

## **Questions and Comments for Alderman for Proposed Zoning Overhaul**

The document titled, The Proposed Somerville Zoning Overhaul, attached below was submitted to the Planning Board, within their comment period, for the Somerville Zoning Overhaul heard before the Land Use Committee and the Planning Board at a Joint Hearing on March 5, 2015. The Planning Board voted to recommend the SZO to the Alderman unanimously on March 24, 2015.

Despite that I submitted the following questions to the Planning Board, I still have not received answers to them or direction as to where these answers reside. I am resubmitting these questions herein to the Board of Alderman. Answers to these questions are necessary for me to make meaningful comments about this proposed zoning to the Board of Alderman. For example, without information as to the allowable number of units, such as, residential, retail, commercial, and without the number of allowable and likely population increase, I cannot tell if this proposed zoning comports with SomerVision or not, or whether it is fiscally responsible or good on the whole. It is noteworthy that this information has not been provided prior to close of public comment.

### **The Proposed Somerville Zoning Overhaul**

Somerville has been and still is the densest city in New England. The 2010 census says we have some 75,754 people, but there are many people here that don't file their census. I would bet there are more like 90,000 people living here. We have 59,000 registered cars<sup>1</sup>, and according to the Mayor's Harvard slideshow presentation, we have 32,577 housing units<sup>2</sup> on 4.2 square miles. We currently, experience great transiency in our population.

It is unclear how many units the city can obtain from this zoning proposal. Is it part of the 6000 units outlined in SomerVision, or is it designed to exceed that? If, so by how much? These are large numbers with great consequential effects that need to be understood.

The presentation at the Joint Hearing on March 5, 2015 with the Planning Board and the Land Use Committee seemed more like an award ceremony for the Planning Department with municipal planners offering each other congratulatory accolades about what a good job they had done to create this zoning proposal

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<sup>1</sup> Registered with Somerville Traffic & Parking

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.slideshare.net/Resistat/1-mayor>

themselves, as opposed to having an outside agency do it, than a serious presentation with facts to substantiate the reasons for it, the effects from it, and why we need to increase the population substantially.

What is clear from the plans is that the proposed changes are comprehensive and will substantially increase the density of the residential population in Somerville for unexplained reasons. A lot of areas, including mine in Ward 2, are being converted to Urban Residential which allows "six-plexes" by-right and up to 7 units in lots of a certain size, which are many lots. There are many examples in this city of combining adjoining lots to enlarge them, which would increase the number of increased unit lots.

### **Questions**

1. Why? What is the purpose of this Zoning Overhaul? Why the increase in density?
2. What are the affects from impacts from this Zoning Overhaul? What are the pretexts to justify what you are proposing?
3. How does the Zoning Overhaul improve the quality of life of current Somerville residents?
4. What has the city offered to justify the substantial increase in density this will cause?
5. Are there better ways to get there?
6. Where else has this Neighborhood Residence (NR), Urban Residence (UR), 3-Story Mixed-use (3MU), 4-Story Mixed-Use (4MU), 5-Story Mixed-Use (5MU), 7-Story Mixed-Use (7MU), 10-Story Mixed-Use (10MU), Fabrication (FAB), Commercial Industry (CI), Civic (CIV) TU-SD, ASQ-SD, NP-SD, BB-SD, IB-SD, been used?
7. What occurred? What were the outcomes there?

### **Tax Revenues**

8. What will be the increase in tax revenues? What will be the costs for municipal services relative to the allowable unit increase and corresponding allowable residents? What will be the net revenues? It is widely known and written about that tax revenues from residential housing do not pay for cost of municipal services they require and cause a deficit. Therefore, by how much, would adding

some currently unknown thousands of residential units worsen the city's deficits for the foreseeable future?

### **Jobs**

9. What will be the increase in long term employment opportunities? What income bracket will these jobs pay at? What is the ratio per resident and city job?

### **Units Built**

10. We are already facing real impacts from additional housing units and population. What are these affects?
11. How many units have been built post zoning change in Assembly Square, Union Square, and the Broadway Corridor 55?
12. What are the number of units allowed by special permits and variances issued by the Special Permit Granting Authorities: the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Planning Board, since 2007?
13. Did the bulk of the special permits and variances by the Special Permit Granting Authorities<sup>3</sup> (SPGA) passed since 2009 fit the proposed zoning specifications?

### **Affordable Housing**

14. How does the proposed zoning make housing more affordable generally, as opposed to forced affordable housing units?
15. Pursuant to the number of population and units that have been added to housing, what types of housing were added? How many are luxury and how many are affordable types? Is the affordable housing allowed in this proposed zoning affordable despite its name? What are the income limits that define affordable? Where do the literal poor fit into this zoning proposal?
16. Somerville has many people who do not qualify for subsidized housing by a small margin. How will they be protected? Will they be forced out? Where is the study showing that this zoning proposal will let the people who are living here continue to live here?

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<sup>3</sup> Zoning Board of Appeals and Planning Board

17. What information does the Planning Board and/or City have to establish how many units have been added? Where does the city keep and update this information for analysis of the growth? Is this available to the public to inspect?
18. The Planning Department claims it will make for more affordable housing. What studies do they have to show that?
19. The Planning Department claims the increase in density will keep the costs of housing down. Where is that study?

### **Allowable units**

20. How many units does the proposed Zoning allow? What is the maximum number of units that could be built under the zoning proposal? Or, if developers built all the units this proposed zoning allows, how much would that be? Most of the information and numbers flow from this one. This question is not to be confused with how many units will be built because technically a developer could build less than is allowed.
21. How many residents can live in the allowed units according to health codes?

### **Affects**

22. Depending upon how many units this zoning proposal allows, what will be the effects on traffic, parking, density, overcrowding, green space, crime, sewer, storm water, drainage, flooding, police, fire, schools, ambulance services, Department of Public Works (DPW) services, building department services, trash and recycling, public health, air quality, toxic waste release, loss of green space, loss of historical identity, due to demolishing many historical structures, and more?
23. Has the need for forecasted facilities and services been identified and analyzed? What are the costs and revenues? Is there a deficit? If so, how much?
24. What studies has the Planning Board and/or the city done about the increased density and its impact on the community?

### **Municipal Services**

25. What studies have the Planning Board and/or the city done to establish that the city infrastructure can take the increase?

26. How much will it cost to bring city departments to the necessary levels to service the new density? What is the proposed cost of
- eminent domain for new service locations;
  - increasing city services to facilitate and oversee development of new buildings;
  - Increasing city departments with buildings, personnel, and new machinery, etc, such as Police, Fire, Department of Public Works, Inspectional Services Department, Schools; and City Hall services, such as the City Clerk, elections, treasury, etc.

Will municipal services have to be moved and/or expanded? If so, from what locations will new and increased municipal services be provided to maintain overall services to the city? What is the process by which municipal services would be amended? Is there a master plan?

27. Can the building department handle the proposed increase in building permits and inspections? Based upon how many units and/or structures this zoning proposal allows, does the building department have enough qualified inspectors to handle the proposed increase in their responsibilities well and properly? How much will the department need to be increased? How many more inspectors and staff will be needed? Will they need a new location? If so, where will that be? How much will this cost?

### **Sewage, Storm Water**

28. How many gallons of sewage daily will this proposed zoning add?
29. In what bank or institution does the city's Infiltration/Inflow Stabilization Fund reside? What is the account number? How much money is there currently? Can the public look at deposits made since its inception? What projects have the funds been used to fix? How can the city determine if it can handle the projected increase of sewage and the anticipated reduction of permeable surface? Who is managing adherence to this IISF fund offset? What amounts and what math are the contributions based upon? Does the city have identified Inflow and Infiltration removal projects that would satisfy the 4 to 1 removal requirement? Where is the list of identified projects?
30. How much permeable surface will be lost by this proposed zoning and what are the effects on flooding? What studies have been done relative to sewage, storm water, flooding, and permeable surfaces?

### **Green, Open, Permeable, and Recreation Space**

31. How does this zoning proposal make the city more livable and green space friendly? How does it provide for the creation, management, and protection of open space, green space, and space for recreation in accordance with the number of units and population this proposal allows? What is the proposed ratio per person to green space? How does that compare with other cities and towns in Massachusetts? What studies have you done to show if green areas will be lost by this proposed zoning? If so, how much?

### **Cars, Traffic, Parking**

32. How many cars are anticipated to be added, both registered with the city and non-registered?

33. What traffic and/or parking studies have the Planning Board and/or the city done?

34. Under the proposed zoning, how much parking is required? What is the ratio between allowed units, and required parking?

35. Is the plan to squeeze out cars or to make it so that, if there is no place to park or drive, residents can't have them?

36. Have you studied health effects on residents from increased cars and traffic congestion?

37. How does it make it more commuter friendly including for those who have and will keep cars?

38. Ward 2 has flooding and a high water table.<sup>4</sup> Can underground parking be allowed where the water table is high? The development at 17 Ivaloo St. with underground parking was flooded. What level of the water table would preclude underground parking?

39. The proposed zoning calls for, "If provided, off-street parking must be located underground or in structures and accessed from an alley."<sup>5</sup> If parking is provided within the structures, will this be on the first floor and/or behind retail? Will it be on the second floor accessed with car lifters or elevators? Where will

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<sup>4</sup> Miller River runs underground, which was visible before it was filled in.

<sup>5</sup> Article 2: Base Districts 7-Story Mixed-Use (7MU), PARKING & ACCESS a. If provided, off-street parking must be located underground or in structures and accessed from an alley. Somerville Zoning Overhaul, pg. 19-20.

cars park within the structures as contemplated by this proposed zoning? How many cars can be parked inside a building that is not a parking garage? If buildings with residential units have parking inside, will that require an alley way, which appears to be another word for a driveway to enter? Will these be shared by adjacent buildings? Where are examples of architecture that could accommodate this part of the proposed zoning?

