



City of Somerville  
**PLANNING BOARD**  
City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**20 AUGUST 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>Absent</i>  |                         |
| Luc Schuster    | Alternate  | <i>Present</i> | <i>Exited at 7:58pm</i> |
| Lynn Richards   | Member     | <i>Present</i> |                         |
| Coralie Cooper  | Alternate  | <i>Present</i> |                         |

City staff present: Alvaro Esparza (Planning Division); Kit Luster (Planning Division)

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm and adjourned at 8:27pm.

**PUBLIC HEARING: 222 Broadway**

*(continued from 16 July 2026)*

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 3 September 2026.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

**PUBLIC HEARING: 6 Wheatland Street**

*(continued from 6 August 2026)*

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 3 September 2026.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

**PUBLIC HEARING: 32-40 White Street**

*(continued from 6 August 2026)*

The applicant team explained that they were waiting for some guidance and clarity through a dialogue with the City regarding how to continue to make this a viable project by including a three-bedroom plan as discussed with the Board, but this has yet to be received.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 3 September 2026.

**RESULT:**

**CONTINUED**

## **PUBLIC HEARING: 120 Middlesex Avenue**

*(continued from 6 August 2026)*

The applicant team explained that continuances have been accepted five times in order to continue to work with various departments. The plan is now at a level of technical updates that the team is proud of. The applicant purchased the permitted site which was approved for roughly the same square footage in 2020, and then, on technical issues, a Major Amendment was filed which allowed the Board to participate again. The Site Plan Approval process was started about eight months ago. The applicant team stated that all the departments are in support. This will be a great amenity for Assembly Row, as it introduces a research use. The applicant supports and has no issue with the conditions as set forth.

The applicant team explained that this will become a key building in what has been referred to as the Gateway to Assembly's Life Science Corridor. This is a development that aims to revitalize and transform an underutilized area. The team has collaborated most closely with Planning, Mobility, and Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) to accommodate requests such as relocating parking off Cummings Street, pulling the corner of the building back, adding a 12' wide multi-use path, and revising the Cummings Street streetscapes for the future of a one-way road. The project will also bring improvement to the Middlesex Avenue streetscape for pedestrians and cyclists. The proposed building is 19 stories tall, with 16 occupiable floors. The zoning height is 259' 6", with 596,000 GFA commercial lab and office space, and floor plates at about 35,000 GFA. All of the floors are capable of being a lab space.

The Board asked what could happen if lab tenants are not able to be found. The applicant team explained that the building is designed for lab and office currently. The building could swing to be all office but is capable of all lab use.

The applicant team stated that there will be 5.5 levels of a below-grade parking that can accommodate about 520 spaces. The building will be LEED Platinum certifiable. The proposed façade combines glass and metal panels in a layered pattern. The composition extends over the first mechanical penthouse level. The façade also sweeps around the corner at Cummings in one continuous gesture, responding to the optic geometry of the intersection. The south end of the building has a unique feature with a desirable outdoor amenity for all tenants. The building envelope option was selected after discussion with the Urban Design Commission (UDC). The design establishes a clear distinction between the base, middle, and top of the building, as prescribed in the zoning guidelines. There will be parallel parking along the curb line of Middlesex, with a drop-off/loading space at the entry. There will be a street curb with a raised, protected bike lane and a permeable paver strip. There will be a line of canopy trees along the edge, working with a mix of native, diverse species in discussions with PSUF on the tree selections. There will be 8' wide planting beds consisting of plant material that will be experienced from the pedestrian streetscape level. The plan shows linear benches that will be precast in a wood combination to make the street edge inviting, along with trash receptacles, which have been recently added at the request of PSUF. There will be visitor bike parking along the edge, and streetlights located so that there will not be conflicts with the street trees. The introduction of the multiuse path will run most of the pedestrian width. In terms of the reconfiguration of Cummings Street, the plan shows the introduction of canopy trees along the area.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. Seeing no public comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board noted that the *Boston Globe* has reported that the Boston area, not just the City, has about 30%-35% empty lab space which is quite a lot of capacity. The applicant team stated that the building will not sit empty. There is still optimism that lab uses will come back. Obtaining the entitlement is the first critical step and the project can then work to pivot quickly as needed. An office tenant could be considered, with the lab systems reengineered to accommodate this within the footprint. If there was an office-only user that this building was

being built for, the applicant would leave it to their discretion whether to build the plans as they are with a lab capacity, or whether to redesign to meet an office standard.

