



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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January 8, 2019

The Honorable Board of Aldermen
City Hall
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Adoption of a new Somerville Zoning Ordinance to supersede the current zoning ordinance as originally adopted on March 23, 1990.

Dear Honorable Board of Aldermen:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Somerville Planning Board submits to your Honorable Board its recommendation on the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance, as submitted for the September 27, 2018 regular meeting (ID# 19498/agenda item 206747) of the Board of Aldermen.

On October 16, 2018, at 6:20 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the Board of Aldermen held a duly advertised joint public hearing in the Aldermanic Chambers in City Hall. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed ordinance and evaluate the proposed ordinance in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Planning Staff.

The Planning Board met multiple times to discuss the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance and the public feedback received since the submission of the revised and re-advertised document. Following due consideration, Rebecca Cooper made a motion to recommend that the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance be adopted by the Board of Aldermen, following consideration and potential amendment of the proposal to address the concerns identified by the Planning Board. Dorothy Kelly Gay seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.



PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

We have been vocal proponents of the Overhaul since it first came to this Board in 2015. Since that time various modifications through extensive and impressive public processes have made this proposal better and better. We believe this plan reflects our SomerVision goals, as well as the desires, of the people of our city – both our residents and our businesses.

The Planning Board sincerely appreciates all the Planning Staff research and expertise that has gone into writing this document. Along with the work of numerous citizens that have attended open houses, provided testimony, and written comments, we also acknowledge the time and effort put forth by the Board of Aldermen as an overhaul of the zoning ordinance is a coordinated team effort.

The Planning Board is extremely supportive of the revised organization of the ordinance and the easy to follow language. The Planning Board encourages adoption quickly to reduce the unpleasant outcomes that the continued use of the current ordinance sometimes creates, but with the understanding that there are certain issues that will need to be further studied and amended shortly after adoption. The Planning Board also requests that the Board of Aldermen consider the following items prior to adoption of the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance:

Current Amendments

- Air quality is of utmost importance and must be included in the overhaul. If the committee of scientists and other experts studying the effects of near highway particulate matter have a recommendation prepared prior to the document leaving the Land Use Committee's purview, then this language should be immediately incorporated into the overhaul.
- The Open Space amendments before the Board of Alderman at this time have serious long range land use implications across the entire city. While interim amendment may be necessary during the adoption process, the overhaul should not be delayed by the need for an open space acquisition plan.

Mapping Issues

- Washington/Beacon Street should be more closely considered. The neighbors' concerns were clearly heard and understood but this area needs more study before editing the zoning map. This area should be part of the big picture of the neighborhood and our city.
- Individual Aldermen know their wards and neighborhoods best. Solving the zoning on particular sites may be necessary in some parts of the city but it is more important to get the structure right and alter the pieces later.

Living Document

- From the time it passes, any ordinance will need to adapt. Zoning should reflect the changing needs and desires of a municipality and, therefore, is not a static document.
- Our City has been working on this overhaul for many years. It has been revised and edited to reflect the concerns and views of an amazing number of constituents. It is time for adoption.

The mandate of this board is to provide our unique expertise and perspectives on the development and growth of the city. However, the zoning ordinance is the charge of the Board of Aldermen. As the revised structure and the text of the code have been complete for a while, the merits of certain language choices could be debated to the point of accomplishing nothing. The City cannot afford to be hampered by an

outdated ordinance any longer. The Planning Board urges the Board of Aldermen to accept the document structure that allows amendable flexibility and adopt the proposed ordinance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. A. Capuano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Michael A. Capuano, Esquire
Chair of the Planning Board