will reduce the impact on neighboring lots and structures and allow the outdoor amenity space to be useable for the residents of the building.

7. *Sound attenuation measures or operational procedures to mitigate potential noise impacts to neighboring lots and structures.*

Staff believe that the mechanical equipment will mitigate noise for the residents using the outdoor space and have minimal impact on the neighboring lots and structures.

## **PERMIT CONDITIONS**

Should the Board approve the required **Site Plan Approval** for the 4-story apartment building, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommend the following conditions:

### General

1. Utility and mechanical equipment is not permitted on any façade or within the frontage area of the lot.

2. Electrical transformers and other mechanical equipment are not permitted above ground within the frontage area of any lot.
3. This decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
4. If the Board requires any changes to the submitted plans, digital copies of all applicable application materials reflecting those changes must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of the Submittal Requirements.
5. A digital copy of the recorded Decisions stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record.
6. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be submitted to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.
7. A Digital Massing Model of only the building's massing, in SketchUp format (.skp), that is to scale and properly geo-located and oriented for use in placing and viewing the project within the City's digital model of existing buildings in the city must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division prior to the issuance of a building permit. The model should be main mass only and should not include any detailed architectural features of the proposed building, including building components or materiality.
8. Any modification or alteration to this project due to the reconfiguration of Webster Ave. and/or Newton St. or the proposed regulatory taking of land by MassDOT to effectuate that reconfiguration would be deemed a major amendment and must be reviewed by the Planning Board

#### Engineering/Construction

9. MWRA operates and maintains a 48-inch ductile iron water main in Webster Avenue. Any utility construction encroachment in the MWRA easement will require an 8(m)-encroachment permit from MWRA.
10. Inflow and Infiltration sewer mitigation is required for all projects that increase sewer flows to the City wastewater system. By City Ordinance and policy, the City only accepted I&I mitigation via fee. This program is managed by the Engineering Division. See Somerville's Sewer, Drain, and Infiltration/Inflow Policy for more information.
11. The Applicant shall submit a Construction Management Plan (CMP) for Engineering and Mobility Division review and comment twenty-one (21) days prior to submission of the Foundation Permit. Limited lot line construction on an Urban Minor Arterial street will require engineering site logistic plans to minimize construction impacts to the high-volume public right of way.
12. Upper floor balconies on Webster Avenue overhang the public right of way. Overhang requires a Section 12-14 license with the City Council view the City Clerk's Office. This license must be secured prior to issuance of main Building Permit.

13. Project must be in compliance with Engineering Sire Construction Rules and Regulations (available at <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/departments-infrastructure-and-asset-management-iam/engineering>) and implement stormwater management BMPs to meet runoff requirements as necessary. Current proposal appears to meet the requirements of a Medium Project Review. Please note that if project is amended to include a direct stormwater overflow to City system the project will be recategorized as a Large Review and subject to stricter stormwater quantity and quality management regulations.
14. Final sidewalk design must provide sufficient width to guarantee at least 5' clear width of cement concrete surface for ADA/MAAB access. The 5' width may be combined by land in public right of way and private land dedicated via a public access easement. Establish easement line parallel to Newton Street side line. Submit easement plans for City review and public general 24/7/365 access to sidewalk area on private property adjacent to Newton Street, as necessary. Executed easement is required prior to Certificate of Occupancy.
15. Sewer lateral for existing building connects to Newton Street brick combined sewer which is greater than 20 feet deep. Engineering would review and potentially allow abandonment of existing sewer lateral on site at location of existing chimney. Contractor must locate chimney and confirm that any proposed abandonment location can be sufficiently protected during foundation construction prior to approval and execution of sewer cut and cap. Applicant and contractor must contact Engineering for more information about existing sewer lateral abandonment alternatives prior to issuance of Demolition Permit.
16. A public right-of-way or pedestrian access easement must be provided in perpetuity by a covenant or other deed restriction for the full area of the sidewalk provided within the frontage area of the lot. Final easement language must be approved by the City Solicitor. The easement must be recorded at the Middlesex Registry of Deeds prior to application for a Certificate of Occupancy.
17. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
18. Material specifications from supplied must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
19. An outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.6 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaires; total site lumen limit table (calculations from the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lamp type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of any timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.

#### Public Space and Urban Forestry

20. Tree removal schedule shows that various private trees are being removed. The Applicant shall provide photos and proof of size and species (invasive status) to

get official tree removal permit exemption prior to issuance of a Foundation Permit. Email [trees@somervillema.gov](mailto:trees@somervillema.gov) to proceed.

21. The removal of trees on private property is subject the City's Tree Preservation Ordinance. Most trees eight (8) or more inches in diameter will require a private tree removal permit. Please visit the City's website to determine if a private tree removal permit is needed: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/tree-removal-guidelines>, and email [trees@somervillema.gov](mailto:trees@somervillema.gov) with any questions. If tree removals are required, please provide a Tree Removal Plan noting trees to be protected and removed that clearly specify tree species and diameter at breast height (DBH).
22. Per SZO 10.3.6 Landscape Buffer, any lot in the MR district abutting the side or rear lot line of a lot in the NR district must be screened by a landscape buffer. Landscape buffers must be located along the outer perimeter of the lot, parallel to and extending along 100% of the length of the lot line; and must include a fence and 1 large tree per 30' of lot line or a continuous row of evergreen shrubs at least 2' tall and 1 large tree per 30' of lot line. The lot line that abuts the NR district to the south measures 93', thus requiring 4 large trees within the 6' landscape buffer. The Amelanchier is not within the buffer area and is not considered a large tree. One (1) additional large tree is required in the landscape buffer.
23. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit a Tree Protection Plan with tree protection details to the Tree Warden for review and approval, and must meet with the Tree Warden to discuss proper tree protection responsibilities and construction operations plans. The Tree Protection Plan must include strategies to be executed and maintained through the duration of the project to ensure the protection of [existing public shade trees adjacent to the site / describe trees onsite to be protected, if any]. The Applicant or their successor must follow the approved plans.

## Housing

24. A deed restriction limiting the sale or rental of all affordable dwelling units to eligible households in perpetuity must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
25. An affordable housing implementation plan (AHIP) must be submitted to the Director of Housing for review and approval prior to applying for a Building Permit.
26. A covenant or other deed restriction agreeing to pay the housing linkage fee must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds or filed with the Land Registration Office. Final deed restriction language must be approved by the Economic Development Division and City Solicitor.
27. The Applicant or their successor in interest shall make a fractional buyout for 0.8 ADUs not provided.

### Mobility/Parking

28. The property owner(s) and applicable future tenants must comply with the Mobility Management Plan dated April 21, 2026, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility's Final Approval dated April 21, 2026.
29. Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
30. All buyers, grantees, lessees, renters, and tenants must be notified in writing prior to sale or lease of any dwelling unit that the residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
31. Formal acknowledgement that residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, and that dwelling units will be advertised as such, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission, must be filed and recorded with this Decision and forwarded to the Somerville Traffic Commission and Inspectional Services Division.

### Sustainability

32. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit all Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.
33. The Applicant or their successor in interest must submit all Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.

Should the Board approve the required **Special Permit** to establish residential housing, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommend the following conditions:

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. Digital copies of all required application materials reflecting and physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
3. A copy of the recorded Decision by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the Public Record.
4. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be provided to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Should the Board approve the required **Special Permit** for mechanical equipment to exceed the maximum height, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommend the following conditions:

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. Digital copies of all required application materials reflecting and physical changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
3. A copy of the recorded Decision by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division for the Public Record.
4. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be provided to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.