



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

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

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning & Zoning Staff
SUBJECT: 73 Summer Street, P&Z 20-003
POSTED: August 12, 2021

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (SPA)
Approve (SP)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from the Planning & Zoning staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the development review application submitted for 73 Summer Street, 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 was deemed complete in July 21, 2021 and is scheduled for a public hearing on August 19, 2021. 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

First Summer 73 LLC proposes to construct a 3-story LEED Gold apartment building and establish a Household Living principle use for twenty-seven (27) dwelling units in the MR3 zoning district. This proposal requires Site Plan Approval and a Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

First Summer 73 LLC is proposing to construct a 3-story LEED Gold apartment building. The proposed development will produce twenty-seven (27) dwelling units of which five (5) are affordable dwelling units, eighteen (18) motor vehicle parking spaces, fifty-six (56) long-term bicycle parking spaces, and four (4) short-term bicycle parking spaces. The proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.27, above the 0.25 minimum score.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

73 Summer Street is in the Mid Rise 3 (MR3) zoning district represented by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen. An apartment building is permitted in the MR3 district by Site Plan Approval on site not fronting a pedestrian street. Establishing a Household Living residential use requires a Special Permit. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address any potential impacts as

necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-variance) discretionary or administrative permits required for the MR3 zoning district.

DESIGN REVIEW

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on January 26, 2021 and February 23, 2021. The Commission provided its official recommendation on March 25, 2021.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and the development team on August 26, 2020 via the Zoom meeting platform. The second neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and the development team on April 7, 2021 via the Zoom meeting platform.

ANALYSIS

Multiple concerns were raised during the neighborhood meetings and the applicant was generally responsive to feedback provided by either making changes to their plans or providing reasonable explanations as to why some of the suggestions were not feasible. A few key ones included: Providing ramp access to the raised amenity courtyard, which was added to the plans. In response to concerns regarding lack of shade and the pedestrian experience of those walking by the building, the project team added a landscape buffer to the Summer and School Street elevations and added a neighborhood respite zone at the corner of the site along School Street. Lastly, in response to multiple comments regarding traffic visibility at the intersection of Summer and School Street the project team incorporated a chamfer at the corner of Summer and School Street to increase traffic and pedestrian visibility.

This proposal is subject to the appearance of two buildings requirement for any facade over 100' wide in the Mid-Rise zoning districts. At a minimum, the ordinance requires each side of the building to have a differing cornice, roof eave, or parapet; upper story wall material; and ground story pilasters, columns, or piers (solid wall) on either side of the division between façade designs. The proposal provides this architectural treatment for both the Summer Street and School Street facades. Key additional recommendations that were incorporated into the design through the review process include expansion of the abutting sidewalks to the required twelve (12) feet, alignment of the accessibility ramp, and coordination with future city street tree plantings.

As a base requirement, all development proposals to construct a permitted principal building type greater than 25,000 square feet in gross floor area must identify a path to LEED certifiability at the Gold level. The project team has provided the appropriate documentation outlining how it will meet this threshold by using industry best-practices for sustainability described within, and measure by, the LEED BD+C: Multifamily Lowrise rating system.

The proposal includes eighteen (18) motor vehicle parking spaces to be provided in underground structured parking, below the Transit Area maximum of one per dwelling unit. On-site bicycle parking will be provided for up to sixty (60) bicycles consisting of fifty-six (56) long-term bicycle parking spaces to be located in an interior room located in the basement of the proposed building, and an exterior bicycle rack that can accommodate up to four (4) short-term bicycle parking spaces to be located within the site along School Street. The proposed bicycle parking supply exceeds the bicycle parking requirements. For further mitigation of the potential impact of motor vehicle parking on-site residents will be ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits.

Environmental efforts include extensive plans to remove invasive species on site and add native species. The proposal is also a substantial improvement over existing conditions regarding stormwater runoff management. Two shared outdoor amenity spaces will be provided for resident use: a habitable green roof, and an amenity courtyard. The project also proposes to add a small parklet located along the eastern corner of the site which is designed to become an extension of the public realm and forms a small green buffer from the sidewalk to the edge of the building. This area will be outfitted with a bike rack, a bike fix-it station, and bench that is intended to be used by the public.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board/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.

Site Plan Approval 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. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

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. (Household Living Use) The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.
4. (Household Living Use) The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.
5. (Household Living Use) The increase or decrease in the number or price of any

previously existing ADUs.

6. (Household Living Use) The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.

Site Plan Approval + Special Permit

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

The proposal will help achieve the following goals from SomerVision 2030, the comprehensive Master Plan for the City of Somerville.

