



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 7, 2023

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:34 pm and adjourned at 8:36 pm with a roll call vote of all in favor (Councilor Wilson, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Davis, and Chair McLaughlin), none absent, and none opposed. A recess was taken at 6:35 pm for the Planning Board to convene, and ended at 6:37 pm with a roll call of all members present (Councilor Wilson, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Davis, and Chair McLaughlin) and 1 absent (Councilor Davis). Another one was taken at 8:34 to allow the Planning Board to adjourn, and ended at 8:35 with a roll call of all members present (Councilor Wilson, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Davis, and Chair McLaughlin).

Others present: Michael Capuano – Planning Board, Erin Geno – Planning Board, Amelia Aboff – Planning Board, Luc Shuster – Planning Board, Michael McNeley – Planning Board, Debbie Howitt Easton – Planning Board, Jahan Habib – Planning Board, Dan Bartman – OSPCD, Tom Galligani – OSPCD, Amanda Keefe – Redgate, Jennifer Shultz, Sarah Lewis – OSPCD, Adam Dash, Garrett Einis, Christine Blais – OSE, Renee Scott, Brendan Shea, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Matthew McLaughlin, Vice Chair Lance L. Davis, Ben Ewen-Campen, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad and Jake Wilson

Public Hearing re: item # 23-0940

1. Public Communication (ID # [23-0940](#)) NRL WSC 200 Inner Belt Prop, LLC requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 200 Inner Belt Road from Commercial Industry (CI) to High-Rise (HR).

The public hearing opened at 7:05 pm and closed at 7:42 pm. Many residents from Brickbottom and Joy Street gave testimony.

Written comment will be open until September 29 at noon and can be submitted to PublicComments@somervillema.gov.

Eric Fields commented on the practicality of the location of the footbridge and on the lack of an inner belt side connection.

Alyson Shultz spoke against spot zoning and asked if the housing needed to be high-rise.

Kim Schmahmann made points about the proposal process and community input, the overlay district, the precedent set by this proposal, and access.

Colleen Palencia said that there have not been enough community

conversations about this proposal and emphasized safety.

Ramon Bueno spoke to traffic issues in Brickbottom created by short-sided solutions.

Anne Randolph expressed concern that Joy St will end up with a parking lot and agreed with the dissent against spot zoning.

Ward 2 City Councilor JT Scott shared their dismay for this proposal.

Stephen Roger commented on the lack of information given about the housing density required for state funding and why it was necessary for the pedestrian bridge. They also said that there was time between now and May for community engagement and talked about the loss of parking spaces by the developer at North River.

Tori Antonino expressed concern about piecemeal development and called for the tax burden to fall on commercial entities, not residents, as well as for the developer to approach the community first and build trust before starting a project.

Rebecca Scott said that Joy St residents feel disenfranchised by the efforts so far to communicate with them and also called for community input first.

Amanda Beckwith, a tenant at Joy St, said that they felt blindsided and wanted more time to respond to the proposal.

Blake Stacey said that the process should have started with community input and that residents want more access to the community path, not a high rise.

Martha Podren said that Somerville is known nationally for its arts, but developers like these are making it impossible to stay.

Linda Irwin said that there was no coherent plan for Brickbottom and called for better communication with the community as well as protecting the arts.

Bill Shelton said that the urgency to fund a pedestrian bridge seems to be conflicting with the fiscal impact analysis. They said that the neighborhood needs to work for everyone and that funding for the pedestrian bridge should wait until the next fiscal cycle.

Polly Pook said that fault was more with the city than with the developer, adding that the developers they have worked with so far have been somewhat communicative, but the city has not been. They said that traffic, community input, and a lack of notification for abutters are all city issues.

Barbara Magnum said that there is a decent relationship between developer and tenant at North River, but found the idea that Joy St would turn into a 4-story garage or high rise disturbing. They said that representatives of the developer have never said as much and asked if those plans for Joy St were correct.

Amanda Keefe, representing Redgate, presented on the zoning amendment plan. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked why the existing building is included in the proposal - which related to frontage - and about the status of the Brickbottom draft plan. Dir. Galligani said that a fiscal consultant has been hired to review the draft plan and determine whether the mix of land uses is feasible for the city. Councilor Wilson asked about the possibility of downzoning, to which Dir. Lewis said that the pros and cons would need to be discussed.

