

Madalyn Letellier

From: Emily Balskus [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 10:16 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: ID # 23-1827 - Rafi / Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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To whom it may concern:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to this project. I am a Somerville resident and I live at [REDACTED], just across the train tracks from the area that would be developed in this project. I have major concerns over the scope of this project for myself and anyone living near the proposed building sites. The 10+ year construction timeline and the permanent changes in traffic that would accompany the proposed project will **irreversibly** change our neighborhood and cause extreme stress and disruption to nearby residents.

I ask that you please consider the concerns of neighborhood residents in considering this zoning change and commit to not allow any buildings higher than the current 4 story limitation. I love my neighborhood and the wonderful community we have. I have also always appreciated the care and concern the city of Somerville has for its residents. I hope that the city will continue to show this type of commitment to citizen wellbeing and oppose the Somernova project.

Sincerely,
Emily P. Balskus

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ami Bennitt [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 10:05 AM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Cc: Anti-Displacement Task Force; Michael Rosenberg; Gregory Jenkins; Katjana Ballantyne; JT Scott; Becky Donner; Franklin Marval; Sam Potrykus; Ethan Dussault; jenn harrington; Daniel Coughlin; belltooth; Camille Stubbe; Daniel Wong
Subject: Letter of Concern: Rafi Property's Zoning Request
Attachments: Public Comment Letter_Rafi Properites Zoning Request_ARTSTAYSHERE Coalition.pdf

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Dear Somerivlle City Council,

Please find attached our letter of concern / public comment in regards to Rafi Property's zoning request.

Thank you,

The #ARTSTAYSHERE Coalition

Ami Bennitt
Motor Media, The Shout Syndicate, #ARTSTAYSHERE Coalition



**PREVENTING ARTS & CULTURAL
DISPLACEMENT IN GREATER BOSTON**



Somerville City Council
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

December 13, 2023

Dear Somerville City Council,

We write to you today with public comment regarding Rafi/Somernova's filing for a zoning overlay in Union Square's fabrication zone.

As you know, Somerville constituents went to great effort in 2019 to introduce the Fabrication Zone, specifically to protect the handful of industrial/warehouse buildings that still exist in Somerville. Regionally, only Somerville has this amazing unsung hero of a zoning rule that protects the arts and creative economy that takes place in these few buildings. Neither Boston nor Cambridge has such protections, and thus have lost most of their artists and creative communities due to development. Over 2M square feet of cultural space has been lost and not replaced in our region alone.

Although we are not against development, nor are we against Somernova, we are extremely concerned about the potential implications of granting their zoning request in Union Square/Fabrication Zone. We feel this would be a terrible precedent to set in Union Square with so much other development about to happen -- including North River's impending development of the Brickbottom area, where both Brickbottom Artists and Joy Street Studios are at risk. By granting the variance as Rafi currently proposes, Somerville would make it easier for other developers to do the same. Changes to their current proposal must be made with the input of Somerville's artists and creative business owners.

Somerville is widely known for its large number of artists, musicians, and creatives--with Somerville Open Studios and Somerville Porchfest seeing participation in over 300 per event each year. We must not only protect these workspaces in Somerville, we actually need to make more.

#ARTSTAYSHERE's mission is to replace what's been lost, protect what we have and build more arts/music/cultural space in our region for the future. If we don't stand up, we know what happens: decades of continued arts displacement. This must change.

The creative economy IS the economy. We must protect what we have for it to keep contributing to our economic health. We implore you to uphold the current zoning rules for the Fabrication Zone. Don't F with FAB.

Sincerely,

Ami Bennett, Cristina Todesco, Ethan Dussault, Becky Donner, Sam Portykus, Franklin Marval
The #ARTSTAYSHERE Coalition
www.artstayshere.org

Madalyn Letellier

From: Martha Cook [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 11:07 AM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: Climate and Equity Innovation Sub Area Overlay District (File 23-1827)

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Good morning,

I live on [REDACTED], across the tracks from the proposed Somernova development. In many ways, I am very excited about the Somernova proposal EXCEPT for the proposed parking spaces. I am willing to suffer through construction but it is unimaginable that 1200 more cars would be on Dane, Tyler, Properzi Streets....and Somerville Avenue. What's wrong walking from Union Square T.....or shuttle busses from Porter and Union? Please.....Somerville is committed, I thought, to being more pedestrian and bike friendly. Use your imagination.

