



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 2, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 7:03 pm on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Davis, Clingan, Sait, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

Others present: Dan Bartman - Director of Planning, Preservation, and Zoning, 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 and Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
Absent:	Ward Two City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin

Committee
Minutes
(ID # [25-1859](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of December 4, 2025.

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

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 shared that a public hearing was held on this item two weeks ago and the committee is prepared to hear from the department regarding additional clarification on changes made to the Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO). Director of Planning, Preservation, and Zoning (PPZ) Dan Bartman spoke about the attached presentation, *Land Use - 2026-04-02 AH Overlay Presentation (with 26-0204)*, to provide more context and comparison about the proposed changes to the existing zoning. Conversation ensued throughout the presentation and clarification around open space was given that it can be considered on top of a building, it is not directly related to complete lot coverage. Following further questions about parking, it was clarified that it is required to be set back 30 feet to avoid encroachment on the buildings and lots. Councilors Ewen-Campen and

Clingan expressed concern for limiting parking for affordable housing units and the desire to see further amendments.

Discussion continued around pre-determined setbacks and the difference in lot sizes between Mid-Rise 3 (MR3), MR4, and MR6 and how it is determined what is most efficient for affordable housing investments.

Director Bartman stated that investors are looking for the highest return on investment, which will appear in MR5 and MR6. Director Bartman expanded upon the setbacks in MR3 and MR4, noting that they are flexible, and the current proposal is based upon parcels that will realistically hold affordable housing units. Councilor Clingan inquired how the Medford Street project would be impacted and Director Bartman shared there is still discussion on whether the community path counts as a front, which will determine setbacks. Setbacks are related to the distance from the lot and slide 5 of the presentation clarifies the setbacks for the zoning districts and how they will be determined by the lot width after this change. Upper story step backs are being eliminated as it was determined that they were leading to a reduction in bedrooms.

Councilor Davis asked about the potential impact for removing masses in the revised AHO. Director Bartman clarified the building code has minimum standards related to health and safety that would preclude developers from building units with varying ceiling heights. What the city has seen is there is no distinction between market rate development and affordable housing units when being made. Director Bartman shared much of these edits come from what has been learned from market rate development. The city is prepared to defer to affordable dwelling developers and the financiers for those units and what is the most beneficial for development.

Councilor Davis inquired about the rationale of the changes to the fenestration requirements. Director Bartman clarified the numbers are all minimum requirements in the table. Councilor Davis continued to ask about the removal of requirements for roof-mounted mechanicals and if this could impact neighbors by allowing bigger buildings to be closer to other lots. Director Bartman shared the requirement to screen the roof-mounted mechanicals still exists, but this amendment gives flexibility about the height of the mechanicals to add, which covers the equipment, screening, and penthouse.

Chair Ewen-Campen referred to feedback from the public hearing about the confusion of the previous presentation and the desire from community members to include arts space in commercial spaces. Director Bartman said that in-lieu payment is being worked on internally and staff are finding it to be a complex thing to put into an ordinance, with many stipulations and requirements that must be abided by and balanced from a legal perspective. A financial analysis has been completed and PPZ is moving into a legal review to ensure none of the language interferes with the many regulations

already in place from the State.

Councilor Clingan asked for more information on Ground Story Commercial Space. Director Bartman stated that there are certain requirements around apartment building, general building, and commercial building all have separate regulations for requiring space.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated the only thing he is opposed to is the parking setbacks and he would like to see an amended version in a future meeting. Councilor Clingan also spoke about parking and how the requirements relate to accessibility. Director Bartman said there are adjustments that can be made to the ordinance to allow for more flexibility to what is allowed for parking.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2026-04-2 AH Overlay Amendment (with 26-0204)
- Land Use - 2026-04-02 AH Overlay Presentation (with 26-0204)