

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ami Bennett [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 23, 2026 10:15 AM
To: Public Comments; City Clerk Contact
Cc: Ethan Dussault
Subject: Public Comment: Affordable Housing Overlay, file #26-0204

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Somerville City Council
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

March 23, 2026

Dear Somerville City Council,

Hi, my name is Ami Bennett, I am a volunteer for The ArtStaysHere Coalition, I live in Dorchester, but do lots of volunteer work in Somerville.

I write to you today with comment on the proposed Affordable Housing Overlay, file #26-0204.

ArtStaysHere's mission is to preserve the current art space we have, and create more inventory of affordable artist workspace and affordable artist housing.

I support building more affordable housing in Somerville and appreciate that we should support those willing to create 100% affordable housing projects.

I understand there are hurdles to development. Developing 100% affordable housing is expensive, and those seeking to do so may struggle to afford requirements like Somerville's 5% Arts & Creative Enterprise set aside. Somerville needs BOTH affordable housing AND affordable arts space; it shouldn't be a choice of one or the other; we should support the city to develop policies that support both.

I request that the city move forward with long-awaited policies for in-lieu and in-kind ACE payments, as well as the creation of a Somerville Cultural Trust. If these policies were in place, there might have been other solutions for the Affordable Housing Overlay besides losing the required ACE set aside.

In the meantime, I respectfully request that if 100% affordable housing is built and the ACE requirement is relaxed, some of the affordable housing be earmarked for certified Somerville artists.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Ami Bennett
Volunteer, The #ARTSTAYSHERE Coaliton

Ami Bennitt
Motor Media, The Shout Syndicate, #ARTSTAYSHERE Coalition

Madalyn Letellier

From: Molly Kaviar [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 4:46 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment for AHO Zoning Amendment

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of the amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance for the Affordable Housing Overlay discussed at the March 19, 2026 public hearing. As a nonprofit affordable housing developer working in Somerville, these changes would improve the zoning process greatly. The simplified zoning laid out here would help reduce barriers to building affordable housing by allowing us to build more homes and diminish confusion in interpreting the zoning language as it relates to our projects. Please feel free to reach out if you have any further questions.

Thank you,

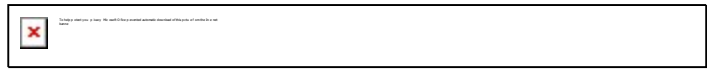
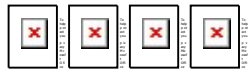
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Molly Kaviar | Senior Project Manager
She/Her/Hers



[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] on:



Madalyn Letellier

From: Meredith Porter <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 9:17 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Mayor; All City Council; Planning Board; Planning1
Subject: ID #26-0204 - Affordable Housing Overlay District amendment

Dear Mayor Wilson, City Councilors, and Planning Board members:

Regarding ID #26-0204, a proposed amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance with respect to the Affordable Housing Overlay District, I am certainly in favor of creating more affordable housing, but many of the effects of the amendment as written weren't evident from the presentation at the public hearing or in the marked-up version of the amendment. I believe that this amendment should be modified substantially, and presented in another public hearing.

The amendment affects Apartment and General buildings in MR3-MR6 zones. In the current zoning ordinance, there are 8 (2 x 4) sets of tables of standards applying to those buildings, plus Table 1-6 for the Affordable Housing Overlay District that overrides some of them. These would be replaced by a new Table 1-6.

When viewing the marked-up amendment or the presentation, the changes involved seem to be relatively small, but close inspection reveals the ramifications to be more complex. Those involved with preparing the presentation may have been unaware of some of these. It takes considerable effort to determine what the effects of this amendment would be, since that requires comparing the new Table 1-6 with each of those 9 sets of tables.

The things that I find concerning regarding Affordable Housing Apartment and General buildings in MR3-MR6 zones are:

1) Standards which currently apply in the underlying zones but are not included in the new Table 1-6, and which therefore apparently would no longer apply

In this category, "Step Back, Top Story (min)" is shown as "Not included in new table (removed)" in the presentation slides, but none of the others are shown there. Some of these are basic and very significant, e.g., elimination of minimum lot width (currently 30 ft) and a minimum number of stories (currently 3). I am opposed to elimination of minimum lot width, for example, since it could lead to development on very narrow lots split off to take advantage of every square foot in areas that are already densely developed.

For more details and a complete list, see CONCERN #1 below.

