

Madalyn Letellier

From: Joel Paul [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, June 29, 2026 7:36 PM
To: Jake Wilson; All City Council; Thomas Galligani; OSPCD; Planning1; Planning Board; Public Comments
Subject: Davis Square Neighborhood Plan: Please Be Ambitious on Height and Density

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Dear Mayor Wilson, members of the City Council, Director Galligani, and members of the Planning Staff,

I'm writing as a Somerville resident and Davis Square Neighborhood Council member to urge the city to be genuinely ambitious in the upcoming Davis Square Neighborhood Plan — and to resist the pull toward anchoring the rezoning too close to the existing six-floor limit.

As you're likely aware, a developer has proposed a 26-story building in Davis Square. Whatever one thinks of that specific proposal, I'd ask that we use it as a moment to reflect honestly on the current situation: single-story retail, one block from the Red Line — the most heavily used rapid transit line in New England — on a site also served by the Minuteman Bikeway and half a dozen bus routes. The status quo is not a neutral baseline. It represents decades of wasted transit infrastructure and foregone housing.

I understand the neighborhood plan may raise the height limit from six floors to something higher. I'd urge you not to stop at eight or ten. Our neighbor right across the border offers a useful benchmark.

In February 2025, Cambridge enacted a citywide reform allowing four-story multifamily housing as-of-right on every residential parcel, with five- and six-story buildings permitted on lots of 5,000 square feet or more, provided 20% of units are affordable. Last fall, Cambridge's Planning Board unanimously recommended raising heights along Massachusetts Avenue to 12 stories, with up to 18 stories in Porter Square under a planned unit development overlay. Squares along Cambridge Street, like Lechmere, allow up to 15 stories. These passed 7-0 at the Planning Board level.

I'd like to see Somerville match that ambition:

- 12–15 floors as-of-right in Davis Square, which is at least as well-served by transit as Porter Square or Lechmere
- A similar citywide baseline: 4 stories by right on all parcels, 6 stories with an affordable housing component
- No artificial cap that locks in undersupply for another generation

This isn't abstract to me. My sister and her husband lived in Somerville for years and loved it here. Last year they moved to Durham, NC. The primary reason was housing costs. They're exactly the kind of people this city says it wants to keep, and we're losing them because we haven't built enough. Eastern Massachusetts is short roughly half a million homes, and a third of young residents are seriously considering leaving the state — housing costs are consistently the top reason. Austin, Texas is permitting

roughly ten times as many new homes per capita as Greater Boston, and their rents have actually come down as a result.

Davis Square is precisely where dense housing belongs: walkable, bikeable, with direct rapid transit to Cambridge and downtown Boston. I hope the planning process is guided by the scale of the need, not the scale of what's there now.

Thanks for your work on this. I'd be glad to discuss further.

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Joel Paul



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