

October 7, 2020

President McLaughlin, Vice President Rossetti and Members of the Somerville City Council  
City Hall  
93 Highland Ave  
Somerville MA 02143

Dear Councilors McLaughlin, Rossetti, Ballantyne, Clingan, Davis, Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Niedergang, Scott, Strezo and White:

We are property owners and residents abutting, or directly adjacent to, several parcels along Medford Street in Gilman Square area that the Council's Land Use Committee approved on 9/29 for potential up-zoning.

We are writing to make an urgent plea that the Council postpone a final vote on this significant change and, instead, direct the City's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development to establish an overlay district process that can provide for a more flexible, comprehensive and inclusive approach to increasing building density and expediting development in the immediate vicinity of the coming Gilman Square MBTA Green Line station.

***While it is clear that this new up-zoning proposal has been made and discussed in good faith, it is equally clear that its existence and its consequences are still not widely known or understood by many of the key stakeholders in the Gilman Square community, including many of the residents, businesses and property owners that will be most affected by the change.*** Not only are some of these stakeholders unaware that this change is under consideration, but they are also unaware of its potential impact on the entire Square – nor do they understand the scope and scale of the new structures that what this change would permit developers to build on the up-zoned parcels *as of right*.

While this lack of public outreach and inclusion may have been entirely unintentional, its omission raises important questions about the timing and desirability of making a significant change to a zoning ordinance only recently adopted by the City after a longer and deliberate review.

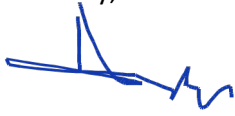
The proposed changes would also seem to fly directly in the face of the stated goals of the City's own 2014 Gilman Station Area Plan, which asserted that "Anchor buildings like the Knights of Malta Hall, the Litchfield Block, Mad Oyster Studios, and the Pearl Street Park senior housing will be preserved and celebrated." This key planning document also clearly stated that "traditional two- and three-family homes on nearby blocks will be protected with stronger, more predictable regulation."

Increased density, transit-oriented development, historic preservation and the enhancement of shared, open and civic spaces are equally welcome and desirable goals – but they are also goals that can sometimes end up in competition with one another. Striking a workable balance in achieving these goals requires a truly inclusive and transparent process.

It is our understanding that City Planning staff have already expressed a preference for the creation of a Gilman Square overlay planning district. This approach would result in the kinds of sensitive, customized, inclusive zoning change solutions that a rushed and narrow up-zoning of a few designated parcels simply cannot provide.

On behalf of our fellow residents, and of property and business owners in and around Gilman Square, we therefore request that the Council hold off on any piecemeal zoning changes in the Square until the City has had an opportunity to bring all stakeholders to the table under the auspices of an overlay district process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gerald Amazu', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gerald Amazu