2) Standards which are included in the new Table 1-6 but not in the current Table 1-6, and whose values would be changed from those which currently apply

These changes were not indicated in the marked-up amendment or in the presentation, except for number of stories and building height. Some notable changes here are that maximum lot coverage would be increased from 90% to 100%, minimum green score would be reduced from 0.25 to 0.20, and minimum open space would be reduced from 15% to 10%. I am opposed to those changes in our city that has so little open space.

For more details and a complete list, see CONCERN #2 below.


These issues could be resolved by coming to agreement on what is desired, adding standards to the new Table 1-6, and updating the marked-up amendment and the presentation to indicate everything that has been changed or eliminated.

These changes are significant, and I believe that this must come up for a new public hearing so that members of the public are aware of everything which is being changed or eliminated.

There is one more thing that I would like to bring to your attention. As I imagine you know, Section 8.1 only applies to buildings where all dwelling units are affordable dwelling units. It appears to me that there may be a problem in the existing Section 8.1 that's not addressed by this amendment: the definition of affordable dwelling unit is very loose, and furthermore development under this section is exempt from Section 12.1 Affordable Housing. It appears, for example, that units might be temporarily sold to a shell corporation at an affordable price in order to take advantage of the looser restrictions of Section 8.1. If that is the case, this loophole should be addressed, either in this amendment or in another.

Thank you for all of your efforts.

Best regards,
Meredith Porter


Somerville, MA 02144

CONCERN #1:

The second slide in the presentation started with this point:

> 1. Superseding Standards – §8.1.6.a.i says Table 8.1.6 supersedes the same standards of a base district

The section of the amendment in question is slightly different:

> 8.1.6.a.ii. The standards of Table 8.1.6 supersede ~~or supplement~~ the dimensional standards for the specified building types permitted by the underlying zoning district.

Note that the words "or supplement" have been deleted relative to the current text of this section. The title of Table 8.1.6 has been changed from Dimensional Standards to Superseding Dimensional Standards.

My understanding of this is that the standards in Table 8.1.6 completely replace the standards for the specified building types permitted by the underlying zoning district; they no longer supplement them, so that if any of those standards are not included in Table 8.1.6, they do not apply to development in the Affordable Housing Overlay District.

Here's how Director Bartman described this:

"The only thing that changed from the old table to the new one is actually the building heights, the number of stories, and a requirement for ground floor commercial units, and then we deleted something from the old table. But the entire table is a replacement so that it is easier to use for all of

our partners that are out there trying to build these buildings. Instead of having them flip back and forth between the code for some standards that are superseded and some that are not, they asked for a complete table that just puts all of the dimensions they need to follow on one page, so that's why the amendment does that."

That statement that "the entire table is a replacement" is in accord with my understanding, and it's clear from third and fourth slides of the presentation, which indicate "Not included in new table (removed)" for Step Back, Top Story (min). There are underlying standards for top story step back, but the presentation makes it clear that because this isn't included in the new table, the requirement would be eliminated.

However, there are many other standards for the building types permitted by the underlying zoning districts that are not included in Table 8.1.6, and which would apparently be removed as well. None of these are shown as "Not included in new table (removed)" in the presentation. Here they are, along with their current values:

Lot Dimensions

Lot Width (min) 30 ft

Main Massing

Building Width (max) 200 ft

Facade Build Out (min)

Primary Front 80%

Secondary Front 65%

Floor Plate (max) 15000 sf MR3&4; 20000 sf MR5; 25000 sf MR6

Ground Story Elevation (min) 2 ft

Story Height (min) 10 ft

Number of Stories (min) 3

Step-Back, Top Story (min) (current AHOD requirement; outside of AHOD, this applies to 5th and 6th stories)

5 or more stories 10 ft (elimination of this was shown in the presentation, as noted above)

Roof Type Flat

Facade Composition

Blank Wall (max) 20 ft

Use & Occupancy

Ground Story Entrance Spacing (max) 30 ft for General buildings

Commercial Space Depth (min) 30 ft for General buildings

Density Factor (min) –

Lot Area < 5,000 sf 1,500

Lot Area >= 5,000 sf 1,125

Net Zero Ready and LEED Platinum Certifiable Building 850

Outdoor Amenity Space (min) 1/DU

Roof-mounted Mechanicals

Mechanical Equipment, Screening, Penthouse Height (max) 10 ft

CONCERN #2:

