

City of Somerville

Review of Multiple-Member
Bodies



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Unfinished Business

Bodies Pending Recommendation

- AIDS Commission
- Gang Advisory Board
- Multicultural Affairs Commission
- Municipal Athletics Facilities Commission
- Recreation and Youth Commission
- PILOT Advisory Task Force

Group 1 Overview

Group 1

- Group 1 Boards and Commissions all reside in the city's [Planning, Preservation, and Zoning \(PPZ\)](#) Division within the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSP/CD).
- Group 1 Bodies:
 - Planning Board
 - Zoning Board of Appeals
 - Urban Design Commission
 - Historical Preservation Commission

Coding Process

Coding Steps

Transcription, Familiarization with Data, and Selection of Quotation



Selection of Keywords



Coding



Theme Development

Example 1 – Coding

Question Number	Question	Transcript Sample	Emergent Code(s)	Code Description	Decision Rules
1a	What do you think is its most important function?	"...to make sure projects meet the design guidelines laid out in the Comprehensive Plan under each zoning ordinance or, like, sub-neighborhood plan, and then, I guess, prevent negative effects to the public realm , so what can be seen from the streetscapes and, design aspects , materials, things like that."	Comprehensive Plan	Implementation of Comprehensive Plan is a function of the body's duties.	Applicable when the Comprehensive Plan is cited as directly impacting the purpose <u>and</u> activities of a MMB.
			Public realm	The well-being of the urban environment visible and accessible to the public is a main consideration in the body's advisory actions.	Applicable when the <u>main criteria</u> for reviewing designs for public spaces is the benefit to residents of the city.
			Streetscape	Dealing with the aesthetic, engagement, and functionality of the street and its amenities.	Applicable when the body is explicitly involved in the development and evolution of the city's streetscape.

Example 2 – Coding

Question Number	Question	Transcript Sample	Emergent Code(s)	Code Description	Decision Rules
19	What is your department's oversight of the work being done by the body?	"We <u>write agendas, send out the notices, we write staff memos</u> . And then we write other memos occasionally."	Admin Support	Department staff is responsible for assisting with the body's administrative needs.	Use when the body primarily receives administrative assistance from the city in order to carry out its activities.

Example – Theme Development

Emerging Code	Code Description	Decision Rules	Theme
Ambience	The atmosphere and character of the city's landscape, streetscape, and buildings as a whole.	Applicable when the intended outcome of design guidance from a body is to impact the quality and identity of the city at large.	Design Goals
Architectural Preservation	Preserving the condition of historically-significant buildings and structures.	Applicable when a body's main function is to regulate the demolition or alteration of the city's built structures.	
Public Realm	The well-being of the urban environment visible and accessible to the public is a main consideration in the body's advisory actions.	Applicable when the <u>main criteria</u> for reviewing designs for public spaces is the benefit to residents of the city.	
Streetscape	Dealing with the aesthetic, engagement, and functionality of the street and its amenities.	Applicable when the body is explicitly involved in the development and evolution of the city's streetscape.	

Planning Board (PB)

Planning Board – Enabling Legislation

- Enabling Legislation: [MGL](#), [Ordinance](#), [Zoning Ordinance](#)
- Governing Documents: [Rules of Procedure & Policy](#)
- Required by Massachusetts General Law

Planning Board – Enabling Legislation

M.G.L. Ch.41 §81A-81J

- The Board is **responsible for authoring, adopting, and periodically updating of the comprehensive plan for the City of Somerville** per [M.G.L. Ch.41 §81D](#).
- The Board, or its designee, **drafts the official map of the City of Somerville** pursuant to [M.G.L. Ch.41, 81E-J](#).
- The Board is responsible for **authoring, reviewing, and adoption of neighborhood plans or area plans** pursuant to [M.G.L. Ch.41 §81D](#).

Somerville Zoning Ordinance

- The Planning Board is the **decision-making authority for discretionary or administrative permits** as indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance.
- The Planning Board **provides advice and recommendations to the City Council** concerning the following:
 - proposed amendments to the text or maps of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance;
 - proposed changes to the official map of the City of Somerville; and
 - the laying out, alteration, relocation, or discontinuance of thoroughfares; and
 - the proposed conveyance of land to the City.
- The Planning Board **adopts an urban design framework each for sub-area within the Master Planned Development overlay district**.

Somerville Ordinance

- The Board is composed of 5 members and 2 alternate members.

Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

Zoning Board of Appeals – Enabling Legislation

- Enabling Legislation: [MGL](#), [Ordinance](#), [Zoning Ordinance](#)
- Governing Documents: [Rules of Procedure & Policy](#)
- Required by Massachusetts General Law

Zoning Board of Appeals – Enabling Legislation

M.G.L. Ch 40A §12, M.G.L. Ch 40B §§20- 23

- **Decision-making authority for all Comprehensive Permits** per [M.G.L. Ch 40B, §§20-23](#).

Somerville Zoning Ordinance

- The Zoning Board of Appeals is the **decision-making authority for discretionary and administrative permitting** as indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance.
- The Zoning Board of Appeals is the **decision-making authority for administrative appeals**.

Somerville Ordinance

- Powers and duties under M.G.L. Ch 40A §12.

Urban Design Commission (UDC)

Urban Design Commission – Enabling Legislation

- Enabling Legislation: [Zoning Ordinance](#)
- Governing Documents: [Rules of Policy and Procedure](#)
- *Not* required by Massachusetts General Law

UDC– Enabling Legislation

Somerville Zoning Ordinance

- To **provide advice and recommendations to the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board** concerning how the design of development projects affects the quality of Somerville’s public realm.
- To **provide advice and recommendations to Staff** when required by a condition of a discretionary or administrative development review decision.
- To **provide recommendations for any design guidelines adopted by the Review Boards.**

UDC – Enabling Legislation Cross-Check

Enabling Legislation		Check	Verifying Source
Purpose	Conducts design review of development proposals.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcript
Meetings	Regular meetings are scheduled on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. Only held if there are items of business on the agenda that must be addressed. An annual calendar of meeting shall be posted. Special meetings may be scheduled.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcript • 2026 UDC Public Meeting Schedule • City Website: Agendas, Minutes, & More
Responsibilities	Provide advice and recommendations to ZBA and PB (“Review Boards”) concerning how the design of proposed development affects the quality of Somerville's public realm. Provide advice and recommendation to Staff when required by a condition of a discretionary or administrative development review decision. Provide recommendations for any design guidelines adopted by the Review Boards.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcript
Powers, R+R	The UDC may adopt rules of procedure and policy as it deems necessary. Design Review occurs during public meetings, public testimony from the public is not required, but only permitted at the discretion of co-chairs.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UDC Rules of Policy and Procedure

Historic Preservation Commission (HPC)

Historic Preservation Commission – Enabling Legislation

- Enabling Legislation: Ordinance
 - Responsible for enforcing the Demolition Review Ordinance and the Historic District Ordinance
- Governing Documents: Rules of Policy & Procedure
- *Not* required by Massachusetts General Law

HPC – Enabling Legislation

Somerville Ordinance

- **Composition: 7 regular members, 7 alternate members**
 - To include an architectural historian, an architect, a licensed real estate broker, a city planner, a lawyer, and two resident members.
- “The commission shall **keep a permanent record of its resolutions, transactions and determinations...and may adopt and amend such rules and regulations** not inconsistent with the provisions of this article...”

Demolition Review Ordinance

- HPC is the **decision-making authority regarding the demolition of buildings 75 years of age or older.**
- The purpose of this ordinance is to preserve significant buildings outside historic districts and **encourage preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or sale instead of demolition.**

Historic District Ordinance

- HPC is the **decision-making authority regarding the issuance of Certificates of Appropriateness, Certificates of Non-Applicability, and Certificates of Hardship** as allowed under [M.G.L. Ch. 40C](#) and the HDO.
- HPC is the **recommending authority regarding the creation of Local Historic Districts (LHDs)** as allowed under [M.G.L. Ch. 40C](#) and the HDO.

HPC – Enabling Legislation Cross-Check

Enabling Legislation		Check	Verifying Source
Purpose	Protect, enhance, and preserve historical resources, promote use of historic districts as a stimulus to local business or industry, preserve significant buildings outside historic district, encourage preservation, rehabilitation, or sale, instead of demolition.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcript • Somerville Historic Preservation Commission Design Guidelines
Meetings	Regular meetings are scheduled on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. Only held if there are items of business on the agenda that must be addressed. An annual calendar of meeting shall be posted. Special meetings may be scheduled.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview transcript • HPC Rules of Policy & Procedure • 2026 HPC Public Meeting Schedule
Responsibilities	Approve/deny applications, issue non-applicability/hardship certificates, make initial determination on a demolition plan, hold public hearings, etc.	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview findings • HPC Cases City of Somerville • HPC Cases & Decisions — 2008-2016 • Calendar City of Somerville
Powers, R+R	Must document certificates, file official records, can take legal action for non-compliance (e.g., illegal voluntary demolition), may enter into contracts, can employ consultants, may accept and expend gifts, can administer real property gifted or on behalf of the city.	—	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not mentioned in interview • Historic Preservation Commission Ordinance

Preliminary Findings

Preliminary Findings

- The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals are required by Massachusetts General Law
- Urban Design Commission
 - In compliance with enabling legislation
- Historic Preservation Commission
 - In compliance with enabling legislation
- Commissioner feedback is pending approval of questionnaire

Questions

Next Meeting

Meeting Prep

- Bodies to Review
 - [Licensing Commission](#)
 - Group 2
 - [Board of Assessors](#)
 - [Retirement Board](#)
 - [Condominium Review Board](#)
- Action Items
 - Review enabling legislation ahead of next meeting