

May 26, 2021

Rebecca Cooper, Senior Planner
City of Somerville
Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143
rcooper@somervillema.gov

**RE: 31 Tufts Street Project
Site Plan Approval Submission – Civic Space/Pocket Park
Project Narrative**

Dear Ms. Cooper:

E3 Development LLC, as Applicant, is providing this Project Narrative to accompany the Site Plan Approval submission for the Pocket Park proposed as part of the 31 Tufts Street redevelopment project. Applicant seeks Site Plan Approval to construct a Civic Space (the Pocket Park component of the project), as required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

Project Overview

In partnership with the City of Somerville, E3 Development LLC is leading the redevelopment of the 13,000 s.f. City-owned parcel at 31 Tufts Street in East Somerville. The proposed project will create 16 units of new affordable rental housing as well as approximately 5,000 s.f. of new, publicly accessible open space to serve the local community. E3 Development, a certified WBE, was selected by the City of Somerville as developer for the project in 2019 as part of an RFP process. The project will deliver a number of community priorities identified in the RFP, including housing designed to meet the needs of different household types and a broad range of incomes, highly sustainable design features, and high-quality open space that contributes to a sense of place for the neighborhood.



Aerial view of 31 Tufts Street parcel.

Rendering of the proposed 31 Tufts Street redevelopment



Community Process

The development team has led a collaborative process with OSPCD and neighbors to inform design decisions for the 31 Tufts Street project. The 2-year engagement process has primarily focused on the design of the project's open space feature, which was a priority in the City's RFP and also for neighborhood residents. Early on, the development team engaged residents in a design charrette help illustrate trade-offs between building, parking, and open space.

To inform further the design of the 5,000 s.f. open space feature, the design team conducted a survey of parks, playgrounds and other civic spaces within a ¼ mile and ½ mile radius of the 31 Tufts Street site.

The following were conclusions from this process:

- Due to the site's proximity to neighborhood schools, local residents already have several opportunities for active recreation but fewer opportunities for passive recreation.
- Neighbors expressed a desire for a more contemplative space with trees and other landscape features.
- Neighbors generally preferred the opportunity to have more open space on the site, rather than to create parking for the new apartment units proposed as part of the 31 Tufts St project.
- There was consensus that the open space feature should be oriented along Glen Street, to make it feel accessible and welcoming to neighborhood residents.



Design charrette during November 2019 community meeting

Urban Design Commission Review

Using this feedback and analysis, the team developed two design options for the open space feature, using the City's new Pocket Park design guidelines. The options were presented to the Urban Design Commission on February 23, 2021. Features of both options included:

- Creation of approximately 5,000 s.f. of new, publicly accessible open space for gathering and passive recreation, which would expand and enhance the open space network in this part of East Somerville
- Orientation on Glen Street, which maximizes the solar exposure for the open space.
- New trees and landscaped areas that will provide shading and seasonal interest.
- A variety of seating locations and options.
- Bike racks and drinking fountain feature.
- Pervious paving to increase onsite infiltration and promote sustainability.
- Green Score in excess of minimum requirements required by zoning ordinance.

Site Plan options presented to the Urban Design Commission in Feb 2021



The UDC members expressed a preference for Option A, and their comments were provided in a recommendation dated March 8, 2021. Following the UDC decision, the development team held a community meeting on March 30, 2021 to update community members on the preferred design direction. No concerns about the open space design were raised at the community meeting. The design team has now updated and further developed the Civic Space/Pocket Park design for the 31 Tufts Street project, incorporating the feedback from the UDC and the community.

Site Plan Approval

Per Section 15.3.2.e of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance:

The review board shall approve a development review application requiring Site Plan Approval upon verifying that the submitted plan conforms with the provisions of this Ordinance and demonstrates consistency to the following:

- a). The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*
 - b). The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.*
 - c). Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.*
 - d). Considerations indicated elsewhere in this Ordinance for the required Site Plan Approval.*
- a. Applicant's proposal for the Civic Space meets the development standards for a Pocket Park as set forth in Section 13.1.3.f of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. In addition, the Urban Design Commission's recommendation dated March 8, 2021 found that all of the design guidelines for a pocket park civic space type were satisfied. The project will comply with the goals of the SomerVision strategic plan because it will "facilitate transit-oriented neighborhood in-fill development", create a "healthier, more prosperous and more attractive place to live, work, play and raise a family", and "preserve and enhance the character of Somerville's neighborhoods". This will ensure that "properties can adapt and change to meet the needs of residents, while respecting the character of the neighborhood". This shows that the Applicant has met the policy plans and standards established by the City.
 - b. The 31 Tufts Street property is located in an Urban Residence (UR) District. Per Section 3.2 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Urban Residence district is characterized by a variety of moderate floor plate, multi-unit buildings where outdoor amenity space is typically shared between the residents of a building. The district is almost entirely residential, with occasional neighborhood stores, schools, places of worship, and arts related uses on advantageous sites. The proposed Civic Space/Pocket Park would provide a new open space amenity to residents of the area and the use is consistent with the intent of the Urban Residence zoning district.
 - c. The proposed project will redevelop the 31 Tufts Street property, which is currently vacant, with new affordable rental housing and new, publicly accessible open space that will expand and enhance the open space network in in this part of East Somerville. The Pocket Park that is the subject of this Site Plan Approval request will provide new trees and landscaped areas that will provide shading and seasonal interest; a variety of seating locations and options for neighborhood residents; and pervious paving to increase onsite infiltration and promote sustainability. By providing these features, the Applicant seeks to mitigate any impacts attributable to the proposed development project.
 - d. Development standards and design guidelines for a Pocket Park are set forth in Section 13.1.3.f of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

In response to the Development Standards outlined in Section 13.1.3.f.i, the Applicant's proposed design provides:

- Two small seating areas at the entrance to the park, along Glen Street;
- A well-defined perimeter along Glen Street, which provides both pedestrian and visual access into the space;
- A generous privacy buffer between the proposed apartment building and the usable portions of the pocket park, which is defined using groundcover, plantings, and a decorative fence;
- A total of 15 trees to provide shade during summer months;
- Planting beds with raised edges throughout;
- A multi-level drinking fountain at the entrance along Glen Street; and
- A bicycle rack that can accommodate two bicycles at the entrance along Tufts Street.

In response to the Design Guidelines outlined in Section 13.1.3.f.ii, the Applicant's proposed design provides:

- Opportunities for gathering and passive recreation, which were priorities for the neighborhood residents who participated in the community process for the pocket park design;
- Multiple entrances into the park along Tufts and Glen Street, defined by a combination of seating, planters, pavers, and special plantings, to balance the feeling of permeability with enclosure along the edge of the park;
- Use of darker colored pavers as the primary ground surface material, to reduce glare;
- Use of ground cover, plantings, and low decorative fencing to promote light and filtered views from the first floor windows at the proposed apartment building;
- Selection of hearty, deciduous trees and hearty plantings to promote ease of maintenance;
- Outdoor lighting that meets the standards outlined for Urban Residence districts in of Section 10.7 of the Zoning Ordinance.

Based on guidance from the Public Space and Urban Forestry staff, the design does not include a community bulletin board near the entrance of the park.

We look forward to your review and comment on the package. Please feel free to contact me at 617-834-7734 or edatta@e3devco.com if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,


Eliza Datta
President, E3 Development LLC

cc Adam Dash, Agent
Deborah Myers, DMLA
Tom Galligani, OSPCD

Attachments

- UDC Recommendation dated March 8, 2021
- Design Review Report
- Neighborhood Meeting Reports, March 10, 2020 and March 30, 2021



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

DESIGN REVIEW RECOMMENDATION

31 Tufts Street Pocket Park

March 8, 2021

The Urban Design Commission (UDC) met virtually via GoToWebinar on February 23, 2021 to review the Pocket Park type of Civic Space proposed at 31 Tufts Street. The purpose of design review, as established by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, is for peers in the professional design community to provide advice and recommendations to Applicants during the schematic design phase of the design process. In accordance with the UDC's adopted Rules of Procedure and Section 15.1.4 Design Review of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, this Civic Space design review recommendation includes the following:

1. Identification of a preferred schematic design option.
2. Identification if applicable design guidelines are satisfied.
3. Additional guidance and recommended modifications to address any outstanding design issues or concerns.