Another concern is that standards were added to the new table that weren't in the old one, with values that are different from those that applied previously, and this wasn't mentioned at all in the

presentation or indicated in the marked-up amendment. It seems implicit in the description above that standards would have been added to the table to eliminate the need to flip back and forth. What was left unmentioned, except for number of stories and building height, was that the values of some of these had been changed. Here are the changes:

Maximum lot coverage is increased from 90% to 100%

Minimum green score is reduced from 0.25-5% to 0.20-5% of their numeric values (that should be to 0.20 - 5%x0.20 = 0.19, not 0.15)

Minimum open space is reduced from 15%-5% to 10%-5% of their numeric values (that should be to 10% - 5%x10% = 9.5%, not 5%)

Primary Front Setback (min/max) is changed from 2-12 ft to 0-15 ft

Side Setback 4th-8th story abutting NR or LHD is reduced from 30 ft to 20 ft for lot depth < 100 ft

Rear Setback 4th-8th story abutting NR or LHD is reduced from 30 ft to 20 ft for lot depth < 100 ft

Number of Stories (max) for MR3-MR6 lots other than MR3 abutting NR is changed from 7 to 8

Building Height, Feet (max) for MR3-MR6 lots other than MR3 abutting NR is changed from 86/88 ft to 96/100 ft for apartment/general buildings

Secondary Front Parking Setback (min) is increased from 10/2 ft Surface/Structured Parking to 30 ft (was this intentionally made more restrictive than the current requirements?)

Ground Story Fenestration for Primary Facade for general buildings is reduced from 70% min to 15%

Ground Story Fenestration for Secondary Facade for general buildings is decreased from 70% max to 70%

MINOR CORRECTIONS NEEDED:

Open Space and Parking Setbacks should be labeled (min)

For Lot Depth, either <= or >= should be used, rather than < 100 ft or > 100 ft. Otherwise, what's the requirement for = 100 ft?

Madalyn Letellier

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 27, 2026 11:24 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Mayor; All City Council; Planning Board; Planning1
Subject: RE: ID #26-0204 - Affordable Housing Overlay District amendment

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Greetings.

Although I am in support of the intention of allowing the additional height (from 7 to 8 stories and from 86 to 95 feet) and agree that consolidation of all the dimensional parameters into a single table makes the requirements easier to understand, it appears from the detailed analysis in Meredith Porter's testimony about the proposed amendment to the AHOD (see forwarded email below my signature) that the consolidated table includes some metrics which are inconsistent with the metrics in the source tables, which for example, in the case of minimum lot widths and lot coverage limits, could have significant adverse implications.

I therefore agree with Mr. Porter's recommendation that the matter be continued, and then revisited at a subsequent public hearing, once the discrepancies in the tables have been corrected/reconciled.

If any of the changes are intentional, those changes should be explicitly stated and explained so that the Planning Board and Land Use Committee can make informed decisions as to the appropriateness of those changes.

Thank you for your consideration of my feedback.

Fred

Fred Berman (he, him, his)
[REDACTED]

From: "Meredith Porter" [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 9:17:29 PM

Subject:

Dear Mayor Wilson, City Councilors, and Planning Board members:

Regarding ID #26-0204, a proposed amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance with respect to the Affordable Housing Overlay District, I am certainly in favor of creating more affordable housing,

Madalyn Letellier

From: Connor Ring [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, April 2, 2026 9:43 AM
To: Planning1; Public Comments
Cc: Ben Baldwin; Andres Bueno
Subject: Comments re: Proposed Amendments to AHO

To whom it may concern,

In response to the proposed changes to the affordable housing overlay, I would like to provide the following comments. Just A Start is largely in support of the proposed changes. We support the elimination of the Top Story minimum Step-Back from the AHO. Top story minimum step-backs are difficult and costly to construct, especially in wood and Mass Timber construction. Step-backs present design challenges to align structural elements, services, and vertical circulation, and they are an impediment to providing viable residential units on the top story.

The proposed amendments also include changes to the Parking Setbacks. Parking Setbacks are proposed as 30 feet for both Primary and Secondary Front Lines. This is more restrictive than the current code and does not distinguish between Surface Parking and Structured Parking. For a lot like 297 Medford Street, with 3 Front Lot Lines, this would make parking nearly impossible. In light of this, we would urge the planning department to reconsider this change to the Secondary Front Parking Setback requirements. Thank you for your time.

Best,
Connor

--

Connor Ring | RE Project Manager
He/Him/His



[REDACTED]
Cambridge, MA 02140

Direct Line: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Connect with us on:

