



City of Somerville

# URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

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

## RULES OF PROCEDURE & POLICIES

In accordance with Section 15.7.4 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the Somerville Urban Design Commission adopts the following rules of procedure and policy.

The Urban Design Commission (the “Commission”) is a Review Board consisting of five (5) members and two (2) alternate members appointed by the Mayor, subject to confirmation by the Somerville City Council. The Commission’s responsibilities are specified by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance as:

1. To ensure that development protects and enhances the public realm and human scale of the City of Somerville.
2. To inform the selection of a preferred schematic design option for proposed development and provide advice and recommendations concerning the satisfaction of design standards and guidelines as the architectural design process advances through design development.
3. To provide advice and recommendations to the Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board, or to Staff when required by a condition of a discretionary or administrative permit decision, concerning how the design of a development proposal affects the quality of Somerville’s public realm.

As authorized by MGL 40A Section 9 and Section 15.7.4 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, these rules of procedure and policy are intended to ensure the orderly conduct of business at meetings of the Commission, to provide the most efficient use of time, and to facilitate the decision-making process of the Commission.

### Administration

1. These rules of procedure and policy were adopted on April 16, 2020 and are effective immediately.
2. The Commission may amend these rules of procedure and policy. Amendments are effective the day they are adopted.

### Organization & Responsibilities

1. Officers
  - a) The Director of Planning & Zoning and the Director of Public Space & Urban Forestry, or their designee(s), serve as non-voting Co-Chairs of the Commission.
2. Duties of Officers
  - a) The Co-Chairs preside over the professional conduct of Commission business in obtaining relevant facts and testimony and maintain order in public meetings to promote efficient time management.

- b) One of the Co-Chairs takes meeting minutes and records all votes in the absence of the Commission staff.
- 3. Alternate Members
  - a) Alternate members will attend meetings and may participate in discussion for any item before the Commission; however, the Alternate member will not vote on any matter before the Commission unless a member is absent and one of the Co-Chairs has announced that the Alternate member is acting as a member of the Commission for the matter at hand.
- 4. Standards of Conduct
  - a) Commission members will conduct themselves in accordance with M.G.L. 268A and any member with a conflict of interest will not participate in deliberation or decision on such matters.
  - b) Any member with a conflict of interest will not participate in deliberation or decision on such matters.
  - c) In the case of an absence, inability to act, or conflict of interest on the part of any Member of the Commission, or in the event of a vacancy on the Commission, one of the Co-Chairs will designate an Alternate member to act as a Member.

## **Commission Meetings**

- 1. Procedure
  - a) All meetings must be held in accordance with M.G.L. 30A, §§ 18-25, the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.
  - b) All meetings will be conducted, generally, in accordance with the parliamentary procedures of *Roberts Rules of Order*.
  - c) The meeting agenda is posted on the City Website and the City Bulletin Board forty-eight (48) hours in advance of each meeting.
  - d) The following events do not meet the statutory definition of a meeting, provided that Commission members do not deliberate on matters before the Commission:
    - i) On-site inspection of a property subject to an application by a quorum of the Commission members,
    - ii) Attendance at a public or private gathering by a quorum of the Commission members, and
    - iii) Attendance at a meeting of the City Council, Planning Commission, Urban Design Commission, or other public body by a quorum of the Commission members.
- 2. Meeting Schedule & Agenda Management
  - a) Meetings of the Commission are generally scheduled on an as needed basis, unless calendar holidays or conflicts with other events require adjustments to this schedule.
  - b) Meetings of the Commission will be advertised in accordance with Article 15 of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
  - c) Design review takes place during a Commission meeting.
  - d) If an Applicant is not present for a scheduled design review, the meeting will be rescheduled for a subsequent date.

3. Attendance
  - a) A quorum is required to conduct any Commission business.
  - b) Three (3) members or alternate members constitute a quorum for all business.
  - c) Applicants may appear on their own behalf or may be represented by an Agent.
  
4. Order of Business
  - a) Regular meetings will have the following order of business:
    - i) Call to order and roll of members present
    - ii) Review and action on meeting minutes
    - iii) Receipt of any communications from other bodies
    - iv) Regular business
    - v) Adjournment
  - b) Design review will have the following order of business:
    - i) Review of applicable design guidelines
    - ii) Presentation by the Applicant
    - iii) Comments and questions by Commission to the Applicant
    - iv) Deliberation by the Commission
    - v) Continuance of the design review, as necessary, to a specified date
    - vi) Motion and voting
  
5. Public Participation
  - a) A design review meeting is a public meeting. Public testimony is generally not permitted but may be allowed at the discretion of one of the Co-Chairs.
  
6. Motions & Voting
  - a) Members may make the following motions during design review:
    - i) To designate a preferred schematic design
    - ii) To designate a priority design guideline(s)
    - iii) To deem a design guideline satisfied
    - iv) To recommend a design modification
    - v) To amend the rules of procedure & policy
    - vi) To continue a design review until the next meeting
    - vii) To adjourn a meeting
  - b) A simple majority of those present is required for passage of a motion.
  - c) Votes must be cast in person at a Commission meeting.
  - d) Voting will be initiated by one of the Co-Chairs asking if there is a motion.
  - e) A tie vote defeats a motion.
  
7. Design Review & Recommendations
  - a) The purpose of design review is for peers in the professional design community to provide advice and recommendations to Applicants.
  - b) The Commission will provide a written recommendation to the applicable Review Board specified by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance and the Applicant within forty-five (45) days of the meeting where a proposed development was reviewed by the Commission.