40. Why do six-plexes and 7 unit developments, in certain minimum lot sizes, have to be allowed by-right with the required site plan? Why not leave it as it is, by special permit, which allows for comment and appeal?

### **Historical Properties**

41. What studies have been done to determine how many historical properties can be demolished? What will be the impacts on the Somerville identity and generally to replace historical buildings with a line of similar building types that are architecturally cheap looking with cheap materials as are exemplified by buildings that have been built and are in the pipeline? For example, at the corner of 595 Somerville Avenue and Spring St.,<sup>6</sup> and at 587-589-593 Somerville Avenue.<sup>7</sup> This building type is proposed in drawings for other buildings planned for Somerville Avenue.<sup>8</sup>

42. Does this Planning Board consider these, turn of the century and earlier homes, a historic resource that should be protected as a group at large as opposed to being subject to the 9 month demolition ordinance<sup>9</sup>?

### **Toxic Materials**

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Somerville%20Ave%20595%20-%20Plans%201-29-2014%20%28POST%29\\_0.pdf](http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Somerville%20Ave%20595%20-%20Plans%201-29-2014%20%28POST%29_0.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Somerville%20Ave%20587-593%20-%20Plans%2011-26-2013%20%28POST%29.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Somerville%20Ave%20508%20-%20Plans%207-29-2014%20%28POST%29.pdf>

<http://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Somerville%20Ave%20510%20-%20Plans%207-29-2014%20%28POST%29.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Sec. 7-28. - Demolition review ordinance.

43. Many of these homes have asbestos and other toxic materials. Is the city capable of handling this removal relative to public safety? Somerville does not have an asbestos removal ordinance, unlike, Cambridge, Arlington, Boston, Everett, Malden, and other cities and towns?

### **Utilities**

44. Can utilities and air-conditioning generators and units be placed on buildings visible from the street? If not, where would they be placed?

### **Homeland Security, Crime**

45. In the event of an emergency, what are the routes to exit the city for this newly proposed density of residents? How long would it take?

46. Would the increase in population in smaller apartments and in close living arrangements with unrelated persons sharing kitchens and the density increase overall increase violence, and crime? If so, how much? What will be the cost of increased Police and related services?

### **Public Health**

47. Would increased development and density increase rats, rodents, cockroaches, and other unwanted varmint populations? What is the effect of increased use of pesticides and harsh chemicals to rid them? Do said chemicals get into the water supply?

48. Does the proposed zoning require room in each structure for one recycling container and one trash container for each unit with corresponding assigned numbers to each unit? Where would these containers, be placed in the building?

49. After the snowstorm on January 27, there was no place to put recycle on the sidewalk for my building and the building next door for pick up until March 11, 2015. There was no room to put the recycle bins on the sidewalk between mounds of snow and on the street where the cars drove close to the mounds of snow. There was no place to drop off the recycling. Now that Somerville Avenue was narrowed, where would the proposed number of increased residents leave their recycle and trash in a major snowstorm? What studies have been done on trash and recycling pick up for the number of units allowed under this zoning? What is the cost of the increase?

**How is Somerville testing its theories and practices?**



50. Somerville Avenue cost approximately 23 million dollars of federal and state money to rebuild.<sup>10</sup> The design was to narrow the road to slow down traffic and push it off onto the side streets. After it was completed, during rush hour, the traffic goes from the Somerville Avenue intersection all the way down Park St. to the Beacon Street intersection where it gridlocks. Paying 23 million dollars to increase traffic congestion and fumes going into residential vents seems contrary to what would be expected. Did this turn out the way it was planned?

51. Is Assembly Row providing the net tax revenues to the city that was promised by the Planning Department, Planning Board, Mayor Curtatone, and Alderman? Do their tax revenues cover their expenses? If not, what is the deficit? Where are the studies on this?

52. Is there anybody in the City asking these questions?

Without answers to these questions, how can any rational, reasonable person or board determine where we are, where we're going, what effects this zoning proposal will have, and whether they are worth adopting? Are the side effects of the medicine worse than the illness? How can the Planning Board make a reasoned recommendation to the Alderman, within the required time, without answers to the questions above and information on the effects of this zoning proposal? Without this information, the public was denied the right to comment on it at the Joint Hearing.<sup>11</sup>

I request the information outlined above be made available in a manner that is easily accessible and request that I be notified when and how they will be made available. Thereafter, I request time to respond to the zoning proposal. Otherwise, I request the Planning Board provide the basis for their recommendation to the Board of Alderman.

Sincerely yours,

Claudia Murrow

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<http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=content/projectsRoot&sid=wrapper&iid=http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/ProjectInfo/> Project #602109, Union Square Revitalization Plan, Somerville, October 2012, Pg. 58.

<sup>11</sup> March 5, 2015 Joint Hearing with The Land Use Committee and the Planning Board