



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

18 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>	<i>Exited at 8:05pm</i>
Jahan Habib	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Michael McNeley	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Coralie Cooper	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Dan Bartman (Director of Planning Department); Alvaro Esparza (Planning Department); Kelly O’Laughlin (Planning Department); David Shapiro (City Attorney)

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm and adjourned at 8:54pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 222 Broadway

This item was previously continued to 16 July 2026.

PUBLIC HEARING: 120 Middlesex Avenue

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to continue this hearing to 16 July 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the 21 May 2026 meeting minutes.

RESULT:

APPROVED

OTHER BUSINESS: 29 Mystic LLC v. Stella Moon LLC Court Order Discussion

The City Attorney suggested that the Board hears briefly from both parties regarding the question from the court as to if Stella Moon LLC’s project violates the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) Section 7.4.7.D.IX., so that the project would require an additional waiver to be able to proceed lawfully. This must be reported back to the court no later than 30 July 2026.

The plaintiff/abutter’s representative explained that the scope of the remand from the court is very narrow. It asks the Board to consider a single provision within the Assembly Square Mixed-Use (ASMD) zoning district, Section

7.4.7.D.IX, regarding whether the open space referred to in this section is required to be accessible to the public. The language states that development surrounding open space should result in a net benefit to the space in terms of activation and public access. The 2025 Assembly Square Master Plan language makes it almost impossible to consider that the 25% open space for this requirement for the district includes an open space, such as purported in this case, which is a private roof deck on the sixth floor which is inaccessible to the public. The Neighborhood Plan was adopted in 2025 and expresses that there is currently a privacy problem in terms of open space in the district, as spaces feel private and uninviting. This rooftop deck would just continue that issue. In terms of physical requirements, there are provisions in the Master Plan that open spaces must be open along at least one street and feature multiple entrances. It also envisions a connected civic loop and targets 30% as the amount of land dedicated to civic spaces. Although this is a design guideline, the reference to the Master Plan and its emphasis on open space, should lead the Board to conclude that this section envisions the open space in question as being a publicly accessible benefit.

A representative for Stella Moon, LLC, explained that in a memo dated 28 February 2025, the OSPCD staff recommended that the Board approve the project by issuing four Special Permit waivers and Site Plan Approval. Staff understood Stella Moon would satisfy the SZO's open space requirement through the rooftop open space that would not be publicly available, yet it did not identify any need to obtain a waiver relating to this issue. After holding a hearing and considering all the evidence, the Board unanimously voted to issue the Special Permit waivers and a Site Plan Approval as requested. The owner of 29 Mystic Avenue filed suit in court claiming that both the OSPCD Staff and the Board got it wrong. Table 7.4.7 of the SZO identifies the open space requirement that applies to Stella Moon's project, and it states that the project must provide 25% open space. The term 'open space' as used in Table 7.4.7 is defined very broadly in Section 2-1 of the SZO to mean, "a ground level or upper story landscaped area, including, but not limited to, natural woodlands, yards, forecourts, courtyards, green roofs, and civic spaces." This definition imposes no requirement that open space be publicly available. Stella Moon is providing open space through a green roof, which is specifically allowed by the definition. Stella Moon is providing much more open space than is required. Therefore, no additional Special Permit waiver was needed. The guideline that 29 Mystic is relying on is only a guideline which uses the word "should." A Special Permit waiver cannot reasonably be required for a building design guideline that uses the term 'should.' Civic space is specifically defined as public space required of Master Plan projects; this is not a Master Plan project. There is no open space that can be provided on the small site other than on a rooftop.

The Board explained that the plaintiff's representative seems to be indicating that in the ASMD district, all open space is civic space. There is a plan for open and green space to be used cohesively throughout the district which will be publicly accessible, but there is a distinction in the way this is implemented. For example, in this case, it is implemented via green roofs. They asked how the plaintiff would propose for the green roof to be publicly accessible. In other districts, the Board has interpreted open space versus civic space as that not all open space is civic space, while all civic space is open space. Where privately owned, open space is intended to be used as civic space. If the Board had wanted the guidelines to be requirements, it would have made them so.

The plaintiff/abutter's representative asked the Board to consider that the guidelines should not be considered in a vacuum. It is difficult to square this development with what the Master Plan envisions. The plaintiff is not supposing that the public be invited up to the roof deck as this would be impractical. However, the Board should consider the kind of precedent this may set if the open space can be satisfied by a private roof deck. If developments like this that provide no public open space are allowed in succession, this would defeat the purpose of the Master Plan.

The Board noted that there is an expectation that there will be a sufficient amount of open space that is publicly accessible throughout the Assembly Square district. Staff did not identify that this item needed to be its own separate Special Permit but that does not mean that it does not warrant a second look. A representative for Stella Moon explained that there are many different types of property within the ASMD. This one is in the micro district. There is no indication that there is a requirement for civic space for small properties. In fact, that would be inconsistent with the SZO per Section 7.4.6 which applies to the Master Plan standards. To be eligible for that, there must either be two lots or 50,000+ s.f. and this imposes a 25% civic space requirement.

This is what the City Council wanted in drafting the code and this is consistent with the ASMD plan. For a small parcel like this, the only option for open space is on a rooftop. It does not make sense for there to be a requirement that the space be publicly available, or that the applicant must obtain a waiver. The way to encourage and require civic spaces is to set this forth in the code itself. That does not apply in this case.

The Board noted that what is being referenced is the Neighborhood Plan, not a Master Plan. There are also Master Plans that have been adopted for other parts of Assembly Square. This parcel is not one of them. The Neighborhood Plan that is being referenced, the 2025 version, was not adopted for 5.5 months after this case was decided. The representatives agreed with this clarification.

The Board recessed at 6:29pm to enter a Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee.

OTHER BUSINESS: Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee

- o Proposing an amendment to Section 2.1.1 of the Zoning Ordinance regarding Homeless Shelters (File# 26-0835)

The Board reconvened at 7:11pm.

OTHER BUSINESS: 29 Mystic LLC v. Stella Moon LLC Court Order Discussion

The Board continued its discussion on this item.

The Planning Director stated that the main aspect of this question is if a project in the ASMD is required to provide civic space due to a certain size versus another that is not because of its size. The words 'open space' will draw a relation to either civic space or open space, but the Board is required to parse the type and condition of space coming into existence and make a decision about when the design guidelines are applicable to projects. Article 2 of the SZO talks about word usage and is informative in making that decision. The standards are written as requirements, and the guidelines are written as suggestions or recommendations and are not always followed for every project because they do not apply to every project.

The Board polled its members as to the question of if Stella Moon's project violates some of the SZO in Section 7.4.7.D.IX, so that the project would require an additional waiver to be able to proceed lawfully. All members voted that they would like the original decision upheld, noting that an additional Special Permit request was not required. This was based on the discussion by Board members and clarified by Staff.

PUBLIC HEARING: 32 Webster Avenue

The applicant team explained that most of the changes made to the plan dealt with accessibility. New construction for a condominium use in Massachusetts requires all units to be Group 1 accessible. This project is proposing to increase that by including three (3) Group 2A units. These units have fully accessible bathrooms and kitchens with a full turning radius, clear space between the island and the rest of the kitchen, and ovens at a height that is fully accessible by wheelchair. The first Group 2A unit would be on the ground floor and fully accessible by an elevator. The other two (2) Group 2A units would be on the second floor. The intention is for these units to be designated as affordable. In terms of the bike room, the revised plans have added some additional bike parking spaces. Also, in terms of the design of the building, additional design options from the original UDC recommendation were previously shown to the Board and the applicant has agreed to use a more classic look that blends better with the

neighborhood. The applicant reviewed the floor plans and layout and determined that it would not be possible to include a three-bedroom unit in the building without removing a unit.

Some Board members noted that the City's immediate past chair of the Commission for Persons with Disabilities was dislocated from Somerville because she could no longer find an affordable, accessible unit that met her unique accessibility requirements. There are likely other individuals who are also struggling with the cross-section of affordability and the constraints on those units that are available, as well as the need for certain accessibility accommodations. The possibility of adding three (3) affordable condo units in the City that are also Group 2 accessible is a very strong contribution by the applicant team. Other Board members noted that, while this project seems to make a good balance with the Group 2 accessible units proposed, there likely needs to be a larger community discussion regarding how to effectuate the construction and availability of larger housing stock in the City.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the Site Plan Approval to develop an apartment building in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memo, the request to construct a mechanical penthouse that exceeds the maximum height in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-1), with Member Habib against, to approve with the conditions outlined in the Staff Memoranda, the request for a residential housing use in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Vice Chair Aboff recused herself from this item and exited the meeting at 8:05pm.

PUBLIC HEARING: 1 McGrath Highway

The applicant team explained that a hotel project for this site was previously approved in 2017 but stalled due to unforeseen environmental issues, which caused a redesign. In 2019, it was approved again, this time by the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) under the old zoning. Then the zoning changed, COVID hit, and a lab building was proposed and approved for 15 McGrath Hwy. The applicant then worked with the lab building on a joint project for the two properties. In 2023, both the ZBA and the Planning Board approved the hotel again. The ZBA granted a Hardship Variance and the Planning Board granted Site Plan Approval and two Special Permits. That approval envisioned a joint driveway for the two properties, with shared parking at 15 McGrath. The 15 McGrath lab building project started by digging a pit, which filled with water when they stopped work on the project.

