



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Planning Board
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 1 McGrath Highway, ZP25-000113 (Major Revision), ZP25-000114 (Hotel Use – Special Permit) , ZP25-000115 (Formula Use – Special Permit)
POSTED: June 12, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Continue (see note)

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 Major Revision, and Special Permits submitted for 1 McGrath Hwy, 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 application was deemed completed on March 29, 2026, and is scheduled for a public hearing on May 18, 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.

NOTE: Hold any voting until next Planning Board Meeting for Variance cases (ZP26-000034 & ZP26-000052) decisions to be finalized by the ZBA.

LEGAL NOTICES

Somerbridge Hotel LLC proposes a Major Revision to the previously Site Plan Approval case # P&Z 21-028 in the High-Rise (HR) zoning district.

Somerbridge Hotel LLC proposes to establish a Hotel Use in the High-Rise (HR) zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

Somerbridge Hotel LLC proposes to establish a Formula Business in the High-Rise (HR) zoning district, which requires a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Somerbridge Hotel LLC is proposing to construct a cross municipal boundary (Cambridge and Somerville) 6 story hotel. The proposed building type is a General Building, the hotel will have 145 rooms, 95 of them will be in Somerville. The building will have a total of 62,646 sf with 44,508 sf in Somerville. The proposed parking lot will have 33 motor vehicle spots, 20 of these will be in Somerville. The project will have bicycle parking on site for 5 short-term bicycles and 10 long-term bicycles on the Somerville side (See figure 1). The Applicant seeks a revision of the Site Plan Approval granted by the Planning Board on

May 18, 2023, in case [P&Z 21-028](#) per section SZO 15.2.4. Additionally, this application requires two (2) special permits, one (1) to allow a hotel use in the HR district per SZO 9.2.9.b and one (1) to establish a formula business (MOXY Hotels) per SZO 9.1.7.d.