Martha Mueller Cook
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Daniel Coughlin [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 12:05 PM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Cc: Anti-Displacement Task Force; Michael Rosenberg; Gregory Jenkins; Katjana Ballantyne; [REDACTED] Ben Ewen-Campen; [REDACTED]; Ethan Dussault; Ami Bennitt; jenn harrington
Subject: Somernova
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Dear Somerville City Council,

My name is Dan Coughlin and I am homeowner at [REDACTED]. I am an artist at Joy Street Studios and a member of their tenant-led steering committee, which helps tenants address building concerns. I am an active member of the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission. I volunteer on the steering committee of Somerville Open Studios and work regularly with the #ArtStaysHere Coalition in an effort to combat arts displacement in the region.

I am writing today as an artist and resident with major concerns about the proposed development at Somernova, and specifically the loss of FAB space. In 2019 the city recognized that certain buildings and zones in the city of Somerville should be protected from the never ending cycle of demolition and development and created FAB zoning. They set aside these spaces with the express intent to preserve the places that artists, small businesses and other creatives work. These spaces create the culture that makes Somerville appealing to so many different kinds of people. Please recognize the long-term negative effects a loss of these spaces would have on the community.

Don't F with FAB
Thanks and regards,
Dan Coughlin

Madalyn Letellier

From: Scott Dugas [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 9:24 AM
To: Public Comments; All City Council
Subject: Re: Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District (File 23-1827)

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Hello,

This is in regards to the proposed zoning change: Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District (File 23-1827).

This proposal, as stated does not align with Somerville, or the immediate neighborhood.

I was at one of the community meetings a couple months ago, and there are a few consistent issues:

1. This will greatly increase the amount of car traffic, unless the amount of parking is restricted, in an already congested area. This should be explicit, before approval. We are supposed to be trending towards fewer cars, and we need to ensure that large developments focus on public transit, not cars.
2. This eliminates a key area of FAB zoning, which would be a sad loss to our community 3. It would be better if we were adding a bunch of housing, as that is sorely needed in our area, as almost everyone is being priced out. Adding high-paying jobs right in somerville is great, but it means more people not in those jobs will continue to be forced out due to our incredibly constrained housing situation.
4. We should not let a community center that the community doesn't have control over count as a win. It's a great addition, but it should have oversight and control by the city/community, not by a developer.
5. Part of the plan is to relocate the business during the phased construction. It would be good to get their feedback directly that what they will be getting is actually going to work, and not that this is a false offer.

Thanks,
Scott Dugas
[REDACTED] Somerville

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ethan Dussault [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 9:59 AM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Cc: Katjana Ballantyne; Anti-Displacement Task Force; Gregory Jenkins; Michael Rosenberg
Subject: Comments on FAB Zone Changes and Zoning Map and Text Amendment Files from Rafi/Somernova (23-1827)

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Members of City Council,

My Name is Ethan Dussault and I live at [REDACTED] in Ward 4 and I work in a FAB zoned building at 438R Somerville Ave in Ward 2 where I operate New Alliance Audio. Formed in 1987, New Alliance Audio is one of the longest running recording studios in the Greater Boston Area and we have survived displacement by development twice. First, we were displaced from the Fenway in 2006 and again from the EMF Building in Central Sq. Cambridge in 2018. Having opened in Somerville during Somerville Open Studios in 2019, I have little doubt that the FAB Zone is keeping businesses like mine alive in our city.

I am writing today to comment on the Zoning Map and Zoning Text Amendments (Files 23-1827 & 23-1830) from Rafi Investments-Somerville, LLC. and their proposed Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District.

The FAB Zone is the unsung hero of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. The FAB Zone's existence provides protections to the Arts & Creative Economy of our city. It does so with such brilliance that cities across the country will soon wonder why they haven't done something similar. Where Boston and Cambridge have yet to act, Somerville has and it shows. Where most artists have lost their workspaces in other cities, Somerville has found a way to keep so many.

The promise of the FAB Zone to the heart and soul of Somerville is that we can maintain our identity as a creative hub by preserving what creative workspaces that we have, bringing back what we've lost, and building a future of a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive creative economy in our growing city.

As many of the small businesses who qualify as Arts & Creative Enterprises (ACE) in the FAB buildings around town are operated by low income residents, the FAB Zone and ACE permissions are the only leverage these businesses have when it comes to keeping affordable workspaces in our city limits. This shows that the FAB zone is working!

