



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 20, 2025

6:30 PM

Joint Meeting with the Planning Board

This meeting was held in person in the Chamber at 93 Highland Avenue and via Zoom and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:32pm and adjourned at 9:50pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

The committee went into recess at 6:36pm and returned at 6:39pm 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 - Deputy Director of Planning and Zoning, Stephen Cary - Planner with Planning, Thomas Galligani - Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Amelia Aboff – Vice Chair of Planning Board, Jahan Habib – Clerk of Planning Board, Michael McNeley – Member of Planning Board, Lynn Richards – Member of Planning Board, Luc Shuster - Member of Planning Board, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

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 # [25-0343](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Joint Meeting with the Planning Board of February 20, 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. Public Hearings

- 2.1. Public Communication (ID # [25-0269](#)) John Fragione and Agostino Feola, Trustees of Frala Realty Trust, requesting 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).

Members of the development team, Ben Walden and Matt Dallmeyer, spoke to the presentation listed in the Referenced Items. They highlighted the changes that will allow for a 7-story building with 100% affordable housing units, they believe this to be a perfect opportunity to promote height and

increase density in the neighborhood.

Councilor Ewen-Campen recused himself from this item as he is board member of the Somerville Land Trust.

Chair McLaughlin opened the hearing at 6:47pm and closed the hearing at 7:27pm.

Comments will be accepted until March 31, 2025, until 7pm and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov <<mailto:publiccomments@somervillema.gov>>.

33 individuals spoke to the proposed changes. Over 25 individuals spoke up in support of the change. With many highlighting the importance of bringing affordable housing units to Somerville and remaining committed to furthering the work the city does to establish itself as Sanctuary and Welcoming City. Several residents expressed hope in the development this would bring to Gilman Square and urged a Community Benefits Agreement be in place before the Council votes. 5 individuals spoke in direct opposition of the development bringing to light the negative effects the shadows will have on the neighbors currently living there. The excessive number of 50 units was also of concern, with individuals pointing out there are numerous infrastructure, health, and environmental concerns including pollution and traffic and parking that will follow the construction of the 50 units. A few individuals spoke up urging future construction to focus on quality materials and building in a way that is climate friendly.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2.2. 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 Galligani spoke to the years of work that have gone into creating these proposed changes and the continued efforts and conversations that will continue to be had with developers, the city, and members of the public. Interim Director Bartman and Planner Cary spoke through the presentation, which can be found in the referenced documents, covering all substantive changes to the four items related to Somernova before the committee.

Chair McLaughlin opened the public hearing at 8:06pm and closed the hearing at 9:48pm.

Comments will be accepted until March 31, 2025, until 7pm and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov <<mailto:publiccomments@somervillema.gov>>.

54 individuals, a mix of in-person and online support, spoke and provided their opinions, recommendations, and further questions regarding the four proposed amendments. Amongst those present in the Chamber 26 were youths from Dojo ready to listen, and some to speak, on the lasting opportunities a community center could provide for them and the resources that Rafi has already worked to protect and promote. Overwhelming, 28 individuals, some in full support and some in opposition, all agreed that a Community Benefits Agreement with Union Square Neighborhood Council and a Project Labor Agreement should be approved prior to the Council voting on the amendments. Amongst those present to speak in support of these amendments the need to allow for tech space, research and development to promote climate advocacy, the creation of a community center, and the ability to support arts were present in almost all who spoke. There were numerous hesitations to the proposed amendments including, but not limited to, the effect development would have on traffic, the rental market, height of the building, shade, pollution, noise, cut through access, how neighbors will access their homes, and the concern for where the Arts who currently exist in the space will end up. Specifically for artists and creatives who many not be able to afford the price post development and the continued loss of arts space.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

- 2.3. 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.

This item was taken up with ID #25-0131.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

- 2.4. 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 taken up with ID #25-0131.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

- 2.5. 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 taken up with ID #25-0131.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use 2025-03-20 Public Comments (with 25-0131)
- Land Use 2025-03-20 Public Comments (with 25-0269)
- Land Use - 2025-03-20 297 Medford Street (with 25-0269)
- Land Use -2025-03-20 Arts & Innovation Sub-Area (With, 25-0131, 25-0128, 24-1460)