

Madalyn Letellier

From: Bob McWatters [REDACTED] >
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 5:31 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Fwd: Bill White's amendment on ADU's

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Begin forwarded message:

From: Planning Board <[REDACTED]>
Date: April 16, 2026 at 4:06:52 PM EDT
To: Bob McWatters [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Bill White's amendment on ADU's

Hello,

Thank you for your email. For zoning amendment comment please also submit them to publiccomments@somervillema.gov

Best,



**Planning Board
Coordinator**
Planning, Preservation, &
Zoning
City of Somerville
93 Highland Avenue | Somerville,
MA 02143
Email:
PlanningBoard@somervillema.gov

From: Bob McWatters <bmcwatters12@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 7:57 PM

To: Planning Board [REDACTED]
Subject: Bill White's amendment on ADU's

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Dear Planning Board Members,
I am writing to inform you I am in support of the proposed zoning amendment being submitted by William White.
Respectfully,
Bob McWatters
[REDACTED]
Somerville, Ma.

Sent from my iPhone

City of Somerville Public Records Notice

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Madalyn Letellier

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 6:10 PM
To: All Clerk of Committee
Subject: Land use committee comments on 4 - 16 amendments

Importance: High

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Dear committee members,
As a concerned citizen watching the often uncontrolled and poorly executed development happening around our city I request that you consider the Amendments as requested by former councilman Bill White, esq.

I support of the four zoning amendments proposed by Attorney Bill White, and I urge the Land Use Committee to advance them.

Taken together, these amendments address loopholes and a lack of transparency that has worked against middle-income homebuyers, retention of long-term tenants, and the overall goal of housing stability and affordability.

- **Amendment 1** aligns with the Commonwealth's Affordable Homes Act and better reflects the spirit of Somerville's ADU ordinance to promote smaller, less expensive units, rather than cramming an additional house into a backyard and eliminating all greenspace.
- **Amendment 2** ensures that backyard cottages function as true accessory structures rather than as a mechanism for developers to build and sell bonus market-rate condominiums on residential lots.
- **Amendment 3** restores public notice and ZBA oversight to lot split decisions; which do have an impact on neighbors and should be subject to typical notification and review processes. If a small dormer needs ZBA review, a split-lot definitively should.
- **Amendment 4** If a developer does substantially expand the number of units on a lot, the 20% affordability requirement should be enforced - the benefit of expanding density should accrue to both the developer and the community.

Somerville's neighborhoods are under significant development pressure. These amendments would restore some balance between developer incentives and the interests of existing residents and future homebuyers. I respectfully urge the Committee to support these amendments.

Regards,
Alex Pitkin, RA
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Will K [REDACTED] >
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 6:34 PM
To: Madalyn Letellier
Subject: Re: Comments Regarding Backyard Cottage Zoning

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Hello!

These comments are for counselor Ben and the land used committee regarding changes to backyard cottage zoning ordinance. My name is William Kuang in ward 1.

Thank you

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

From: William Kuang [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, April 9, 2026 1:36 PM
To: Public Comments [REDACTED]
Subject: Comments Regarding Backyard Cottage Zoning

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

Dear Committee,

My name is William, and I am the owner of [REDACTED]. Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments. I am currently in the process of building a backyard cottage at the rear of my property for my parents, and I would like to share some feedback for the Land Use Committee.

As one of my contractors put it, projects on a house are often “death by a thousand cuts.” It’s not one large expense, but rather the accumulation of many smaller costs across multiple trades. While each of the following points may seem minor on its own, together they significantly increase the total cost of construction. I hope these observations can help inform adjustments to zoning that would make these types of buildings more affordable.

1. **Underground utility requirement**

While the requirement for underground utilities is understandable, it is currently too restrictive. As it stands, I am required to have Eversource excavate the street and then hire a contractor to dig a trench to the rear of my property to supply power. Eversource has completed the design plans, with an estimated cost of approximately \$12,000, plus an additional \$6,000 for trenching and electrical work.

My home currently receives power via overhead service from across the street. According to my contractor, and based on discussions with ISD, there is no code requirement preventing me from continuing overhead service to my house and then routing power through my basement to the backyard cottage. This approach would reduce getting electrical to the rear of my lot by approximately 75%. Allowing more flexibility here could significantly improve affordability. Not to mention it seems like an efficient use of time to have city time approve a below ground utility easement.

2. **Half story cathedral roofs**

As pictured in one of your examples and what I’ve been recommended to do, because of the half story requirement, to have useable square footage it requires a 4 gable end roof design. Which creates half story cathedral roofs that are very expensive to insulate. Meeting code required insulation values either requires a highly material and labor intensive roof assembly or extensive use of spray foam insulation. While spray foam has its uses, it is both costly and environmentally unfriendly due to its high global warming potential.

Allowing cottages to be built as full two story structures would reduce construction costs, as traditional gabled attics are simpler, more cost effective, more environmental, and more efficient to insulate.

3. **Roof design and solar feasibility**

The four gabled roof designs often recommended to maximize usable space in half story structures also make it difficult to install solar panels effectively. Simpler rooflines would better support future solar installations.

4. **Gross floor area cap**

The current cap of 1,200 square feet is too restrictive. It would be more appropriate to allow the size of the cottage to scale with the size of the primary structure. Given the high fixed costs of starting any construction project in Boston, spreading those costs over a larger floor area would make these projects more financially feasible.

In summary, I am building a simple structure—a basic box—and it should not be so difficult or expensive to do so. I appreciate your consideration of these points as you evaluate current zoning regulations.

Thank you,

William

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Madalyn Letellier

From: PJ Santos [REDACTED] >
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2026 9:07 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment for 4/16 Land Use / Planning Board

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Hello Land Use Committee and Planning Board Members,

My name is Peter Kim-Santos, I live at [REDACTED]. Apologies, I could not attend today's hearing, but I'd like to offer a quick public comment in favor of the "Dormers" petition and against the "Backyard Cottage" proposal that was on today's agenda.

In each case, I'd like to see Somerville as a city that makes it easier for residents to live here.

For Dormers, the existing law does not seem to be very effective at improving the aesthetics of buildings (and some of the examples I've seen of "complying" dormers look pretty awful!). Making it easier for families to add an extra bedroom, or perform much-needed renovations to their home will help them stay in Somerville should they have an extra kid, or for some reason need to perform a home renovation. This is a no-brainer improvement to our zoning code.

Regarding the "Backyard Cottages" proposal, I think it would be wrong for the City Council to make it harder to build them. We have a severe housing shortage, and we should not be putting up more barriers to people living here.

Thank you for considering my opinion,
Peter Kim-Santos

Elan Sassoon
SMT Development

4/15/2026

Land Use Committee
Planning Board
City Council
Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD)
Mayor's Office
City Hall
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Opposition to Proposed Zoning Text Amendments – File Nos. 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330

(Submitted by William A. White, Jr. and 29 registered voters – the “White Petition”)

Dear Members of the Land Use Committee, Planning Board, City Council, OSPCD, and Mayor's Office:

I am writing as a longtime Somerville developer to **strongly oppose and urge you to reject in their entirety** the four zoning text amendments contained in File Nos. 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330 (the White Petition).

Having acquired, financed, and successfully built dozens of multifamily projects in Somerville — ranging from three-unit infill homes to 100-unit corridor developments — I have an intimate, first-hand understanding of what makes housing projects economically viable. The White Petition's proposed changes, particularly the new 20% affordability mandate on NR lot split projects, combined with the elimination of Minor Site Plan Approval for lot splits, would be a major blow to progress toward sensible housing policy.

Developers like me who deliver the housing Somerville says it needs must be able to rely on the zoning ordinance — especially one the City itself just amended in 2023 after years of public process, professional analysis, and MBTA Communities compliance work. That framework deliberately exempted small-scale NR projects from affordability requirements because the Planning Department (and City Planner Dan Bartman) recognized the economic reality: smaller-scale three to twelve-unit projects lack the scale to subsidize affordable units. The recent allowance of three units plus a cottage without affordability mandates was not an oversight; it was a thoughtful and strategic policy which is already paying dividends to the City's housing stock. This progress would be undermined by these proposed amendments and render Somerville's zoning is unreliable.

