



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
GRADUATE STUDENT COUNCIL

John Long, City Clerk
City Hall - Aldermanic Chamber
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Somerville Board of Aldermen:

We write to ask you to remove the provision from the Somerville Zoning Ordinance prohibiting more than four unrelated persons from sharing a single dwelling without a special license.

The Graduate Student Council (GSC) represents the 6,800 graduate students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in all matters concerning their welfare, academic opportunities, and professional careers after graduation. We support measures that provide more access to affordable housing for all graduate students and their dependents, and therefore **we strongly support removal of the provision from the Somerville Zoning Ordinance prohibiting more than four unrelated persons from sharing a single dwelling.** Restrictions on the number of people allowed to share a residence should be based on safety considerations and not the family relationship between household members.

A large number of MIT graduate students and alumni live in Somerville. Many of these students live in formal housing cooperatives, and many others live in informal cooperative living situations, where individuals and/or families share and create a household together. These students and alumni are stable community members. Many have committed to living in the area for the 5 or more years it takes to complete a PhD program, and nearly half of PhD students and 30% of master's students continue to live in Massachusetts after graduation.

Communal and cooperative living bring a number of benefits to MIT graduate students, alumni, and the surrounding community. They enable residents to benefit from shared living expenses, often lowering the amount individuals spend on food, rent, and utilities. They enable residents to share in the day-to-day work of living, including communal meals and shared childcare. Communal houses are also often among the most socially and politically engaged households in the community, drawing residents who care about equity, social justice, and community-building and allowing them to share information and pool resources for engagement.

We acknowledge the legitimate concerns, including safety and noise issues, that may arise due to overcrowding, and **we support limits on overcrowding that ensure a suitable amount of living space per resident, such as those already specified in the state sanitary code.** We recommend treating households with related and unrelated members as equivalent, rather than including a separate means for recognition of cooperative houses, since we do not believe in discriminating against households with unrelated members by requiring them or their landlords to go through a licensing process. **Any regulations intended to promote affordable housing for families with children should be based on the number of children in the household;** this would allow Somerville's Zoning Ordinances to support all households with children without favoring



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traditional family arrangements above other arrangements that also create caring and affordable environments for raising children.

In conclusion, we urge you to **remove the provision from the Somerville Zoning Ordinance prohibiting more than four unrelated persons from sharing a single dwelling** and to support safe, economical, and community-oriented living options for all Somerville residents.

Best regards,

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