



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

4 JUNE 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>	<i>Exited 7:00pm, rejoined 8:00pm</i>
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Coralie Cooper	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	<i>Arrived at 6:18pm</i>

City staff present: Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Dan Bartman (Director of Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Kit Luster (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 8:27pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the 7 May 2026 meeting minutes.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 222 Broadway

This item was previously continued to 16 July 2026.

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 18 June 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 120 Middlesex Avenue

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 18 June 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Arts & Innovation District – Urban Design Framework Discussion with the Urban Design Commission

Members of the Urban Design Commission (UDC) introduced themselves.

It was noted that the UDC reviewed the draft Arts & Innovation (A&I) District Urban Design Framework (UDF) extensively and made recommendations that were presented to the Planning Board in two memos. The initial memo was fairly broad, including comments that the district boundary should be tightened up to reflect the same boundary as the zoning district and the key areas of the A&I sub-area of the Master Plan District. The UDC's second memo dug into the architectural design and integration aspects.

The Board asked why the boundaries do not align. Staff explained that, originally, the framework looked at a larger area for the A&I District. The likelihood of that happening with some of the smaller property owners seems slim, but how the Master Plan District interacts with its neighbors was one of the initial thoughts when drafting the framework.

Member Cooper joined the meeting at 6:18pm.

Staff discussed the function and enforceability of an UDF, also explaining that it serves as a "Neighborhood Plan Light", providing parameters for the Planning Board and UDC to review projects in designated areas. The design guidelines apply to both Master Plan Special Permits and individual buildings, while also serving as guidance for future development.

There was discussion regarding adjacent properties and how they could be addressed as part of this district. Staff suggested that language could be added to encourage voluntary inclusion. The Board agreed and stated that the document may have greater longevity in that way.

The Board asked about separating truck traffic from pedestrians. Staff explained that a rear alley might be possible on deeper blocks, but narrower parcels, such as #1, present challenges for truck access. This could be addressed at the Master Plan Special Permit level. The UDC noted that the current UDF lacks three-dimensional representations of building massing and scale, making it difficult to provide specific recommendations for building forms.

The UDC expressed that the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) is too prescriptive regarding civic spaces and streetscapes without providing specific dimensions or clear guidance on when deviations are acceptable. The Board asked for specific recommendations to address these concerns. Staff mentioned that they are aware of the need to revisit green space requirements and will continue to work on potential amendments.

There was discussion regarding responding to the developer's intention for the buildings in this district, while also incorporating the UDC's feedback regarding a variety in human scale and streetscape interaction. It was noted that the UDC's feedback was conceptual, trying to describe a unique character for the district to be friendly to entrepreneurs. The intention is to make the area feel integrated to what is around it, while also allowing people to feel welcome in it.

Staff explained that changes can be made to the document based on the UDC's recommendations. Staff can then bring the document back to the Planning Board for review and potential adoption.

Member McNeley exited the meeting at 7:00pm.

The Board recessed for five minutes and reconvened at 7:09pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 32 Webster Avenue

Staff explained that this hearing was previously opened and the Board made comments regarding the bedroom count and mix, bicycle parking, and the presentation of the additional design options that the applicant presented to the UDC. The applicant team submitted updated plans and will now present them.

The applicant team explained that the bike and trash room have been modified to combine the bike storage and the trash room using wheeler bins. This now allows for 34 bike parking spots. It also made the space much more efficient. The applicant team displayed the other design options presented to the UDC and during the Neighborhood Meetings. Some of the options included more traditional materials for Somerville, and other options included color modifications to distinguish the bays. A new option with more clapboard siding, wood, and standing seam metal siding was also shown. A final option showing clapboard and board and batten siding, with a less prominent cornice was also presented.

Staff noted that the bike room presented this evening looks slightly different than what was reviewed by Mobility. The Board noted that this could be addressed with a condition of approval.

Some Board members expressed interest in the two new design options (#4 and #5) presented this evening. There was a concern that option #5 might be too dark as a design. Other Board members noted that the intention should be to make the design look like it is a bunch of townhouses next to one another. The applicant team stated that they like the pointy balconies as a statement piece of the building but are not otherwise married to any of the designs presented. It was noted that one of the recommendations from the UDC was that all the materials be through color and so there is not much concern with the colors fading too much over time. There was agreement to allow the applicant to pursue options #4 and #5 with Planning Staff moving forward.

There was discussion regarding the requirement of one bike space per unit and the existing actual utilization in buildings. The Board noted an interest in allowing for enough space to store larger cargo and e-bikes. The Board also noted that there may be a distinction between this project which is so proximate to transit infrastructure, and a project $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the nearest rail station. There may be much more of a need for cargo bike capacity in the latter situation. Allowing for more bike parking in a multifamily building is better than not having it, in terms of forward thinking.

The applicant team explained that this is a just under 9,000 s.f. lot with a unique shape. The intention is to maximize for livability and habitability. The proposed unit mix could include more one bedrooms and studios, but trying to incorporate three bedrooms into this footprint would require the combining and stacking of units. This is a 29-unit project which, per the ordinance, does not require a 3-bedroom mix. The Board noted that it has pushed back on other projects to create additional larger, family-sized housing as this is what the City needs and wants in development. The Board expressed concern that the applicant is not looking to include even one 3-bedroom unit. The applicant team explained that if the project goes up to 30 units, it will be required to have 20% 3-bedroom units, making the project potentially infeasible. There is likely space within the building to include one 3-bedroom unit, but shoehorning one in is difficult. The Board noted that the City also has a great need for accessible, affordable units. If a 3-bedroom unit is not possible, the applicant could consider making at least one of the designated affordable units a Group 2 accessible unit.

Member McNeley rejoined the meeting at 8:00pm.

The Board stated that it would like to see some data regarding what unit mix types are needed and desired in the City.

The applicant team agreed to work on some of the items discussed this evening and come back to the Board at a later date.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0-1) with Member McNeley abstaining, to continue this hearing to 18 June 2026.

RESULT:	CONTINUED
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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.](#)