Mr. Capuano of the Planning Board asked what engagement has been done so far with the neighborhood. Ms. Keefe explained that there has been little community engagement at this time because of the timeline and requirements for qualifying for state funding. She said that at this point, there are no details on a residential building because the goal is to prove their commitment to providing housing. Mr. Capuano requested that the applicant hold a community meeting and update the Land Use Committee and Planning Board before action is taken on this item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Public Hearing re: item # 23-1070

- 2. Public Communication (ID # [23-1070](#))

Daniel C. and Lieba R. Savitt requesting an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 113 Prospect Street from Urban Residence (UR) to Neighborhood Residence (NR).

The public hearing opened at 7:48 and closed at 7:50. Written comment will be open until September 15 at noon and can be submitted to PublicComments@somervillema.gov.

Lieba Savitt, the owner, explained the rationale for the proposal. Ward 2 City Councilor JT Scott requested that the committee recommend approval. Tori Antonino expressed support for the proposal.

Attorney Adam Dash presented on the proposal, explaining that the applicants want to build a rear addition to the structure, which is not possible in the Urban Residence (UR) district.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Public Hearing re: item # 23-1033

- 3. Public Communication (ID # [23-1033](#))

David Einis requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 0 White Street Place from Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) to Urban Residential (UR) and 14 White Street Place from Neighborhood Residential (NR) to UR.

The public hearing opened at 7:54 and closed at 7:55. Written comment will be open until September 15 at noon and can be submitted to PublicComments@somervillema.gov.

Tori Antonino requested the owner consider green space, balconies, and other factors when renovating.

Garrett Einis explained the rationale for the change. Councilor Gomez Mouakad said that she had not heard back from adjacent homeowners but thought that the UR district would be consistent with adjacent properties. She echoed a public comment calling for features such as green space and

balconies.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Public Hearing re: item # 23-0791

- 4. Zoning Ordinance By Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Wilson
(ID # [23-0791](#)) Amending the Zoning Ordinances Section 10.3, Development Standards, and Table 10.4.1. to include vegetated roofs.

The public hearing opened at 8:14 and closed at 8:27. Written comment will be open until September 15 at noon and can be submitted to PublicComments@somervillema.gov.

Amy Mertl supported the green roof amendment.
 David Turin expressed support and asked if there is a way to retrofit existing buildings for vegetated roofs.
 Keja Valens was in favor of both vegetated roofs and solar and said that vegetation can even grow under solar panels.
 Erin Hemenway expressed concern that exemptions will make it too easy for target buildings to do without. They called for the removal of the radio and cell structure exemption, and the removal or modification of the photovoltaic exemption.
 Jacob Bloom expressed support.
 Sam Engelstad supported the amendment and spoke to their wariness of developers' approaches in the past.
 Tori Antonino commented on the limited space in Somerville and the need to maximize green space, both for climate resilience and biodiversity. They called for the removal of the photovoltaic exemption.
 Matthias Rudolph said that there is a false dichotomy between solar and vegetated roofs and called for the removal of the photovoltaic exemption.

Councilor Ewen-Campen said that the proposed amendment was a close collaboration with community members and groups and explained some of the details of the ordinance. He said that the amendment would not prescribe what form the vegetated roofs should take as not to conflict with state building code, that a "green score" would incentivize meaningful installations, and that precautions were taken to not detract from solar.
 Renee Scott and Brendan Shea presented on the upsides of vegetated roofs and what kinds of buildings would benefit from them.

Dir. Blais talked about shared goals and upcoming events in the Office of Sustainability and Environment. Councilor Gomez Mouakad said she did not like the green score idea and asked if the city would struggle to meet the specialized energy code if solar panels were removed. Dir. Bartman said that he could follow up on this question.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2023-09-07 Public Comments (with 23-0940)
- Land Use - 2023-09-07 Public Comments (with 23-0940) 2
- Land Use - 2023-09-07 Public Comments (with 23-0940) 3
- Land Use - 2023-09-07 Public Comments (with 23-0940) 4