



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
***MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT***  
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GERARD AMARAL, *ALT.*

October 21, 2013

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

Re: An ordinance amending the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) with respect to modifications to Article 15

Dear Honorable Board of Aldermen:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Planning Board submits to your Honorable Board its recommendation on the ordinance to amend the Linkage section of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to amend the uses that trigger linkage and increase the linkage fee modifying sections 15.2, 15.3 and 15.5. This amendment was addressed in a staff report dated September 26, 2013 provided to your Honorable Board and the Planning Board. This proposed amendment has been modified from the Linkage amendment submitted on June 24, 2013 that has passed the timeframe on which the Board can act and it has been placed on file.

On October 21, 2013, at 6:00 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the Board of Aldermen jointly held a duly advertised public hearing in the Aldermanic Chambers in City Hall. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed amendments and to evaluate the amendments in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Planning Staff.

This report from the Planning Board to the Board of Aldermen will focus on the discussion at the October 21, 2013 meeting and the Board's final recommendation.



*Joint Public Hearing*

At the October 21, 2013 hearing, Dana LeWinter, Director of Housing for the City of Somerville explained the proposal and what was different from the last Linkage amendment discussed in the Spring of 2013.

The Boards discussed a number of topics related to the amendment:

1. The impact to the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund with the increase in fees. The projections can be based on the figures in the Comprehensive Plan that includes having 9 million square feet of commercial space in the City over the next 25 years.
2. The reason for leaving the square foot threshold at 30,000 was because there was concern that the 20,000 square foot threshold was too low; however, this is going to be reviewed further because it is an important point in the linkage nexus study.

Five constituents spoke in support of the ordinance. Items that they discussed include:

- 1- The need for affordable housing in the City that is such a desirable place to live.
- 2- The fee has not been adjusted in 8 years and if considering the Consumer Price Index the increase is nominal.
- 3- The Comprehensive Plan includes a goal of 20% affordable housing in the City.
- 4- The fee will be in the middle range of other fees in the area.
- 5- The number of people in need of a better housing situation that would benefit from the increased funds.

Two constituents spoke in opposition of the ordinance. Items that they discussed include:

- 1- Commercial development is needed in Union Square.
- 2- The argument that commercial development is driving up housing prices is not supported in the nexus study.
- 3- Union Square is ahead in terms of providing additional housing and no commercial development is proposed.
- 4- The Community Preservation Act will increase the funds for affordable housing without burdening commercial development.

The Land Use Committee and the Planning Board closed the public hearing and will not accept additional public testimony because this amendment has been discussed at length in the past.

*Planning Board Recommendation*

The Planning Board was supportive of the ordinance; which incorporated items that they asked to be removed in the past including the automatic rate increase of the fee. Members felt that the increase in fee will not negatively impact the ability to attract commercial development.

Following due consideration, Elizabeth made a motion to **RECOMMEND APPROVAL** the proposed amendment. Michael Capuano seconded the motion, which carried 4-0, with Kevin Prior and Joe Favaloro absent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elizabeth Moroney". The signature is written in a light blue or grey ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Elizabeth Moroney  
Acting Chair