Following a presentation by the Applicant and review of the submitted materials and the design guidelines for the Pocket Park Civic Space type, the Commission provided the following guidance and recommended modifications:

- Option A, the more loose, open, organic, and curved design theme preferred by the Applicant and supported by the Commission, should be further developed, with some inspiration taken from the ideas of the alternative option.
- The final design should include a number of spaces for unassociated/unrelated people to gather as individuals, pairs, or small groups.
- The size, shape, and position of the curved landscape planters and the landscape within should provide a spatial balance between passive, programmable space and opportunities for seating and gathering and contribute toward a sense of enclosure.
- The landscape design and palette should be informal, casual, and diverse.

The Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend option A for further design development, voted unanimously (4-0) to recommend the guidance and design modifications identified be above, and voted unanimously (4-0) that all of the design guidelines for a pocket park civic space type were satisfied.

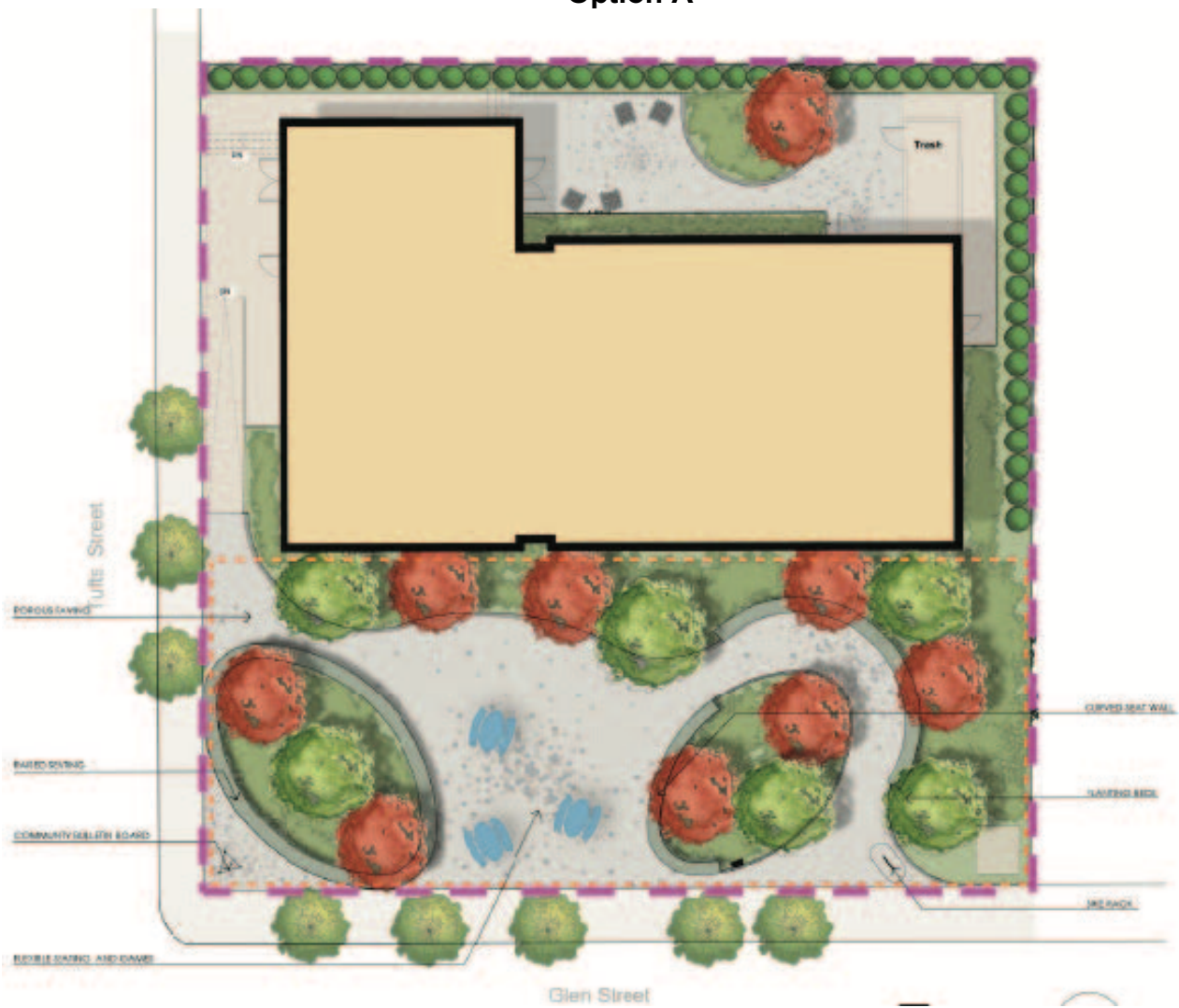
Attest, by the voting membership:

Deborah Fennick
Andrew Arbaugh
Heidi Cron
Tim Talun

Attest, by the UDC Co-Chair:

Sarah Lewis

Option A



APPLICABLE DESIGN GUIDELINES:

POCKET PARK			
LANGUAGE	SATISFIED?	PRIORITY?	NOTES
Pocket parks should be designed in consideration of the wide range of ages and habits of the people who may use the space at different times of day or night, with primary concern of the potential users living or working within a five (5) minute walk whom most need recreation space.	YES (4-0)		
A community bulletin board should be included near the entrance to the pocket park.	YES (4-0)		
The entrance to the pocket park should be emphasized through special planting, paving, seating, or other design elements that draw attention.	YES (4-0)		
Paved surfaces should be paved with darker colored paving material(s). The use of concrete should be minimized to reduce glare.	YES (4-0)		
If abutting properties have first floor windows that would benefit from light and a filtered view, chain link perimeter fencing, and fast-growing vines should be used instead of any solid fence materials.	YES (4-0)		
In non-residential areas, the exterior walls of surrounding buildings should be capitalized on where possible.	YES (4-0)		
Trees should be deciduous and of a species that can tolerate being climbed by children.	YES (4-0)		
Plantings should be fast growing, resilient, easily maintained, and not poisonous.	YES (4-0)		
Nighttime lighting should be sensitive to abutting uses.	YES (4-0)		



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rcooper@somervillema.gov

**RE: 31 Tufts Street Project (Pocket Park/Civic Space)
Design Review Report**

Dear Ms. Cooper:

The Applicant, E3 Development LLC, presented the open space feature (pocket park) of the 31 Tufts Street project to the Urban Design Commission on February 23, 2021, as required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The UDC provided its written recommendation on March 8, 2021. The following is a detailed response to the UDC's recommendations:

Recommendation: Option A, the more loose, open, organic, and curved design theme preferred by the Applicant and supported by the Commission, should be further developed, with some inspiration taken from the ideas of the alternative option.

Response: We have further developed Option A for the pocket park design. The plans submitted with the Site Plan Approval package show similar open, organic and curved design features that were shown in the Option A design that was presented to the UDC. The updated plan also takes inspiration from certain features of the alternative option that was presented, including adding definition along Glen Street with additional planters, to balance the feeling of permeability with enclosure along this edge.

Recommendation: The final design should include a number of spaces for unassociated/unrelated people to gather as individuals, pairs, or small groups.

Response: The updated plans for the pocket park offer a variety of seating types and locations – both at the edges and inside the park – to allow for various, unrelated users to gather. Seating options have been updated to include seatwalls with and without backs, as well as picnic tables and benches.

Recommendation: The size, shape, and position of the curved landscape planters and the landscape within should provide a spatial balance between passive, programmable space and opportunities for seating and gathering and contribute toward a sense of enclosure.

Response: We have refined the shapes and locations of the planters and landscape within the park to provide an optimal balance between passive and programmable spaces, and between permeability and enclosure. As noted above, we have added definition along Glen Street with additional planters, to balance the feeling of permeability with enclosure along this edge. We have

increased the number and types of seating to promote gathering at various locations in the park. And we have expanded the central paved area to create opportunities for programming.

Recommendation: *The landscape design and palette should be informal, casual, and diverse.*

Response: The feedback we received from the community aligns well with this recommendation – neighbors spoke to us at length about their preference for native plantings that will provide seasonal color and interest in the park. We've proposed a planting palette that incorporates many natives with adapted species to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eliza Datta". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a stylized "E" and "D".

Eliza Datta
President, E3 Development LLC

cc Adam Dash, Agent
Deborah Myers, DMLA
Tom Galligani, OSPCD

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING REPORT

Property: 31 Tufts Street
Applicant: E3 Development LLC
Agent: Adam Dash, Esq.
Zoning District: Urban Residence (UR)

Meeting Date: March 10, 2020

The March 10, 2020 neighborhood meeting was the second neighborhood meeting on this project. It was held in person at the Capuano School Cafeteria from 6 – 8 p.m.