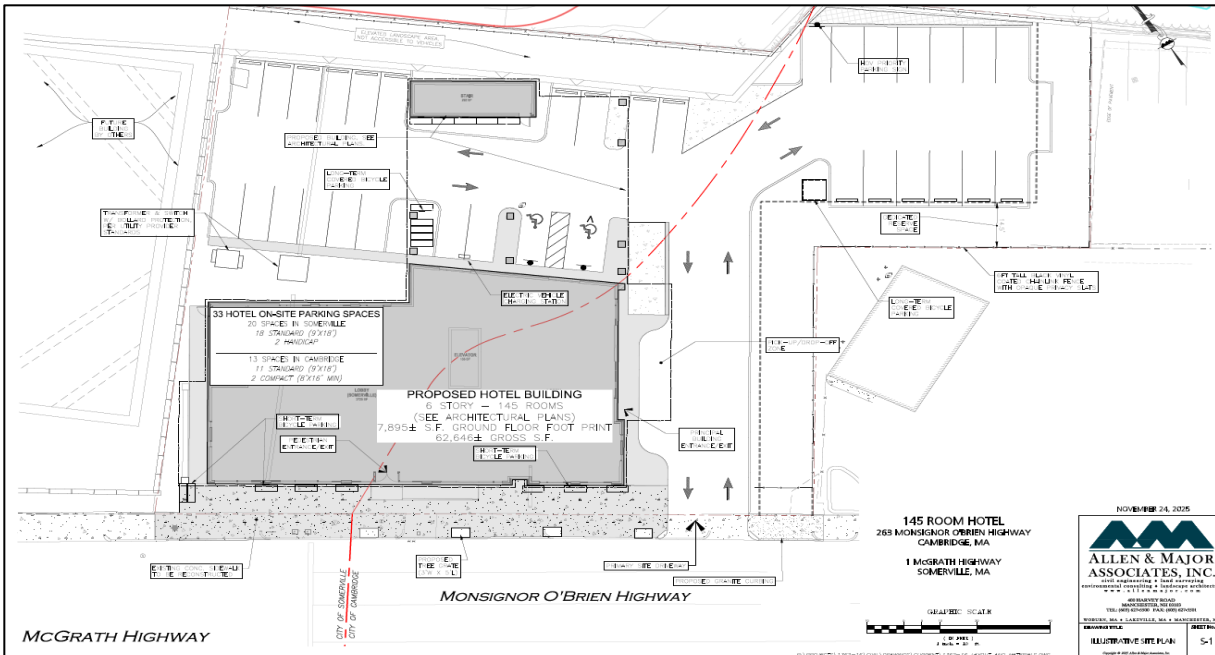


Figure 1 - Site Plan of current proposed development

BACKGROUND

1 McGrath Highway is located in the 0.50 mi Transit Area in the High-Rise (HR) zoning district in the Inner Belt neighborhood, represented by Ward 2 Councilor J.T. Scott. The applicant has applied for two (2) Hardship Variances, one (1) to allow surface level parking and one (1) seeking relief from parking lot landscaping standards, this proposal is scheduled for the June 17, 2026, ZBA hearing. Furthermore, as noted above, this proposal requires a Major Revision to the Site Plan Approval to permit [P&Z 21-028](#) and Special Permits for a Hotel and Formula Use. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the HR zoning district.

1 McGrath Highway has gone through a few permitting processes between 2017 - 2024. In 2017 the Applicant first permitted this property as a 120-room hotel. Due to environmental complications and its location between the Community Path Extension and Grand Junction Path, the project did not proceed with its permits in a timely manner.

In 2019, the Applicant received a Special Permit and Variances from the ZBA for the construction of 135 room, 6-story hotel (case #[ZBA 2018-138](#)) and extended the approval in 2020 (case #[ZBA 2018-138-E1](#)).

In 2023, the Applicant received Site Plan Approval and Special Permits from the Planning Board and a Variance from the ZBA for the construction of a 199 room, 6 story hotel, relief from the minimum motor vehicle parking requirement, as the Applicant proposed only 13 parking spaces (none of which were located in Somerville), and relief from the façade build out requirements. The respective permits for the mentioned cases are [P&Z 21-028](#) and [P&Z 23-032](#). In 2024, the ZBA extended the Variance in case [ZP24-000011](#). As part of this proposal the Applicant worked with the abutting building developer at 15-21 McGrath Hwy (see figure 2) to create a shared driveway for both projects, and for the hotel to use parking of the building lab. Since this permit was issued, the neighboring lab developer paused construction indefinitely after digging a large foundation pit. As a result, this application was redesigned to move it away from the pit for structural safety and relocate the shared driveway to the Cambridge side of the property.



Figure 2 - Aerial image of locus, abutting property, and its proximity to the neighboring municipality.

All departments reviewed this project and have provided comments, though final conditions from ISD, Engineering and Mobility will be issued after the Zoning Board’s decision is finalized.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

This project required one Neighborhood meeting per the Special Permit requirements 15.2.1.d.ii. This neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor JT Scott, and the Applicant via remote participation on August 18, 2025, at 6:00 pm. Many residents

inquired about the 14-foot clear ramp to be built across the Cambridge portion of the property to connect the McGrath/O'Brien Highway with the Community Path Extension, to which the Applicant responded that the space will be provided in the same manner as per the 2023 permits, though redesign is required and the space will be needed during construction. Other attendees asked about the amenities of the hotel, its timeframe and the role of the abutting parcel in the current project.

ANALYSIS

Site and Building Design

Due to the existing large pit at 15 McGrath, the proposed hotel has moved away from the abutter property line, this also impacted the parking and driveway configuration, hence the requirement of the variances (ZP26-000034 & ZP26-000052). Furthermore, the hotel will have a total of 62,646 sf, with 44,508 sf in Somerville and 18,138 sf in Cambridge, which reduced the number of rooms from 199 to 145 when comparing to the permit approved in 2023. Though the scale of the project has decreased, the height of the hotel will maintain its height (six (6) stories) as the previous approved project.

Within the narrative the applicant has indicated that other elements which will be modified from the previous decision are the roof top bar removal, and the reduction to a one product hotel. While other elements that will not be changed other than the use and height are the food and beverage service amenities will be open for public and the commitment to the inclusion of Community Path -Grand Junction Path.

