



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 16, 2026

6:00 PM

Joint Meeting with the Planning Board

This meeting was held via Zoom and in the Chamber [KW1.1] and was called to order by Chair Ewen Campen at 6:01 pm and adjourned at 8:59 pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen Campen), 0 opposed.

The Land Use Committee entered recess at 6:06 PM to allow the Planning Board to convene and returned at 6:18 PM with 5 members present (Councilors Davis, Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen Campen).

Others present: Jahan Habib – Planning Board Member, Lynn Richards – Planning Board Member, Michael McNeley – Planning Board Member, Coralie Cooper – Planning Board Member, Amelia Aboff – Planning Board Member, Madalyn Letellier – Assistant City Clerk, Legislative Services.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, 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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-1859](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of December 4, 2025.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

2. Public Hearings

- 2.1. Public Communication (ID # [26-0287](#)) 26 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.

Elliot Borenstein was present to discuss the attached presentation about dormers, Land Use - 2026-04-15 (2026) Dormer & 3-Story Zoning Amendment Presentation (with 26-0287).
Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 6:30 PM.
Six residents were present to speak on the item. They relayed the sentiment of wanting to allow homeowners to do what they would like and not add bureaucracy for the sake of bureaucracy. One resident discussed the possible issue of setbacks and considered what the original reason was. One resident asked how many applications go to planning each year and the breakdown of

developers versus homeowners.
There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed at 6:37 PM.

Chair Ewen-Campen shared that comments will be accepted until Friday May 1, 2026, at noon and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2.2. Public Communication (ID # [26-0257](#))

Union 2 Associates, LLC requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 2 and 9 Union Square, 286, 290, and 298 Somerville Avenue from Commercial Core 5 (CC5) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6).

Jameson Brown and Tim Talun from The Hamilton Company were present to discuss the attached presentation, Land Use - 2026-04-16 OneUnionSquare_Public Hearing_V3-1 (with 26-0257). Jameson Brown gave context about the benefits of changing the units and the ability to add around 150 units of housing, including affordable housing, and some public spaces. Tim Talun, who is the architect on the project, spoke to specific design elements of the proposal and the opportunity to enhance this site’s uses.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 6:54 PM.

Thirteen residents were present to speak on the item. While some supported changing the Commercial Core designation to Mid-Rise 6 to allow for more versatile land use, others argued that maintaining the commercial zoning is vital for the city’s tax base and local economy. Residents who were not in favor of the proposal stated if this project were to move forward the city should strongly consider requiring more affordable housing. Multiple residents raised concerns around The Hamilton Company not following the Neighborhood Plan that has already been accepted and the desire to adhere to the original vision of Union Square.

There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed at 7:20 PM.

Chair Ewen-Campen shared that comments will be accepted until Friday May 15, 2026, at noon and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2.3. Public Communication (ID # [26-0330](#))

29 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend Zoning Ordinance Section 3.1.12 Backyard Cottage.

This item was discussed with agenda items #26-0330, #26-0329, #26-0328,

and #26-0327.

Bill White was present to discuss items #26-0330, #26-0329, #26-0328, and #26-0327 together and the attached presentations Land Use 2026-04-16 Photos (with 26-0330, 26-0329, 26-0328, and 26-0327).pd and Land Use 2026-04-16 Presentation (with 26-0330, 26-0329, 26-0328, 26-0327).pdf. Mr. White framed his discussion that developers who are buying property are knocking down existing structures and trying to build 4-story luxury condominium spaces in areas that are zoned for Neighborhood Residential (NR). Mr. White asserted that the lack of green space, impervious services, and lack of rights for tenants while rental units are being demolished are major issues. Mr. White spoke about the multiple violations against the Zoning Ordinances and the required processes of the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA). Mr. White also spoke about the potential for gentrification in the city if the continued production of luxury condominiums is allowed to continue, and the eventual sacrifice of neighborhoods for housing.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 7:50 PM.

21 residents spoke on these items, with 17 speakers in favor and 4 in opposition. Senator Pat Jehlen spoke in support of the proposed amendments and the need to require affordable housing in future developments. Many residents spoke against the current zoning which allows developers to split lots and build multiple buildings on one lot, which one resident argued are inaccurately labeled as "accessory dwelling units". One resident shared about comments they submitted in 2015 and 2018 that spoke against the ability for developers to take away greenspace and the effects the city is still seeing because of those decisions. Most of the residents who spoke in favor of the amendments continue to support current residents in affordability and livability in the city and prevent developers from continuing to split lots. Multiple residents spoke to the dissatisfaction of the lack of a requirement that notice be sent to abutters, the lack of preserving green space and lack of required affordable units. One resident urged members of the public to view the structures being built at 17 Hudson Street and the negative effects it is having on the neighborhood.

Speakers in opposition urged the council to reject the changes, arguing that the existing "Backyard Cottage" process is already in alignment with city ordinances and provides a necessary path for development. They expressed concern that adding new restrictions would ultimately slow down the production of much-needed housing and complicate the zoning process. There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed at 8:57 PM. Chair Ewen-Campen shared that comments will be accepted until May 15, 2026, at noon and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2.4. Public Communication (ID # [26-0329](#))

14 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend the Zoning Ordinance Section 3.1.12 Backyard Cottage.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 7:50 PM. This item was discussed with agenda item #26-0330. There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed at 8:57 PM. Chair Ewen-Campen shared that comments will be accepted until May 15, 2026, at noon and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2.5. Public Communication (ID # [26-0328](#))

14 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend Zoning Ordinance Section 12.2.2 regarding affordable dwelling units.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 7:50 PM. This item was discussed with agenda item #26-0330. There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed at 8:57 PM. Chair Ewen-Campen shared that comments will be accepted until May 15, 2026, at noon and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2.6. Public Communication (ID # [26-0327](#))

29 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend Zoning Ordinance Section 15.7.2.d Zoning Board of Appeals Board Rules.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the public hearing at 7:50 PM. This item was discussed with agenda item #26-0330. There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed at 8:57 PM. Chair Ewen-Campen shared that comments will be accepted until May 15, 2026, at noon and can be submitted to publiccomments@somervillema.gov.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

For Deliberation

3. 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.

Chair Ewen-Campen provided an update to the committee that he has asked for two additional amendments to be drafted regarding additional parking setbacks and one that would allow affordable housing overlay buildings to go to 9 instead of 8 stories.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2026-04-16 OneUnionSquare_Public Hearing_V3-1 (with 26-0257)
- Land Use - 2026-04-15 (2026) Dormer & 3-Story Zoning Amendment Presentation (with 26-0287)
- Land Use - 2026-04-16 Public Comments (with 26-0204).pdf
- Land Use - 2026-04-16 Public Comments (with 26-0257).pdf
- Land Use - 2026-04-16 Public Comments (with 26-0330, 26-0329, 26-0328, and 26-0327).pdf
- Land Use 2026-04-16 Photos (with 26-0330, 26-0329, 26-0328, and 26-0327).pdf
- Land Use 2026-04-16 Presentation (with 26-0330, 26-0329, 26-0328, 26-0327).pdf