The applicant team explained that the site is almost entirely paved with no stormwater controls and has been derelict for a long time. There is a large stone retaining wall behind the property which leads to the community path and the Green Line Extension beyond that. After its third approval of the hotel, in both Somerville and Cambridge, the build cannot currently move forward as approved. There can no longer be a shared driveway or shared parking, as the lab building at 15 McGrath is not currently moving forward. The applicant also cannot build the hotel close to the pit, because it is not structurally safe and there cannot be any shoring near it. The timing of these two projects, the lab building and the hotel, is no longer aligned. The applicant is currently proposing a separate driveway, moved to the other side of the property on the Cambridge side, and a smaller sized hotel. The applicant will still allow space for the ramp to go up to the top of the wall to the community path. Setting land

aside for that ramp moves the building to the left, but the pit on the other side moves the building to the right. Thus, the entire building will be reduced in size. The property is surrounded by commercial structures. Last night, the ZBA granted two Hardship Variances to allow for surface parking relief and parking lot landscaping relief. The Planning Board is being asked to approve a Major Revision of the prior Site Plan Approval, and two use Special Permits for the hotel use and for the formula business use.

The applicant team reviewed that the revised plans propose to use identical materials and a similar general layout of the building, with horizontal and vertical corrugated panels, oversized windows, wood accent panels, and dark trim and dark windows. This will be a very similar, six-story building. The main entry drive is now proposed to be located within Cambridge. The rear of the building will face the community path. The project was originally intended to have 199 keys, and a total of approximately 86,765 s.f., with 63,560 s.f. located in Somerville. The currently proposed hotel has 145 keys, and a total of approximately 62,646 s.f. of which 44,508 s.f. are located in Somerville. The revised plan still shows a dedicated reserved space for the future community path ramp. This is a 14' 5" wide path from the streetscape up to the top of the retaining wall. The retaining wall gets taller as it goes from Cambridge to Somerville, leading to the start of the path being located in Cambridge, where the wall is lower. This moves the building to the left, while the building is also moved to the right by the pit at 15 McGrath, so the building was reduced in size. At the location where the future ramp terminates at the rear of the property, the wall is approximately 12'-14' tall. The length of the ramp is such that it meets the slope requirement for a walkway, and so is not actually classified as a ramp. Thus, there are no requirements for landings. The walkway will be fully accessible. At the location where the property crosses into Somerville, the wall is approximately 20' tall. The team noted that the main entrance to the building will be situated along the east side of the building. There is a bi-directional access way off Monsignor O'Brien Highway, traversing to the back. There will be parking within both Cambridge and Somerville. There are currently 20 spaces located within the City of Somerville limits, and 13 parking spaces within the City of Cambridge. The site will provide for both long-term and short-term parking. The applicant worked with the City to create an approved Mobility Management Plan (MMP) that outlines the details.

The applicant team explained that the proposal includes extensive landscape planting measures along the street, along Monsignor O'Brien Highway, and as a buffer between 15 McGrath and 1 McGrath, with substantial plantings situated atop the retaining wall. The applicant will maintain the street trees along Monsignor O'Brien Highway. The site will have a combination of low shrubbery trees, medium trees, and large trees. The project meets the Green Score. There will be a net reduction in the overall impervious cover for the site, exceeding 3,600 s.f. The existing property is vastly paved, with little to no stormwater management. The proposed plan has a comprehensive stormwater management system, which will collect roof water, as well as treating the surface runoff within the parking area, and store and infiltrate that with an overflow connection to the municipal system within the city of Cambridge.

The applicant team also noted that the proposal will widen the sidewalk at McGrath Highway, part of which will be on the hotel's property. This is a contaminated site, which the applicant will be working to take care of.

