



City of Somerville

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

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

TO: Zoning Board of Appeals
FROM: OSPCD Staff
SUBJECT: 180 Somerville Ave, ZP26-000056
POSTED: August 28, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Continuance

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 Special Permit application submitted for 180 Somerville Ave, 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 is still not complete, and is scheduled for a public hearing on September 2, 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.

LEGAL NOTICE

Seth Anderson seeks to expand the existing formula business into the neighboring vacant storefront, which requires a Special Permit for the expansion of a pre-existing nonconforming formula business.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

Seth Anderson is proposing to expand the existing retail use space at 180 Somerville Ave (Target) into the vacant storefront next door by removing the interior wall between the spaces. The existing retail space consists of 94,000 sq ft. The vacant storefront is currently 40,000 sq ft, meaning it will result in a 134,000 sq ft retail space.

BACKGROUND

180 Somerville Ave is located in a Transit Area in the Commercial Business (CB) zoning district in the Union Square neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor J.T. Scott. Expanding the square footage of an existing non-conforming formula business requires a Special Permit in the CB district. The Zoning Board of Appeals is the decision-making authority for all discretionary or administrative permits required for the CB zoning district.

This proposal currently has outstanding staff reviews from Mobility and PSUF. The proposed addition of retail square footage above 10,000 sq. ft triggers a Transportation

Impact Study requirement. The Mobility Division also recommends that the Board condition the Applicant to prepare a Transportation Access Plan (TAP) as a requirement of a complete application for the proposed alteration of the Retail Sales use. Given the size of the site and anticipated volume of trucks entering and exiting the site, the TAP is a critical document for evaluating site access and compliance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. In addition, Per Table 6.4.16 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Applicant must provide new short-term and long-term bicycle parking equivalent to 1 space per 1,000 square feet and 0.1 space per 1,000 square feet, respectively, for the proposed alteration of the Retail Sales use. To mitigate the anticipated impact of added vehicle trips to the site generated by the proposed alteration of the Retail Sales use, the Mobility Division also recommends that the Board condition the Applicant to provide an on-site location for a City-owned and City-provided Bluebikes station.

According to PSUF, documentation proving Green Score compliance has not yet been properly provided. There is an error in the applicant's current calculation and documentation for credit for their tree preservation has not yet been provided.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 2 Councilor J.T. Scott and the applicant on May 4, 2026, via the Zoom meeting platform and in-person. The applicant answered questions about ownership of the building, storm water drainage, landscaping, and disruption caused by construction.

ANALYSIS

A Special Permit for a non-conforming formula business is required for this proposal. Under SZO 9.1.7.c.i, occupancy of any single commercial space greater than 10,000 square feet in leasable floor area by a retail sales use requires a Special Permit. Under SZO 9.1.7d, formula businesses require a Special Permit. The property is an existing nonconforming formula business, as the existing retail sales use exceeds the 10,000 square feet threshold established by 9.1.7.c.i, and the existing use is also a formula business. Expansion of this use by 40,000 square feet constitutes an alteration of an existing nonconformity as per SZO 14.1.6.c.ii. Per SZO 14.1.6.c.i, the alteration of a nonconforming use within a structure may be permitted by Special Permit.

As mentioned previously, this application has outstanding reviews by the Mobility and PSUF divisions. Comments from both divisions have been incorporated into the conditions so that these outstanding requirements may be addressed if the Board chooses to approve this application.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Zoning Board of Appeals 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.

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 extent and nature of the proposed alteration.
4. The ability of conforming alterations to meet the demonstrated need of the Applicant.
5. Consistency of the proposed alterations with the evolution of neighboring structures.
6. The impact of the alteration to the neighborhood when compared to the existing nonconforming use.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

Special Permit

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

At this time, staff cannot determine whether or not this project supports the goals laid out in SomerVision 2040, the City's Comprehensive Master Plan, including the following:

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

The intent of the CB zoning district is, in part: "To maintain commercial activities that are primarily accessed by motor vehicles."

At this time, staff cannot determine if it achieves this intent.

3. *The extent and nature of the proposed alteration.*

At this time staff cannot evaluate this criteria.

4. *The ability of conforming alterations to meet the demonstrated need of the Applicant.*

At this time staff cannot evaluate this criteria.

5. *Consistency of the proposed alterations with the evolution of neighboring structures.*

The use is consistent with the zoning district and is not increasing the footprint of the existing building.

6. The impact of the alteration to the neighborhood when compared to the existing nonconforming use.

At this time staff cannot make this comparison

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit expand an existing non-conforming formula business greater than 10,000 sq ft., Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Validity

1. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Public Record

2. 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.
3. 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.

Mobility

4. A compliant Transportation Impact Study must be approved by the Mobility division prior to the issuance of a building permit.
5. A compliant Transportation Access Plan must be approved by the Mobility division prior to the issuance of a building permit.
6. The applicant must submit compliant plans for bike parking prior to the issuance of a building permit.
7. The applicant is required to provide an on-site location for a City-owned and City-provided Bluebikes station, the location of which will be determined by Mobility.

Trees and Landscaping

8. The applicant will submit landscape plans that are compliant with Green Score requirements prior to the issuance of a building permit.