

Good evening, Council Members.

My name is Sean Selby. I'm an Architect and Partner at Arrowstreet, a firm whose work is deeply rooted in multifamily residential design. Our clients develop housing projects across Massachusetts — and across the country.

I ask you to support a resolution to allow single-stair egress multifamily residential buildings. Simply put, these mid-rise structures would be built with only one stair, rather than the two that are required today.

You might wonder “is that safe?” The answer is yes. I could walk you through the architectural details, fire-rated construction, sprinkler requirements, ladder truck reach heights, and how each of those concerns can be carefully addressed. Those conversations are worth having. But tonight, I want to talk about something more important: what this change could actually do for Somerville.

First: it unlocks land that nobody's looking at right now.

Large developers work in volume. They need big sites to make their economics work. But there are small, underutilized parcels in every city and town in this state — lots that get passed over because they can't support a conventional multifamily building. Single-stair construction changes that equation. It brings *smaller, local developers* into the conversation — people from the community, building for the community — on sites that would otherwise sit dormant. That's new housing where there was none.

Second: it changes what it feels like to live in an apartment building.

Think about a large 300-unit building — maybe 50 or 60 units on each floor. You can live there for years without knowing your neighbors' names. Now imagine a building where there are four to six units on your floor. That floor becomes your neighborhood. People run into each other. They look out for one another. Single-stair buildings have the potential to foster genuine community — the kind that's increasingly hard to find.

And third: this is inherently more affordable housing.

Every stair core in a conventional building takes up space that could be a unit. Eliminate the redundant stair, and that space becomes *housing*. Cities like Somerville can still require affordability by policy — but single-stair construction builds efficiency directly into the math.

More housing on forgotten lots. Stronger neighborhoods. More affordable by design. I urge you to support this resolution — and I'm happy to participate in the discussion at any time.

Thank you.