



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 31, 2016

REPORT OF THE LAND USE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Lance L. Davis	Chair	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	Alderman At Large	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One Alderman	Absent	
Maryann M. Heuston	Ward Two Alderman	Present	
Robert J. McWatters	Ward Three Alderman	Present	
Tony Lafuente	Ward Four Alderman	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven Alderman	Present	
John M. Connolly	Alderman At Large	Absent	
Dennis M. Sullivan	Alderman At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	Alderman at Large	Present	

Others present: George Proakis - OSPCD, Charles Sillari - Clerk of Committees

The meeting took place in the Aldermen's Chamber and was called to order at 7:00 PM by Alderman Davis and adjourned at 10:05 PM.

Document List:

- Residential Neighborhoods 2 (with 198429)

198429: Requesting the adoption of a New Zoning Ordinance (updated) to supersede the current Zoning Ordinance as originally adopted on March 23, 1990.

The committee continued its deliberation on the matter of zoning. Mr. Proakis informed the members that the draft would be completed in June and the fiscal impact study will be ready by July. The planning staff is currently two months behind schedule on this issue and Mr. Proakis would like the summer months to allow staff to perform research and writing of the code.

Among the topics discussed were:

- the RA/RB report of 2014,
- the impacts on affordable housing, FAR and other nuances,
- the low number of conforming lots in the city,

- the method to convert a 2-family in an RA zone into a 3-family,
- the NR district,
- regulating “building form”,
- neighborhood input on “by right” and other projects,
- special permit requirements,
- various building types, lot sizes and dimensional standards,
- additions and building on vacant lots,
- conversion of single family buildings in 2-family (triggering a special permit),
- local government restrictions on non-conformities,
- using old industrial buildings for arts or residential uses

Alderman Heuston spoke about not limiting creativity in the design of buildings, however she pointed out that neighborhoods are unique and some may lose their character under the proposed new rules.

Alderman White would like a clearer explanation and walk through, along with documentation, of what form based zoning is, noting that some people might be against ‘cookie cutter’ buildings. He also expressed concern about building 3-families in NR districts. Alderman White requested data on the number of vacant lots and non-conforming structures in the NR zones, as well as the number of single families turned into multi families. Alderman Ballantyne asked for clarification of where form based zoning is being proposed in the city.

Alderman Lafuente said that he felt that this was too complicated and he requested that an abbreviated version of the proposed zoning be put on the city’s website. He questioned the wisdom of working on the residential portion ahead of business and commercial, rather than mixing it all together.

Mr. Proakis explained that the form is the box, but the design and architecture may deviate, adding that creative design is encouraged and architectural creativity fits within the box being discussed. A purely numerical based code allows zoning to be manipulated, whereas form based code does not. Mr. Proakis stated that immediate neighbors usually impede creative and modern design and don’t like designs that don’t fit into their neighborhoods.

Alderman Niedergang opposed and questioned the rationale for reducing side setbacks.

There was discussion regarding accessory units and their regulation, with some members in favor of the proposal. Chairman Davis stated that he is concerned about limiting rights to “family”, noting that the city has non-traditional families, and said that careful consideration of this aspect is warranted. Alderman Niedergang expressed his concern that this topic might monopolize the conversation and derail the entire process.

Alderman White spoke about the city’s upcoming budget and GLX financing and the possibility of a new elementary school being built. He wants the public to be able to review the zoning proposals and asked that the Land Use Committee not meet as a Committee of the Whole until September. When the overhaul draft is submitted to the Board of Aldermen, there will not be a time deadline for a public hearing, since it won’t be an official submission.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE