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: October 30, 2026

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

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. Since the public hearing on September 2, 2026, the applicant's Landscape Plans have been reviewed by the division of Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF), who have confirmed compliance with Green Score standards. The applicant has also submitted a revised Transportation Access Plan (TAP) and Transportation Impact Study (TIS), which has been reviewed, approved, and deemed to be compliant by the Mobility Division

The link to the memo published for the September 2, 2026 meeting can be found here.

LEGAL NOTICE

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

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. In their narrative, the applicant states that the new additional space will be used primarily to store additional stock.

BACKGROUND

180 Somerville Ave is located in a Transit Area in the Commercial Buisness (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 buisness 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.

The proposed addition of retail square footage above 10,000 sq. ft triggers a Transportation Impact Study (TIS) as a submittal requirement. The applicant has submitted a TIS, which has been reviewed and approved by the Mobility Division. The Mobility Division also suggested that the applicant submit a Transportation Access Plan (TAP), so that the applicant could demonstrate their plans to address the anticipated increase in delivery vehicles on the property this proposal is likely to cause. The applicant's TAP has been reviewed and approved by the Mobility Division.

In addition, Per Table 6.4.16 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Applicant will 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. The Mobility Division has approved of the applicant's bicycle parking plan included in the TAP.

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 buisness 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 buisness, 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.

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.

Staff also believes that this project meets the broader intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, including the following:

- Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.
- Prioritize commercial development until the number of jobs in Somerville is equal to the number of working residents.

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.”

3. The extent and nature of the proposed alteration.

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. The footprint of the existing building will remain the same.

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

Because the business is a pre-existing formula business over 10,000 sq ft, any increase in the use would require a Special Permit. Therefore, a conforming version of this proposal would not be possible.

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.

The proposal is intended to increase stock space in the building, keeping the footprint and retail space the same. This may result in increased deliveries to the building. However, the Mobility Division has reviewed and approved of the applicant's Transportation Impact Study and Transportation Access Plan.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit expand an existing non-conforming formula buisness 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 submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

Mobility

1. The Applicant and/or property owner shall implement the transportation demand management measures described in the Transportation Impact Study (TIS) approved by the Mobility Division on October 29, 2026.
2. The Applicant and/or property owner shall implement the transportation demand management measures described in the Transportation Access Plan (TAP) approved by the Mobility Division on October 28, 2026.

Trees and Landscaping

3. Contractor shall take all necessary precautions to avoid damaging any tree to remain, including trees on abutting properties, in the right-of-way, and along existing island planting to remain.

4. To preserve the structural integrity and health of any trees to remain (including trees on abutting properties), applicant shall establish a Tree Protection Zone at the dripline of each tree at a minimum (the dripline is the outside edge of the tree branch tips). The Tree Protection Zone will be established using a chain-link, wire-mesh, or wooden fence, which must be installed prior to any work and must be maintained throughout construction and the fence must comply with regulations set forth by the city's division of Parks and Urban Forestry.