Regarding the Major Revision to the prior Site Plan Approval, the applicant team explained that their contention is that the project is essentially the same. This will still be a hotel with a similar design and materials. Certain aspects had to be altered due to no fault of the applicant but rather due to inaction of the developer at 15 McGrath. Some of the conditions in the 2023 Planning Board decision must be removed or revised to eliminate references to the 15 McGrath joint development and the shared driveway and parking. The applicant agrees with the proposed conditions in the Staff Memo, dated 12 June 2026. The hotel still meets the requirements of Site Plan Approval, as was the case in 2023. The applicant team stated that this will activate a long vacant site, bring in lodging and meals taxes to the City, provide a gateway to the City of Somerville along the McGrath/O'Brien corridor, provide space for the community path ramp, provide landscaping on an almost entirely paved lot, provide stormwater controls where there are currently none, facilitate the goals of SomerVision with a transit-oriented neighborhood infill development, make Somerville a more attractive place to be, and adapt a property to the City's changing needs. This project will facilitate the goals of the High-Rise (HR) zoning district to accommodate development with an intense mix of multi-story, mixed-use, and commercial buildings, and serve the neighborhood, community, and region by providing jobs. The building meets all the dimensional requirements for a general building in the HR

district. The team also noted that it will improve transportation, as the applicant has entered into a robust MMP with the City. This project also meets the requirements of a hotel use Special Permit. The hotel use will make the site cleaner, bring in taxes, create a gateway to the City, provide landscaping, improve the look and feel of the McGrath/O'Brien corridor, and meet the goals of SomerVision in the HR district. There are other hotels in this corridor, but they are in Cambridge.

The applicant team explained that this hotel is geared towards a younger guest. Moxy Hotels are known for having a lively, exuberant, fun personality. They attract a youthful-thinking, outgoing guest who wants to experience a new location. Each Moxy is unique. There are no mandatory uniforms, no menus, no mandatory architecture or decor. They offer gathering spaces where local neighbors and guests can relax and socialize. Moxy Hotels are open to the public for food and beverages, breakfast and dinner.

The applicant team stated that the requested Special Permit for the hotel use will allow for the applicant to provide space for the ramp and widen the sidewalk. The drop-off area for the site will not interfere with traffic on the McGrath/O'Brien corridor and will improve the public realm with landscaping visible from the community path above. The visibility of the parking area will be blocked by the building in the front and the wall in the back. The project meets the requirements for a formula business Special Permit, because it meets the goals of SomerVision and the HR district. While Moxy is a formula business, there is only one other one in New England. The hotel embraces the surrounding industrial style of the area and will be unique. The applicant team noted that this site has been vacant for a very long time, and this proposal will activate the site, the neighborhood, and the area overall.

In response to a question from the Board, the applicant team explained that there is a defined separation between the path and the drop-off area. The drop-off area is a dedicated 22' wide area. There will be a curb and a narrow grass strip, and then the walkway to the community path. The ramp will terminate at the sidewalk. It will be elevated to the sidewalk level and then gain elevation as it gets to the back of the property.

Chair Capuano opened for public testimony.

Lynn Weissman (Friends of the Community Path) - stated that the City has been working with this developer for years and the applicant has been generous in terms of holding space for the walkway. Since the Planning Board decision, what has changed is that the developer was originally planning to complete a full design of the ramp, along with funding and a full execution of the ramp. At this point, due to the financial hardships, the City is now recommending that a feasibility study be completed and that only a 25% design funding and completion be carried out by the developer. Thus, there is no later design funding or construction funding to build the ramp. There is no proponent to take on the funding for the full design and construction of the ramp. Everyone wants the ramp, but there is currently no one to complete it. It would be nice if the developer at 15 McGrath could be fined for the blight of the property. This funding or another contingency could then be used for the ramp. One of the issues with the ramp being on Cambridge land is that a City Solicitor needs to sign off on the public right of way easement and deed restrictions, and it is not clear if that would be the Somerville or Cambridge solicitor.

Rachel Burckardt (Friends of the Community Path and Friends of the Grand Junction Path) – stated that, while the applicant team correctly identified that the ramp would connect to bike lanes on McGrath, there are also plans to connect across McGrath Highway through the Gold Star Mothers Park to a cycle track/sidewalk on Gore Street, which would then connect to the Grand Junction path. In the grand scheme, this would connect two path systems in Cambridge and Somerville together. It is important that this is not the missing link. The developer has been great in working on this item. The request is to see if the Board can do anything to foster the certainty of this ramp eventually being built; to make sure it becomes a reality.

Tori Antonino (65 Boston Street) – stated that this development is asking for a Hardship Variance for surface parking. There are constraints of building underground parking, as the developer no longer has a partner with the lab building. However, the City worked hard to not have surface parking in its zoning. In fact, there is mandated underground parking for certain overlay areas. Surface parking, aside from not being absorptive, is very hot. She

does not want the City to start making exceptions to not having underground parking. Many of these developments hit the Green Score but do not provide the type of green the City was hoping for. The City, and especially this area, need a bit more green space. She would support this development if the developers would install a solar structure on top of the surface parking that is exposed.

Seeing no additional public comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony. The written comment period was left open.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Member Habib, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 16 July 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

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.](#)