



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 5, 2025

6:30 PM

Joint Meeting with the Planning Board

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:30 pm and adjourned at 10:36 pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Others present: Daniel Bartman – Director of Planning and Zoning, Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility, Justin Schreiber – Senior Planner, Emily Hutchings – Senior Planner, Josh Eckart-Lee – Sustainability Planner, Yasmin Raddassi – Legislative Liaison, Michael McNeeley – Planning Board Member, Lynn Richards - Planning Board Member, Luc Shuster - Planning Board Member, Michael Capuano - Planning Board Member, Amelia Aboff - Planning Board Member, Johan Habib - Planning Board Member, Madalyn Letellier – Legislative Services Manager.

The committee went into recess at 6:33pm and returned at 6:34pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

The committee went into recess at 6:43pm and returned at 6:44pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

The committee went into recess at 8:53pm and returned at 8:58pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0904](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of May 1, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

-
2. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0970](#))
- Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Joint Meeting with the Planning Board of May 15, 2025.
- RESULT:** **ACCEPTED**
- AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis
3. Public Hearing
- 3.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0907](#))
- Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 8 of the Zoning Ordinance to update Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) references.
- Director Bartman explained that flood maps must be updated periodically, which directly affects homeowners who need flood insurance for their properties. He also noted that since the initial submission, the language has been revised to ensure that every required word is explicitly included in the section, rather than just referenced. Additionally, the flood map itself has been updated.
- Chair McLaughlin opened the public hearing at 6:39pm.
Nobody from the public spoke on the item.
Chair McLaughlin closed the public hearing at 6:39pm.
- Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to replace the existing item with the attachment **Land Use - 2025-06-05 Floodplains 2025 Update (with 25-0907)**, this was accepted on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis
4. Officer's Communication (ID # [25-0921](#))
- Planning Board conveying recommendations for items #25-0200, #25-0457, and #25-0590.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
-

-
- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| 5. | Public Communication
(ID # 25-0894) | 16 residents submitting comments re: item #25-0200, a Zoning Text Amendment to amend Sections 3.1.8c, 3.1.9c, 3.1.10c, 3.1.13k, 3.1.13l, 3.2.12l. and 3.2.12m.

RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED</u> |
|
 | | |
| 6. | Officer's Communication
(ID # 25-0829) | Planning Board conveying recommendations for items #25-0269, #25-0129, #25-1460, #25-0128, and #25-0131.

RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED</u> |
|
 | | |
| 7. | Mayor's Request
(ID # 25-0737) | Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 2 and Article 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise definitions and the green score calculation of columnar trees.

RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED</u>
AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis |
|
 | | |
| 8. | Public Communication
(ID # 25-0725) | Senator Jehlen and 61 residents submitting comments re: items #24-1460, #25-0128, #25-0129, and #25-0131, amendments to the Zoning Ordinance for laboratory, research and development, and arts uses.

RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED</u> |
|
 | | |
| 9. | Public Communication
(ID # 25-0724) | Eight residents submitting comments re: item #25-0269, a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 295-297 Medford Street and 93 Walnut Street from Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4).

RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED</u> |
|
 | | |
| 10. | Mayor's Request
(ID # 25-0590) | Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 2 of the Zoning Ordinance to allow the Building Official to waive certain dimensional standards for means of egress.

Councilor Davis inquired about what is different in the newly attached item. Interim Inspectional Services Department (ISD) Director Zaino explained that the additions include adding padding and height requirements to the accessibility standards. The update also allows for the ability to waive dimensional standards, addressing concerns that were raised after the last council meeting. Councilor Wilson shared that the Chair of the Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) requested ongoing |
-

communication to give the SCPD an opportunity to discuss the item further and then submit a supplemental document outlining their concerns. Discussion ended around timeline concerns in order to hear from the commission and discuss the item on the agenda again. Councilor Wilson expressed his desire to allow the commission time to review the materials and provide their input should it lead to any amendments.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to replace the existing attachment with **Land Use - 2025-06-05 Means of Egress Amendment Update (with 25-0590)**, this was accepted on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

11. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [25-0516](#))

Planning Board conveying recommendations for item #24-1584.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

12. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0457](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2-5 and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to remove conflicts with the State Building Code.