These amendments would result in a combination of delays, entitlement uncertainty, and the overburdening of even modest projects. The result will not be more affordable housing. It will be significantly fewer new housing units across the city. In a market where rents are already among the highest in the region and working families are being priced out - Mr. White's proposal does not make sense. His own letter acknowledges that the real goal is to stop developers from "outbidding homebuyers." That is a market complaint, not a legitimate zoning purpose. Weaponizing lot-split procedures to impose a de-facto moratorium is counterproductive and will only accelerate the very affordability crisis the City is trying to solve.

I respectfully urge you to reject all four amendments and preserve the current zoning framework that is actually delivering gentle-density infill housing. Somerville's future depends on consistent, predictable rules that encourage — rather than punish — the production of the homes our residents need.

Sincerely,

Elan Sassoon



SMT Development

Madalyn Letellier

From: Elan Sassoon [REDACTED] >
Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2026 8:35 AM
To: Jake Wilson; Public Comments; Ben Ewen-Campen; Jesse Clingan; Lance Davis; Matthew McLaughlin; Naima Sait; All City Council; OSPCD; Mayor; City Clerk Contact; Planning Board
Subject: Opposition to propose zoning text amendments
Attachments: 2026-04-21 08.31 TINY SCANNER.pdf

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To all thank you for reviewing our concerns.

All the Best,

Elan Sassoon

Madalyn Letellier

From: Jaclyn Pillitteri <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, April 17, 2026 3:02 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Proposed Backyard Cottage Amendments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hello,

I would like to send my thoughts on the Backyard Cottage amendments.

AGAINST Amendment 1. - require ADUs to be owned by the neighboring larger unit.
This only seems to benefit wealthy landlords that can afford multiple homes.

AGAINST Amendment 2. - define ADUs as under 900 feet only.
As long as ADUs meet the state law, I see no reason to limit them to the smaller requirement of 900 sq ft.
Larger homes for families are essential to maintaining a diverse community.

FOR 3. require ZBA approval and public hearings.
Abutters should have the right to be heard about potential impacts to their homes, and renters to be able to know of potential disruptions.

AGAINST 4. Affordability Requirements for Lot Splits in NR District
Ultimately, I think requiring affordable homes is likely to land us where we were before the requirement was nixed - with developers preferring to build smaller units and thus fewer homes for our neighbors.

I live in a triple decker adjacent to and across the street from 3.5-story apartment buildings, and a half block away from a new 3-story building + 1500sqft ADU – and it's fine, and in keeping with the density on the rest of the block. Allow more Backyard Cottages (aka more *homes*) to be built in Somerville!

Jaclyn Pillitteri
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Colin Larsen [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, April 27, 2026 1:37 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Resident Comments Re: Development Activities

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Hello Councilmembers,

I live at 379 Broadway in Ward 4 and wanted to share comments with respect to a couple of land use activities in Somerville, though I know they are not currently on your agenda

1. I am supportive of the Copper Mill development as it is currently designed. I know the developer is looking to go through 40B so you all are not directly involved. I still want to express my opinion as a constituent that I think Somerville needs more projects like this, not less. I like taller buildings and I generally think redevelopment is good. I have not at all been happy with the way DSNC has had such a say in this process and I think these hyperlocal bodies are un-democratic.

2. I read this news piece about "backyard cottages":

<https://www.cambridgeday.com/2026/04/18/somerville-backyard-condo-loophole/>

Firstly, it seems ridiculous to me that an attorney representing someone suing a developer over this ordinance is actively proposing amendments to it while the lawsuit is ongoing. Planning Board member quoted in this article calls him "Councilor" when the guy hasn't been in office for more than 5 years. Would I get the same level of deference as him? Could I just show up with an ordinance amendment and expect it to be taken up immediately?

Secondly, I think it's great that the city managed to craft an ordinance that's enabling some 4-unit infill projects. It likely doesn't make much of a difference in terms of housing numbers citywide, but I like these kinds of projects. Mr. White says it's removing "starter homes", but the property he's representing the litigant over was sold for \$1.6 million in 2024.

By-right approval is good. I don't think the basis of a functioning community is one in which every little thing is subject to a vote, particularly when we're talking about such small projects.

Thank you,
Colin Larsen

Madalyn Letellier

From: Rosenberg, Beth [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 7:40 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Zoning amendments

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

Hello,

I am writing as a longtime resident of Somerville. I am a neighbor of Denise Provost. I am aghast at the congested development that is going on our city, under the banner of "we need more housing."

I am in full support of councilor Bill White's amendments to limit lot splits and clarify ADUs. The development project going on in the city and particularly at 17 Hudson St serves no one but developers. Green space and sun are being lost to tall buildings in our residential neighborhoods. If I wanted to live in Manhattan, I would have moved there instead of to Somerville.

We are the most densely populated city in the commonwealth. We don't need more housing. We need more affordable housing. Our city is losing the charm of 2 and 3 family houses, with postage stamp yards. These new developments don't even allow for those tiny yards. We say we're Sustainville, but again, how can that be when there's no green space, and the zoning regs count pervious pavement as "green"? The pollinators certainly don't benefit!

Bill White's amendments are a step in the right direction. I fully support them and encourage you to do so as well.

Thank you,

Beth Rosenberg

[REDACTED]
Somerville 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Mouhab Rizkallah [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 4, 2026 3:51 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Backyard Cottages - please do not change square footage

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Dear City Council,

I am writing to comment on the proposed Backyard Cottage amendment as it relates to rentals.

We have found that, **as rentals**, they are highly desired by families who want an affordable way to have a separated home (no shared walls or floors).

However, the 900 sf amendment does not recognize that the max floorplate is 576 sf, and so **a staircase in that floorplate takes up roughly 1/3rd of each floor.**

This 576 sf floorplate is just enough for a strip-kitchen, small living room, and a disproportionately large stairwell.

You **cannot even fit a bathroom on the first floor** with that sized floorplate.

This pushes the bathroom to the second floor, and after subtracting the stairwell, pitched head-height (and dormer rules), you have a closet for a bedroom.

Taken together, limiting these units to 900 sf (as the amendment proposes) destroys the space's rental functionality - I hope my points make sense.

So please do not reduce the sizes of the rentals lower than the current 1500 sf.

Respectfully Yours,

M Z. Rizkallah

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Madalyn Letellier

From: Mary Chitty [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 7, 2026 10:22 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Denise Provost
Subject: Backyard Cottages" and "Lot Splits"

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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I attended the April 16th Join hearing by Zoom. I was distressed to learn about the oversize and excessive number of ADUs currently allowed in Somerville. I hope that Bill White's proposed amendments are given every serious consideration. Mary Chitty

Mary Chitty MSLS

[REDACTED] Somerville MA 02144
Librarian, Taxonomist, Fact-checker, Lexicographer
cell phone [REDACTED]

Artificial Intelligence Terminology Cheat Sheet: ChatGPT& beyond

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/artificial-intelligence-terminology-cheat-sheet-mary-chitty-h7g7e/>

EJ Phillips: Her Dramatic Life <https://maryglenchitty.com/>

<https://bsky.app/profile/mgchitty.bsky.social>

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kate Lila Wheeler [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 7, 2026 12:51 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Denise; Kate Lila Wheeler; David Guss
Subject: Please Support Proposed ADU Policy Amendments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Land Use Committee and others whom it may concern,

We support all four of William White's proposed amendments to Somerville's ADU policy and urge you to do the same.

These amendments align with the intent of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, state guidelines, the goal of creating more affordable housing, and -- last but not least -- public health. The zoning ordinance emphasizes the modest scale of ADUs and state guidelines limit them to 900 square feet. Current practice in Somerville, however, often allows large, luxury-oriented developments that do not reflect that intent.


In practice, this overdevelopment does not serve residents or prospective residents who want to share in the character of this city. Somerville's 20% affordability requirement has been eliminated, while luxury development continues to push out longtime residents, causing evictions when taking rental apartments off the market and discouraging new residents. Meanwhile, the developments continue to increase pressure on city services and infrastructure. This approach doesn't ensure that people who live and work here can continue to afford to stay, nor does it invite young, working class, or immigrants to be residents. "Affordability" is relative. Developers' need for profit is cited as a given. But how much profit? And at whose expense? Tax benefits for residents haven't exactly been dramatic.

A more modest ADU scale would serve current and future residents' needs for housing, rental income or space for family members. Modesty would also help preserve the city's neighborhood character, existing green space, and public health. Gardens and trees are a valuable public asset, especially in a city already facing heat-island effects and pollution-related health risks. Most of Somerville's current green space is private, maintained at homeowners' expense; the city continually states that it seeks new opportunities for public open space yet never finds them and doesn't implement its own policies when developers claim they can't make enough money and can't afford to meet the city's criteria. Let's consider all green space as worth preserving and think well about density, setbacks, the 'accidental' deaths of trees.

The current approach also places added strain on sewers, traffic, schools, fire, and police services, while reducing setbacks and paving over more open space. Allowing lot splits without public debate would only intensify these problems.

We urge you to adopt all four amendments and to prioritize quality of life, affordability, green space, and responsible planning in this city.

Kate Wheeler and David Guss



--

Kate Lila Wheeler



Antonia Shelzi

[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

April 9, 2026

Land Use Committee
Planning Board
City Council
Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD)
Mayor's Office
City Hall
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Opposition to Proposed Zoning Text Amendments – File Nos. 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330

(Submitted by William A. White, Jr. and 29 registered voters – the “White Petition”)

Dear Members of the Land Use Committee, Planning Board, City Council, OSPCD, and Mayor's Office:

As a Somerville property owner, I am writing to oppose and respectfully urge you to **REJECT ALL FOUR** proposed zoning text amendments contained in File Nos. 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330 (the White Petition) to Somerville Zoning Ordinance Sections 3.1.12 & 10.2.1, 3.12, 12.1.2, and 15.7.2, certified by the Board of Election Commissioners on March 5, 2026.

The planning department's recent amendment permitting three units plus a cottage without an affordability requirement was the product of careful professional analysis. Staff recognized that small-scale NR development cannot economically bear the cost of deed-restricted units, and they crafted the rules accordingly. This was a deliberate policy judgment, not an accidental omission. Amendment 4 seeks to override that expert determination by imposing a 20% affordable mandate through the lot-split process—an end-run around a decision the City's own planners made for sound reasons.

Somerville faces one of the most acute housing shortages in the Greater Boston region. Rents continue to climb, and the households being displaced are overwhelmingly the young families, immigrants, and working-class residents who give this city its character. The current zoning framework has begun to produce results—backyard cottages, ADU permits, and gentle-density infill are adding units to the housing stock in a meaningful way. The White Petition would choke off this progress at precisely the moment when we need to be accelerating it, not retreating from it.

When a proposed lot split produces parcels that meet every dimensional standard in the ordinance—frontage, lot area, setbacks, lot coverage—there is simply no planning

decision left to make. The question is mathematical, not discretionary. OSPCD recognized this when it determined that Minor Site Plan Approval is the appropriate review path for conforming splits. Amendment 3's proposal to route these projects through a full ZBA special permit hearing would inject subjective judgment into an objective process, creating opportunities for arbitrary outcomes and opening the City to legal challenges from applicants whose projects satisfy every written requirement.

Somerville's neighbor to the south has already learned this lesson. Cambridge commissioned multiple studies on the economics of small-scale housing and found that affordability mandates at the scale of NR-type projects are counterproductive—they do not generate affordable units; they simply prevent market-rate units from being built. Cambridge responded by amending its zoning to allow up to ten units per lot with no affordable requirement. The White Petition asks Somerville to adopt precisely the approach that Cambridge has already studied, tested, and abandoned.

The 2024 Affordable Homes Act mandates that municipalities allow detached backyard cottages by right and prohibits the imposition of unreasonable restrictions. Somerville's current ordinance goes further than the state minimum, which is appropriate for a housing-constrained city. Amendments 1 and 2 would move in the opposite direction—tightening cottage restrictions in ways that conflict with the Act's requirements. At a time when the state is actively expanding housing rights, Somerville should not be contracting them.

Amendment 2's 900-square-foot gross floor area cap does more than reduce cottage size—it effectively eliminates basements. Under the current framework, basements beneath cottages serve critical functions: additional bedrooms, storage, laundry, and mechanical systems. Capping gross floor area at 900 square feet means there is no room in the calculation for below-grade space. The result is a cottage that looks adequate on paper but is significantly less livable in practice, particularly for families who need every square foot they can get.

A special permit requirement for conforming lot splits does not add meaningful planning review—it adds a political process. In practice, ZBA hearings for compliant projects become forums for abutters to object to development they do not want, regardless of whether it meets every standard the City has established. The effect is to give neighboring property owners an unofficial veto over lawful land use. Zoning is supposed to set predictable, objective rules; it is not meant to serve as a mechanism for neighbors to block projects they find inconvenient.

The trajectory of state housing policy in Massachusetts is unmistakable: the MBTA Communities Act, the statewide ADU law, and the Affordable Homes Act all push toward by-right approvals and fewer discretionary barriers. Every amendment in the White Petition moves Somerville in the opposite direction—adding special permit requirements, imposing affordability mandates at infeasible scales, and restricting building types that state law expressly encourages. Adopting these changes would place Somerville out of step with the state's policy direction and could invite preemption challenges down the road.

I respectfully request that you reject File Nos. 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330 in their entirety and preserve the current Zoning Ordinance that continues to deliver additional housing for Somerville residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signed by:
Antonia Shelzi
D044B72212C748B...

Antonia Shelzi
Somerville Property Owner

CC:

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Toni Shelzi <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2026 5:35 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Fw: Zoning Ammendment letter
Attachments: Outlook-A picture; Somerville NR Zoning Amendment - Shelzi_Letter_of_Opposition.docx.pdf

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Please see the attached comments and consolidate all comments for zoning amendments.

Toni Shelzi

Principal
ABG Commercial Realty



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From: Planning Board <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, April 29, 2026 12:06 PM
To: Toni Shelzi <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Zoning Ammendment letter

Hello, thank you for submitting this. Could you please also submit to publiccomments@somervillema.gov, they consolidate all comments for zoning amendments.

Thank you,



Planning Board Coordinator

Planning, Preservation, & Zoning
City of Somerville
93 Highland Avenue | Somerville, MA 02143
Email: PlanningBoard@somervillema.gov

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Madalyn Letellier

From: Paula Woolley [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 7, 2026 1:01 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: TO Land Use Committee on "Backyard Cottage" amendments

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Hi,
Upon seeing the build-out of the plan for 2 triple-deckers with "backyard cottages" behind them, I support Bill White's amendments. North American Development plans to repeat this format of building 8 units on two split lots on the lot behind my house, at 112 Albion St.

My concerns are the following:

- 1) Developers seem to be able to disregard the spirit, if not the rules, of the new zoning for NR, in which new buildings are supposed to fit in with the scale of the surrounding existing homes. Yet, the new triple-deckers at 17 Hudson St and on Albion Street near Cedar St (I'm not sure of its address) are much taller than the surrounding three-story houses and use up much more of the land.
- 2) In my opinion, **affordable units should be required in the NR zone** if developers construct 4 or more units (this would be 25% rather than 20%). This rule would lower their likelihood of splitting lots to avoid including an affordable unit. (I know that my opinion is different from Bill White's Amendment #4, which specifies " 5 or more units"; I disagree with the 5 units because the Backyard Cottage could be considered 1 unit when it's first built.)
- 3) I'm concerned about the lack of green space in such extreme use of the land. Developers are notorious for taking down trees and not replacing them on the property they're (over)developing.

Specifically, in the proposed development behind me, at 112 Albion St, that section of Albion St frequently floods during heavy rain. Water from as far uphill as Highland Ave (if not even Summer St) seems to end up on Albion St. The lack of porous land to absorb that water is a concern with that project, which will presumably include living space in the above-ground basement.

4) Backyard Cottages (ADUs): The "Backyard cottage" currently under construction at 17 Hudson St, seems to be as large as the two-story house behind it, unlike images of the backyard cottages in the Zoning document.* I support ADUs as a place for older or younger family members to live, who don't need an entire house, but the developers seem to be taking on the idea as a full house. It's possible they believe these large ADUs could be made into 2 units in the future. I understand that the city is trying to bring this building type into conformity with state guidelines, and I hope that they'll be smaller and truer to the reason for

their existence. Doing so would enable the preservation (or addition) of more green space on these lots.

*<https://online.encodeplus.com/regs/somerville-ma/doc-viewer.aspx?secid=331#secid-337>

Thank you,
Paula Woolley



Madalyn Letellier

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 7, 2026 1:40 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Recent Zoning Amendments

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Somerville Zoning Board of Appeals,

At the April 16th Joint Hearing of the ZBA and the Land Use Committee 4 Amendments were thoughtfully submitted by Attorney Bill White.

I also oppose the two Somerville YIMBY Amendments as submitted.

Dear committee members,

As a concerned citizen watching the often uncontrolled and poorly executed development happening around our city I request that you consider the Amendments as requested by former councilman Bill White, esq.

I support of the four zoning amendments proposed by Attorney Bill White, and I urge the Land Use Committee to advance them.

Taken together, these amendments address loopholes and a lack of transparency that has worked against middle-income homebuyers, retention of long-term tenants, and the overall goal of housing stability and affordability.

Amendment 1. Align “Backyard Cottages” with the State’s Affordability Law

This amendment would limit the size of a “Backyard Cottage” to no more than 900 square feet in size. This change tracks a 2024 state law, the “Affordable Homes Act,” which requires local zoning codes to allow creation of “Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs).” These can be freestanding, connected to or inside homes, or converted from other outbuildings, like garages or barns.

The state policy behind this law is to promote ways to provide less expensive homes: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/accessory-dwelling-units>. Somerville’s practice of permitting house-sized ADUs defeats this intended purpose.

Many developers have been allowed to mis-interpret and mis-represent this laudable provision both locally and at the State level. By keeping accessory dwelling units at a reasonable and small scale we can meet two goals: affordable, small units that can support those in need and protect permeable/open space

within the city. Yards are open space and help our Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) issues by maintaining reasonable permeable space throughout the city. Green space (yards) also reduce heat-island impacts that are only getting worse with climate change.

Amendment 1 aligns with the Commonwealth's Affordable Homes Act and better reflects the spirit of Somerville's ADU ordinance to promote smaller, less expensive units, rather than cramming an additional house into a backyard and eliminating all greenspace.

Amendment 2. Make it Clear that Backyard Cottages are Accessory Structures.

This amendment would assure that a "Backyard Cottage" be genuinely *accessory*, which means *subordinate to and in the same ownership as the principal building on the lot*. Currently, Somerville practice allows these accessory units to be sold off separately.

In current practice, Somerville allows Developers to build highly lucrative "Backyard Cottages" as large condominium units, typically behind 3-unit buildings. These are sold separately, as freestanding, market-rate, single-family homes - which are also condos. This practice gives Developers the opportunity to build 'bonus' fourth units on each lot - a huge financial incentive to outbid middle-income home buyers in Somerville.

Back-yard cottages and basement units can make the difference for homeowners who need more space or income to support their own challenging housing costs in our City.

Amendment 2 ensures that backyard cottages function as true accessory structures rather than as a mechanism for developers to build and sell bonus market-rate condominiums on residential lots.

3.Restore Transparency and Due Process for Lot Split Decisions

Under controlling law, the city's Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is supposed to decide lot split requests. Normal ZBA processes would put these requests on a meeting agenda, with notice to abutters, and an opportunity to be heard at the meeting – basic elements of Due Process.

In current city practice, a lot split is deemed "a minor plan change." They are decided privately by Planning Staff. The public does not know when a lot split application is filed or granted. Bill's third amendment simply removes the language that gives Planning Staff blanket authority to decide lot splits on their own, in private, without public knowledge or input.

Many decisions currently being made are favoring developers' rights over existing residents' rights with little or no accountability. There is a lack of trust being created by elected and non-elected officials ignoring Somerville's thoughtful SOMERVISION and Somerville 2040 planning guides which holistically consider the City fabric.

Amendment 3 restores public notice and ZBA oversight to lot split decisions; which do have an impact on neighbors and should be subject to typical notification and review processes. If a small dormer needs ZBA review, a split-lot definitively should.

4.Restore Affordability Requirements for Lot Splits in NR District

In recent years, the city has eliminated the 20% affordability requirement in our residential neighborhoods. Under current zoning, a Developer need not provide a single affordable unit when building 8 condominium units on a lot as small as 6500 sq. ft.

This amendment would require that Developers provide one or more affordable units whenever a residential lot is split into two or more smaller lots. If the total number of units constructed adds up to 5 or more units, 20% of those units must be affordable.

The current process is clearly working against the City's stated goals of adding affordable housing.

Amendment 4 If a developer does substantially expand the number of units on a lot, the 20% affordability requirement should be enforced - the benefit of expanding density should accrue to both the developer and the community.

Two additional Amendments of questionable merit have also been put forth by Somerville YIMBY that do not fully consider the affordability, character and quality of the city's housing stock:

1. Increasing the allowed height of the Detached House, Semi-Detached House, and Duplex building types in the NR district from 2.5 stories to 3 stories

Mis-applied and taken out of context these blanket changes have pitted neighbor against neighbor, supported Developers over citizens and added to the distrust that citizens have towards our elected and non-elected oversight boards. Our current density requires careful consideration of individual alterations not simple blanket removal of protections.

2. loosening restrictions on the construction of Gable and Shed Dormers in both the NR and UR districts.

Mis-applied and taken out of context these blanket changes have pitted neighbor against neighbor, supported Developers over citizens and added to the distrust that citizens have towards our elected and non-elected oversight boards. Our current density requires careful consideration of individual alterations not simple blanket removal of protections.

Across the city one can see many poor examples of how our zoning has lacked the protections necessary to serve the simple housing stock that gives our city its texture, scale and density that are the backbone for affordable housing. These types of blanket zoning changes serve the developer's needs not homebuyers and have fueled the inflation of our housing pricing.

Please consider thoughtfully the impacts that your efforts are having on the environment, the quality, and the housing and families of our city.

Respectfully,
Alex Pitkin, Architect (Designer for the new Somerville High School and Argenziano School)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kevin McIntosh [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 7, 2026 8:35 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Re: In Support of Bill White's Amendments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

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Dear Land Use Committee,

I am writing to you in support of Bill White's four proposed amendments. Mr. White's amendments will keep the densest city in New England from being overrun by "Backyard Cottages" that are really just oversized luxury dwellings, housing that runs counter to the original purpose of the legislation. His amendments regarding lot splits would guarantee transparency—the hallmark of good government—as well as making affordability a condition of development. I think you'll agree that affordability has never been a keener issue in Somerville.

I appreciate your thoughtful deliberation on this matter.

Sincerely,

Kevin McIntosh
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02144

Madalyn Letellier

From: kate byrne <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, May 10, 2026 7:51 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Denise Provost; JT Scott; Elana Anastasio; dorinda joquith; Bill Cavellini; Samantha Wolfe
Subject: "Cottages"

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To the Land Use Committee and the Planning Board,

I am horrified at how our neighborhoods have been put up for sale to developers who are using the advantage of the City Council's order allowing ADUs and triple-deckers to get around the 20% affordability inclusionary zoning. While these units cram our neighborhoods, they can be sold as condos for millions of dollars. The ADUs, supposedly small units, are just as large as the units in the triple-deckers, with basements and second floors.

In my neighborhood, a property that held a duplex was purchased. A request at the Planning Department to one employee to divide into two lots was granted, and the building was torn down, despite historic preservation. It has been allowed to have two triple-deckers with an additional ADU on each lot. These will all be sold off making millions for the developers and disrupting our neighborhood. It is really concerning that currently, the developer is building within three feet of the property line. By the way, there is another lot around the corner from that one, a four family, where the tenants left because the landlord wanted to sell the building empty. It was torn down in two days. There are no permits as yet except for the demolition permit. Just a question, Why are we allowing totally good buildings, those housing tenants, to be torn down? Obviously, to put major \$\$\$s in the pockets of developers. This is not adding to the needed affordable housing market; this is increasing the gentrification of Somerville and taking properties that house tenants off the market.

