



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 7, 2026

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:01pm and adjourned at 7:57pm on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, and 1 absent(Councilor Davis).

Councilor Clingan joined the meeting at 7:04pm.

Others present: Dan Bartman - Director of Planning, Preservation, and Zoning, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Madalyn Letellier - Assistant City Clerk, Legislative Services.

Roll Call

Present: 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
Absent: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [26-0502](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of March 19, 2026.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen
ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

2. Committee Minutes (ID # [26-0639](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of April 2, 2026.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen
ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

3. Committee Minutes (ID # [26-0723](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting in Joint Session with the Planning Board on April 16, 2026.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen
ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

4. Officer's Communication (ID # [26-0649](#))

Planning Board conveying recommendations for item #26-0204.

This item was discussed with item #26-0204.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. 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 stated that the Planning Board recommended approval on this amendment.

Chair Ewen-Campen moved to replace the text of the item with a previous version shared in committee, Land Use - 2026-04-2 AH Overlay Amendment (with 26-0204) . The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilor Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 2 absent (Councilor Clingan, Davis).

Chair Ewen-Campen led the discussion by clarifying that the replacement text before the committee does not include additional parking setbacks to the affordable housing overlay. Discussion continued around limiting buildings to eight stories rather than nine stories. Director Bartman shared some practical limitations to building nine stories and ultimately capping at eight promotes Mass Timber production projects. Director Bartman also highlighted a possible amendment to adjust the green score to 0.25, if desired by the committee, to require more green space in the affordable housing overlay. In response to a question from Councilor McLaughlin, Director Bartman stated that buildings beyond certain heights trigger stricter Type 1 safety regulations under the national building code. These requirements, which vary across five distinct construction types, impose more rigorous material and ground-floor regulations as buildings get taller, making nine-story structures significantly more expensive than shorter alternatives.

Chair Ewen-Campen moved to amend Table 8.1.6 to change lot depth under rear and side setback to “greater than or equal to 100 feet” and

under side setback to amend the last line to “lot width to greater than or equal to 100 feet”. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilor Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 2 absent (Councilor Clingan, Davis).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

6. 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.

Chair Ewen-Campen led the conversation about the proposed amendments focused on dormers and building heights in Neighborhood Residence (NR) district. Director Bartman stated that the Planning, Preservation and Zoning Division aimed for significant public engagement by holding a public hearing and sending out a survey to residents about dormers. He noted that the responses were not representative of the entire population and staff tried their best to meet everyone’s requests. The Planning, Preservation and Zoning Division recommended that any side-facing dormer be set back two feet from the building’s front to preserve the traditional "pitched roof" aesthetic and the 2.5-story appearance characteristic of the neighborhood. Councilor Ewen Campen shared visuals of what different dormers looked like from a previous presentation given to the committee, Land Use - 2026-04-15 (2026) Dormer & 3-Story Zoning Amendment Presentation (with 26-0287). In response to a question from Councilor Sait, Director Bartman gave some historical context of existing street-facing gables and debated whether these dormer regulations would effectively facilitate functional third-floor additions or merely serve as building extensions.

Chair Ewen-Campen moved that the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning prepare a revised amendment to include a two-foot setback for dormers. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilor Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Discussion centered on whether Neighborhood Residence zoning should

explicitly allow three-story construction or continue regulating height through dormer standards. Director Bartman highlighted practical and aesthetic distinctions between adding dormers to an existing roof versus removing the roof entirely to build a flat top third floor. Director Bartman also mentioned the argument about whether triple-deckers should be allowed by right. Chair Ewen-Campen expressed support for dormers. The committee also discussed technical requirements, such as a 15% window minimum for dormers, and addressed the complexities of applying these standards to backyard cottages and new construction versus older buildings that may not meet current codes.

Chair Ewen-Campen moved that the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning prepare a revised amendment to remove a third story by right from detached house, semidetached house, and duplex house. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilor Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Chair Ewen-Campen moved to amend table 3.1.13 Building Components to change gable dormer and shed dormer to “N” for backyard cottages. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilor Clingan, Sait, McLaughlin, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

7. Resolution
(ID # [26-0061](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Davis, Councilor Sait, Councilor Wheeler, Councilor Hardt, Councilor Link, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Scott

That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning draft an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances for transit-oriented height and density bonuses for additional affordable housing and other enumerated community benefits.

Director Bartman shared upcoming plans to engage with Gilman Square groups and the community on the requested amendments. The Planning Board will be present at Ward 4 Slice of the City and plans to host a community hearing showcasing the four zoning maps that were created by

the City Council Land Use Analyst, Samantha Carr, last spring.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2026-04-2 AH Overlay Amendment (with 26-0204)
- Land Use - 2026-05-07 Affordable_Housing_Overlay_Parking_Setback_Amendment (with 26-0204)
- Land Use - 2026-04-15 (2026) Dormer amp 3-Story Zoning Amendment Presentation (with 26-0287)
 - Land Use - 2026-05-07 Affordable_Housing_Overlay_Parking_Setback_Amendment (with 26-0204)
 - Land Use - 2026-04-2 AH Overlay Amendment (with 26-0204)
 - Land Use - 2026-04-15 (2026) Dormer amp 3-Story Zoning Amendment Presentation (with 26-0287)