



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
***MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT***  
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March 26, 2015

The Honorable Board of Aldermen  
City Hall  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Adoption of a new Somerville Zoning Ordinance to supersede the current zoning ordinance as originally adopted on March 23, 1990.

Dear Honorable Board of Aldermen:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Planning Board submits to your Honorable Board its recommendation on the zoning overhaul (item 198429), as submitted to your honorable board on January 22, 2015.

On March 5, 2015, at 6:00 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the Board of Aldermen jointly held a duly advertised public hearing in the Aldermanic Chambers in City Hall. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed ordinance and to evaluate the amendments in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Planning Staff.

This report from the Planning Board to the Board of Aldermen will focus on the discussion at the March 5 public hearing and subsequent March 24, 2015 Planning Board meeting, the written testimony received and the Planning Board's recommendation.

## DISCUSSION DURING HEARING

At the public hearing on March 5, 2015, Brad Rawson, Dan Bartman, and George Proakis, of the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, presented the proposed zoning ordinance. Brad Rawson presented the SomerVision comprehensive plan process which tasked the City with modernizing the zoning ordinance. SomerVision called for clear and predictable paths to development, red tape cut for small businesses, and development in the right places. Dan Bartman presented the process for writing a new code for the City by posing four questions: where have we been, where do we want to go, do our regulations match, what tools are available? George Proakis then presented the current challenges of our code which makes a rewrite necessary and then the goals of our code: provide better customer service and open government, strengthen protections for residential neighborhoods, cut red tape for small business in commercial squares, guide redevelopment in transitioning industrial areas, protect the arts economy and create new maker space.

George then explained the major topics of the code. The proposed code has simplicity and predictability by using building type, components, and graphics. The code promotes the arts and creative economy by establishing the fabrication district and allowing for arts and fabrication uses across the city. The code solidifies the development of affordable housing by increasing the required percentage of affordable housing development and creating a middle income category. The code promotes the Somerville economy simplifying the use table and differentiating between local business and chains. The code guides investment in Somerville to our new neighborhoods which have an increase in community benefits. The code addresses 182 of the 584 of the goals, policies, and actions of the SomerVision plan.

After the conclusion of the presentation, the Boards opened the floor for public comment. In all, 43 people spoke. The main topics of discussion were:

1. Support for further increasing the inclusionary housing requirement to address housing needs
2. Suggestions for reduction of the inclusionary housing requirement to encourage future developments
3. Ensuring that the code includes incentives for commercial development over residential development
4. Increasing the open space requirements, and specifically requirements for green space
5. Supporting the fabrication district concept
6. Questioning permitted uses and mapping of the fabrication district
7. Adjustments to the current rule limiting residential units to no more than 4 unrelated individuals living together as a household unit

The Board of Alderman made general comments on the code. The Board left their public comment period open until March 27, 2015. The Planning Board left their public comment period open until March 20, 2015 at noon.

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY RECEIVED

The Planning Board received 49 letters from 30 individuals by the close of the written portion of the Planning Board portion of the public hearing. The majority of the comments were regarding:

1. Limitation of 4 unrelated individuals living together as a household unit (on both sides of this issue)
2. Technical details regarding requirements for building types (mainly about concerning individual metrics)
3. Formula for affordable housing (including percentages, trigger for affordable units, income calculations)

4. Creation of more open space and differing types of open space
5. Ensuring creation of commercial development as a part of new neighborhoods
6. Ensuring that residential as well as commercial is developed in new neighborhoods
7. Residential density (including concerns about the method to calculate density, differences in density between current and new code, types of buildings allowed in some districts, and demand for smaller units)
8. Lot size required for large development (Brickbottom - 2 acres, InnerBelt – 8 acres) being too large
9. Ideas regarding mobility management and car sharing
10. Permitting process for Site, Large, and Neighborhood Development Plans, differences from current Special Permit process, and how these processes are applied to specific districts and building types.

Also 50 map change requests were submitted as of March 20, 2015 as well as some requests for map adjustments that are detailed in the letters submitted.

### PLANNING BOARD MEETING

The Planning Board met on March 24, 2015 to discuss and make a recommendation on the proposal zoning code. The Board discussed the following topics:

- a. The zoning will emphasize and enhance our squares and increase the commercial tax base for the City.
- b. The proposed code will make it easier for small businesses to establish themselves in the City.
- c. Parking policies outside of zoning should be explored to address the on-street parking situation and match off-street parking strategies.
- d. The affordability and diversity of housing and maker space is an important part of the proposed code.

### PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Following due consideration, Kevin Prior made a motion to strongly endorse the proposed overhaul of the zoning ordinance. Dorothy Kelly Gay seconded the motion, which carried 5-0.

The Board requested that the Board of Aldermen Land Use Committee consider the following items in their review of the proposal:

1. Consider eliminating the apartment building type from the 4MU, 5MU, 7MU and 10MU Districts.
2. Consider limits to high rise apartment buildings to ensure growth of the commercial tax base.
3. Consider requiring more commercial square footage in the mixed use districts.
4. Retain the proposed regulation limiting residential uses in the Fabrication District.
5. Consider requiring special permits for residential uses in the 4MU, 5MU, 7MU and 10MU Districts.
6. With buildings of six or more units, require a percentage of units to have a designated number of bedrooms, such as 20% have 3 bedrooms, 30% have 2 bedrooms, and 50% have 1 bedroom or are studios.
7. Revisit reducing parking requirements in the neighborhoods until the Green Line extension beyond Washington Street is underway.
8. Strengthen the green space requirements.
9. Allow already permitted projects to retain the requirements that were in effect at the time of permitting, specifically those with PUD preliminary approval.
10. Retain the number of unrelated people living together as a household unit; however, consider adding a specific owner-occupied co-housing use that allows for non-traditional living arrangements, while still restricting the number of undergraduate college students living together.

11. Consider the impact and special permit criteria for the triple-decker building type in the Neighborhood Residence District.
12. Consider approval of the map change request submitted by White Street property owners to change White Street properties from the 3MU to the 4MU district.

The Planning Board requested that staff forward all written testimony that they received to the Board of Alderman.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Prior". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "K".

Kevin Prior  
Chair