



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2026

6:30 PM

Joint meeting with the Planning Board

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:31 pm and adjourned at 8:32 pm on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin and Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Others present: Daniel Bartman – Director of Planning and Zoning, Samantha Carr - Land Use Analyst, Matt Zaino - Deputy Director of Inspectional Services, Joshua Manion - Senior Zoning Review Planner, Michael McNeeley – Planning Board Member, Lynn Richards - Planning Board Member, Luc Shuster - Planning Board Member, Michael Capuano - Planning Board Member, Amelia Aboff - Planning Board Member, Johan Habib - Planning Board Member and Delaney Fisher-Cassioli - Clerk of Committees.

The committee entered recess at 6:32pm and returned at 6:34pm with 4 members (Councilors Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin and Ewen-Campen), and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

The committee entered recess at 7:36pm and returned at 7:36pm with 4 members (Councilors Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin and Ewen-Campen), and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen

Absent: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Public Hearings

- 1.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0204](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance to provide for larger buildings, additional dimensional flexibility, and fewer use restrictions for affordable housing projects.

Daniel Bartman, Director of Planning and Zoning, reviewed the document titled Land Use - 2026-03-19 Fact Sheet (with 26-0204) concerning the proposed amendments.

In response to a question from Planning Board member Amelia Aboff, Director Bartman clarified that no changes had been made to the design of the building exteriors.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that buildings located on a pedestrian street are typically required to include ground-floor commercial space. However, under the proposed amendments, these buildings would be exempt from the

requirement that 5% of space be designated for arts and creative uses. Director Bartman explained that while such uses would still be permitted, they would no longer be mandatory. He added that property owners have expressed interest in incorporating spaces that would serve and benefit residents of these affordable housing units.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 6:50 PM.

Eight residents spoke on the proposed amendments. Speakers generally expressed support for increasing affordable housing and noted the strong demand for such housing. Several residents supported increasing development capacity to enable more housing production, including allowing additional height and density. One speaker also supported lowering minimum ground-floor elevation requirements to improve accessibility.

Multiple speakers highlighted the value of arts and creative spaces, with some expressing concern that the amendments would make such uses optional rather than required, and one suggesting that affordable units be prioritized for artists. Others underscored the importance of open space and greenery, suggesting that new development should incorporate features such as balconies. Several speakers also noted the technical complexity of the proposal, referencing changes to lot coverage, green score, and parking setbacks. One residents had concerns about the impacts on neighborhood balance and another resident expressed a preference for pursuing project-specific variances rather than broader zoning changes.

There being no further speakers Chair Ewen-Campen closed the public hearing at 7:07 PM.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that public comments will be accepted until Friday, March 27th at noon and should be sent to publiccomments@somervillema.gov

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

- 1.2. Zoning Ordinance (ID # [26-0234](#)) By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Davis and Councilor Sait Amending Sections 2.1.1 and 3.1.12 of the Zoning Ordinances regarding Accessory Dwelling Units.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the item will be discussed further in mid-May.

Samantha Carr, Land Use Analyst, reviewed the document titled Land Use - 2026-03-19 LUC Accessory Dwelling Unit Amendment (with 26-0234). She stated that the current discussion is focused on regulatory mechanisms, with the potential for future discussion of broader policy considerations.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 7:16 PM.

Eight residents spoke during the public hearing. Several speakers expressed support for the proposal, noting that it could help expand housing options and reduce costs. Many supported the use of existing structures and prefabricated units as a way to enable additional housing, though one expressed concern about the proposed 1,200 square foot size limit.

Multiple residents also raised concerns about potential impacts. Several speakers cautioned that developers could take advantage of the amendments, including by replacing existing structures with larger or higher-end units or constructing oversized backyard cottages. Others expressed concern that the proposal could negatively affect neighborhood character, increase building scale and shadows, reduce open space, and fail to support affordability or intergenerational housing.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the public hearing at 7:33 PM.

Chair Ewen-Campen shared that public comments will be accepted until May 1st at noon and should be sent to publiccomments@somervillema.gov

He also stated that this is the start of a longer conversation as the City needs to figure out the terminology and alignment with the state.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2. Order
(ID # [26-0068](#))

By Councilor Wheeler, Councilor Mbah and Councilor Sait

That this Council work with the Administration to clarify understanding of the rules for accessory dwelling units or affordable dwelling units as detailed within.

Joshua Manion, Senior Zoning Review Planner, reviewed the document titled Land Use - 2026-03-19 Presentation (with 26-0068), explaining key differences between Somerville's zoning rules and the Massachusetts Affordable Homes Act of 2024. Planner Manion noted that Somerville uses different terms than the State and that the City already allows backyard cottages as a type of accessory building. Chair Ewen-Campen asked if the Administration is preparing changes to address these differences, and Planner Manion explained that staff are currently developing guidance for how to apply the State rules in Somerville. Matt Zaino, Deputy Director of Inspectional Services, and Daniel Bartman, Director of Planning and Zoning, added that staff are also seeking policy direction from the Committee as they work on potential changes to the ADU code.

Planner Manion clarified that Protected Use Accessory Dwelling Units (PADUs) are regulated by State law. PADUs can be up to three stories and 900 square feet in total, and State rules prevent local zoning from adding extra restrictions beyond these limits. Backyard cottages, by contrast, remain fully subject to Somerville's local zoning rules for height and size. Lot

coverage limits for the main building still apply, and other design requirements may be reviewed case by case to ensure compliance with State rules. Planner Manion also noted that the City's legal team is asking the State Attorney General for guidance on open questions, including whether more than one accessory building can be allowed on a lot if one qualifies as a PADU. Director Bartman added that because State law has changed since Somerville's original zoning rules were adopted, the City will need to update its regulations to avoid confusion.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that a public hearing will be scheduled in the future on the proposed amendments.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2026-03-19 Fact Sheet (with 26-0204)
- Land Use - 2026-03-19 Presentation (with 26-0204)
- Land Use - 2026-03-19 Presentation (with 26-0068)
- Land Use - 2026-03-19 LUC_Accessory_Dwelling_Unit_Amendment (with 26-0234)