It is absolutely necessary that the Council reconsider their orders, and the Planning Board accepts Bill White's amendments. The decision to split lots into two should never be in the hands of one individual. Neighbors need to be involved and consulted. The current set-up is unacceptable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kate Byrne

Kate Byrne (she\her)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Elana Anastasio [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 11, 2026 3:16 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: In support for proposed zoning amendments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

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Dear Land Use Committee and Planning Board:

I am writing to urge your acceptance of Bill White's proposed zoning amendments. While I support expanding Somerville's housing, current rules allow developers to displace long-term residents by exploiting lot-splitting loopholes to avoid inclusionary zoning requirements.

Specifically, I have recently seen developers demolishing functional multi-family homes to build expensive condos and "ADU" cottages marketed as luxury units. This practice prioritizes developer profit over neighborhood stability and affordable housing, and removes viable rental stock from the market. In my own neighborhood, this has resulted in the displacement of residents who had been part of our community for decades.

It is essential that lot-division decisions become transparent, include affordable housing considerations, and are no longer left to a single individual's discretion. Please adopt these amendments to ensure Somerville remains accessible for all residents.

Thank you,
Elana Anastasio

Madalyn Letellier

From: ELISSA MINTZ [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 11, 2026 10:36 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Proposed amendments to the regulations regarding "backyard cottages" (ADUs)

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Dear Land Use Committee:

I am writing to express my whole-hearted support for attorney Bill White's proposed amendments to the laws regarding ADUs and the splitting of lots.

It is a true puzzle to me that Somerville has deviated so sharply from the state's definition of (and intentions for) ADUs. ADUs are supposed to be accessory dwelling units, so the obvious question is, accessory to what? And the answer is, to an *existing structure* owned by a Somerville resident. ADUs are supposed to provide homeowners with ways to care for a) aging relatives, bringing health care costs down for themselves and for the rest of us, or b) younger relatives/tenants not yet able to afford current market-rate rents. ADUs were not intended to line the pockets of developers.

I live within a couple of blocks of massive, newly constructed (or under construction) apartment buildings, including a 22-unit "luxury" apartment building, a 26-unit building, and a 16,000 square foot lot that will be used for yet another apartment building. If we're going to allow so many buildings of such an enormous size in such a small area, we don't need to pervert the ADU laws to cram in still more large, pricey luxury units in whatever space remains. It would be great if ADUs were used as they were intended to be used: as support for Somerville families struggling to survive in these difficult economic times.

Thanks for any help you can offer to improve the affordability and livability of our beloved Somerville.

Sincerely,

Elissa Mintz
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Julius Anastasio [REDACTED] >
Sent: Tuesday, May 12, 2026 8:54 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Support for proposed zoning amendments

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

Dear Members of the Land Use Committee and Planning Board,

I am writing in support of Bill White's proposed zoning amendments. These are common-sense changes that would help close loopholes developers are using to avoid the intent of Somerville's zoning rules.

I support adding housing in Somerville, especially near transit. But in and around our neighborhood, about a five-minute walk from the Union T stop, we are seeing existing multifamily homes demolished and replaced with luxury condo developments that provide little public benefit. Within 100 feet of our property, two multifamily buildings have been demolished in the past two months, despite both being designated as "preferably preserved" by the historic commission and despite significant neighborhood concern. Both projects have also used lot splits that appear to avoid affordable housing requirements.

This is not meaningful housing progress. It removes rental stock, displaces residents, and replaces existing homes with expensive condos and oversized "ADU" cottages (which are consistently larger than the majority of condos and many single families in our city) that seem designed to maximize developer profit rather than meet community needs. Somerville needs more housing, but it also needs rules that ensure new development actually serves residents. Lot divisions should be transparent, affordable housing requirements should not be so easily avoided, and backyard cottages should remain appropriately scaled and truly accessory.

Please adopt these amendments to protect neighborhood stability, preserve rental housing, and make sure development in Somerville benefits our broader community.

Thank you,
Julius Anastasio

[REDACTED]

PUBLIC COMMENT

Proposed Zoning Amendments Would Harm Somerville's Housing Supply & Affordability

File Nos. 26-0327 • 26-0328 • 26-0329 • 26-0330

Amending SZO §§ 3.1.12, 10.2.1, 3.12, 15.7.2, 12.1.2

Counter to the Petition by William A. White, Jr. & 29 Registered Voters

Somerville City Council, Land Use Committee, and Planning Board

Proposed Amendments – Summary & Current Context

Current Zoning Already Increased Supply

- 2019 Zoning + 2022-2023 MBTA amendments produced meaningful increase via backyard cottages and removal of affordable requirements.

1. Backyard Cottage Redefinition (§§ 3.1.12 & 10.2.1)

- Eliminates flexible redevelopment: Homeowners prefer condominium ownership path; amendment prohibits this.
- Risks MBTA compliance.

2. Square Footage Cap (§ 3.12)

- 900 sq ft too small for families (no space for home office/caregiver); eliminates basements.
- Misapplies state ADU regs.

3. Eliminating Minor Site Plan Approval (§ 15.7.2)

- Current process is ministerial (conforming lot verification).
- Forcing ZBA discretionary review creates arbitrary decisions and due process risks.
- Previously rejected (File #24-1315).

4. 20% Affordable Mandate (§ 12.1.2)

- At <12 unit scale, 20% math does not work – no cross-subsidy. Result: no housing.
- White admits goal is to block developers.
- Direct evidence: No new 3-unit buildings post-2019 due to affordability requirement.

Evidence: Amendments Would Reduce Housing Production & Increase Costs

Backyard Cottages & Small Infill (Amendments 1–2)

- 900 sq ft cap + accessory-only rule limits viability of incremental projects.
- Current ~1,500 sq ft units add of family sized units; restrictions make them studios or 1 bedrooms.
- Restrictions reduce output where gentle density is most needed.

Lot Split Procedures (Amendment 3)

- Mandatory ZBA review extends timelines by months and increases costs. Current ministerial process is efficient.
- Forcing discretionary review creates arbitrary decisions and regulatory takings exposure.

Affordable Mandate on Small Splits (Amendment 4)

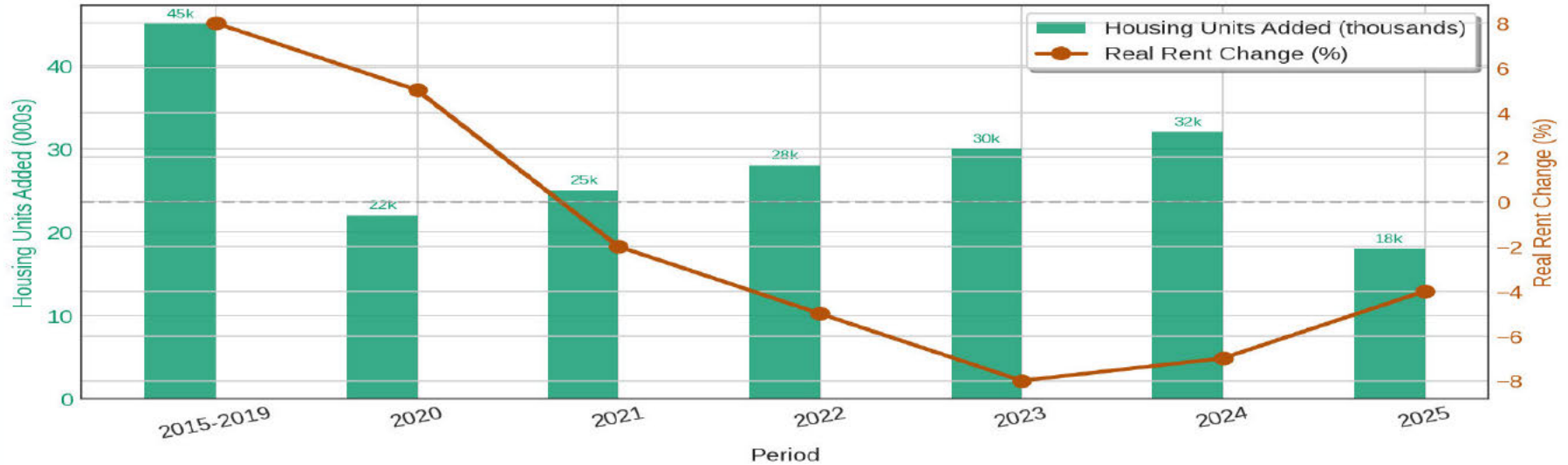
- At <12 unit scale, 20% affordable requirement renders projects unfeasible. Result: no housing.
- City deliberately exempted this scale; White admits goal is to block developers.