Any attempt to change the FAB zone as it currently exists ought to be done with extreme caution and with the input of the greater arts and creative economy stakeholders in Somerville (i.e., Somerville's artists and ACE operators). Through my volunteer work with the ArtStaysHere Coalition, artists are being organized across the city on the issue of the FAB zone and attempts to develop within it. Our goal is "Development without Displacement" and we hope to see an open, honest, and measured approach to dealing with proposals in the FAB zone from the city, developers, neighborhood councils, and artists alike.

The current proposal by Rafi Investments shows that input from the ACE community in Somerville has yet to be taken into account. However, together and with some diligence, I believe we all can do right in the FAB zone and keep the Arts & Creative Economy that continues bringing people to Somerville year after year after year.

Don't F with FAB.

—Ethan Dussault
New Alliance Audio

Madalyn Letellier

From: Cameron Fischer [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 10:18 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: With regards to proposal 23-1827

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[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143
Dec 12th, 2023

Dear Somerville City Council,

I'm writing to share my comments regarding the proposal over the **Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District (File 23-1827)**.

Somernova and Rafi Properties would like to change the zoning laws to construct multi-story industrial buildings in the heart of my Somerville neighborhood, but the proposal as it currently stands is just too grand. Buildings of that size, particularly along Tyler Street and Properzi Way, would dwarf all of the existing residential homes and cast them into near permanent shadow. A row of high-rise buildings like that would be like dropping a mountain range in a suburb.

I appreciate that Somernova has ambitious plans for their own properties, but for the sake of the neighborhood, I would hope they could restrict themselves to buildings of sizes more reasonable and respect **that** aspect of the existing zoning laws. At the very least, could any massive buildings be restricted to the properties east of Dane Street, behind Greentown Labs. That area is already industrial, away from people's homes, and better suited for that sort of construction.

I will be watching this proposal closely, and it is my hope that the City Council will take the concerns of the local residents into consideration when considering the zoning change.

Thank you, for hearing my comments.

Your Ward 2 resident at
[REDACTED],
Cameron Fischer

Madalyn Letellier

From: Andrew Haidle [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 7:38 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: ID # 23-1827 - Rafi / Somernova

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Hello,

I live at [REDACTED], just across the train tracks from the area that's the subject of this item. I have major concerns over the scope of this project for myself and anyone living near these properties. I don't want to see the zoning changed to allow anything greater than the currently zoned 4 story high buildings. The 10+ year construction and then the forever traffic that would come along with the proposed project I doubt is something that anyone living nearby would want.

Please listen to the neighborhood residents! If I told you there would be 10 years of construction 50 yards from your house, how would you react?

Thanks!

Andrew

Madalyn Letellier

From: jenn harrington [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 9:56 AM
To: Public Comments; All City Council; JT Scott; Ben Ewen-Campen; Willie Burnley, Jr.; Mayor
Cc: Ami Bennitt; Ethan Dussault; Daniel Coughlin; belltooth; Becky Donner; Cristina Todesco; Camille Stubbe; Daniel Wong; Ami Bennitt; Luis Quizhpe; Michael Rosenberg; Steven Flythe; Victor Nascimento; Sarah Lewis; Maria Nagel; Gregory Jenkins; Rachel Strutt; Heather Balchunas; Iaritz Menjivar
Subject: Letter of concern: Zoning Map and Zoning Text Amendments (Files 23-1827 & 23-1830) from Rafi Investments-Somerville, LLC

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Dear Somerville City Council,

My name is Jenn Harrington. I have been a renter on [REDACTED] over 20 years. I have worked with and supported the musicians and artists and makers at Milk Row Studios (a Union Square arts space I consider at risk of displacement). I have supported the artists at Washington Street (a Union Square arts space I consider at risk of displacement). I have supported events run by Starlab (a creative coworking space that was gentrified out of two locations in Union Square). I have had gallery projects and music events supported by Repeat Press and Cuppow at Fringe Union (a 7500 sq ft coworking space community that was gentrified out of Union Square). I have been delighted by the artists and makers of Artisans Asylum (gentrified out of Union Square). I'm sad I never got to visit Aircraft Aerial Arts (gentrified out of Union Square). I could keep on adding to this list, but I think you know as well as I: we have already lost so many workers in the arts and creative industries in just one square and Somerville already doesn't have enough space to bring those losses back.

