



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, September 5, 2024

6:30 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:31 PM by Chair McLaughlin and adjourned at 7:22 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Pineda Neufeld, Ewen-Campen, Davis, McLaughlin), 0 opposed.

Others present: Sarah White - Senior Planner, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson

Roll Call

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1027](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of July 9, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Wilson

2. Public Communication (ID # [24-0642](#)) 14 registered voters requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 228, 230, 232, 234, 236 Pearl Street from Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6).

Senior Planner Sarah White spoke on this item stating that the Planning, Preservation and Zoning Division (PPZ) is not in support of this proposal and would prefer to see a whole scale upzoning of the block rather than upzoning a few properties at a time. Councilor Wilson addressed Sarah White and asked why this view is different than the rezoning related to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Sarah White responded each project is looked at individually and the YMCA proposal came back with revisions to look at the entirety of the parcel of land for upzoning. Councilor Ewen-Campen pointed out that to the west of the parcel of land already holds buildings that are six stories high. He shared his thoughts of disfavor to spot zoning in general, but looking at this item there has been a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) in place from the local Neighborhood Council and as it sits next to a transit location is in favor of adding height and density to the area but would still like to hear from the Ward Councilor. Councilor Wilson echoed the thoughts on embracing

transit-oriented development like this proposal throughout the city. Councilor Davis also shared thoughts on hearing from the Ward Councilor and any concerns that may be present and similar thoughts on the value of transit-oriented zoning and the area would benefit from a density bonus. Attorney Adam Dash spoke on this item stating that the main opposition came from the condominium building next door and the CBA addressed those concerns and reiterated to the committee that the building will be next to another building of this size and there are additional steps to gain neighborhood input before being built.

Chair McLaughlin asked Senior Planner White if proposals that tend to look at more land for rezoning at once are more favorable to the Planning Board. She responded that each proposal is reviewed individually and goes through a thorough evaluation and the Planning Board is in general looking at proposals that address a broader rezoning over spot zoning.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked how colleagues feel about going through the rezoning process again for another overhaul that will further delay projects such as this one proposed. Councilor Davis responded that the initial overhaul was supposed to provide a framework to the old zoning, but the intent was to go back and address specific areas, such as transit areas and there is not a view to wait for a whole new plan as his own ward, specifically Davis Square, is still awaiting a new neighborhood plan. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if city staff can give detail on the development of a new transit-oriented map. Sarah White responded there is no information at this time.

Chair McLaughlin moved that the City Solicitor provide an opinion on whether this item is considered spot zoning.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Wilson

- 3. Public Communication (ID # [24-1165](#))

26 individuals submitting comments re: item #24-0642, a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 228, 230, 232, 234, 236 Pearl Street from Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6).

This item was discussed with ID #24-0642.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 4. Officer's Communication (ID # [24-1195](#)) Planning Board conveying recommendations for items #24-0551 and #24-0642.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED
AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Wilson

- 5. Public Communication (ID # [24-0641](#)) 14 registered voters requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 136 School Street from Urban Residence (UR) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6), 95 Highland Avenue from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to MR6, and 97, 99-99A, 101-103, and 107 Highland Avenue from Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) to MR6.

Senior Planner Sarah White stated Planning is in support of the upzoning noting the favorability of taking up multiple lots at a time and this proposal looks at the area in a comprehensive fashion. Councilor Ewen-Campen spoke in support of the proposal and the eventual redevelopment of the YMCA. Councilor Ewen-Campen made note zoning changes are not linked to a specific project but rather to an area and thinks the zoning is appropriate, he closed his remarks by addressing the corner lot is not included in the YMCA’s proposal but is included in the rezoning proposal.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED
AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Wilson

- 6. Public Communication (ID # [24-0898](#)) Emily Duquette submitting comments re: item #24-0641, a Zoning Map Amendment for the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).

This item was discussed with ID #24-0641.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 7. Public Communication (ID # [24-1164](#)) 3 individuals submitting comments re: item #24-0641, a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 136 School Street from Urban Residence (UR) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6), 95 Highland Avenue from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to MR6, and 97, 99-99A, 101-103, and 107 Highland Avenue from Mid-Rise 5 (MR5) to MR6.

This item was discussed with ID #24-0641.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Officer's Communication (ID # [24-1194](#))

Planning Board conveying recommendations for items #24-0607 and #24-0641.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Public Communication (ID # [24-0607](#))

Mo Rizkallah requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 5 Homer Square from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Urban Residence (UR).

Councilor Ewen-Campen recommended against approval of the item due to the appearance of spot zoning for one parcel to become Urban Residence (UR) in the middle of a Neighborhood Residence (NR) street and no attempt at a community process. Chair McLaughlin included that the recommendation from the Planning Board is also to not approve, and shared similar sentiments to Councilor Ewen-Campen on why it should be recommended to be not approved.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE NOT APPROVED

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Wilson

10. Public Communication (ID # [24-1092](#))

8 individuals submitting comments re: item #24-0607, a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 5 Homer Square from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Urban Residence (UR).

This item was discussed with ID #24-0607.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED