



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEMBERS

MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ., *CHAIR*
AMELIA ABOFF, *VICE CHAIR*
JAHAN HABIB, *CLERK*
MICHAEL MCNELEY
DEBBIE HOWITT EASTON, *ALTERNATE*
LUC SCHUSTER, *ALTERNATE*

2 November, 2023

The Honorable City Council
City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Honorable City Council:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Somerville Planning Board submits to your Honorable Council its recommendation on the following proposed amendments to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. On 19 October 2023, at 6:00 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the City Council held a duly advertised virtual joint public hearing. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed amendments to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance and to evaluate the proposals in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Staff to the Planning Board. On 2 November 2023, the Board convened at their regularly scheduled meeting to discuss the following five (5) agenda items:

PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

1. Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinances, Sections 3.1 Neighborhood Residence and 3.2 Urban Residence, to permit the house and triple decker building types without any conditions, and to repeal the lot depth, dwelling units per lot, and development benefits requirements.

The Board's deliberation included a statement from Chair Capuano that Somerville has been a leader in the state in zoning for transit-oriented housing density, therefore, Somerville should have been exempt from the burden of compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Chair Capuano also noted that the requirement to demonstrate compliance by the end of the year is a short time frame, limiting the amount of public engagement that could be included in the process. The Board also solicited input from staff, and then made the following specific recommendation. Following due consideration, Chair Michael A. Capuano, Esq. made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be**

adopted by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Aboff, and approved by the Board, **3-0-1** (Chair Michael Capuano voting “present”)., incorporating the following:

- The Planning Board requests City Staff and the Council, per public input received at the joint hearing, continue to explore the possibility of an affordability mechanism in the Neighborhood Residential (NR) zoning district.
- The Planning Board requests City Staff and the Council to evaluate residential parking permit limit of 2-3 stickers (per existing dwelling units) for on-street parking for all residential neighborhoods that are outside of the transit area, to mitigate impacts of additional tenant vehicles that may result from the construction of third units.

2. Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance to repeal Section 10.9 Steep Slopes

The Board’s deliberation included a statement from Chair Capuano that Somerville has been a leader in the state in zoning for transit-oriented housing density, therefore, Somerville should have been exempt from the burden of compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Chair Capuano also noted that the requirement to demonstrate compliance by the end of the year is a short time frame, limiting the amount of public engagement that could be included in the process. The Board also solicited input from staff, and then made the following specific recommendation. Following due consideration, Chair Michael A. Capuano, Esq. made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be adopted** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Aboff, and approved by the Board, **3-0-1** (Chair Michael Capuano voting “present”).

3. Mayor Ballantyne requesting ordainment of an amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinances to replace the text of Section 9.1.11 Residential Use Categories and revise Table 9.1.1 Permitted Uses and the corresponding permitted use table of each zoning district, in accordance with changes to Table 9.1.1, to replace the two residential use categories

The Board’s deliberation included a statement from Chair Capuano that Somerville has been a leader in the state in zoning for transit-oriented housing density, therefore, Somerville should have been exempt from the burden of compliance with the MBTA Communities Act. Chair Capuano also noted that the requirement to demonstrate compliance by the end of the year is a short time frame, limiting the amount of public engagement that could be included in the process. The Board also solicited input from staff, and then made the following specific recommendation. Following due consideration, Chair Michael A. Capuano, Esq. made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be adopted** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Aboff, and approved by the Board, **3-0-1** (Chair Michael Capuano voting “present”).,

- The Planning Board requests City Staff and the Council to evaluate residential parking permit limit of 2-3 stickers (per existing dwelling units) for on-street parking for all residential neighborhoods that are outside of transit area to mitigate impacts of additional student vehicles that may result from the repeal of the four (4) unrelated rule.
- The Planning Board requests City Staff and the Council to evaluate imposing a limit of five (5) unrelated, full-time undergraduate or graduate students living together in one dwelling unit, similar

to the City of Boston, to prevent unscrupulous landlords from packing their apartments with students.

4. Mai Lau, 635 Somerville Avenue LLC, requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 627 Somerville Avenue from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Mid-Rise 3 (MR3).

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff then made the following specific recommendation. Following due consideration, Chair Michael A. Capuano, Esq. made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be adopted** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Vice-Chair Aboff, and unanimously approved by the Board, **4-0**.

5. John Fragione and Agostino Feola, Trustees of Frala Realty Trust, requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 295-297 Medford Street and 93 Walnut Street from Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) to Mid-Rise 5 (MR5).

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff and made the following specific recommendation. Following due consideration, Chair Michael A. Capuano, Esq. made a motion to **make no recommendation** on whether the City Council should or should not adopt the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, incorporating the relevant discussion from the 2 November 2023 Planning Board meeting, including the following:

- The Planning Board expressed their hesitation to recommend adoption for a zoning map amendment that is meant to make a particular project financially viable and that has been met with some opposition from the neighborhood. They further stated that seeking a Hardship Variance may be the more appropriate route to permitting a five-story building, given that there are steep slopes on the parcel. However, they also stated their reluctance to recommend denial of a proposal that could result in increased residential density.

The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Amelia Aboff, and unanimously approved by the Board, 4-0.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Capuano
Chair of the Planning Board