I'm writing today to comment on the Zoning Map and Zoning Text Amendments (Files 23-1827 & 23-1830) from Rafi Investments-Somerville, LLC. and their proposed Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District. I am writing today because I am worried that this zoning change proposal will set a terrible precedent that will not only decimate the arts and creative industries in our city, but will also ruin the long-term economic possibilities of Somerville as a whole.

The arts and creative industries are the most organic community trades. They invite people in to look, to listen, to learn, to collaborate, to ponder, and to commune. These are the workers that attract people to live, work, and visit a city. These are the workers that rarely leave a building unused for a weekend. These are the workers that work many shifts so there is a constant influx of activity. If they don't have space to do their work, this industry moves to other cities and the people who live and work and visit this city will follow. We've been seeing this now for over a decade and now the moving truck wheels are seriously spinning.

To be amazingly frank: Somerville ain't all that great without the workers of the FAB district. I urge the Council to proceed with caution on any zoning change to FAB. Please do not spend your energies draining a wisely-created protection for affordable space for the arts and creative industries. These workers need FAB spaces. Our residents need the cultural benefits that come from FAB spaces. Our independent businesses are in dire economic need of the customers that go in and out of FAB spaces. Our city gains an amazing reputation from FAB spaces. If we can point to one thing that's going right for Somerville's economy and community goodwill, I think almost everyone (but developers) would go directly to the workers in FAB spaces.

Instead of dismantling FAB, it would feel a heck of a lot better to work together to build it up (and to see the benefits of those spaces dispersed into our community)! And this should be good news to developers: there is a need and desire to build! We just don't need or want to wipe out an entire industry to do so.

Don't F with FAB.

Jenn Harrington

Ward 3 / Writer of many letters

Postscript

While I have you here, I need to note that the community conversation process with developers is not genuine. While this issue reaches far beyond our city, I would like to see Somerville become an innovator for more productive conversations between developers and residents/workers.

Somerville needs to take a very big inward look at whether they are actually asking for meaningful interactions to occur during this process. One idea is to require developers to submit not just their proposal, but notes taken at those meetings by an independent moderator, as well as a list of how their proposal changed after community discussions were held (or reasons why no changes were made).

One feels heard if one witnesses a shift in the listener. I fear that the current community conversation process ends up being a waste of time for our community because the city does not seem to be requiring proof of negotiation. Moreover, I fear that because Somerville is asking its community to engage in a performative process, it's encouraging its community to be idle. In these divisive times, we can't afford to motivate people to quit.

If there was one thematic question that our city could adopt in 2024, "How can Somerville give weight to "conversation" in ALL community processes?" might be the one to repetitively ask.

Ok! Many thanks for your time! More essays to come (about Somernova's master plan as well as other topics) on another day, I'm sure! I'll try my best to wait until 2024. Happy new year!

Madalyn Letellier

From: Maya Honda [REDACTED] >
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 12:44 PM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: Fwd: Somernova proposal

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Dear Members of the Somerville City Council,

I am resending the email that I sent to you on November 14, 2023 about the Somernova development proposal, because the proposed development will require rezoning a large section of Ward Two, where I live. I am opposed to rezoning that will allow the outsize scale of the proposed development.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Amy Maya Honda
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Maya Honda [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Nov 14, 2023 at 6:24 PM
Subject: Somernova proposal
To: [REDACTED]

Dear Members of the Somerville City Council,

I am writing to express my opposition to the Somernova Community Master Plan being proposed by Rafi Properties. Office buildings from 9 to 16 stories tall and underground parking for over 1,200 vehicles seem ludicrous possibilities for the Somernova site in Ward Two.

I am concerned that putting 1,200 vehicles on Park Street and Dane Street, as well as on Somerville Avenue and neighborhood side streets, will negatively affect the health and safety of residents, pedestrians, and cyclists, from children to seniors.

I am also concerned that the proposed project will significantly stress the area infrastructure, including water and sewer use, as well as utilities. The infrastructure in Ward Two is fragile and in need of work, as periodic flooding following a heavy rain storm reveals.

Yet another concern is the potential effect of the proposed buildings on the quality of light for the neighborhood. Buildings from 9 to 14 or 16 stories will most certainly cast shadows across streets and onto smaller buildings, limiting the available light to residents and other businesses in the neighborhood.

A more immediate concern for me is the impact a construction project of the proposed scale and length of time (more than a decade!) will have on the quality of life for my Village Street/Ward Two neighborhood. Construction noise and construction traffic will negatively affect the daily life and health of the neighborhood's residents.


I have made Somerville my home for 25 years and I have seen many positive changes across those years. I do not own a car, so it is important to me to be able to walk places safely. I appreciate that the City of Somerville has worked hard to improve the pedestrian and the cyclist experience. I also appreciate the City's efforts to support much needed housing throughout Somerville and to plant trees to increase urban greenery. The City's support of small businesses, maker spaces, and innovation industries has led to a lively urban commercial environment, particularly in Ward Two.

The Somernova proposal seems antithetical to all of these positive developments that the City has made over the years. I oppose the Somernova development as proposed and I ask that you oppose it for the health and welfare of the people of Ward Two and all of Somerville. Change and development can be good for Somerville, but not at the scale proposed by Rafi Properties for Somernova.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Amy Maya Honda


Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Mark Edmonds [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 5:16 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Somernova Zoning Filing

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Dear Members of the City Council,

I am writing to express my concerns about the potential zoning change proposal filed by Rafi Properties, which is expected to be discussed in the upcoming City Council meeting.

I am overall against this proposal and would prefer the zoning change be rejected.

There are several critical issues that need to be considered, reflecting the community's aspirations and challenges:

Community Needs: The community has a strong desire for a community-owned center. Any development should align with this vision and support communal activities and interests. This is my top concern. Once the buildings are built, we, as a community, will not be able to tear them down should our priorities or desires change. We should have the same guarantees to safeguard the community center.

Rafi properties should have the direct ability to stop, halt, or significantly modify the community center without community input. What this could look like: a governance model for the community center that does not allow Rafi properties to change the intent / purpose of the of the community center or the space / land available for it, so long as the high rise buildings stand.

Excessive Parking: The current plan appears to include excessive parking facilities. It's essential to balance such provisions with the city's environmental goals and the need for more green spaces, as well as coordination to allow for transportation of 6k people in and out every day.

Support for Artists: Artists in our city are facing significant difficulties in finding affordable spaces to live and work. The new development should incorporate elements that facilitate and nurture the artistic community.

Housing Affordability: The foremost concern for residents is the escalating cost of housing. The proposed development must address this issue, potentially through affordable housing options.

Impact on Neighbors: The abutters will be directly impacted by the construction and scale of the proposed development. Their concerns regarding noise, disruption, and changes to the neighborhood's character must be carefully considered.

Given the potential implications of this zoning change, I urge the Council to thoroughly evaluate these aspects and ensure that any development aligns with the broader interests and needs of our community. I also recommend referring

this proposal to the Land Use Committee for a more detailed and comprehensive discussion.

Thank you for your attention to these critical matters.

Sincerely,
Mark Edmonds



Madalyn Letellier

From: Patricia LaValley [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 11, 2023 8:54 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Somernova Development Project

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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City of Somerville,

I am writing to express my opposition to the Somernova development project, in its present proposal. I'm scratching my head at how, HOW Somerville can think a project of this scale is good for the fabrication district, and all of the residents that live and work there. I don't oppose development and I understand Somerville's need to expand the tax base. However, a project of this scale does not belong in an already very dense urban neighborhood. This project is better suited to an industrial park on the perimeter of Somerville, that can be a destination the City can be proud of providing - another Somerville innovation. When I first saw the plans I thought to myself, there is no way this project will ever get off the ground. It smacks of developer overreach and extreme greed and the City will never go for it. Now here we are facing a rezoning request.

It is abundantly clear this project will place undue burden on neighborhood residents. It will cause what will feel like a life time of construction, make traffic on and around Somerville Ave unbearable, ruin air quality, and turn the neighborhood into something completely unrecognizable and unwanted. I've lived in this neighborhood for 23 years and seen a lot of very positive changes. This proposal is disappointing in almost every way: from its shocking 1.4 million square feet of commercial space; its excessive parking allocation; and the paltry space allocated for the arts. Hard to believe 36,000 square feet for community services is the best is being offered and considered for this overreach.

This project feels like a single neighborhood being made to carry the burden for many of the needs of the entire city. Somerville can do better by us, a lot better. I am counting on it.

Patricia La Valley
[REDACTED]

cc: JT Scott

Madalyn Letellier

From: Anna Markov [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 8:08 AM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: Re: Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District (File 23-1827).

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Hello,

This email is in regards to the zoning application titled: Climate and Equity Innovation Sub-area overlay district file 23-1827.

I ask that you reject their bid for a change in zoning. The plan is against the values of Somerville and does not support the community or provide clear improvements for the area. Over all the larger buildings and their construction are set to be completed without consideration to the neighborhood, the already congested streets, and do not adequately address the flooding that already impacts that area.

As we move forward in Somerville we need to focus on how to build up our city without making it impossible for those who made it great to remain. This plan will negatively impact the area due to its lack for forethought. Please reject the bid for a zone change until the issues are resolved.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,
Anna Markov
[REDACTED] t. Somerville

[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Keith Morency [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 5:06 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Somernova Campus Expansion

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City of Somerville,

We are writing to express our opposition to the Somernova campus expansion, as it is currently being proposed.

As first time homeowners, we decided to buy property in Duck Village because we were enamored by the genuine sense of community we could feel in the neighborhood, combined with access to a wonderful urban center in Union Square.

It is a neighborhood rich with history and culture, but it already feels like it is bursting at the seams. It's truly impossible that the roads in the area could accommodate an influx of cars; certainly not the 1,200 cars currently proposed by the developer. How does the City expect the hundreds of workers, shoppers and community members to access this site on a daily basis without completely choking up an already dense neighborhood? This fact alone illuminates the developer's disconnect with the situation on the ground, and illustrates a borderline crass disregard for the local community.

The project guarantees to be a logistical and environmental nightmare. It would make the neighborhood oppressively loud, polluted, and congested for years - are the physical and mental costs incurred by hundreds, if not thousands, of local residents worth tax dollars, when similar goals could be achieved through more responsible uses of space?

In fact, it would be a major departure from other prominent examples of development in this region, which have prioritized pedestrian accessibility, revitalization of unused industrial space, and community benefit. Instead, it would place massive, inaccessible and unneeded commercial buildings at the heart of a thriving, peaceful, and family-oriented urban neighborhood.

We may support a revised proposal for development of this parcel in the future, as long as it is far more aligned with the scale of the neighborhood, more considerate of the local residents, and displays a genuine interest in providing resources for the community. Until then, we remain staunchly opposed, and expect the city to advocate in the best interests of its residents, rather than those of greedy and inexperienced developers.

Regards,
Keith Morency & Jessica Wilson
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Belltooth [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, December 13, 2023 12:00 PM
To: All City Council; Public Comments
Cc: Gregory Jenkins; JT Scott; Ethan Dussault; jenn harrington; Daniel Coughlin
Subject: Public Comment: Zoning Map and Zoning Text Amendments (Files 23-1827 & 23-1830) from Rafi Investments-Somerville, LLC

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Somerville City Council,

My Name is Coleen Palencia, I am an artist that rents and works out of Joy Street Studios.

I write to you today with public comment regarding Rafi/Somernova's filing for a zoning overlay in Union Square's fabrication zone.

As you know, Somerville constituents went to great effort in 2019 to introduce the Fabrication Zone, specifically to protect the handful of industrial/warehouse buildings that still exist in Somerville. Regionally, only Somerville has this amazing unsung hero of a zoning rule that protects the arts and creative economy that takes place in these few buildings. Neither Boston nor Cambridge has such protections, and thus have lost most of their artists and creative communities due to development. Over 2M square feet of cultural space has been lost and not replaced in our region alone.

Although I am not against development, nor am I against Somernova, I am extremely concerned about the potential implications of granting their zoning request in Union Square/Fabrication Zone. This would be a terrible precedent to set in Union Square with so much other development about to happen -- including North River's impending development of the Brickbottom area, where both Brickbottom Artists and Joy Street Studios are at risk. By granting the variance as Rafi currently proposes, Somerville would make it easier for other developers to do the same. Changes to their current proposal must be made with the input of Somerville's artists and creative business owners.

The Fabrication zone represents just a small percentage of the overall zoning in Somerville. It is ludicrous to chip away at zoning meant to protect artists.

Somerville is widely known for its large number of artists, musicians, and creatives--with Somerville Open Studios and Somerville Porchfest seeing participation in over 300 per event each year. We must not only protect these workspaces in Somerville, we actually need to make more.

The creative economy IS the economy. we must protect what we have for it to keep contributing to our economic health. I implore you to uphold the current zoning rules for the Fabrication Zone. Don't F with FAB.