Broader Harm

- Housing supply is the most effective affordability tool. Restricting accelerates gentrification.
- Condominium cottages provide ownership pathways for middle-class and immigrant families.
- Amendments inconsistent with state by-right trends (MBTA, ADU law).

Evidence: Supply Increases Moderate Costs — Austin, TX

Austin, TX: Housing Supply Surge Correlates with Rent Declines (2015-2025)



Reforms:

- Eased ADU rules (2,850+ permitted)
- Citywide parking reductions
- Density bonuses
- Expedited permitting

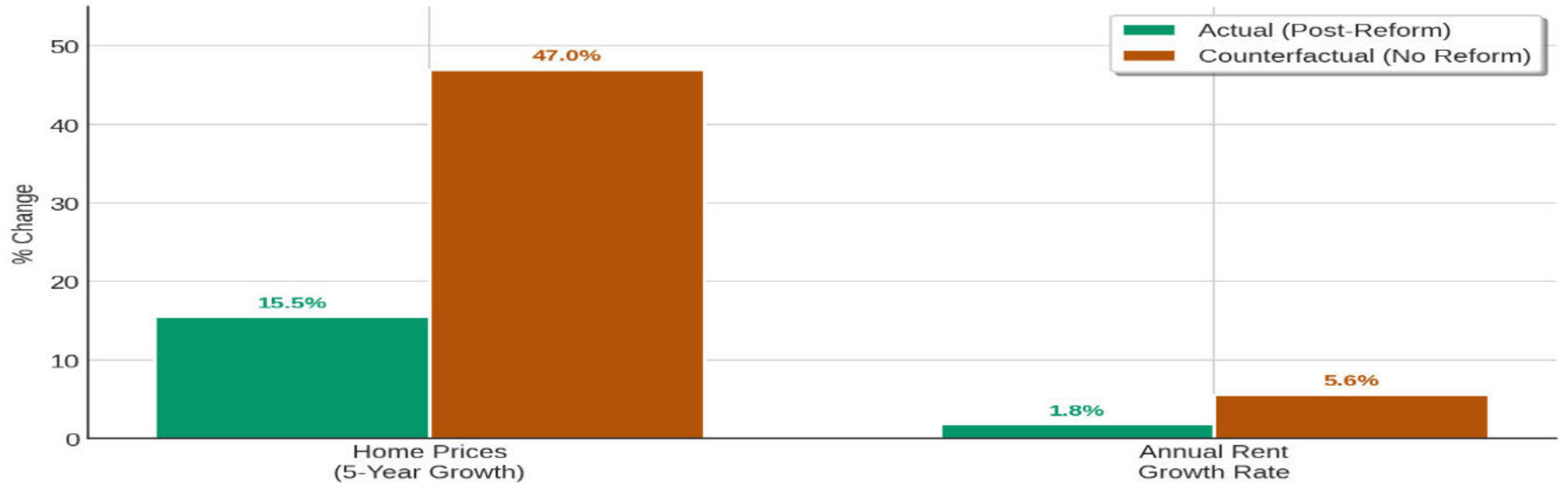
Results:

- Rents fell -11% in lower-cost apartments (steepest among large metros)
- Affordability improved (95% → 84% AMI)
- Despite robust growth, supply outpaced demand.

Source: Pew Charitable Trusts (Mar 2026)

Evidence: Zoning Reform Moderated Prices — Minneapolis 2040

**Minneapolis 2040 Plan: Actual vs. What Prices Would Have Been
(Synthetic Control Comparison to 83 Similar Cities)**



Reforms:

- Eliminated single-family-only zoning
- allowed duplexes/triplexes citywide
- increased density near transit.

Results:

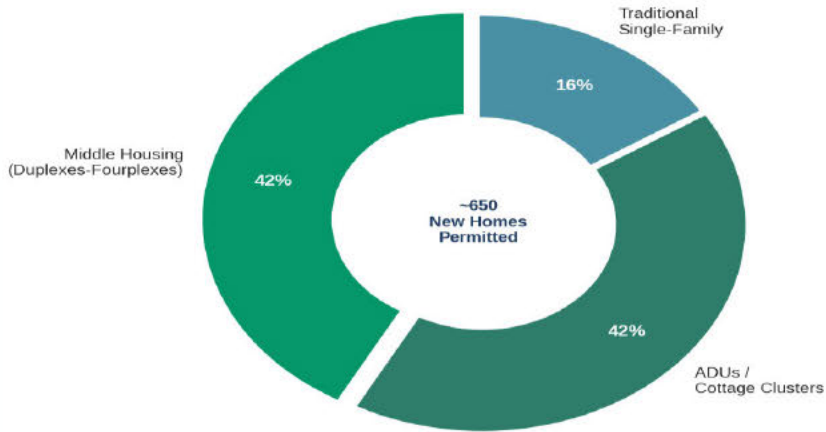
- Home prices 16–34% lower
- Rents 17.5–34% lower after 5 years
- Effect via changed expectations — anticipated supply reduced aggressive bidding.

Source: Gu & Munro (2025) — https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5347083

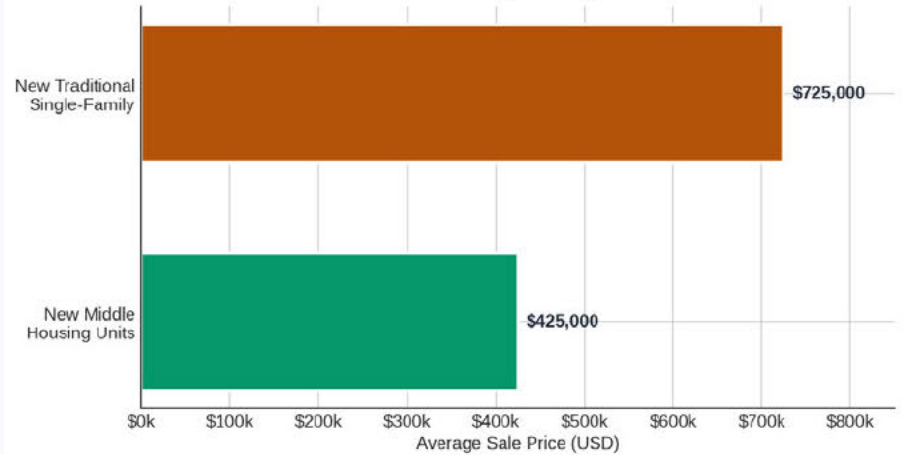
Synthetic Comparison: Researchers created a 'synthetic' Minneapolis from 83 similar cities without reforms to compare actual outcomes vs. what likely would have happened. Gap shows reforms kept prices/rents much lower than expected.

Evidence: Middle Housing Reform — Portland, OR (Residential Infill Project, 2021)

Portland Residential Infill Project (2021-2023)
New Housing Permits in Rezoned Single-Family Areas



Portland: Middle Housing Units Sell for 250k – 300k Less Than New Single-Family Homes



Reforms:

- Allowed duplexes through fourplexes in single-family zones.
- Removed or reduced size limits, setback requirements, and lot coverage restrictions that previously limited smaller homes.
- Eliminated owner-occupancy requirements for middle housing types and adjusted density rules to encourage infill on existing lots.