Sustainability Planner Eckart-Lee explained the net zero density bonus proposal aims to remove conflicting language from the existing code. The edited version adds the word "of" several times, as it had been mistakenly removed due to a scrivener's error. Councilor Ewen-Campen re-clarified the process, explaining that instead of using the term "net zero," which conflicts with the building code, the language will be revised to reflect standards that meet the city's requirements. Planner Hutchings also shared that adding the language "LEED Platinum certifiable" ensures that the bonus is meaningful and properly incentivizes high-performance buildings.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to replace the existing attachment with **Land Use - 2025-06-05 -Sustainability Amendments Update (with 25-0457)**, this was accepted on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

13. Order
(ID # [25-0338](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning provide the Committee on Land Use with an opinion as to whether the City Council may dictate standards and materials used for outdoor bike facilities.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

14. Order
(ID # [25-0246](#))
- By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Mbah
That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning discuss with this Council, Type IV heavy timber construction now permitted in the 10th edition of Massachusetts State Building Code 780 and potential impacts on inspections, development, and the Zoning Ordinance.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

15. Public
Communication
(ID # [25-0200](#))
- 15 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend the Zoning Ordinance sections 3.1.8c, 3.1.9c, 3.1.10c, 3.1.13k, 3.1.13l, 3.2.12l, and 3.2.12m.

Director Bartman shared that while the city agrees it should be easier to build, it does not support the amendment in its current form. He expressed concerns like those voiced by the Planning Board, noting that not enough of the community has had the opportunity to weigh in on the proposal allowing flat roof construction. Councilor Wilson asked whether the concerns were practical construction issues or purely aesthetic. Director Bartman explained that some concerns are indeed aesthetic, particularly regarding the extent to which a dormer can occupy an entire roof, which is a point of disagreement. He added that with slight revisions, the amendment could potentially move forward. He also referenced a 2019 objection aimed at addressing the varied house types allowed in zoning areas that currently do not exist within the Neighborhood Residence (NR) district.

Councilor Wilson inquired about what public engagement would look like to bring the city to a level of where the community supports these changes. Director Bartman responded that the city has staff in place and would normally hold two open houses where the public could review the proposal on their own time. However, the city is unaware of the extent of engagement that the applicants have done with the community before submitting this proposal. Councilor Wilson continued by asking if the amendment could reintroduce some of the varied housing types that may not match the aesthetic of Somerville. Director Bartman stated that, in his opinion, this

could be possible since the amendment does not need to be applied uniformly to all sides of the building.

Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed support for homeowners' ability to add more space to their homes and emphasized the desire to have further conversations with the Planning Department to better understand specific concerns. Councilor Davis asked for a conservative estimate of whether this issue would come up again in the fall or later. Director Bartman shared that the amendment is included in the budget for the second half of the fall, reflecting a desire to make building easier for homeowners. The conversation then shifted to how delaying the amendment might impact other major projects. Bartman emphasized that the projects listed in the budget, including upzoning, are prioritized and that any new projects should not hinder the department's capacity to continue its work.

Chair McLaughlin raised the topic of pitched roofs versus flat roofs.

Director Bartman explained that there are specific percentages defining what qualifies as a flat roof, and research has been conducted on how dormers are built and connected, as well as how they affect ice and shed water management. When asked about the number of permits, zoning applications, or waivers received that align with what this proposal would permit, Bartman said he would work with the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) to gather those numbers.

In closing comments, both Chair McLaughlin and Councilor Davis reflected on the public input process that occurred in past years, emphasizing the importance of thorough community engagement moving forward.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

16. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0131](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 8 and 12 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Arts & Innovation sub-area of the Master Planned Development Overlay District.

