Principal Entrances

Land Use Committee and Planning Board Joint Hearing

October 1, 2026

Kortney Cena, Senior Planner
Kelly O'Laughlin, Planner

Strategy & Development Department (SDD)
[Planning Division]

Principal Entrance- What is Changing?

There are three major proposals with this proposed amendment package:

Proposal 1:
Allow for primary entrances on the side of a building, given that there is an entrance to the ground story dwelling unit on the (front) facade.

Proposal 2:
Allow for a primary entrance to be on the rear or side of an external accessory dwelling unit.

As a result of Proposal 1 and 2, the Planning Division is also proposing to updating texts to in alignment to allow for street numbers to be allowed on a facade wall.

Proposal 3:
Remove principal entrances spacing requirements on commercial building ground floors.

Proposal 1 – Principal Entrances on side, given an entrance to ground story dwelling unit on the façade

Proposal 1:
Allow for primary entrances on the side of a building, given that there is an entrance to the ground story dwelling unit on the (front) facade.

The Goal:
In Somerville's dense urban environment, with narrow parcels, it may be appropriate to locate a buildings principal entrance on the side of a building rather than the façade.

This amendment allows a side principal entrance, as long as there is a ground-story dwelling unit with its own entrance on the facade. The goal is to preserve street facing access and character, while allowing property owners more design options and flexibility on tight lots.

A resulting text update is that street address may be located on the facade wall, regardless of where the principal entrance is located.

Example of a triple decker with a side principal entrance, but a façade entrance to the ground floor dwelling unit

Proposal 2 – Allow for a primary entrance to be on the rear or side of an external accessory dwelling unit.

Proposal 2:
Allow for a primary entrance to be on the rear or side of an external accessory dwelling unit.

The Goal:
In Somerville's dense urban environment, with narrow parcels, it may be more appropriate to locate an external accessory dwelling unit's entrance on the side or rear of a building rather than the façade.

This amendment allows a rear or side entrance for an external dwelling unit.

A resulting text update is that street address may be located on the facade wall, regardless of where the principal entrance is located.

Examples of external dwelling units with side or rear entrances (reference only)

Proposal 1 and 2 - Amended Text

Proposed amendment impacts Somerville Zoning Ordinance 2.4.5

2.4.5 Uses and Features

b. Use & Occupancy

i. Pedestrian Access

a). Buildings must have at least one (1) principal entrance. ~~Principal entrances must be located on the facade, provide both ingress and egress, and be operable at all times.~~

i). The principal entrance may be located on the front or side of the building provided that at least one (1) entrance is provided on the front facade.

~~a).~~ ii). The principal entrance of an external accessory dwelling unit may be located on the front, side or rear of the building.

Related Update: Street Address Location in Development Standards

3.1.17 Development Standards

a. Signs

i. A sign, individual numerals or letters, or a nonelectrical nameplate identifying the property address is required for all real property as follows:

a). Each ground story non-residential use must identify the street address either on the principal entrance door or above or beside the principal entrance of the use.

b). All residential building types must identify the street address either on the principal entrance door, above or beside the principal entrance, on the facade wall, or on a mailbox.

Impacted Sections of SZO

Neighborhood Residence (NR)	3.1.17
Urban Residence (UR)	3.2.16
Mid-Rise Districts (MR)	4.1.14
	4.2.14
	4.3.14
	4.4.15
High-Rise Districts (HR)	5.1.16
Commercial Districts	6.1.12
	6.2.13
	6.3.12
	6.4.15
Special Districts	7.2.9

Proposal 3 – Removing Entrance Spacing Requirement for ground floor commercial building principal entrances

Proposal 3:
Remove principal entrance spacing requirements on commercial buildings

The Goal:
The current principal entrance spacing requirements for commercial building are designed to indirectly control the number of commercial units on the ground floor. However, this approach has shown to be ineffective, as the requirements can be satisfied by adding non-functioning doors, rather than the desired number of commercial units.

Removing this requirement reduces unnecessary design constraints on commercial principal entrances.

By removing the 30 foot maximum principal entrance spacing requirement, the SZO better allows smaller commercial unit footprints.

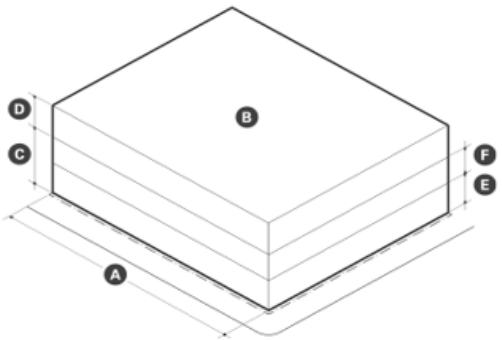
Proposal 3 – Removing Entrance Spacing Requirement for ground floor commercial building principal entrances

Domino's on Cutter and Elm that complies with current principal entrance spacing requirements, but with non -functioning doors

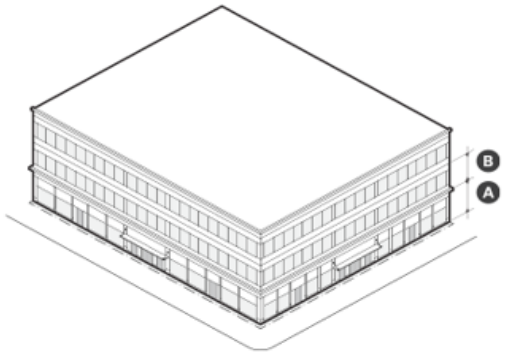
Proposal 3- Amended Text

4.1.8 General Building

m. Massing & Height



d. Uses & Features



Main Massing	
A Building Width (max)	200 ft
Facade Build Out (min)	–
Primary Front	80%
Secondary Front	65%
B Floor Plate (max)	15,000 sf
C Ground Story Height (min)	14 ft
D Upper Story Height (min)	10 ft
E Number of Stories (min/max)	2 3
F Building Height, Feet (max)	42 ft
Roof Type	Flat

Facade Composition	
A Ground Story Fenestration	–
Primary Facade (min)	70%
Secondary Facade (min/max)	15% 70%
B Upper Story Fenestration (min/max)	15% 70%
Blank Wall (max)	20 ft

Use & Occupancy	
~~Ground Story Entrance Spacing (max)~~	~~30 ft~~
Commercial Space Depth (min)	30 ft

Roof-mounted Mechanicals	
Mechanical Equipment, Screening, Penthouse Height (max)	10 ft

Impacted Sections of SZO

Mid-Rise (MR) General and Commercial Buildings	4.1.8
	4.1.9
	4.2.8
	4.2.9
	4.3.8
	4.3.9
	4.4.8
	4.4.9
High-Rise (HR) General and Commercial Buildings	5.1.7
	5.1.8
	5.1.9
Commercial District General and Commercial Building	6.2.7
	6.2.8
	6.4.9
	6.5.7

Questions and Comments

Thank you!