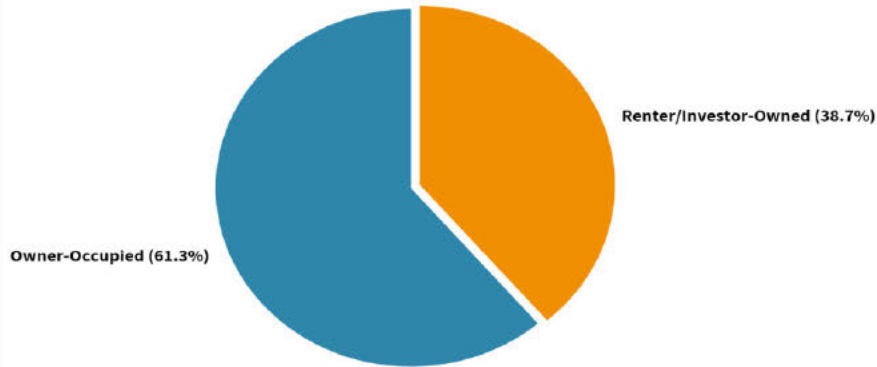
Results:

- In the first 1–2 years, ~650 new homes permitted in rezoned areas.
- Middle housing units sold for \$250,000–\$300,000 less on average than new single-family homes.
- Peer-reviewed evaluation (Dong 2025, Journal of the American Planning Association) showed middle housing share rose from 13.4% pre-reform to 44.7% post-adoption; estimated potential to reduce average housing costs by ~1/3 in affected neighborhoods.

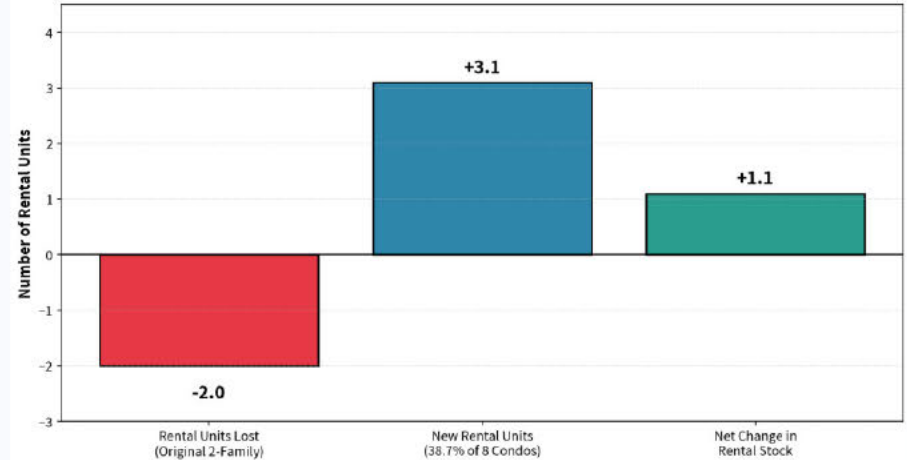
Sources: Portland BPS; Dong (2025) JAPA — <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2024.2344628>

Evidence: Redeveloping Small Rentals into Condos = Net Gain for Somerville Rental Stock (FY20 Data)

Somerville Condominium Units (FY20 Data)
Total: 6,259 Units



Net Rental Stock Impact: 2-Family → 8 Condos
+1.1 Net Gain in Rental Units



The Data (City of Somerville Condominium Review Board FY20 Annual Report):

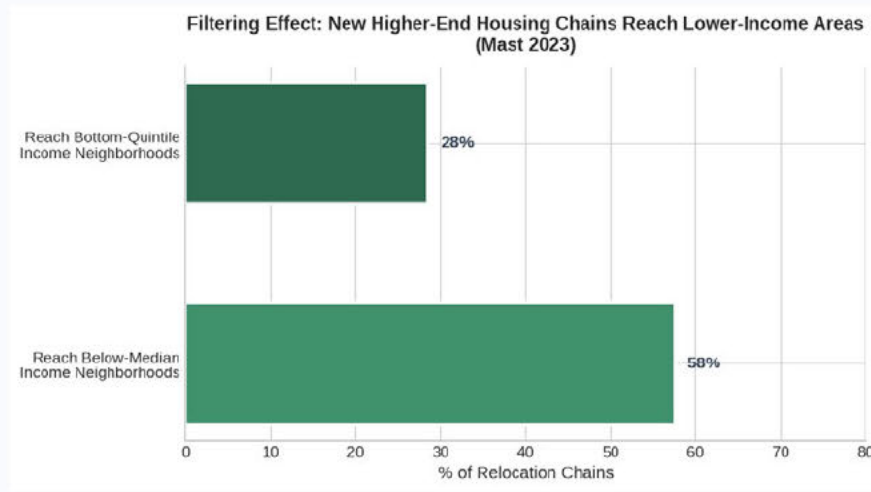
- 6,259 total condominium units in Somerville.
- 61.3% owner-occupied (3,835 units) — new homeownership pathways.
- ~38.7% renter-occupied / investor-owned (~2,424 units) — function as rental housing.

Example: 2-Family Rental Torn Down → 8 New Condos

- Rental units lost: 2 (from the original 2-family).
- New condos that become rentals: ~38.7% of 8 ≈ 3.1 units.
- Net change in rental stock: $-2 + 3.1 = \text{**}+1.1 \text{ units**}$ (plus newer, efficient housing for both owners and renters).

Sources: City of Somerville, Condominium Review Board FY20 Annual Report (Oct 2020) — <https://www.somervillema.gov/content/condominium-review-board-annual-report-fy20> (Assessing Dept. data)

Evidence: Market-Rate Supply Benefits Lower-Cost Segments



Study 1: Local Neighborhood Effects (Asquith, Mast & Reed 2023, Rev. Econ. & Stats.)

Studied: Local effects of new market-rate apartments in low-income U.S. neighborhoods using microdata on buildings, rents, and migration vs. controls.

Findings: 5–7% lower nearby rents • Supply effect (absorbs high-income) outweighs amenity pressures • Slows rent increases • Increases low-income in-migration.

Study 2: Filtering & Relocation Chains (Mast 2023, J. Urban Econ.)

Studied: How new higher-end housing triggers relocation chains across U.S. metros.

Findings: 45–70% of chains reach below-median neighborhoods • Reduces demand on lower-cost stock • Improves affordability without subsidies.

Study 3: Aggregate Effects (Mense 2025, J. Urban Econ.)

Studied: New supply vs. rents across U.S. metros by quality segment.

Findings: 1% supply increase → ~0.19% lower average rents (larger on lower-quality) • Consistent across metros.

Sources: Asquith et al. (2023); Mast (2023); Mense (2025) — *Journal of Urban Economics*

Evidence: Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) on Smaller Projects Raises Costs, Reduces Output

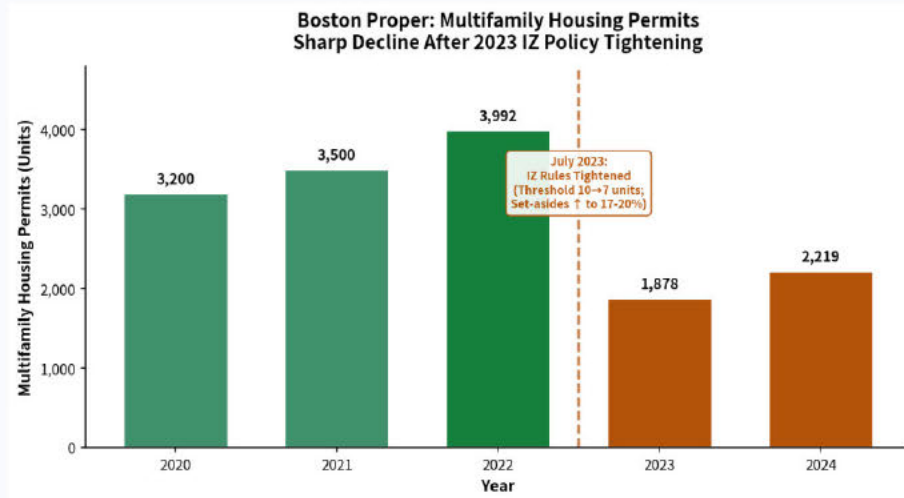
Study: IZ Effects in Suburban Boston & SF Bay Area (Schuetz, Meltzer & Been 2011, Urban Studies)

Studied: Panel data on IZ programs in suburban Boston and SF Bay Area; how IZ affects market-rate prices and production, controlling for market conditions.