- Facilitate transit-oriented, neighborhood infill development when it enhances the lively, human scaled and walkable character of Somerville blocks and neighborhoods.
- Preserve and expand an integrated, balanced mix of safe, affordable and environmentally sound rental and homeownership units for households of all sizes and types from diverse social and economic groups.
- Promote mixed-use, mixed-income transit-oriented development to provide new housing and employment options.

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

In the MR3 district the intent is to “create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for smaller scale, multi-use and mixed-use buildings and neighborhood serving commercial uses”, while one of the key the purposes is to “create dwelling unit types, sizes, and bedroom counts ideal for larger households in apartment buildings”.

The proposal achieves the intent to enhance by replacing a fully paved gas station site with a compliant apartment building, while depaving over 1,300 square feet to create open space. The proposal achieves the district purpose by providing a balanced assortment of dwelling unit sizes including three (3) studio apartments, ten (10) one-bedroom units, eleven (11) two-bedroom units, and three (3) three-bedroom units.

Site Plan Approval

3. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any impacts attributable to the proposed development.

The proposal has been repeatedly adapted to include design features generated to respond to community feedback received during neighborhood meetings. No other mitigation is proposed due to a perceived lack of remaining negative impacts directly attributable to the proposed development.

Special Permit Considerations Specific to a Household Living Use

1. *The suitability of the site for a household living principal use compared to other potential principal uses.*

Planning Staff believes the development site is highly suitable for a residential building due to the walkability, transit access of the site as well as the amenities available in nearby Union Square, the central hill campus and Gilman Square. The site's presence on the corner of two primarily residential streets and not fronting a pedestrian street make it an appropriate site for an apartment building. This development is desirable given the growing housing demand on the area, as well as the benefits of transit-oriented development.

2. *The ability of the development proposal to meet the demand for dwelling units of various types, sizes, and bedroom counts.*

The development proposal includes three (3) studio apartments, ten (10) one-bedroom units, eleven (11) two-bedroom units, and three (3) three-bedroom units. This unit mix is consistent with recent housing studies that identified 92% of demand for new market-rate units was from singles, childless couples, empty nesters, and retirees.

3. *The increase or decrease in the number or price of any previously existing ADUs.*

There were no previously existing ADUs on the site.

4. *The number of motor vehicle parking spaces proposed for development within a Transit Area.*

There are eighteen (18) proposed motor vehicle parking spaces to be offered in underground structured parking. The proposal is compliant with the transit area one per dwelling (1/DU) unit the maximum number of motor vehicle parking spaces allowed.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the required Special Permit to establish a Household Living use, the Planning & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Housing

- An affordable housing implementation plan (AHIP) must be submitted to the Director of Housing prior to applying for a Certificate of Occupancy.
- A deed restriction limiting the sale or rental of all affordable dwelling units to eligible households in perpetuity must be executed and recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Should the Board approve the necessary Site Plan Approval for the *3-story LEED Gold apartment building*, the Planning & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Parking

- At least four (4) accessory vehicular parking spaces must be offered annually to all ADU households as a right of first refusal until each parking space is either rented or refused.
- Formal acknowledgement that residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission, must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- Dwelling units must be advertised as ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission.
- All buyers, grantees, lessees, renters, and tenants must be notified in writing prior to sale or lease of any dwelling unit that the residents are ineligible for on-street Residential Parking Permits, subject to the regulations of the Somerville Traffic Commission. This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.

Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.

Mobility

- The property owner and applicable future tenants shall comply with the Mobility Management Plan as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility on 20 November 2020.

Sustainability

- All Step 2 documentation required by the LEED Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.
- All Step 3 documentation required by the LEED Certifiability Requirements must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment.

Public Record

- Physical copies of all development review submittal materials, as permitted by the Planning Board, must be submitted to the Planning & Zoning Division for the public record.
- A copy of the recorded Decision stamped by the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds must be submitted to the Planning & Zoning Division for the public record.

Construction Documents

- Utility meters are not permitted on any facade or within the frontage area of the lot.
- Material specifications from suppliers must be submitted to confirm fenestration glazing is compliant with the VLT and VLR ratings required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
- Alterations to the design or location of the transformer vault is a major amendment to the approved plans, and is permitted only as a Plan Revision in accordance with Article 15 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
- An updated outdoor lighting plan and supplier cut sheet specifications of chosen lighting fixtures must be submitted to confirm compliance with Section 10.7 Outdoor Lighting of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The site photometric plan must include a keyed site plan identifying the location of all luminaires; total site lumen limit table (calculations from the SZO); lighting fixture schedule indicating the fixture type, description, lamp type, lumens, color temperature, color rendering index, BUG rating, mounting height, and wattage of all luminaires; and notation of any timing devices used to control the hours set for illumination.