Director Bartman presented on slide deck *Land Use 2025-06-05 - Arts and Innovation OSPCD Presentation (with 25-0131)* providing further clarification on the process and parking. He explained that up to 40% of trips to and from the site are expected to be made by vehicle, with ongoing monitoring required through quarterly reports tracking employee travel patterns, visitor residence data, and parking garage usage, which can be automatically measured. Councilor Davis expressed concerns about how traffic monitoring would be consistently enforced. The discussion highlighted that the SomerVision map serves as general guidance for redevelopment rather than strict requirements. Director Bartman emphasized that while the Council approves zoning permissions, the Planning Department and Planning Board will collaborate to align development with SomerVision's goals, even if exact map details are adjusted. Councilor Ewen-Campen questioned the absence of civic space in base zoning, and Bartman clarified that only open space can be mandated by law, not civic

space. Regarding parking, it was noted that paid parking could affect zoning classifications, but currently, commercial zoning controls parking pricing and has not extended paid parking outside transit zones.

Director Rawson and Planner Schreiber continued to present on slide deck *Land Use 2025-06-05 - Arts and Innovation OSPCD Presentation (with 25-0131)* by addressing mobility concerns, focusing on how site users travel via different transportation modes. Director Bartman clarified that mode share and level of service (traffic flow efficiency at intersections) are distinct metrics and should not be conflated. When questioned about efforts to reduce vehicle trips, Director Rawson explained that ongoing work involves identifying transit priorities and collaborating with community partners to implement effective interventions. Councilor Davis raised concerns about how level of service estimates would reflect the impact of mobility management plans once applied. Planner Schreiber noted that improvements such as widened roadways and upgraded traffic signals are part of a mitigation strategy aimed at discouraging driving. Additionally, Director Rawson emphasized that staff have the authority to set parking pricing, a key tool for influencing parking behavior and managing demand.

Russell Preston, with Rafi, presented on the remaining slides entitled *Land Use 2025-06-05 - Arts and Innovation OSPCD Presentation (with 25-0131)*, focusing on transportation data and parking needs. Councilor Ewen-Campen questioned how transportation figures were calculated, and Mr. Preston explained that predictive models were used to estimate vehicle volumes at intersections. Clarifications were provided on technical visuals to help the committee understand the data and assumptions behind the projections. Councilor Sait asked why 750 parking spaces were deemed necessary for the development, to which Preston responded that the proposed parking ratio is relatively low compared to similar areas, noting that current tenants have already requested more parking in anticipation of future growth. He also stressed that the parking amount could be negotiated downward as the process proceeds. Director Rawson added that a demand model must be approved by Planning and that the 750-space figure should be viewed as a maximum subject to ongoing review and adjustment through a thorough approval process.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

17. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0129](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 3-6, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for arts and creative enterprise, office, and residential uses.

Chair McLaughlin shared the provisional vote of the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) coming out of the Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) that occurred earlier in the week. The update stated that the CBA had passed with a 2/3 vote. Councilor Wilson asked about the R&D district

and whether the zoning was changing. Director Bartman clarified the use case and explained how it interacts with lab uses and how all these uses relate to one another. A conversation took place discussing items 25-0129, 25-0128, and 24-1460, along with agenda item 25-0131, which is inclusive of the commonly referred to SomerNova proposal.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

18. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0128](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 6, 9, and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Research & Development zoning district.

This item was discussed with agenda item 25-0129.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

19. Order (ID # [25-0085](#)) By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Davis and Councilor Wilson That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning draft an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances for transit oriented height and density bonuses for additional affordable housing and other enumerated community benefits.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

20. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-1460](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings.

This item was discussed with agenda item 25-0129.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2025-06-05 TOD Upzoning Updates (with 25-0085)
- Land Use - 2025-06-05 Floodplains 2025 Update (with 25-0907)
- Land Use - 2025-06-05 Sustainability Amendments Update (with 25-0457)
- Land Use - 2025-06-05 Means of Egress Amendment Update (with 25-0590)
- Land Use - 2025-06-05 Arts and Innovation OSPCD Presentation (with 25-0131)
- Land Use - 2025-06-05 Arts and Innovation SomerNova Presentation (with 25-0131)