



City of Somerville  
**URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**24 MARCH 2026 MEETING MINUTES**

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on Zoom.

| NAME            | TITLE     | STATUS         | ARRIVED |
|-----------------|-----------|----------------|---------|
| Sarah Lewis     | Co-Chair  | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Estello Raganit | Co-Chair  | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Frank Valdes    | Member    | <i>Absent</i>  |         |
| Deborah Fennick | Member    | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Andrew Arbaugh  | Member    | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Tim Talun       | Member    | <i>Present</i> |         |
| Martin Pavlinic | Alternate | <i>Present</i> |         |

City staff present: Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

Estello Raganit, Co-Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:04pm and adjourned at 7:38pm.

**GENERAL BUSINESS: MEETING MINUTES**

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) approve the 24 February 2026 meeting minutes, as presented.

**OTHER BUSINESS: Arts & Innovation Urban Design Framework**

The Commission discussed that the intention of this framework is to welcome innovative organizations and entities. This would likely include startups and entrepreneurs who may be looking for an inexpensive or co-location space. The current language is very prescriptive about larger-scale lab and research entities and there could be more nuance considered.

The Commission noted that the language references half a dozen planning documents and a bibliography or links could be helpful in better navigating these callouts. In terms of the civic space, the document mentions this as a minimum size of 15,000 s.f. which, per the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO), makes it a neighborhood park. Most of the language seems to be a copy of the SZO language for a neighborhood park which feels a bit redundant. The language could instead call out what is different or special about this space. The documents note that the space needs to have a number of requirements which makes it difficult to determine what the priorities are for it.

Staff explained that the current document serves as design guidelines at the neighborhood plan level, which will overlay with existing district guidelines during future building and civic space reviews. More detailed civic space definitions would be refined during the master plan process.

There was discussion regarding the flood protection diagram, with Commissioners expressing confusion about its clarity and suggesting it should include elevation indicators to explain why certain areas need special attention due to low-lying terrain.

There was also discussion regarding the proposed 20' clear space intended as a fire lane in the civic space design. In terms of allowing vehicular traffic through the space, Staff suggested reviewing meeting notes to confirm the intended design approach. The discussion concluded with agreement that the space could potentially be closed off during events while remaining open at other times.

The Commission considered the design guidelines for building scale and human-scale elements in the district. There was mention of creating variation in massing, particularly on the lower floors; also using fenestration, doorways, and building projections to achieve a more engaging street presence. The Commission noted the importance of ground-level transparency and depth variation. There were examples given to show that even large buildings can maintain a human-scale through thoughtful ground-level design. There was a suggestion to create more and smaller scale variation in massing on the lower floors of the building as compared to the upper floors.

The Commission suggested language that the district seek opportunities to create unique and inspiring building elements that enhance the sense of wonder in the public realm. Also, variation in massing and façade treatments that reflects internal programmatic variation. Finally, to use quality materials and details which will endure visually over time, and which reward the intimate gaze.

Additionally, the Commission addressed the need for acoustic screening between commercial and residential areas and incorporating sustainability as a design driver. There was agreement to submit a follow-up memo to the Planning Board with these updates.

### **OTHER BUSINESS: Update on In-Person Meetings**

Staff explained that they are still waiting to hear information regarding the Tufts building use.

Staff explained that they have also started to review the zoning amendments that would be necessary to allow the Commission to have parity with other Boards and Commissions. These changes would allow the Commission to be entitled to vote on its own chair and officers, etc. This can be further discussed at the next meeting.

*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.](#)*