



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 17, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:00pm and adjourned at 8:11pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Others present: Dan Bartman, Director of PPZ, David Shapiro - City Solicitor, Matt Zaino - Interim Director of ISD, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Thomas Galligani - Director OSPCD, 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 # [25-1111](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Joint Meeting of June 5, 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. Order
(ID # [25-0338](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning provide the Committee on Land Use with an opinion as to whether the City Council may dictate standards and materials used for outdoor bike facilities.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

3. Order
(ID # [25-0246](#))

By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning discuss with this Council, Type IV heavy timber construction now permitted in the 10th edition of Massachusetts State Building Code 780 and potential impacts on inspections, development, and the Zoning Ordinance.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

4. Public Communication (ID # [25-0200](#)) 15 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend the Zoning Ordinance sections 3.1.8c, 3.1.9c, 3.1.10c, 3.1.13k, 3.1.13l, 3.2.12l and 3.2.12m.

Chair McLaughlin shared a conversation he had with a member who submitted the zoning request regarding the proposal, highlighting concerns raised by city staff about potential unintended consequences in its current draft. Despite these concerns, all committee members reaffirmed their support for the proposal's core concepts. They expressed a shared commitment to collaborating with Yes In My Backyard (YIMBY) and look forward to reviewing a revised version of the proposal when it is returned to the committee following collaborating with the city.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE

5. 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.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to amend the language of the Master Planned Development Overlay District to add section v and sub-section a to read:

“v. Master plans must include at least one hundred and fifty (150) dwelling units.

a). No more than fifteen percent (15%) of the total proposed gross floor area may be provided to residential uses.”

This was approved on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

Director Bartman shared feedback from a conversation held with the Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) to add a few words to the Superseding Table 8.4.19a to clarify a text change regarding step backs.

Councilor Wilson moved to amend table 8.4.19a to add the language “or 75 ft (whichever is less)” after 4th story within Block 1, 2, and 4. This was approved on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

Following the acceptance of the above amendments Councilor Ewen-Campen raised a question about the role of the Urban Design Commission (UDC) in the Master Plan process. In response, it was clarified that the next step involves the Planning Board adopting an Urban Design Framework, with the expectation that the UDC will play a key role in shaping that framework. The UDC will be responsible for evaluating the streetscape and design elements that will be incorporated into the project. Once the project enters the permitting phase, the UDC will review and approve aspects related to streets, civic spaces, and building sites. It was also confirmed that a hotel is permitted under the commercial use category

within the base zoning unit, but a hotel has not been proposed as part of any conversations to date. During the Master Plan review, there will be opportunities for community members to provide feedback. Sidewalk widths, brought up by Councilor Ewen-Campen, were a topic of interest, and will depend on the inclusion of bike lanes or on-street parking, indicating a flexible approach based on street design.

Councilor Davis voiced strong concerns about whether the proposed development is truly the best option for the city. He pointed out the lack of proximity to transit, the potential for increased traffic, and the risk that economic and political challenges could prevent the project from being completed. Chair McLaughlin agreed that zoning by petition is not an ideal method and acknowledged the inevitability of traffic in any future development, though he found the proposed mitigation measures to be satisfactory. Councilor Wilson also expressed disagreement with by-right zoning and validated the public's concerns. All councilors shared apprehensions about the impacts of construction, traffic, and whether a more suitable proposal could better serve the neighborhood's needs.

Chair McLaughlin concluded by outlining the procedural steps for moving the item out of committee-either through a vote or by discharging it without a recommendation. Liaison Raddassi noted that the deadline for action is June 29th, with the final opportunity for the full Council to vote scheduled for the June 26th meeting.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED**

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

6. Order
 (ID # [25-0085](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Davis and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning draft an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances for transit oriented height and density bonuses for additional affordable housing and other enumerated community benefits.

Land Use Analyst Samantha Carr presented on the presentation, *Land Use - 2025-06-17 TOD Upzoning Updates (with 25-0085)*, offering insights into current zoning dynamics. During the discussion, Councilor Ewen-Campen posed a question to Director Bartman regarding the factors driving the preference for urban residence districts over mid-rise ones. Director Bartman explained that a key driver is the ability to construct four-story apartment buildings by-right in urban residence zones, which streamlines the development process. This sparked a broader conversation among councilors about the distinctions between residential, urban, and neighborhood residence zones, and why urban residences appear to be thriving more. Director Bartman elaborated on several contributing factors, with particular emphasis on the permitting process and the overall time required to bring a

development to competition. Chair McLaughlin expressed interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the by-right development process and how it intersects with the creation of affordable housing, to be discussed at a future meeting.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

7. 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.

Director Galligani addressed a concern raised by Councilor Scott regarding the possibility that a developer might choose to build under the Research & Development (R&D) base district zoning. This route could potentially allow for more development than what the community envisions. In response, the city worked with the Councilor on a zoning amendment to reduce the maximum number of stories permitted from four to two. This change is intended to serve as a disincentive for developers to pursue the R&D design while still enabling existing businesses to expand. The base district continues to support a range of uses, and the overlay district ensures those uses apply consistently across the entire area, preserving development opportunities. The conversation then shifted to the types of uses currently allowed under zoning, with Director Bartman referencing a presentation from March 20, 2025, which included a slide detailing permitted building uses and occupancy types. A discussion followed about whether limiting the number of stories or setting a maximum building height would be more effective in guiding development. Director Galligani concluded by emphasizing the city's confidence in the trust established with the developer, Rafi, and expressed opinion that the project would proceed according to the proposal, he acknowledged that absolute certainty is never guaranteed in development processes.

Councilor Davis moved to amend Sec 6.5.7c Main Mass table, Section E, amending number of stories under Number of Stories to strike the word "min" and the number "4". This motion failed on a roll call vote of 2 in favor, (Councilors Davis and Sait), 3 Councilors opposed (Councilors Wilson, McLaughlin, and Ewen-Campen), 0 absent.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

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

8. 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 discussed with agenda item #25-0128.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

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

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0590](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 2 of the Zoning Ordinance to allow the Building Official to waive certain dimensional standards for means of egress.

City Solicitor Shapiro attended the meeting to address questions raised during the previous committee meeting. He highlighted recommended language changes aimed at making the ordinance more inclusive. Councilor Ewen-Campen inquired whether the inclusion of this language was essential or if it could be removed. Interim Director Zaino confirmed that the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) supports the proposed language change.

Following the initial discussion, Councilor Ewen-Campen introduced an amendment to strike and reinsert the inclusive language into Section C. Both Mr. Shapiro from the Law Department and Director Bartman agreed that maintaining consistent language throughout the ordinance was important. No concerns were raised regarding this amendment.

Councilor Wilson moved to amend Section 2.4.1.b of the Zoning Ordinances to strike the word “possible” and insert the language “feasible without undue financial hardship”. This was approved on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to amend Section 2.4.1.c to of the Zoning Ordinances strike the word “possible” and insert the language “feasible without undue financial hardship”. This was approved on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 0 absent.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

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

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2025-06-17 TOD Upzoning Updates (with 25-0085)