Attendees:

Matthew McLaughlin, Ward 1 Councilor
Sunayana Thomas, OSPCD
Rebecca Cooper, OSPCD
Michael Feloney, OSPCD
Eliza Datta, E3 Development LLC (Applicant)
Deborah Myers, DMLA (landscape architect)
Andres Bernal, Placetaylor (architect)
Jerry Lauretano
Kerry Callahan
Mary Mahan
David Last

Sunayana Thomas from OSPCD and Councilor McLaughlin made opening remarks about the 31 Tufts Street project, and then Eliza Datta, Deb Myers, and Andres Bernal (the development team) made a presentation on the project.

The development team presented four site plan options for the 31 Tufts Street site, based on community input provided at the prior neighborhood meeting held on November 18, 2019. The site plan options highlighted the trade-offs between building location and open space. They also highlighted the impact of providing off-street parking, which would significantly reduce the amount of open space the project could provide.

Community feedback included:

- Neighbors generally preferred the opportunity to have more open space on the site, rather than to create parking for the new apartment units.
- There was consensus that the open space feature should be oriented along Glen Street, with the building perpendicular to Tufts Street, to make it feel accessible and welcoming to neighborhood residents.
- The owner of a condo unit at 47 Tufts St noted concerns about the impact on his building (shadow, sight lines) if the building is oriented perpendicular to Tufts St.

- Neighbors expressed a desire for a more contemplative space with trees and other landscape features.
- Neighbors requested that the team consider lighting, shadows, and on-going maintenance as the plans develop.
- Neighbors noted that the City should allow parking on both sides of Tufts St.

Ms. Datta thanked the community members for their input and explained that the development team would take this feedback into account as the team further develops site plan options for the project.

Ms. Datta and Ms. Thomas outlined the timeline for next steps in the community process.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:00 p.m.

All meeting materials were provided and remain available on the project's website: www.31tufts-somerville.com

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING REPORT

Property: 31 Tufts Street
Applicant: E3 Development LLC
Agent: Adam Dash, Esq.
Zoning District: Urban Residence (UR)

Meeting Date: March 30, 2021

The March 30, 2021 neighborhood meeting was the third neighborhood meeting on this project. It was held via remote participation at 6:00 p.m.

Attendees:

Matthew McLaughlin, Ward 1 Councilor
Thomas Galligani, OSPCD
Sarah Lewis, OSPCD
Luisa Oliveira, OSPCD
Eliza Datta, E3 Development LLC (Applicant)
Deborah Myers, DMLA (landscape architect)
Andres Bernal, Placetaylor (architect)
Jerry Lauretano
Robert Newton
Marie-Elle Merchant
Senator Patricia Jehlen
Bonnie Denis
Martin Kwok
Sam LaTronica
Ellin Reisner
Robert Schofield
Kerry Callahan
David Last

Councilor McLaughlin made opening remarks about the 31 Tufts Street project, and then Eliza Datta, Deb Myers, and Andres Bernal (the development team) made a presentation on the project.

The development team provided an update on the project's progress since the previous community meeting, noting that important milestones had been achieved despite the pandemic, including that the project had received significant funding awards from the City and State for the proposed affordable housing.

The team presented an update on the open space design based on feedback from the community process and the Urban Design Commission's recommendation. The team

also gave an overview of the building design, which is being designed to Passive House standards.

Community feedback included:

- Positive reaction to both the open space and building design. Neighbors expressed an appreciation for the fact that the development team had listened to and responded to their feedback.
- Desire to see planting materials used in the open space that will provide seasonal color. Ms. Datta and Ms. Myers confirmed that the final planting plan would take this into consideration.
- One neighbor inquired about what kind of air filtration would be included as part of the building's mechanical systems. Mr. Bernal explained that by meeting Passive House standard, the housing project would meet higher indoor air quality standards.
- One neighbor asked if residents of the new affordable housing would be eligible for an exemption from the City's new parking permit restriction for transit areas. OSPCD staff indicated that residents of the affordable units would be eligible.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:20 p.m.

All meeting materials were provided and remain available on the project's website: www.31tufts-somerville.com