



City of Somerville

# PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

**TO:** Planning Board  
**FROM:** Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff  
**SUBJECT:** 74 Middlesex Avenue, PZ 21-022  
**POSTED:** November 10, 2021

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

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 74 Middlesex Avenue, 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 on October 4, 2021 and is scheduled for a public hearing on November 18, 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

74M Property Owner, LLC proposes to develop a 16-story LEED Platinum lab building in the Assembly Square Mixed Use District (ASMD), which requires Site Plan Approval.

## SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

74M Property Owner LLC is proposing to construct a 16-story LEED Platinum lab building. The proposed development will produce 494,000 square feet of office, research and development, lab, and retail uses, 350 motor vehicle parking spaces, 101 long-term bicycle parking spaces, 8 short-term bicycle parking spaces, and the proposed landscape will earn a Green Score of 0.20.

## ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

74 Middlesex Avenue is located in the Assembly Square Mixed Use (ASMD) zoning district in the Assembly Square neighborhood represented by Ward 1 Councilor Matthew McLaughlin. It is approximately a 10-minute walk from the MBTA Assembly Square Orange Line Station. A lab building is permitted by Site Plan Approval. Site Plan Approval is the administrative review and approval of conforming development to address and potential development impacts, if necessary. The Planning Board is the decision-making authority for all (non-Variance) discretionary or administrative permits required by the ASMD zoning district.

## **DESIGN REVIEW**

The proposal was reviewed by Somerville Urban Design Commission via the GoToWebinar meeting platform on May 25, 2021 and June 8, 2021. The Commission provided its official recommendation on July 9, 2021.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS**

The first neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward 1 Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and the applicant on April 8, 2021 via a remote participation platform. The second neighborhood meeting was also hosted by the Ward Councilor and the applicant on July 28, 2021 via a remote participation platform. The summary of these meeting included in the materials submitted to the Planning Board is an accurate account of the event.

## **BACKGROUND**

On June 11, 2020, the applicant came before the Planning Board for approval of the required Master Plan Special Permit (MPSP) and Special Permit associated with the proposal. The Planning Board approved Special Permits for the proposed building of the Master Plan to exceed the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 10.0, exceed the maximum permitted building height of 125 feet, and to authorize commercial uses over 10,000 square feet.

A Plan Revision (P&Z21-066) for a minor amendment to the MPSP was approved administratively on September 1, 2021. The revision made the City a co-applicant to include the existing Kensington Park property in the development (previously referred to as off-site improvements) enabling design clarification of the Neighborhood Park to incorporate the previously identified Through-Block Plaza at the Kensington Avenue right-of-way.

Following approval of the revisions to the previously issued Master Plan Special Permit, 74M Property Owner LLC is applying for the Site Plan Approval required for the building authorized by the Master Plan.

## **ANALYSIS**

The proposal is a 16-story lab building consisting of office/lab/R&D and retail space with a full block footprint effectively bounded by Interstate 93 and Middlesex Avenue. It is approximately a 10-minute walk from the MBTA Assembly Orange Line Station, providing an important transit connection to downtown Boston and the suburbs to the north. The site is a short walk from the restaurants, amenities, and employment opportunities associated with Assembly Row and close to the on-going planned development associated with 5 Middlesex Avenue. The design of the project is intended to integrate into the fabric of ASMD and the context of the continued buildout of the neighborhood.

During the Neighborhood Meetings, there was consistent feedback in support of the bike room being positioned in a highly visible location rather than relegated to a back of house corridor as is frequently observed in commercial projects. The applicant has incorporated design recommendations from the Urban Design Commission such as, further exploring the penthouse materiality, relocating the bike room to a different location in the building base, and maintaining a green buffer along Middlesex Ave streetscape.

The proposal is on track to be LEED Platinum certifiable and is targeting 84 points of the 80 required to reach Platinum. As currently designed, the proposed lab building will use Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) as part of their heating plan, along with heat recovery chiller and high efficiency condensing boilers to provide some level of electrification. The heat recovery chiller will allow for energy to be reused when simultaneous heating and cooling loads occur. This will reduce natural gas usage by approximately 80 percent.

Approximately 9,000 square feet of uncovered hardscape exists in the site in its existing condition. To limit heat island effect from these surfaces the Applicant is looking at pavers with high albedo and light-colored standard concrete for sidewalks. A portion of the hardscape areas are located beneath the building tower canopy which provides adequate shading and further reduces the effects of heat island. The site incorporates 7,000 square feet of additional landscaped areas and 8,750 square feet of green roof at Level 2 and the Mechanical Level. Additionally, the design consolidates parking in a 4-level underground parking structure, which helps to reduce potential heat island effect associated with traditional surface parking lots. It has been designed to retain rainfall from the 90th percentile rain event to achieve 3-points. Stormwater will be collected and reused for fixture flushing and irrigation.

