



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 2, 2021

REPORT OF THE LAND USE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Ben Ewen-Campen	Chair	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:30pm and adjourned at 7:37pm.

Others present: Dan Bartman - OSPCD; Rebecca Cooper - OSPCD

Planning Board: Michael Capuano - Chair, Amelia Aboff - Vice Chair, Sam Dinning - Clerk, Jahan Habib, Rob Buchanan - Alternate

The Committee entered into recess at 6:32pm to allow the Planning Board to convene its meeting. The Committee was called back to order at 6:38pm and a roll call vote was taken, with all Committee members present.

Public Hearing on item #210940 - amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the purpose of the public hearing is to receive feedback on the proposed amendments. There are 34 in the first attached document and an additional 6 in the second document, many of which are corrections, though some are more substantive. The Chair added that the public comment will remain open until March 12. The Planning Board written record will also remain open until Friday March 12 and these items will be discussed at the Planning Board meeting on March 18.

Mr. Bartman began with a presentation, highlighting that he will have a reference for the relocation items of Section 8.3 Master Planned Development prior to the next meeting. The major changes (not corrections) include: MR5 and MR6 design guidelines; Section 7.4 Assembly Square Mixed Use district; Section 9.2 Use Definitions & Standards (Recharging Station); Section 10.2 Accessory Structures (EV Charging Station); Section 11.2 Motor Vehicle Parking; and Section 15.4 Certificates.

The Chair opened the Public Hearing at 6:50pm.

Meredith Porter shared the observations that in the section on certificates, the language is confusing. He added that a number of updates have been made to the ordinance that do not

appear to be reflected on the somervillezoning.com website.

The Chair closed the Public Hearing at 6:54pm.

Mr. Bartman noted that all of the amendments are on somervillezoning.com, but have not been incorporated into one document, largely due to the frequency with which the ordinance is being updated. In the future, they will also be updated on Municode.

210940: Requesting approval of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance for new changes, corrections and clarifications.

Chair Ewen-Campen shared that the Committee will await the Planning Board's recommendation.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Public Hearing on item #211231 - amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

211231: Requesting approval of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance for new edits, corrections, and clarifications.

Chair Ewen-Campen shared that the Committee will await the Planning Board's recommendation.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211349: That the Committee on Land Use consider regulating the height of rooftop mechanicals on commercial buildings that abut Neighborhood Residence and Urban Residence districts.

Chair Ewen-Campen offered the background that currently the height of mechanical devices and the enclosures around them are not currently regulated in the Zoning Ordinance. There are setbacks and the Planning Board can consider the height. He suggested that in some areas, such as MR3 buildings surrounded by NR or UR districts, there should be some clarity around what height is allowed. One approach could be to choose a maximum height, another could be to focus on the MR3 districts.

Councilor Niedergang noted that MR4 should also be considered, noting that a lot of Magoun and Ball Squares are MR4. Councilor Davis added that it would be important to consider that the consequences of choosing a height that doesn't offer enough space could lead to moving systems to a place that would be less desirable. Councilor White agreed that this should be explored and asked for more information from Planning staff. Chair Ewen-Campen elaborated that the concern stems from the possibility that this could create a loophole for building heights.

Mr. Bartman clarified that many of the lab buildings have variability based on the specific use and their needs, so there is a lot to learn. The addition of commercial buildings into smaller scale neighborhoods was not foreseen, but is a promising sign and something that will be addressed.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211348: That the Committee on Land Use revisit whether to remove parking minimums outside of Transit Areas.

Chair Ewen-Campen clarified that the intent is to revisit parking minimums outside of transit districts. There are required minimums for parking spaces that need to be built, based on the square footage of

the building. Councilor Davis agreed that forced parking is not necessary, and many developers are still building parking by choice, which will not be prohibited. Councilor Niedergang added that the goals of reducing vehicles and achieving carbon neutrality are important to the public, and are growing in urgency. Developers will continue to build parking if there is a market for it, and he supports removing the minimum requirements. Councilor White shared that the requirements were from a time where neighborhood parking was difficult, and there were no plans to restrict parking permits. He suggested some distinction between commercial and residential developments. Councilor McLaughlin also supported the concept of limited parking, as long as there is acknowledgement that there will also be no on-street parking permits issued. He noted that some developers are supportive of this, but others are definitely opposed. Councilor Davis emphasized that this isn't prohibiting parking, it is merely making it an option.

Chair Ewen-Campen elaborated that building the parking makes traffic more significant, and expressed an understanding of the fear that some residents may have about parking options. Councilor Niedergang added that the Traffic Commission's policy prohibiting parking permits for residents of new developments could perhaps be extended in conjunction with this. Mr. Bartman noted that there are many cities taking this step, as the decision point is better understood by the people that will build or inhabit the building, and the Planning staff cannot predict the correct amount of parking years in advance. He agreed that there are peripheral reforms that could address parking across the entire city and shared that there are multiple car-free buildings in various stages of the planning process (within transit areas).

Councilor White expressed some reservations about letting the market decide and urged that the parking permit restriction is an important concept. Councilor McLaughlin added that in the relatively recent past there were waivers for parking relief issued, and those were some of the most controversial decisions related to housing. Denying parking passes to residents outside of transit areas may be a major hurdle. He clarified that he is not opposed, but there is much that has to be considered.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Referenced Materials:

- Joint Hearing - Zoning Amendments
- 2021-03-02-JOINT-HEARING-Corrections (with 210940, 211231)