

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Pat Jehlen [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, November 5, 2023 8:13 PM  
**To:** Planning1; Public Comments  
**Subject:** Comments on zoning proposal

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To the Planning Board and City Council,

I realize that the public comment period has ended, but I hope you will still consider my concerns about the new zoning proposal. (I can't tell from the website if the Planning Board made a decision on the Mayor's proposal for NR zoning changes at the Nov. 2 meeting.) I appreciate the thoughtful work that went into the current zoning, and into the proposed changes. However, I have these concerns:

1. I understand that there can be affordability requirements over 10% of units if the city does an Economic Feasibility Analysis to prove that a developer could still have a project "pencil out" with the below-market rents. Did Somerville decide not to do an EFA? If not, why not? Affordability is what we need!

I am disappointed that the requirement of affordability for third units has not resulted in new affordable units, and is therefore being abandoned. I hope you will think of **other methods of encouraging affordability**. I have no confidence at all that increased density will lower prices.

2. "The Neighborhood Residence district is characterized by a variety of small and moderate floor plate, one-, two-, and three-unit principal buildings with minimal front and side setbacks to help prioritize rear yard space." (Somerville Zoning Ordinance p. 37)

**Preserving rear yard space is important.** Somerville has very little green and open space; much of what we have is on private property. Developers have built added units in rear yards leaving almost no space. I'll attach photos of two places in our neighborhood.

Rear yards are also important for community; they are traditionally a place **neighbors** connect over the back fence and share plants and gossip. When there are adjoining rear yards, they can allow **birds and animals** like squirrels and rabbits to live. (Rats seem to do well in almost any environment.)

Therefore, I hope you will consider providing **greater setbacks than 3 feet for all permanent accessory structures, including garages, but especially for accessory dwelling units**. Three feet from the property line is very close and discourages any neighbor interaction. (10.2.1 Unless otherwise specified, accessory structures are permitted to encroach any side or rear setback, provided that at least three (3) feet is maintained from the vertical plane of any lot line.) The 20' setback for main structures should apply.

3. Please consider **ways to advantage potential homeowners over large corporations**. According to former Alderman Bill White, the number of residential exemptions has actually gone down for 2-3 family homes and condos.

4. Also possibly consider advantaging homeowners over people buying second, third or more homes. Somerville is certainly not like Boston as in the Globe Spotlight [REDACTED]," but there are at least some condos that are owned by absentees who live there occasionally. A vacancy tax, as has been proposed for commercial properties?

I share the concern of the person who commented at the meeting:

"One speaker commented that he noticed something that is allowing architects and landscape architects to play with different ways to cut a lot of actual green space and still be compliant and he asked that the city look into this." Perhaps the use of "permeable" rather than "pervious" is what has led to large areas being covered with pavers.

I support these comments submitted by others and reported in the minutes:

- *Support stated for triple deckers, but not the reduction of setbacks,*

- *Support for more housing, but don't want to end up in a situation where everything is packed up with no space in between,*

- *Against removing the affordable housing requirements for triple deckers as it will undermine the city's effort to increase for affordable housing stock,*

- *Concerned about green space,*

- *Horrified by the notion that the affordable housing requirement would be eliminated, There has got to be another way to do this,*

Thank you for your work and for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Pat Jehlen

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