

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Aaron Weber [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Friday, March 20, 2026 4:19 PM  
**To:** Public Comments; strezoatlarge@gmail.com  
**Subject:** March 19 Land Use/Planning Board hearing

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Councilors & Planning Board Members:

At the March 19 Land Use Committee/Planning Board joint hearing, I was disappointed to hear former councilors Provost and White among the people speaking in opposition to the construction of backyard cottages. Their testimony featured several misconceptions that are common in opposition to debate about new construction. The Land Use Committee and Planning Board alike are well aware of these facts, but they bear repeating:

Opponents of new construction claim that developer profits are excessive. In reality, construction margins are tight. The profit from the redevelopment of a property in Somerville mostly accrues to the prior homeowner who sold it, not to the builder.

They claim that profit from redevelopment is unethical. In reality, homebuilding is a legitimate business that delivers a necessary product. That's just as true today as it was 100 years ago when for-profit developers built the rest of the existing housing stock in this city.

They lament a lost era of affordable multifamily housing in the form of triple deckers. But the policies they propose would block new multifamily construction which would make the same thing possible today.

They claim to support entry-level homeownership opportunities, but then oppose the construction of condominiums which provide them.

Most importantly, they claim that the city can support affordability by opposing new construction. This is patently false, and councilors White and Provost in particular should be well aware that blocking new construction actually increases the value of their own properties.

It should not be controversial to say that our city's regulatory environment should support necessary and useful industries like homebuilding, rather than impede them. Please bear this in mind when updating our zoning code.

Sincerely,  
Aaron Weber  
[REDACTED]  
Somerville MA 02143

**Madalyn Letellier**

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**From:** Jon Landry [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 21, 2026 9:13 AM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment with Proposed Ordinance Language – ADU / Backyard Cottage Amendments City of Somerville – Land Use & Planning Board

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**Public Comment with Proposed Ordinance Language – ADU / Backyard Cottage Amendments  
City of Somerville – Land Use & Planning Board**

**Date: March 21, 2026**

**To the Honorable Members of the Planning Board and City Council,**

**I am writing in strong support of expanding and simplifying Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulations. I have been a builder and developer working in Somerville for many years, with hundreds of projects completed or in progress. I can say without hesitation that the current level of regulatory friction—layered reviews, dimensional constraints, and inconsistent interpretations—directly limits housing production and increases costs that ultimately get passed on to renters and buyers.**

**If the goal is to address the housing shortage in a meaningful way, the City must focus on what actually gets built in the real world. Right now, too many viable ADU projects die in the design phase or become financially infeasible due to avoidable zoning constraints. The result is fewer units, higher costs, and missed opportunities to utilize existing properties more efficiently.**

**The ADU program is the right idea. However, to make it effective at scale, the ordinance must go further in reducing barriers and allowing practical, buildable solutions.**

**Below are specific proposed amendments based on real construction and permitting experience:**

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**### 1. Setbacks and Yard Use**

**Issue: Existing setback requirements prevent the use of otherwise viable rear yards and limit ADU feasibility on typical Somerville lots.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “Detached ADUs shall be permitted with no minimum rear yard setback and no minimum side yard setback, provided that applicable building and fire codes are satisfied.”**

**Rationale:**

**Many lots in Somerville are constrained. Requiring setbacks for small accessory units is unnecessary and significantly reduces buildable area. Allowing zero-lot-line placement—similar to garages and sheds—will unlock a substantial number of new housing opportunities without altering neighborhood character.**

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**### 2. Building Separation and Fire Safety**

**Issue: Arbitrary building separation requirements (e.g., 10 feet) limit site layout flexibility, even when modern fire protection systems are used.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “Minimum building separation requirements for ADUs may be reduced or eliminated where the ADU is fully protected by an NFPA 13D or equivalent sprinkler system and complies with applicable fire-rated construction standards.”**

**Rationale:**

**In practice, nearly all ADUs are already being sprinklered. Fire protection systems provide a higher level of safety than separation distance alone. The code should recognize this and allow flexibility where enhanced safety measures are in place.**

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**### 3. Height and Story Allowance**

**Issue: Limiting ADUs to 1-1.5 stories unnecessarily restricts livability and density.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “Detached ADUs shall be permitted up to two (2) stories in height, subject to an overall height limit consistent with accessory structure standards.”**

**Rationale:**

**Allowing two-story ADUs enables more functional layouts, including multiple bedrooms. This directly supports increased housing capacity without increasing footprint.**

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**### 4. Basements and Below-Grade Space**

**Issue: Restrictions or ambiguity around basements limit efficient use of space.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “Finished basement or below-grade space within an ADU shall not count toward maximum gross floor area where compliant with building code and egress requirements.”**

**Rationale:**

**If the goal is more housing, it should not matter whether square footage is above or below grade. Additional bedrooms and living space increase usability without impacting exterior massing.**

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**### 5. Gross Floor Area Cap**

**Issue: A strict 900 sq ft cap can limit functionality.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “ADUs shall be permitted up to 900 square feet of above-grade gross floor area, with additional below-grade finished space permitted as described herein.”**

**Rationale:**

**Maintains a reasonable size limit while allowing practical layouts that can accommodate families or multiple occupants.**

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**### 6. Reuse of Existing Structures**

**Issue: Existing barns, garages, and accessory buildings are underutilized due to nonconformity issues.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “Existing accessory structures may be converted to ADUs regardless of nonconforming setbacks, lot coverage, or dimensional standards, provided no expansion beyond the existing footprint occurs.”**

**Rationale:**

**If a structure already exists, reusing it for housing should be encouraged. Preventing conversion due to technical nonconformities is counterproductive and wasteful.**

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**### 7. Approval Process**

**Issue: Delays and discretionary reviews slow production.**

**Proposed Language:**

**> “ADUs meeting the above criteria shall be permitted by-right through administrative building permit review without requirement for special permit or discretionary design review.”**

**Rationale:**

**Speed and predictability are essential. If approvals take months, projects will not move forward at scale.**

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## **## Closing Statement**

**If Somerville is serious about addressing the housing shortage, the City must align its regulations with how housing is actually built. Every unnecessary restriction reduces supply and increases cost. Those costs do not disappear—they are passed directly to the end user.**

**ADUs represent one of the most practical, low-impact ways to increase housing supply. But for this program to succeed, it must be easy to build, repeatable, and economically viable.**

**The current proposal is a strong step forward. With the above adjustments, it can become a truly effective tool for increasing housing production across the city.**

Thank you,

Jon Landry



North Andover, MA 01845



## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** amanda desmond [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Saturday, March 21, 2026 1:03 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Public Comment – Environmental and Sustainability Support for ADU / Backyard Cottage Zoning Reform City of Somerville – Land Use & Planning Board

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Date: March 21, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the Planning Board and City Council,

As a lifelong Somerville resident and property owner I am writing in strong support of the proposed expansion and simplification of Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) and backyard cottage regulations, particularly from the standpoint of sustainability and environmental responsibility.

ADUs represent one of the most practical ways for Somerville to advance environmentally conscious housing. Smaller, efficiently designed living spaces inherently consume fewer resources—both in construction and in long-term operation. By encouraging compact, well-designed units, the City can reduce overall energy consumption, lower carbon emissions, and promote a more sustainable pattern of development.

From a construction perspective, smaller units require fewer raw materials, generate less construction waste, and reduce the environmental footprint associated with new development. From an operational standpoint, ADUs are significantly more energy-efficient to heat, cool, and maintain. When paired with modern building practices—such as high-performance insulation, heat pump systems, and energy recovery ventilation—these units can operate at a fraction of the energy demand of larger homes.

Equally important is the concept of land use efficiency. ADUs allow the City to increase housing supply without requiring new infrastructure expansion, large-scale demolition, or suburban-style sprawl. Instead of pushing growth outward, ADUs make better use of existing lots, existing utilities, and existing neighborhoods. This form of “gentle density” is widely recognized as a key strategy for sustainable urban development.


Backyard cottages and small-scale housing also support alternative living patterns that align with environmental goals. Smaller homes encourage reduced consumption, lower utility usage, and more intentional use of space. This aligns with broader trends toward minimalist living and resource conservation, which are increasingly important in addressing climate-related challenges.

However, for these environmental benefits to be realized at scale, the regulatory framework must allow these units to be built efficiently. Excessive dimensional constraints, setbacks, and approval delays not only limit housing production, but also prevent the widespread adoption of this more sustainable housing type.

If Somerville is serious about its climate goals and sustainability initiatives, then enabling ADUs is a direct and actionable step forward. By making it easier to build smaller, energy-efficient homes within existing neighborhoods, the City can reduce environmental impact while simultaneously addressing the housing shortage.

I strongly encourage the City to continue advancing these reforms and to ensure that the final regulations support practical, scalable implementation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Amanda Desmond  
  
Somerville ma 02143  
Thank you,

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