The Board suggested leaving the written comment period open until 28 September 2026 at 9am and that the Board continue to consider this proposal for another two weeks.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 3 September 2026.

|                |
|----------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b> |
|----------------|

|                  |
|------------------|
| <b>CONTINUED</b> |
|------------------|

### **PUBLIC HEARING: 8 Medford Street**

The applicant team explained that this property is in a Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district. The proposal is for a 4-story mixed-use building, with 18 residential units and a first floor commercial space. This is located on a pedestrian street, and any potential tenants will have to comply with the requirements of a pedestrian street. At this time, the applicant team does not have a clear indication who a tenant would be for the site. There is no parking on the site. Of the 18 residential units, 3.6 of them will be affordable. The team stated that Mobility is supportive of the request not to have parking on the site. Moreover, they are supportive of the proposal to have a loading zone in the front of the building. There have been several neighborhood meetings; one in October 2021, where traffic was a question; one on 27 June 2022, where the traffic study was discussed; and one on 13 March 2023, to discuss the UDC recommendation.

The applicant team explained that, from Warren Street, there will be a residential entry, trash area, and underground transformer vault. Going toward the corner of Medford and Warren Streets, there will be commercial entries along Medford Street, bike room access, and emergency exit access near the train tracks, which cross Medford Street, and lead directly to the bike path.

The applicant team reviewed the at-grade landscape plan and green roof plan. The main goals are to enhance the pedestrian experience in the public realm on the two streetscapes, and to support the proposed residential units on the site by designing a patio and greenscape on the roof area. The building facades facing the streets are set back approximately 5.5' from the Medford Street property line and between 6'-8' from the property line on Warren Street. This gives a full width of setback for a total of a minimum 12' wide streetscape area from the curb line to the building façade. As a result of those setbacks, the applicant team will be able to plant four new shade trees along the curb lines. They are also proposing four bike racks for short-term bike parking for eight bikes along the furnishing zone. The applicant will incorporate permeable unit pavers into the furnishing zone as well to help infiltrate stormwater and support the street tree plantings. This design incorporates all of the City's streetscape design elements and dimensions as required, including things such as structural soils around all of the trees underneath the pavement. A new concrete paved pedestrian sidewalk will be built, which will be wider and safer, as it will be set back from the curb line behind the trees at a minimum of 8' wide for both streetscapes. Currently, there are two curb cuts onto the site, one from Warren and one from Medford. With the reconstruction of the sidewalks, these curb cuts will be closed and eliminated, making it safer for pedestrians. In the green spaces along the rear and side, the applicant team has incorporated native, shade-tolerant, and climate-resilient plantings to help enhance biodiversity. In the slightly enlarged green space at the rear, a rain garden is proposed with wet-tolerant plantings which will also help mitigate stormwater. On the roof, there will be a patio deck area on the north side of the head house, which affords a bit of shade from the structure. Surrounding the deck is a minimum 6" in depth, extensive vegetated green roof. Some lightweight planters are included to help divide the deck into several zones. This plan achieves the required Green Score.

The applicant team stated that the gross area of the building which includes the basement, is approximately 20,500 s.f. There are six studio units, nine one-bedroom units, and three two-bedroom units proposed. There is

commercial space proposed on the corner of the two streets. In terms of materiality, the proposal includes masonry and brick in a mix of grays and then lap siding with some accent cornices and details in a fiber cement bronze color. There are heavier materials and full masonry proposed for the upper floor, and lighter material with lap siding for the lower floors, slicing the rest of the façade with the overhanging base of lighter material and bronze accents. The plans show overhanging bays with overhanging canopies and cable rods. The height is proposed at 47’.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony.

Marc Truant (32 Warren Street, Cambridge) - stated that he has been expressing in community meetings how important the end of Warren Street is in terms of commuter traffic. It is very important that there be two lanes at the very end of Warren Street, where it goes onto Medford Street. He does not believe any of the traffic studies that have been done have been appropriate.

Seeing no additional comments, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

In response to a question from the Board, Staff stated that residents of this building would be eligible for residential parking permits, as the property is outside the transit area, and the traffic commission regulation would not be applicable to this development. It is not in the transit walkshed. The applicant team noted that there is currently space for three parking spaces at the bend of Warren Street. There is not much room for on street parking along Warren Street. Some renters do not have vehicles, and the building is geared toward those renters. The Board expressed concern with where the vehicles will go, if the 18 renters do have cars. The applicant team stated that the proposed units are smaller and will be rentals. The Board asked about a condition that the project would be exempt from residential parking stickers in the area. The applicant team stated that this would be considered further.

Some Board members stated that in Union Square, Boynton, and some of the other master plan districts, it is believed that underground parking and parking in general were included to be accessible to the neighborhood. The Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) requires that parking be unbundled in order to create opportunities to not require parking and to lease the parking at commercial rates. The question was raised if long-term leases are available to help support the need. Staff stated that they would need to look further into this.

Other Board members noted the importance of offering choices to residents. Artificially imposing no residential parking stickers on residents may not be appropriate.

The Board noted that the written comment period will be left open until 11 September 2026 at 9am.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to continue this hearing to 17 September 2026.

|                |
|----------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b> |
|----------------|

|                  |
|------------------|
| <b>CONTINUED</b> |
|------------------|

*The Board took a brief recess and reconvened at 7:57pm.*

*Member Schuster exited the meeting.*

## **OTHER BUSINESS: Board Jurisdiction Zoning Amendment**

Staff explained that part of the reason for this amendment was the Mayor's budget goal of permitting streamlining for FY2027. This is believed to be in line with the budgeting goal, Staff is proposing a zoning amendment to consolidate the review of Site Plan Approval and Special Permits.

Also, in the past, there were three statutory criteria that a Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) would need to weigh a Hardship Variance related to soil conditions, shape, and topography of a lot; whether a hardship exists, financial or otherwise; and whether the requested relief would be a detriment to the public good. Now there is one test - the practical difficulty test. The ZBA must consider whether a variance provides benefits to the appellant or to the petitioner. This includes weighing the interest in supporting the production of housing against the detriment to the public health, safety, and welfare of the neighborhood. The ZBA may also consider the soil conditions, shape, topography of a lot, the financial hardship, or whether the practical difficulty was self-created as part of the test. Use variances for residential housing can also be obtained, as long as the ZBA finds that the variance is in the public interest. Variances are now valid for two years instead of one. The amendment would include streamlining permits by transferring Site Plan Approval and Special Permit jurisdiction from the ZBA to the Planning Board.

The Board noted that pre-2013 or so, the Planning Board acted as an advisory board to the ZBA, whereby permits for which the ZBA was the permit-granting authority, would go before the Planning Board first. In addition to its own agenda, the Planning Board would take those items up and have a public meeting, similar to a public hearing. This took up a good portion of the Board's docket, and it was double review. The Planning Board's own work was sidelined by things that a different board was the permit-granting authority for. The process was changed at some point after this to eliminate the double review. The Planning Board's work has exploded over the last 5-8 years. Concern was expressed that streamlining the process could weigh on the Planning Board significantly. A number of years ago, the Planning Board changed its policies and procedures to allow for five agenda items to be heard per night, and nothing new to be heard after 9pm. This process works because there are multiple boards handling various permits and the work can be divided amongst those who are experts in different areas.

Staff stated that they would look further into this for further discussion at a future meeting.

### **OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration Open Discussion**

None at this time.

*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.](#)*