The Applicant has indicated the following about conditions of permit [P&Z 21-028](#):

- To eliminate conditions 2, 9, 19, 21, 22, 32 because the scale of the project has decreased and the various changes caused by 15 McGrath not being part of the project anymore, therefore causing shifting in design.
 - Condition 2 – see the Economic Department comment
 - Condition 9 - this project still meets the applicability criteria for an MMP as identified in SZO 11.3.2.a.ii/v. Applicant has worked with staff as indicated in the Mobility Department assessment.
 - Conditions 19, 21, 22 and 32 may be removed.
- To revised conditions 16, 17, 18, 20 and 24
 - These conditions may be revised with the language proposed.

Economic Development

The Economic Development Division has no objections or conditions to the Applicant's proposal in its current form. Economic Development does note that the project has an existing Development Covenant with the City from 2023 that is still in effect at this time. Any changes to the covenant will require discussion with Economic Development staff. The applicant and staff are working to amend the covenant.

Mobility

The Applicant proposes on-site 20 motor vehicle parking lot and on site for 5 short-term bicycles and 10 long-term bicycles. The Applicant has provided their TIS (Traffic Impact Study), TAP (Transportation Access Plan) and MMP (Mobility Management Plan), all these materials have been reviewed, meet their respective requirements, and any outstanding comments have been addressed by Mobility staff with the conditions included in this memorandum. The Applicant has reviewed and signed the MMP which has been included with the material package.

Public Space and Forestry (PSUF)

Following the submission of a complete application and per comments provided by PSUF staff, the Applicant has updated a revised Landscape Plan (May 1, 2026) to address comments regarding landscape buffer requirements, curbing and fencing details. Additionally, the updated plan shows the project's Green Score is at 0.45 which is complaint for this site. PSUF staff indicated that there may be some concerns regarding tree spacing and would require to review a revised plan prior to building permits are issued, though Any trees over 8" in diameter need to be reviewed for removal, even if they are invasive species. The Applicant will need to contact relevant staff when trees are being removed.

Sustainability

Applicant submitted evidence of LEED Gold Certifiability and Sustainable & Resilient Development Questionnaire. OSE (Office Sustainability and Environment) staff reviewed and approved the questionnaire and noted that final proof of LEED Gold is expected with building plans. Applicants will continue to coordinate with OSE staff to confirm their LEED requirements and Specialized Code compliance.

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.

Major Revision 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.
4. When considering a revision to a previously approved development review application, the review boards shall limit their review to only the changes to the previously approved application.

Hotel Use - Special Permit 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. Compatibility with the level of activity associated with the surrounding properties.
4. Capacity of the local thoroughfare network providing access to the site and impact on pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic and circulation patterns in the neighborhood.
5. Location and visibility of the principal entrance, guest drop-off area, taxi queuing station, outdoor amenity space for guests or employees, and pedestrian circulation from all exit points.

Formula Business - Special Permit 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. The existing concentrations of formula businesses within the neighborhood.
4. The availability of other similar uses and the maintenance of a diverse blend of uses within the neighborhood.
5. The compatibility of the proposed formula business with the existing architectural and aesthetic character of the neighborhood.
6. The proposed uses contribution to the nationwide trend of standardized offerings that detracts from the uniqueness of Somerville's neighborhoods.
7. The existing non-residential vacancy rates within the neighborhood.

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:

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

- The intent of the HR zoning district is, in part: “To accommodate the development of areas appropriate for an intense mix of multi-story multi-unit, mixed-use, and commercial buildings; neighborhood-, community-, and region-serving uses; and a wide variety of employment opportunities.”

Additionally, PPZ Staff believe that granting the requested Site Plan Approval and Special Permits would support the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including, but not limited to, the following:

- To permit development and redevelopment according to plans that are collaboratively developed with the Somerville community.
- To preserve and enhance the design of Somerville’s public realm.
- To increase commercial tax base in support of the fiscal health of the City.
- To protect and promote a diverse mix of businesses.
- To capture a fiscal return on investments made in transportation infrastructure by locating higher intensity development, employment opportunities, and a broad mix of uses along major corridors and within walking distance of transit stops.

Site Plan Approval Specific

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

Staff believe that, as conditioned, the mitigation proposed properly alleviates any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

4. When considering a revision to a previously approved development review application, the review boards shall limit their review to only the changes to the previously approved application.

Hotel Use Special Permit Specific

5. *Compatibility with the level of activity associated with the surrounding properties.*

As previously approved Staff believe that the Hotel Use on this site is compatible with the level of activity associated with the surrounding properties, which include existing and proposed commercial activities, including other hotel uses.

6. Capacity of the local thoroughfare network providing access to the site and impact on pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic and circulation patterns in the neighborhood.

Although there is additional motor vehicle parking proposed on the Somerville site in comparison to the previously approved project, staff believe that the

proper implementation of the approved MMP permits for local thoroughfare network to retain sufficient capacity to provide access to the site and impact on pedestrians, bicycle, and vehicular traffic and circulation patterns in the neighborhood.

7. *Location and visibility of the principal entrance, guest drop-off area, taxi queuing station, outdoor amenity space for guests or employees, and pedestrian circulation from all exit points*

Staff believe that the revised location of the principal entrance, guest drop-off area, vehicular queuing area, outdoor amenity space, and pedestrian circulation meet the functionality of the site to support the Hotel Use.

Formula Business Special Permit Specific

8. The existing concentrations of formula businesses within the neighborhood.

The neighborhood currently hosts various formula businesses; therefore, Staff believe that the proposed Formula Business will impact positively the existing neighborhood context.

9. The availability of other similar uses and the maintenance of a diverse blend of uses within the neighborhood.

There is other three (3) hotel formula businesses in the area, however, gives its location and proximity to other cities, the proposed business will support the existing hospitality industry in the area, without impact negatively. Furthermore, the Applicant has indicated that this Formula business will target a “youth oriented” audience, which will positively contribute to diversify lodging options in the area.

10. *The compatibility of the proposed formula business with the existing architectural and aesthetic character of the neighborhood.*

As mentioned above, the neighborhood currently hosts various formula businesses, additionally historically the area has a primary industrial character, and in recent years there has been a transition to a more commercial focused area, therefore the proposed business along with its architecture will not negatively impact the aesthetic of the neighborhood.

11. *The proposed uses contribution to the nationwide trend of standardized offerings that detracts from the uniqueness of Somerville’s neighborhoods.*

Staff believe the proposed use will not detract from the uniqueness of Somerville’s neighborhoods, as the immediate area is composed of various formula business. The proposed use and its architecture will not negatively detract architecturally or aesthetically its neighborhood.

12. The existing non-residential vacancy rates within the neighborhood.

As mentioned within the background of this project, its permitting history through the last years, and the changes with the abutting parcel project on hold, have made the immediate area maintained vacant for several years, after the closure of the car wash. Other non-residential vacancies may exist in the Twin City Plaza. Development in the proposed area will be beneficial to continue to reduce the non-residential vacancy.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required **Revision to Site Plan Approval P&Z 21-028** for the 6-story general building, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
2. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

3. 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 & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
4. One (1) digital copy 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.
5. A digital 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.

Construction Documents

6. Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
7. Material specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
8. An outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.7 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.