Sincerely,
Coleen Palencia
Joy Street Studio

--

Belltooth



[@belltooth on Instagram](#)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Jeffrey Parker [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 6:22 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Somernova zoning change

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear City Council,

This is a letter in opposition to the Somernova Master Plan and the associated rezoning. There has been no serious discussion of the effect on the neighborhood of a massive construction site.

Most of the neighbors have not been alerted to the project. In a series of community meetings, the developer has not addressed concerns about construction noise, air pollution, nor traffic. Because the construction will last for a decade, these concerns must be addressed before the city can consider the benefits from the completed project.

I propose the following requirements before the rezoning is considered:

- 1) Notifying all the households near the site.
- 2) An independent traffic study of the effect of a construction site with 5800 workers.
- 3) An environmental study of the consequences of demolishing the two old factories.
- 4) Noise and air pollution monitoring during the construction with mitigation plans.
- 5) A plan to relocate the site's neighbors, should it be necessary. I count at least 40 units facing the site, potentially many more.

If Rafi Properties develop further without the zoning change; Somerville will win more Fab space for the arts and creative economies. This less destructive to the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Parker

[REDACTED]
Somerville MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Camille Stubbe [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 8:42 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Resident Concerns on Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Councilors,

My name is Camille Stubbe, I am a resident at [REDACTED] in Somerville. I am writing to you today about the Climate & Equity Innovation Sub-Area Overlay District (File #: 23-1827) that was filed last week on behalf of 13 residents. This proposal is from Rafi Properties, the owner of land on Dane St., Tyler St., Properzi Way, and Somerville Ave. and had proposed a drastic change to the current zoning of this area - including the construction of 9 - 16 story office buildings and 1,200 parking spaces in a location currently zoned as FAB (4 story max, zoned for artists, smaller start ups, and manufacturing). As a direct abutter to this potential development, I have been working with JT Scott, Daniel Wong, and my neighbors / fellow community members to gather community input on the proposal and create a list of needs from the community.

For 3 meetings hosted by a mix of Councilor JT Scott (cc'd), the Union Square Neighborhood Neighborhood Council, Rafi Properties, and myself, the feedback has been clear - this plan needs to change. We cannot accept this overlay as is. The buildings are too tall for these residential side streets. The parking is too much if we are building toward a sustainable future. The overlay does not protect artists or preserve neighborhood feel as FAB intended. The community center cannot be privately owned. The neighborhood cannot support the size and scale of traffic that would be required for such a development. The plan does nothing to address rising housing costs. With over 50 contributing voices, I am sharing the changes that need to be made to the plan in order for the community to support this plan:

TOPIC	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Transportation <i>Parking, transit, etc.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work toward no parking except for accessible or EV - and ensure ample access for walkers and commuters• Additional studies are needed to understand the impact on traffic, specifically, cross-town cut-through traffic if any parking is included• Funding a corporate shuttle and commuter rail stop at Park St. (ala Boston Landing) could decrease car needs
Community Benefits <i>Community Center, Social Impact Fund, Media Center, etc.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure the community center is permanent and deeded to the city or a non-profit and a longer budget provided• Plan for youth innovation: high-paying jobs/internships, trainings, etc.• Target Somerville residents with employment opportunities• Include public art spaces, civic spaces, free spaces, worker co-ops
Neighborhood Uses <i>Ground floor, businesses, artist space, daycares, etc.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep 100% of current community-facing tenants and provide funding to businesses to make a transition and stabilize/control their rent

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% of the development to be dedicated to arts and creative (ACE), 20,000 sq ft of rehearsal space, and housing for artists per FAB • Increased green space on the ground level (not on rooftops) - community gardens, parks, etc.
Housing and Commercial Mix <i>Ratio, amount subsidized for each, etc.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both affordable and low-income housing needed on site (30 - 50% AMI) and family housing (multi-bedroom) • Housing needed to preserve the current market rate for housing in the area and support ½ of the anticipated workforce
Impact on Neighborhood Environment <i>height, etc.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct smaller buildings to reduce the risk of building construction failing financially • Keep the height low specifically on Tyler and Properzi St. to protect abutters and preserve the neighborhood (build taller in 3A/B) • Preserve existing buildings per FAB intention - specifically the current collection of Aeronaut, BBP, Dojo, etc. • Build closer to 5-6 stories to make the project more “human scale” and reduce the shade cast on abutters, consider less ‘blocky’ architecture

Thank you,
Camille Stubbe



Madalyn Letellier

From: Stephanie Ternullo [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 5:32 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: somernova/rafi properties proposed zoning change

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear City Council,

My name is Stephanie Ternullo; I live on [REDACTED], just opposite the train tracks from the Somernova property. I'm writing to encourage you to consider the city's dire need for affordable housing when you think about rezoning the parcels owned by Rafi Properties. I'm writing both as a political scientist studying housing and zoning policies, and a concerned resident. There are several reasons that I am concerned about using the land for R&D lab space rather than housing.

