



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

3 SEPTEMBER 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>	
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Coralie Cooper	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Alvaro Esparza (Planning Division); Fiona DiMartino (Deputy Director of the Planning Division); Kit Luster (Planning Division)

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm and adjourned at 7:48pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the 16 July 2026 meeting minutes, as amended.

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

OTHER BUSINESS: Board Jurisdiction Zoning Amendment

Staff explained that the proposal for the amendment is to significantly evaluate how to streamline permitting efforts across City operations. There is a directive from the Administration, ISD, and the Economic Development Bond Bill at the State level to improve permitting. A core goal is expanding uses and modifications of structures to be by-right in accordance with the effort.

The Board asked how many cases will be transferred from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) to the Planning Board. The Planning Board seems to be being put in a position where it is being asked to take on more for less. Staff stated that an analysis of the projects that were permitted by the ZBA over the last two fiscal years, found that the Planning Board would be asked to consider five additional permits under its jurisdiction based on the new rules. The ZBA will also see additional cases based on updates to the Zoning Act.

The Board asked for data regarding how much time will be saved on the average permitting process through the proposed amendments. Staff stated that this could be further addressed during the Joint Hearing with the Land Use Committee in a couple of weeks.

PUBLIC HEARING: 222 Broadway

(continued from 20 August 2026)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to continue this hearing to 17 September 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 32-40 White Street

(continued from 20 August 2026)

The applicant team explained that they were able to redesign the garden level of the building by moving some walls around. It was initially thought that they would not be able to have any movable walls due to the stacking nature of the building and some of the structural elements. However, there are workable floor plans which incorporate a three-bedroom unit, as discussed with the Board, into the garden level of the building. The unit will have a walkout outdoor patio off of the living room. It is the only unit in the building that would have its own outdoor private space. All of the bedrooms are conforming to the dimensional requirements for bedrooms in Somerville. This proposal allows for the original unit count of 29 units to remain, and this will still include the enhanced Level 2 accessible units as originally proposed. The three-bedroom unit will be offered to the inclusionary program as well. The building is fully conforming in every other dimensional sense, with the exception of the head house, which needed to be raised for accessibility to the common shared roof deck area. There are no other height, size, setback, or other dimensional reliefs requested. There are still seven two-bedroom units in the proposed plan.

The Board thanked the applicant for redesigning the space in a creative manner that created a three-bedroom unit.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with the conditions laid out in the Staff Memo and as demonstrated in the plan set presented this evening, the Site Plan Approval in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with the conditions laid out in the most recent Staff Memo as well as demonstrated in the site plan presented by the applicant this evening, the maximum height Special Permit in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district with the recommended conditions as described.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with the conditions shown in the most recent Staff Memo and as demonstrated by the site plan shown by the applicant this evening, the residential Special Permit in the Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 120 Middlesex Avenue

(continued from 20 August 2026)

The applicant team explained that there was previously a question about the Green Score, which was submitted.

The Board asked the applicant team for consideration at a later stage if this ends up being an office tenant building rather than a lab user with some office occupancy, to dial down the systems for a flexible permitting scenario for the lab building. High energy use intensity would presumably be detrimental to the performance and, at an operational level, a huge waste of energy. The applicant team noted that consideration of efficiency, based on potential use of the building, is a highest priority and will remain so.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve, with the conditions in the most recent Staff Memo, the Site Plan Approval in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use (ASMD) zoning district.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 8 Medford Street

(continued from 20 August 2026)

This item was previously continued to 17 September 2026.

