



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 11, 2026

7:00 PM

Special Meeting

NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the City Council's minutes. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the data provided, do not rely on this information without first checking with the City Clerk.

1. OPENING CEREMONIES

Councilor Sait arrived at 7:08 PM.

Councilor Mbah arrived at 7:10 PM.

Present: Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
City Councilor At Large Jon Link
Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott
Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan
City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo
Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait
City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler
Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt
Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin
City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah
Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM by Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis.

The City Council entered Executive Session at 8:23 PM and returned at 10:40 PM with 11 members present (Ewen-Campen, Link, Scott, Clingan, Strezo, Sait, Wheeler, Hardt, McLaughlin, Mbah, Davis), 0 absent.

- 1.1. Roll Call Call of the Roll.
(ID # [26-0747](#))

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

2. CITATIONS

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

4. ORDERS, ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

7. COMMUNICATIONS OF THE MAYOR

- 7.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0736](#)) Requesting that this Council convene in Executive Session to discuss 90 Washington Street.

City Attorney Amara confirmed that Executive Session was appropriate due to the ongoing negotiations with both developers.

President Davis announced that no votes were taken in Executive Session except the vote to adjourn.

RESULT: **APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Wheeler, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Mbah, and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

- 7.2. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0739](#)) Requesting approval to endorse Wood Partners and North River Leerink Manager LLC as the two finalists in the 90 Washington Street Request for Proposals process.

President Davis introduced that there were only two proposals, and the City Council must submit two to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority, who owns the land.

Economic Development Senior Planner Ben Demers shared a presentation to provide an overview of the proposals received in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP). He noted that the financial proposal will be discussed in executive session, but the technical proposals can be discussed in open session. The process includes a review by the real estate consultant, HR&A, who provided scoring based on the RFP rubric and interviews conducted.

The 90 Washington Street Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) also reviewed each of the technical proposals and interviewed the two candidates. Staff have continually reviewed the proposals as well, to ensure that they meet the standards and goals of the city. The CAC has provided feedback, and now the City Council must select two finalists to recommend to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA), and those two will enter a Best and Final Offer Period. The SRA decision will be made in early July.

President Davis underscored that because there are only two proposals, the vote is effectively a formality, but the Council can share their feedback as part of the process, which is not required to be supportive.

Senior Planner Demers added that a Land Development Agreement (LDA) will also need to be approved by the City Council as a final step in the process, following due diligence.

The first response was from Wood Partners and would include residential use with ground floor retail and community space, with one 7-story building. The proposal would follow the city's inclusionary zoning, with 20% of the units being income-restricted, which would total 324 units and 65 income-restricted units. There would also be 5,700 square feet of community space, and 398 parking spaces. Highlights from the CAC review were the access drive, and the team's experience with Somerville. There were concerns around how large the single building felt and a lack of density on the site, as well as the high parking ratio and lack of new green space. Staff review largely mirrored the CAC feedback, focusing on the parking and open space accessible to the public. HR&A noted that the proposal is strong and executable, but requires further iteration on parking, massing, density, public realm strategy (civic space), and ground floor activation strategy. The second response was from North River Leerink (NRL) and would include residential use with ground floor retail and arts space, with three buildings ranging from 6 to 16 stories. The proposal would also follow the city's inclusionary zoning, with 20% of the units being income-restricted, totaling 426 units and 86 income-restricted units. There would also be 200 parking spaces. Highlights from the CAC review were greater density and the central green space. There was a strong preference for this proposal based on the existing technical elements. There was disappointment that the number of units dropped from the original proposal. Staff review centered on a central green space that may not be understood as accessible to the public. The team also proposed using Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) to build income-restricted units, but the units are concentrated in one building rather than spread throughout the project, and there is some concern about implementation. HR&A appreciated the clear public realm anchor, but noted that the proposal is ambitious and there is limited precedent for subterranean parking at this scale.

Using HR&A's scoring rubric, Wood Partners scored 37 out of 45 points, and NRL scored 29 out of 45 points.

Councilor Strezo emphasized that to segregate the lower-income units, as in the NRL proposal, is not a policy that she can support. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for confirmation about the central green space in the NRL proposal, and it would be available to the public, but not visible and the design would not support the public understanding that they were able to use the space. Councilor Link supported less parking, and agreed that separating low-income units is not a good idea. He expressed a desire for more height and more berm. Councilor Hardt asked when it could be determined whether the underground parking in the NRL proposal is feasible, and Senior Planner Demers shared that the details would be completed during the due diligence period, after the selection but prior to the execution of the Land Development Agreement between the development team and the SRA. Councilor Wheeler noted that Wood Partners has extensive experience, but not with high-rise structures. This was a concern for the CAC, as they would like to see more housing. He suggested that a no parking or radically reduced parking approach might also be considered. He

expressed a preference for the NRL proposal, though noting that it is not without its problems.

Councilor Sait echoed concerns about segregation of affordable units and parking. She also asked about playgrounds, and whether they could be included. Senior Planner Demers noted that in general the entire parcel is positioned for redevelopment, and the types of civic space may still require additional research. Senior Planner Fields emphasized that the CAC has discussed this extensively for many years, and there has been much discussion of civic space and open space, but playgrounds did not arise as a key concern. Senior Planner Demers added that this could also be determined in the negotiations. Councilor Davis also suggested that public engagement in the space will be essential to ensure it is utilized. Councilor Mbah asked about the land value and President Davis reminded everyone that the financial components would be discussed in executive session. Councilor McLaughlin shared that he has heard a lot of support for the NRL proposal and he also supports it, as it is less intrusive on the senior residents of Cobble Hill. He echoed the calls for more height and more berm, and added that underground parking would be very difficult due to the high costs and likelihood of contamination. He expressed support for the idea to include a playground, but highlighted the need for benches, as there are a lot of senior residents in the area. He asked about the retail spaces and the plan for trash collection. Senior Planner Demers explained the access drive in the NRL proposal and the benefit for trash and fire access.

Councilor Scott asked for clarification on whether the Council could vote to endorse only one proposal and President Davis confirmed it cannot, but it can authorize representatives to share details from the executive session in conveying the endorsement. Councilor Scott has done a lot of coordination NRL in Ward 2 and has found them to be creative and collaborative partners. He emphasized that there is room to meet the higher standard of development goals and generate a substantially improved version. Councilor Clingan emphasized that he understands these will be tight margins, but would like to see as much union labor as possible, and contractors that share our community values and labor practices.

Councilor McLaughlin moved: That this City Council authorizes Councilor Ben Wheeler and Senior Planner Ben Demers to convey its discussion from executive session regarding each of the two proposals to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority in executive session, and for Councilor Wheeler to review the minutes of this Executive Session following approval by the President, in advance of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority meeting. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Ewen-Campen, Link, Scott, Clingan, Strezo, Sait, Wheeler, Hardt, McLaughlin, Mbah, Davis), 0 opposed.

RESULT: APPROVED

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Wheeler, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Mbah, and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

8. COMMUNICATIONS OF CITY OFFICERS

9. NEW BUSINESS

10. SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 10:49 PM on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Ewen-Campen, Link, Scott, Clingan, Strezo, Sait, Wheeler, Hardt, McLaughlin, Mbah, Davis), 0 opposed.