First, there is an equity dimension. As gentrification has spread out from Cambridge through Somerville, and the area has not kept up with the pace of demand for affordable housing, people are being displaced. Building only R&D lab space and no housing will only further exacerbate the jobs vs housing imbalance. This is particularly worrisome because the Somernova property is an ideal candidate for housing, and for affordable housing: as someone who lives right next door, I can attest that it is close to several transit options as well as an affordable supermarket and other services. We have already rezoned so much of the land around the new Union Square station for industrial use; I strongly urge the Council not to lose this opportunity to shift the balance.

Second, there is an economic development dimension. The Boston metro-area has seen several years of domestic out-migration, balanced in part by international immigration into the area - at least for now. People are leaving the area largely due to the cost of living crisis, and - by definition - they're being replaced by people who *can* afford to live here. (This, of course, relates to the equity dimension.) But at some point, this will become unsustainable - the biotech and tech companies who have attracted affluent new residents will no longer invest in this area because they'll be worried about labor supply. Instead, the companies will move south to places like the research triangle (and some already are). Although I recognize that the long-term projections for research/wet lab demand in our area remain promising, many developers much larger than Rafi Properties are putting these kinds of projects on hold. I think the Council should do the same until we have a better sense of where the market will be in 5-10 years. What we do know for certain is that we do need more housing.

This raises the final dimension. We are in a *regional* housing crisis, but I worry that Somerville and Cambridge are treating these as local problems. It seems that Somerville as a city is trying to capitalize on Cambridge's unwillingness to permit further lab development by winning more development to our city -- Union Square and Assembly Square are testaments to this. While this strategy will help increase our tax revenue, it exacerbates the broader crisis.

I appreciate your consideration of all public comments in your decision-making process.

Sincerely,
Stephanie

Madalyn Letellier

From: Xenia Parker [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 12, 2023 6:31 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Somernova / Rafi Properties zoning

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Council Members,

I live 75 feet away from the buildings that Rafi properties is planning to rebuild. I do not support rezoning, and I have many questions:

1. I work in my home - how am I supposed to keep my job if I can't hear a zoom call when the construction is going on?
 - o Are you expecting that Rafi will relocate residents during the 10 years of construction?
2. What measures will be taken to prevent particles from getting into our lungs? Am I supposed to keep my windows closed for the next 10 years?
3. The buildings nearest to Market Basket used to be factories that worked with metal. Since then, the ground has been paved over, but the toxins will be released into the air and surrounding environment once the ground is broken. What measures will be taken to keep the residents safe from this? An environmental study has to be done by the city, not by the developer to ensure the safety of its residents.
4. Are we going to close our eyes to the fact that traffic studies from Cambria Hotel construction failed, and let Rafi further congest an already strained infrastructure? Rafi is saying that a traffic study will be done AFTER they get the rezoning permit. We need to do our own traffic study to inform the rezoning decision - just look at what's already happening in Union Square on weekdays.
5. Does the city have enough expertise and experience to ensure that the developer will not "screw us over," whether knowingly or unknowingly? This is one of the largest developments ever proposed for a residential neighborhood, and the developer himself has no experience with projects of this size. We recently learned that Somerville only checks whether construction is built to code, and that we do not check whether the buildings are compliant with the allowed plans during the construction. That we hold the residents to keep the developer to the rules laid out by the city - are you expecting my elderly neighbor to keep an eye on a 3.3 Billion dollar construction project?
6. Have you seen this article: " Lab slump hits Somerville just as big projects near completion?" Are we trying to put up more empty buildings?
 - o <https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2023/11/30/lab-slump-hits-somerville-big-projects.html>
7. How can we trust someone who has already pitted neighbors against each other for their own benefit? Rafi's people positioned kids against neighbors who care about the quality of their lives. We need to take care of people of all ages in our community, and not rely on developers to do that.

Xenia