



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEMBERS

MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ., *CHAIR*
AMELIA ABOFF, *VICE CHAIR*
JAHAN HABIB, *CLERK*
MICHAEL MCNELEY
LYNN RICHARDS
LUC SCHUSTER, *ALTERNATE*

April 10, 2025

The Honorable City Council
City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear Honorable City Council:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Somerville Planning Board submits to your Honorable Council its recommendations on the following proposed amendments to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. On March 20, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the City Council held a duly advertised virtual joint public hearing. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed amendments to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance and to evaluate the proposals in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Staff to the Planning Board. On April 3, 2025, the Board convened their regularly scheduled meeting and discussed the following agenda items:

PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

1. John Fragione and Agostino Feola, Trustees of Frala Realty Trust, requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 295-297 Medford Street and 93 Walnut Street from Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) (File # [25-0269](#)).

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff and made the following specific recommendations. Following due consideration, Chair Michael Capuano made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be approved** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Amelia Aboff, and unanimously passed by the Board, **6-0**, with the following discussion:

- The Planning Board stated their support for the affordable housing that this upzoning would enable.

2. Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 3-6, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for arts and creative enterprise, office, and residential uses (File # [25-0129](#))

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff and made the following specific recommendations. Following due consideration, Chair Michael Capuano made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be approved** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Clerk Jahan Habib, and unanimously passed by the Board, **6-0**, with the following discussion:

- The Artist Housing land use category should be updated to clarify that no portion of *the studio* of a live-work unit may be rented or sold.
- For Home-Based Business land use category, there should be an exception to the prohibition on walk-in customers for *organized events*, such as Somerville Open Studios.
- The Home-Based Business land use category should be updated to include reference to artists and artist studios.
- The purpose of these changes is to ensure that this zoning amendment does not negatively impact the small home-based arts community.

3. Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings (File # [24-1460](#)).

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff and made the following specific recommendations. Following due consideration, Chair Michael Capuano made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be approved** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Clerk Jahan Habib, and unanimously passed by the Board, **6-0**, without discussion.

4. Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 6, 9, and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Research & Development zoning district (File # [25-0128](#)).

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff and made the following specific recommendations. Following due consideration, Chair Michael Capuano made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be approved** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Clerk Jahan Habib, and passed by the Board, **5-1**, with the following discussion:

- In dissenting, Vice Chair Aboff stated that the proposed re-zoning is developer-led, that it is misaligned with the goals of the comprehensive plan which were formulated based on community input, that she would like to see more of an emphasis on housing, and moreover that, given the duty of the Planning Board with respect to the comprehensive plan, she cannot endorse the amendment.
- The Board otherwise expressed general support for the amendment with strong reservations about the height and scale; they recommend that the Council assess the height and scale in response to concerns of the neighborhood and consider that this area was not designated a “transform” area in the comprehensive plan.
- Member Richards asked the Council to consider the long-term (10 year) traffic and parking impacts of the potential build-out allowed under the amendment.

- Other members of the Board expressed their frustration with the amendment process, the lack of clarity with regard to public engagement procedure, and the Planning Board's lack of substantial role in formulating the amendment.

5. Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 8 and 12 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Arts & Innovation sub-area of the Master Planned Development Overlay District (File # [25-0131](#)).

The Board deliberated and solicited input from staff and made the following specific recommendations. Following due consideration, Chair Michael Capuano made a motion to recommend that the proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance **be approved** by the City Council. The motion was seconded by Clerk Jahan Habib, and passed by the Board, **5-1**, with the following discussion:

- In dissenting, Vice Chair Aboff stated that the proposed re-zoning is developer-led, that it is misaligned with the goals of the comprehensive plan which were formulated based on community input, that she would like to see more of an emphasis on housing, and moreover that, given the duty of the Planning Board with respect to the comprehensive plan, she cannot endorse the amendment.
- The Board otherwise expressed general support for the amendment with strong reservations about the height and scale; they recommend that the Council assess the height and scale in response to concerns of the neighborhood and consider that this area was not designated a "transform" area in the comprehensive plan.
- Member Richards asked the Council to consider the long-term (10 year) traffic and parking impacts of the potential build-out allowed under the amendment.
- The Board agreed that lodging uses should not be calculated as a residential use.
- Other members of the Board expressed their frustration with the amendment process, the lack of clarity with regard to public engagement procedure, and the Planning Board's lack of substantial role in formulating the amendment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Capuano", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael A. Capuano
Chair of the Planning Board