



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

2 APRIL 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>Absent</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Coralie Cooper	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Alvaro Esparza (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Sarah Lewis (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm and adjourned at 7:08pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 222 Broadway

This hearing was previously continued to 16 April 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 1 McGrath Highway

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 4 June 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 365 Somerville Avenue

This item was addressed concurrently with the item for 369 Somerville Avenue.

The applicant team explained that in 2020, Somerville Family Dental was granted a Use Special Permit to operate its dental office in the two ground floor units, 365 and 369 Somerville Ave, on a pedestrian street. These are operated as one dental office. The Special Permit decision included Condition #3, which states that the use runs with the applicant and is non-transferrable. Also, the Special Permit shall terminate immediately if the applicant ceases to occupy the space. The applicant is currently occupying the space without issue. The applicant is seeking to remove the condition because, while the practice has been operating successfully for six years, the condition prevents Somerville Family Dental from restructuring, bringing in partners, selling the practice, etc. There are no plans for any changes at this time, but the intention is to make sure that the dental practice would be able to remain open into the future.

The applicant team explained that, as part of this proposal, the dental use is not changing in any way. There are no physical changes proposed to the building, and there will be no change in hours, traffic, or neighborhood impact. The current Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) already ensures that a different use at this location would require separate review and approval. Removing this condition will help ensure continuity of care for the practice's patients and stability for the staff, while allowing the practice to continue serving the community for the long term.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. Seeing none, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board asked if this is a common condition to be included in a Special Permit. Staff explained that when the applicant first applied for this permit, there were limitations regarding the uses on pedestrian streets. These limitations did not allow for personal services, and other uses. This item has since be amended in the ordinance, and this condition would not be included if a permit was applied for today at this location.

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 Memorandum, the condition removal to the previously issued Special Permit DRA #2020-125.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 369 Somerville Avenue

This item was addressed concurrently with the item for 365 Somerville Avenue.

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 Memorandum, the condition removal to the previously issued Special Permit DRA #2020-125.

RESULT:

APPROVED

OTHER BUSINESS: Arts & Innovation District Urban Design Framework

Staff explained that this framework is essentially a neighborhood plan that requires adoption by the Planning Board. The intention is for the Planning Board to have a chance to comment on the document in order to consolidate the comments with those from the Urban Design Commission.

The Board asked the role of these design guidelines in the broader development process. Staff explained that there are sections called development standards, which are more regulatory and important than the actual design guidelines. This document is meant to be used by developers and their architectural teams as they are designing master plans and buildings for this particular area. The Planning Board and Urban Design Commission (UDC) will use the document for evaluating proposals as they come forward. With the adoption of the Urban Design Framework (UDF), it becomes quasi-regulatory.

The Board asked if there are ways in which the enforceability of an UDF varies from a neighborhood plan. The intention may be to have content that goes beyond design intent. If so, it may be worth taking the time to draft supplementary information that is a bit more expansive. Staff explained that this was not a full-scope neighborhood planning process. This document is to help guide the design which is why it is focused on the design pieces and works hand-in-hand with zoning, without getting into the larger neighborhood-based issues. Staff noted that language clarifying the scope could be included in the document.

Some Board members noted that the developer has, by and large, gotten what they wanted out of the City in this process. They feel that the City largely accommodated the developer's desire to rezone an area that was not originally part of the City's initiatives. The City could take more time to flesh this out and incorporate other aspects that are priorities for the City. The draft design guidelines available to developers are unlikely to change in a meaningful way, and they already have the majority of what they need to advance their efforts. It is not the role of this Board to be responsive to that type of action.

The Board noted that the UDC's changes proposed on page 5 of the memo seem to muddy the water a bit in terms of what the prototypical building in this district is intended to be. This language may potentially set the Board up for more conflict. The Board stated that this should be reviewed further.

There was also discussion regarding strengthening the language around separating truck traffic from pedestrians and cyclists.

There was agreement to continue this item to the next meeting for additional discussion.

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendation to the City Council

- Mayor Wilson requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to provide for larger buildings, additional dimensional flexibility, and fewer use restrictions for affordable housing projects (File # 26-0204)

The Board discussed the proposed amendment. There was a split opinion on the setback requirements, with some members of the Board finding the zero setback too severe, and other members finding it to be okay. One Board member suggested adding accessible entrance requirements to the amendment, which the Board supported to move forward in their recommendation to the Land Use Committee.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to recommend the amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance, with the discussion points raised this evening, for adoption to the Land Use Committee.

RESULT:

RECOMMENDED

OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration Open Discussion

The Board has no topics to discuss at this time.

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.](#)