The project site is connected to a bicycle network and the current design includes a bike storage area providing at least 104 total storage spaces and 9 shower facilities meeting the LEED requirements for 101 long term storage spaces, 4 short-term spaces, and 9 showers based on the building occupancy estimates. The design includes 18 parking spaces with electric vehicle supply equipment (EVSE) to satisfy LEED electric vehicle criteria.

The building is supportive of the City of Somerville's net-zero goals and the project's path to LEED platinum. The building is set up so that all base building systems can be transitioned to all-electric over time. A potential pathway to net zero goals will include replacement of supplemental condensing hot water boilers with electric heat pumps or electric resistance boilers by 2040.

## **CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS**

The Planning Board 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.

Information relative to the required considerations is provided below:

### Site Plan Approval

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

The proposal is consistent with the objectives of SomerVision 2040:

- Minimize the overall space in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles.
- Build a sustainable future through climate leadership, balanced transportation, engaging civic spaces, exceptional educational opportunities, improved health, varied and affordable housing options, and the responsible use of our natural resources.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is accessible, inviting, and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- 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.
- Protect and foster the diversity of our people, culture, and economy.

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

The intent of the ASMD zoning district is, the project continues to redevelop underutilized areas within close walking distance to the Assembly Square T-station with mixed-use, mid-rise and high-rise, transit-oriented development that will support the transformation of Assembly Square into an urban commerce center and will improve physical connections to surrounding areas, including East Somerville, Ten Hills, and Sullivan Square.

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

This proposal will have a LEED Platinum certifiable building and a Neighborhood Park designed to mitigate stormwater run-off. The sustainability and energy goals of the project will continue to investigate the feasibility of on-site energy generation and flood resiliency is an important component to the design. No other mitigation is proposed due to a perceived lack of remaining negative impacts directly attributable to the proposed building.

## PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the *required Site Plan Approval for the 16-story LEED Platinum lab building*, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

### Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- This Decision does not authorize the removal of any public shade trees or private trees, which is subject to the Tree Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 12, Article VI) of the Somerville Code of Ordinances.

### Public Record

- Physical copies of all development review submittal materials, as permitted by the Planning Board, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & 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, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.

### Construction Documents

- Construction documents must be substantially equivalent to the approved plans and other materials submitted for development review.
- 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.
- An 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.

### Maintenance

- The applicant is responsible for the construction and all regular and long-term operations, maintenance, replacement, insurance, and other applicable costs associated with all improvements within the frontage areas abutting Middlesex Avenue and Kensington Avenue Neighborhood Park including, but not limited to, utilities and utility service, stormwater management infrastructure, landscaping, paving, furnishings, and other associated features.

### Sustainability

- All Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements for the subject certification program.

- All Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's Net Zero Ready Certifiability Requirements for the subject certification program.
- All Stage 2 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.
- All Stage 3 documentation required by the Office of Sustainability & Environment's LEED Certifiability Requirements.
- The building must be registered with the USGBC and evidence that the required registration forms were submitted, and registration fee were paid must be submitted to the Office of Sustainability & Environment prior to applying for a Building Permit.
- The Applicant or their successor in interest shall apply for LEED certification and provide evidence to the Office of Sustainability & Environment that a completed certification application and certification review fee were submitted to USGBC within one (1) year of the issuance of the first Certificate of Occupancy for the building.

#### Use

- The underground structured parking must be operated as a Commercial Parking facility principal use.
- The underground structured parking must have a parking access and revenue control system to manage vehicular access and collect parking revenues from patrons.

#### Parking

- The initial operations plan for the Commercial Parking facility identifying, at least, the type and pricing of various passes, rates, and fees must be submitted to the Director of Mobility.
- A sign must be provided near the vehicular entrance to the underground parking structured parking that identifies, at minimum, the number of spaces available in real time.
- An annual report, including documentation of any changes to the layout plan or operations plan of the parking facility, must be submitted to the Mobility Division to validate continued compliance with the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, this Decision, and the Director of Mobility's standards for monitoring and annual reporting.

#### Mobility

- The property owner and applicable future tenants shall comply with the Mobility Management Plan submitted July 28, 2021, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility.

#### Conditions

- A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with permit conditions must be to the Inspectional Services Department at least ten (10) working days in advance of a request for a final inspection.