



City of Somerville, Massachusetts
Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development
Joseph A. Curtatone
Mayor

June 19, 2020

Mobility Development Submittal Comment Memo for ZBA
Subject: 34 North Street - Clarendon Hill

This memo outlines comments from the Mobility Division regarding the applications Mobility Management Plans, Traffic Impact and Access Study, and Transportation Access Plan. Revisions to these documents were submitted to the city in May and June of 2020.

Mobility Management Plans

Mobility Management Plans (MMPs) serve multiple purposes in the development process including improving available transportation options, reducing negative environmental impacts associated with vehicle travel, reducing the demand for parking facilities, and incorporating transportation planning considerations into development review.

The applicant coordinated with the Mobility Division on the development of the MMPs for this project. In March of 2020, the Mobility Division provided preliminary comments on the MMPs and recommended the addition of several commitments. The applicant agreed to commit to much of the city's initial guidance including funding and installing a larger (19 dock) bluebike station, committing to the SomerVision goals of increasing non-auto mode share, and providing one month of MBTA bus fare on a Charlie Card to each new household, among other commitments to sustainable transportation.

The Mobility Division notes that while parking for this development is proposed to be less than that required by the zoning code (1.0 spaces per dwelling unit), it is critical to consider the local context of the proposed development. The MMP describes the multiple bus routes with stops located approximately one tenth of a mile (3 minutes walking distance) from the proposed housing. Specifically in relation to the bus routes in proximity to the proposed development, the city and the MBTA are planning bus mobility improvements within the next year to roadways in the project area (including stop consolidation and street/signal changes that provide bus priority) that will increase the reliability of these bus routes. In addition to nearby bus routes, the MMP correctly notes the MBTA Red Line stations (Davis Square and Alewife) and a new Green Line Extension Station at College Ave. that are all within approximately 1 mile from the project site.

Research has demonstrated a direct link between parking supply and automobile use. Therefore, when approving new developments in the city in light of our mode share and greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals, it's important to think critically about the amount of new parking that should be supplied and the potential impact of new parking on the city's ability to meet our goals. Given the proximity to transit and existing bicycle infrastructure; the fact that the city is continuously working to improve the safety and efficiency of these mobility options; and, the city's ambitious and critical sustainability and carbon neutral goals, parking at the proposed development could still be provided at a lower ratio to further encourage low-carbon mobility.

The applicant includes 33 parallel on-street parking spaces in their calculation and analysis of parking capacity. Specifically, out of the 358 total parking spaces there are 58 ground-level, on-street spaces (33 of which are proposed to be located on New Streets 1 and 2 which will be under City jurisdiction). The Mobility Division notes that it is critical that these on-street parking spaces remain public street parking subject to the jurisdiction of the city's Traffic Commission. This will ensure that the city is able to maintain flexibility in how this public street space is utilized in the future. In order to further the city's sustainability, mobility, and equity goals, this space could be dedicated to additional bicycle parking, designated pick-up/drop-off areas, and ADA accessible pick-up/drop-off areas.

Traffic Impact and Access Study

The applicant worked with the Mobility Division to update and revise their previously submitted Traffic Impact and Access Study (TIAS) and Transportation Access Plan (TAP). A revised addendum to these plans was submitted on June 2, 2020.

The revised TIAS discusses recent updates to infrastructure in the project area as well as to the proposed project itself. In addition to the mitigation committed to in the MMP to reduce overall vehicle trips, the TIAS includes mitigation measures to adjust signal timing to reduce the traffic impact of the project. The city intends to work with the applicant throughout future phases of development approvals to ensure signal retiming is completed in a way that aligns with the mobility goals of the city.

The Mobility Division also notes that a critical component of future mobility in the project area is the reconstruction of the intersection of Alewife Brook Parkway and Powder House Boulevard. The city secured a MassWorks grant for \$4.9 million to undertake the design, engineering, and construction of a safer intersection at this location in order to improve mobility in the Clarendon Hill neighborhood. The Mobility Division and the Infrastructure and Asset Management Department are working diligently to advance the design of this key infrastructure improvement and to ensure that the project is bid and constructed on a timeline that coordinates with the schedule of the housing redevelopment. The city is grateful to the development team for their commitment of \$600,000 in private financing to support the reconstruction of this intersection.

The Mobility Division notes that while the project's impacts on overall circulation may be relatively unchanged, there will be acute impacts to the immediate neighborhood, some of which

are summarized in the TIAS but some that are not, including traffic impacts and associated increases in traffic noise and emissions, heavy vehicle traffic during construction, etc. The TIAS estimates between 52 and 88 additional vehicle trips during the AM and PM peak hour, respectively; this translates to about 1.16 additional vehicles per minute or about 18 vehicles per 15-minute period; this is a noticeable level of additional traffic to the neighborhood, even if the impacts on area intersections is not significant.

Requested Waivers

Bicycle Parking

The Mobility Division recognizes that the zoning code does not require bicycle parking at this development given the zoning district in which it's located. The city's long- and short-term bicycle parking requirements were written in order to follow best practices for making bicycle parking safe and accessible in order to encourage bicycle mobility.

The Mobility Division notes that buildings A/B and the townhomes are proposed to include long-term bicycle parking that is largely in compliance with the city's zoning. The affordable units in Buildings E and D do not comply with the requirements for bicycle parking in the zoning code. While the applicant did remove one underground parking space in order to provide 13 long-term bicycle parking spaces for Building D, all of these long term bicycle parking spaces are proposed to be vertical racks or bike hooks which do not comply with the city's zoning. The Mobility Division maintains that equity is a key component of this development. One of the city's goals through this redevelopment project is to knit this housing into the fabric of the Clarendon Hill and larger West Somerville neighborhoods. In order to fully accomplish that goal, the low income units should benefit from the same elements of best practice design and construction as the market rate units. A critical aspect of equitable development and the provision of equitable housing and mobility options is to ensure that our low income residents have the same access to high-quality, safe, and accessible infrastructure as do our higher-income residents. It would be a disservice to lower income residents to not provide bicycle parking that complies with the local and national best practices outlined in the city's new zoning code.

Somerville bicycle and pedestrian count data shows that compared to 2010, the average number of bicyclists counted at an intersection during peak commuting hours increased by 103% in 2019. Bicycle parking is an important component to encouraging bicycle transportation and helping to make it an easy mode choice for residents. Accessible bike parking that can accommodate the growing range of bicycle sizes and attachments is key to ensuring bicycle parking is usable and appropriate for multiple types of riders. The bicycle parking racks required in the zoning code are of the type that accommodate all bike sizes, bike attachments, and users. Specifically, vertical racks or bike hooks such as those proposed by the applicant can be appropriate in certain high-density indoor parking situations; however, they are not accessible to all users or all bikes and can create safety concerns that don't arise with on-ground parking.

Sidewalk walkway widths

The applicant requests a waiver from a minimum walkway width of 6 feet. The Mobility Division recognizes the need to maintain the location and layout of the buildings as currently planned in order to construct all of the housing units. With that in mind, the Mobility Division also notes a number of issues that should continue to be thought critically about as design of the project progresses.

The development will house vulnerable populations and communities of concern including elderly, young children, and people of color. In our current context of COVID-19 response, the city is undertaking a major work effort to provide expanded walking space on existing narrow residential sidewalks. Future construction of sidewalks should be considered in light of this current context.

Similar to bicycle infrastructure, walking is a key form of mobility for residents in Somerville, and a transportation choice that we make easier when infrastructure is constructed following best practices of safety and accessibility. Adhering to design principles detailed in the city's zoning should be done wherever possible.