PUBLIC HEARING: 6 Wheatland Street

(continued from 20 August 2026)

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to continue this hearing to 17 September 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 365 Somerville Avenue

The applicant team explained that the request is for Conditions #1 and #2 from the 25 June 2020 Planning Board decision and DRA #2020-0125, to be removed and, accordingly, for the plans to be minimally revised for the dental office which occupies both of the condo units at 365 and 369 Somerville Avenue. These are adjoining storefront condo units on the first floor of a larger building. The current conditions require that all the storefront windows maintain transparency, with the exception of conforming display areas for art displays, and that any artistic displays shall be rotated on a quarterly basis. On both the left and right sides are community art spaces, and behind this is a dental operation. The original decision from the Planning Board under the old zoning was one decision for both addresses, but there are now two applications as the addresses are in the system separately. The dental practice has been at this location for about five years now. It is doing well but having to deal with various space constraints. The applicant team noted that the Office Manager is currently working in the hallway because of the large art display which is taking over the space where the office would normally go. One of the operating rooms is very small and hard to work in without bumping into equipment, walls, cabinets, and a large display area. As part of the proposal, some of the art space would become an office and the operating room would be expanded. Removing these conditions does not prevent the building from still complying with the Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) requirement for the building, due to another ACE use in the building, which meets the required 5% of gross leasable commercial floor area by itself. There are six commercial units in this building. The dental practice proposes having an approximately 4' tall privacy screen for the operatory space atop an existing display case, which is about 1.5' tall. The office space, instead of being a closed-off art space, will be a glass area looking into the office space, and the glass would still remain at the 365 address. Both of these areas of the

storefront will have more transparency along the streetscape because the new office space will be opened up for a view into the interior. This provides for more activity along the pedestrian street, as required.

The applicant team explained that the two display areas have a real impact on how the business functions. This is not about avoiding the aesthetic requirements, but about making practical use of very limited interior space for the employees and patients. On the office side, removing the display area will create a completely unobstructed view from the sidewalk, directly into the office. This will actually be more transparent than what currently exists, while giving the office manager a proper working space. On the treatment room side, patient privacy is very important. The proposal is an approximately 4' high interior privacy panel set above the 1.5' display case, behind the existing storefront glass. This is so that a patient receiving treatment is not visible from the sidewalk. There are no changes proposed to the exterior, windows, façade, or storefront. The applicant team stated that the request is not something that will change the character of Union Square.

Chair Capuano opened public testimony. Seeing none, Chair Capuano closed public testimony.

The Board asked about the depth between the screen and the window. The applicant team stated that this is 1.5'. The Board stated that this is more than enough space to maintain community artwork that is flat and that can be adhered to the backside of the privacy screen. The applicant team suggested decorating the screen in some way. There have been some issues with the rotation of the artwork, and challenges with accessing the area through the operatory space. Some Board members stated that the intention is to meet the needs of the local business, while also meeting the needs of the rest of the community at the ground floor level. The applicant team stated that they have been searching for artists all the time and having difficulty. Other Board members noted that it could be a burden on the business to have to find and replace art in the building every three months. If there is a public good for having the art, it should potentially fall on the City to provide the art. The Board stated that having shallow art in one of the two windows is a potential compromise. It is important to continue to preserve art storefronts in this area.

The Board suggested that this could be art, as provided by the Somerville Arts Council, or a visual display of some sort so that passersby do not see simply a blank privacy screen. The City could develop a partnership with businesses, if requirements are placed on them through conditions. A suggestion was made for there to be a display of art to be organized by the Somerville Arts Council or a similar organization on whatever schedule they see fit, or, if such a program is not available, an alternative visual display relevant to the community be installed and updated every three months. Some Board members stated that they would like to see exact verbiage and additional research to the Somerville Arts Council prior to approval. A majority of the Board did not find this to be necessary and agreed that the applicant should make a quarterly outreach to the Somerville Arts Council, or similar organization for art for the display. If this cannot be obtained, the applicant should post a visual display with other types of art or community information.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-1), with Member McNeley against, to approve with the conditions as modified this evening, the request to remove conditions to previously issued special permit DRA #2020-0125.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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PUBLIC HEARING: 369 Somerville Avenue

This item was addressed as part of the previous agenda item.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-1), with Member McNeley against, to approve with the conditions as modified this evening, the request to remove conditions to previously issued special permit DRA #2020-015.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration Open Discussion

The Board did not discuss this topic at this 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.](#)