Mobility

9. Prior to Building Permit, the Applicant or their successor shall coordinate with the Mobility Division to complete a feasibility study, to be funded and executed by the Applicant, of the Community Path Ramp. The scope of the feasibility study shall include, at minimum, analysis of constructability, grading, soil conditions, materials selection, and alternative ramp alignments. The scope of the feasibility study must be approved by the Mobility Division. The Applicant's site plan will be modified, if necessary, to address the results of the feasibility study and ensure the final site plan is compatible with the preferred Community Path Ramp alternative.
10. Prior to Building Permit and prior to application for a MassDOT Access Permit, the Applicant or their successor must submit final designs for all project elements on the McGrath Highway Right-Of-Way for review and approval by relevant City of Somerville departments.
11. Prior to Building Permit, the Applicant or their successor shall modify their site plan to provide an accessible route between onsite accessible parking and the principal building entrance that does not require travel in the driveway, to reduce the potential for conflicts between motor vehicles and vulnerable road users. In the Applicant's proposed site plan, the accessible route between onsite accessible parking and the principal building entrance requires a person to travel in the driveway with motor vehicles. This is anticipated to be a high-volume driveway, with the Applicant estimating over 800 daily motor vehicle trips generated by the project.
12. Prior to Building Permit, the Applicant or their successor shall reconfigure the placement of the proposed short-term bike parking racks so that both sides of the racks can be used. In the Applicant's proposed site plan, the majority of the short-term bike parking racks can only accommodate one bike because of the proximity of the racks to the building façade. Reconfiguration will allow the Applicant to provide the same number of bike parking spaces using fewer racks. The Mobility Division recommends that the Applicant shift the placement of short-

term bike parking from the Somerville side to the Cambridge side of the McGrath Highway/O'Brien Highway frontage, so that the space on the Somerville side can be preserved for a future Bluebikes station.

13. Prior to Certificate of Occupancy, the Applicant or their successor shall fund and execute a design of the Community Path Ramp to the 25% design level. The scope of the design must be approved by the Mobility Division.
14. Prior to Certificate of Occupancy, the Applicant or their successor shall install weather shields adjacent to the long-term bike parking near the edge of the building overhang. In the Applicant's proposed site plan, several of the long-term bike parking spaces are likely to be exposed to the elements due to their location near the edge of the building overhang. If these long-term bike parking spaces are exposed to the elements, they will be out of compliance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance and will need to be relocated or reconfigured to be fully sheltered from the elements.
15. The Applicant or their successor shall coordinate with the Cities of Somerville and Cambridge on the design and construction of the proposed Community Path Ramp. The Applicant will provide the space on their site for the Community Path Ramp and will allow for all site access necessary for construction to occur.
16. The Applicant or their successor must provide a public right-of-way or pedestrian access easement in perpetuity by a covenant or other deed restriction for the full area of the proposed Community Path Ramp. Final easement language must be approved by the City Solicitor. The easement must be recorded at the Middlesex Registry of Deeds prior to Certificate of Occupancy.
17. The Applicant or their successor shall continue to coordinate with the City, MassDOT, and the proposed developments at 15 McGrath Highway and 35 McGrath Highway to ensure cohesive design and implementation of changes to the adjacent sections of McGrath Highway.
18. The Applicant or their successor must provide a public right-of-way or pedestrian access easement 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 Certificate of Occupancy.
19. The Applicant or their successor shall construct the sidewalk across the curb cut on McGrath Highway as a continuous concrete sidewalk-level crossing.
20. The Applicant or their successor shall work in good faith with the Mobility Division to provide a location for a future City owned Bluebikes bike share station on the project site, provided there is no loss of necessary functionality. The location will be determined in coordination with the Mobility Division and must be approved prior to the issuance of any building permit for the site and identified on building plans as applicable. The Siting Agreement with the operator of Bluebikes must be signed prior to issuance of any Certificate of Occupancy.
21. At least one (1) bicycle repair facility shall be provided for employees and hotel guests in a convenient and visible location near the long-term bike parking, and must be maintained in a state of good repair. The location will be determined in

coordination with the Mobility Division and must be approved prior to the issuance of any building permit for the site and identified on building plans as applicable.

Should the Board approve the required **Special Permit to establish a Hotel Use**, Planning & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- 22. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- 23. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

- 24. 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 & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
- 25. One (1) digital copy 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.
- 26. A digital copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division for the public record.

Should the Board approve the required **Special Permit to establish a Formula Business**, Planning & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- 27. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- 28. A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.

Public Record

29. 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 & Zoning Division for the public record. Materials must be submitted in accordance with the document format standards of relevant Submittal Requirements.
30. One (1) digital copy 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.
31. A digital 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.