- c) Buildings
  - i) Recommendations for development subject to the current Somerville Zoning Ordinance must identify the preferred schematic design option, identify if applicable design guidelines are satisfied, and provide design guidance to remedy any outstanding design issues or concerns.
    - (1) Recommendations for development limited to only modification of an existing principal or accessory building may include only design guidance to address any outstanding design issues or concerns.
  - ii) Recommendations for development subject to any previously approved PUD of the former ASMD zoning district must provide design guidance in reference to the applicable PUD design guidelines.
- d) Civic Spaces
  - i) reserved
- e) Thoroughfares
  - i) reserved

### **Submittal Requirements**

1. The Director of Planning & Zoning and the Director of Public Space & Urban Forestry are authorized to establish additional submittal requirements for information and materials submitted and presented to the Commission.
2. Applicants must submit the following materials for design review:
  - a) Buildings
    - i) A concise narrative that describing how the proposed development fits within and contributes to the immediately surrounding built context, any environmental sustainability objectives, and, if applicable, any approach to historic preservation.
    - ii) Development subject to the current Somerville Zoning Ordinance must provide the following:
      - (1) Conceptual landscape plans and pedestrian perspectives for any public realm (sidewalk) improvements, frontage area landscaping, and publicly accessible on-site open space.
      - (2) Axonometric massing diagrams of three (3) viable schematic massing concepts for any building in the high-rise district.
      - (3) Architectural elevations of three (3) viable schematic design concepts for the building façade(s). Development limited to only modifications of an existing principal or accessory building may submit only one (1) design concept for the building façade.
      - (4) Illustrations and diagrams indicating the intended satisfaction of applicable design guidelines.
    - iii) Development subject to any previously approved PUD of the former ASMD zoning district must provide a site plan, conceptual landscape plans, axonometric massing diagrams, architectural elevations, pedestrian perspectives illustrating the design decision making.
  - b) Civic Spaces
    - i) reserved
  - c) Thoroughfares

- i) reserved

### **Design Standards & Guidelines**

1. Design standards and guidelines are either established by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, prior PUD development permitting, or officially adopted plans and policy of the City of Somerville. These documents use the words 'must', 'shall', 'will', and 'may not' to identify mandatory requirements. The words 'may' and 'should' are permissive. The term 'guideline' is used for actions or built outcomes that are strongly encouraged and are always indicated by use of the term 'should'.
2. The following design guidelines are officially recognized by the Commission and apply to real property as shown on the maps included in their respective plans or policies:
  - a) Design guidelines specified in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance
  - b) **Common Building Features** (p 94-94), Davis Square Neighborhood Plan
  - c) **ASSEMBLY ROW** Design Guidelines (PUD)
  - d) **XMBLY MASTER PLAN** Design Guidelines (PUD)
3. The intent of the various design guidelines in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance and officially adopted plans and policies is to be mutually supportive of any mandatory design standards for the subject development proposal. Design standards are typically focused on building morphology or the required features of a civic space while guidelines promote quality and allow for design creativity. An example of the close relationship between standards and guidelines from the Somerville Zoning Ordinance for building facades is provided below:

## FAÇADE DESIGN STANDARDS & GUIDELINES

### Summary of Standards

- Facades **must** frame any storefront or lobby entrance with solid material through either pilasters or columns supporting a horizontal lintel and cornice, a spandrel positioned between two pilasters or columns extending from the upper stories to the ground, or flat wall above and to either side of a void or punched opening.
  - Mechanical louvers necessary for venting purposes **are not** permitted in the required frame, but may be incorporated into any storefront or lobby entrance system.
- The ground story **must** be differentiated from the upper stories through horizontal articulation, a change in material, or a change window size or pattern to create a distinct base to the building facade.
  - The entire height of the ground story **must** be included in the facade base.
  - The design of the base **must** align horizontally for corner buildings.
  - The design of the base **may not** shift up or down across the width of the facade.
- Building components, architectural elements, physical details, and materials **must** provide surface relief to the facade.

### Summary of Guidelines

- Materials framing each storefront or lobby entrance **may be** reflective of the overall design of the façade or customized for individual storefronts and lobby entrances.
- The facade of buildings with five (5) or more stories **should** include, at least, the entire height of the first two (2) stories in the design of the required base.

An example of a design guideline established in a plan or policy that builds upon the standards and guidelines in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance is also provided below:

### **COMMON BUILDING FEATURES (DAVIS SQUARE)**

New development and modifications to existing buildings should include features commonly found as part of the established character of existing buildings.

- Entrances to corner commercial spaces **should** be located at the corner of the storefront and **should** be chamfered or recessed to provide an entryway for pedestrians.
- Corner commercial spaces **should** have storefronts on the side street frontage for the width of a least one architectural bay.
- Storefronts **should** have a recessed entrance to provide an entryway for pedestrians.
- Recessed entryways **should** be decorated with tiles, pavers, or other artistic pavements to add visual interest to the entryway.
- Folding, sliding, and tilt-turn display windows, doors, and other storefront systems that open to permit a flow of pedestrians between the interior/exterior **should** be provided for eating and drinking establishments.
- Permanent signage for ground floor uses **should** be three-dimensional.
- Facades **should** have a cornice either at the top of the façade or at the transition that differentiates the building's middle floors from its top. The inclusion of a parapet at the top of a façade is common.
- Permanent or moveable frontage planters **should** be included advantageously along the facade.