Findings: In Boston suburbs, IZ linked to higher prices and lower production • Significant for smaller-scale development • Concluded IZ 'contributed to increased prices and lower production'.

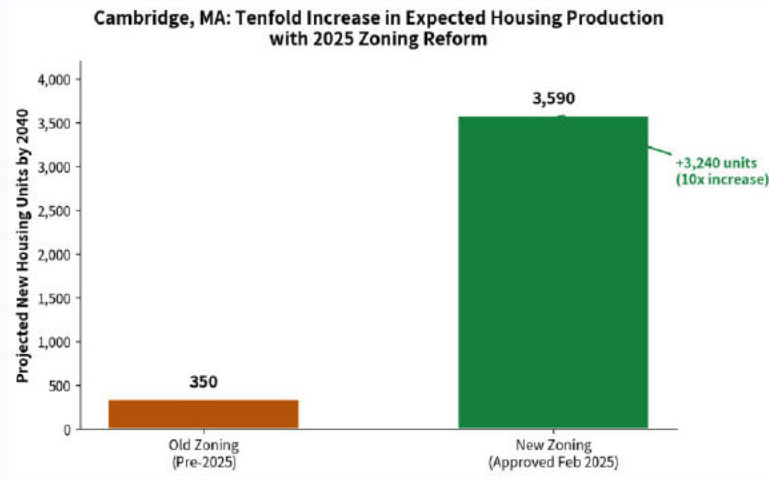
Recent Boston (2023–2025): Lowered trigger to 7 units, raised IZ requirements to 17–20%.

- Boston multifamily permits dropped from 3,992 units in 2022 to 1,878 in 2023 (>50% decline) — the lowest annual total since 2012 — remained suppressed at 2,219 units in 2024.
- Greater Boston permits fell ~40% from the 2021 peak of 15,019 to under 9,000 in 2024.
- The sharp decline coincided with the July 2023 BPDA approval and October 2024 implementation of tighter Inclusionary Zoning rules



Sources: Schuetz et al. (2011); Boston IZ updates (2023–24); MassLive (Oct 2025); Bartman notes on post-2019 production, Bartman notes on post-2019 production, Boston Indicators / Boston Foundation, "How Many Homes Are We Actually Building?" (Oct 2025) and 2025 Greater Boston Housing Report Card (Nov 2025).

Contrast: Cambridge, MA Zoning Reform (Feb 2025) — Supply Expansion



Key Changes (Adopted Feb 10, 2025):

- Multifamily by right citywide (up to 4 stories) — ended exclusive single-family zoning.
- Removed: min lot sizes, unit caps per lot, FAR limits, many setbacks.
- Up to 6 stories (higher via AHO) on $\geq 5,000$ sq ft lots with 20% affordable.

Affordable Requirements Targeted:

- Standard IZ (20%) for 10+ units per lot. Higher density tied to IZ on larger lots. 100% affordable gets height bonuses (up to 9–13 stories).

Relevance to Somerville:

- Expanded supply by removing unit caps and easing process — opposite of proposed amendments.
- IZ strategic to larger projects, not small infill.
- Projected $>3,000$ new homes.
- Amended to allow up to 10 units/lot with no affordable in some contexts, recognizing small-scale economics.

Sources: Cambridge CDD (Feb 2025) — <https://www.cambridgema.gov/News/detail?path=%2Fsitecore%2Fcontent%2Fhome%2Fcdd%2Fnews%2F2025%2F2%2Fzoningformultifamilyhousingcitywide>

Conclusion: Evidence Points to Reduced Supply and Higher Costs

The proposed amendments would:

- Limit viable backyard cottage and small infill via size caps and accessory-only rules, reducing incremental supply.
- Increase costs/timelines for lot splits via mandatory ZBA review instead of predictable staff-level processes.
- Apply 20% affordable mandates to small-scale splits (<10–12 units), where costs disproportionately reduce viability or raise market prices.

Evidence from peer cities shows the opposite works:

- Austin: +120k units (2015–2024) → 19% real rent decline (–11% in lower-cost apartments).
 - Minneapolis: Zoning liberalization → prices 16–34% lower, rents 17.5–34% lower than without reforms.
 - Portland: Middle housing reforms → 42% of new permits smaller/affordable units; ~1/3 cost reduction potential.
 - Broader: New market-rate units lower nearby rents 5–7%; chains reach lower-income neighborhoods 45–70% of time.
- Cambridge (2025): Removed unit caps, allowed 4 stories by right — expanded supply while retaining targeted IZ; amended for up to 10 units/lot with no affordable.
- Net: Upward pressure on costs, downward on production in NR District. City previously declined these changes (File #24-1315, Dec 2024). No new evidence justifies reversal. Approval would reduce production, increase costs, reverse gains, and expose City to legal/financial risks.

Citations with Links

Austin: Pew (Mar 2026) — <https://www.pew.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2026/03/18/austins-surge-of-new-housing-construction-drove-down-rents>

Minneapolis: Gu & Munro (2025) — https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5347083

Local Effects: Asquith, Mast & Reed (2023) — <https://direct.mit.edu/rest/article-abstract/105/2/359/100977>

IZ Boston: Schuetz et al. (2011) — <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0042098009360683>

Portland: Dong (2025) JAPA — <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944363.2024.2344628>; Portland BPS (2023–2025)

Cambridge: Cambridge CDD (Feb 2025) — <https://www.cambridgema.gov/News/detail?path=%2Fsitecore%2Fcontent%2Fhome%2Fcdd%2Fnews%2F2025%2F2%2Fzoningformultifamilyhousingcitywide>

Additional: Mast (2023), Mense (2025) — J. Urban Econ.; Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2025; Counterpoints (Silverstein, Mullane, Bartman)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Maxwell Shortsleeve [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, May 12, 2026 1:38 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment Zoning Amendment File #'s: 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330
Attachments: Somerville Housing Production PDF.pdf

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

Good Afternoon,

Please find attached public comments regarding proposed zoning amendment File #'s: 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330.

Thank you,

Maxwell Shortsleeve

Madalyn Letellier

From: sheila gilligan [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2026 1:48 PM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Denise provost
Subject: Bill White's four amendments on "backyard cottages" & "lot splits"

This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

To public comments staff,

As a homeowner in Somerville for 42 years, having raised my family in our 1910 (ca) home, which my husband and I purchased from his Belgian grandparents' in 1984, I've grown to love my community. I've watched Somerville grow into a dynamic city in which we have enjoyed an abundance of thoughtful improvements to the quality of our lives.

Against the backdrop of our national crisis, the critical loss of our democracy, the setbacks felt locally at many turns, the expanding assault on our neighborhoods by the forces of construction is finding well-deserved push back by concerned and, even, upset residents. Many of the informed are, understandably, incredulous that these predominantly profit-driven projects of developers are widely supported by a city seemingly willing to bend the rules beyond their intended application.

This is our city. Those in its administration are charged with implementing the majority will of our people. Essential to any order of progress is a trust in our leaders that they will represent our best interests. This means each must avoid the temptation of zoning loopholes that skew the power mostly toward profit, away from much needed affordable housing and toward a reduction in our neighborhoods' quality of life.

Importantly, a basic requirement of democracy is the high value assigned to each and every citizen's voice. Therefore, abutters' input on decisions that directly impact homeowners & tenants, both deserving residents, is a required essential.

I write to push back against the lack of leadership's community-mindedness and the unacceptable opportunism that I see in the liberties taken to overbuild.

On behalf of all my impacted neighbors, now and in the future, and those leaders who have worked tirelessly toward a healthier vision for our city, I whole-heartily support Bill White's four amendments that address the real definition of Accessory Dwelling Units and the need for them to be affordable and restoring transparency, fairness and affordability to lot splits.

-appreciatively, Sheila Gilligan,
[REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: S Bodner [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, May 14, 2026 2:03 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: comment on proposed amendments to the SZO

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I am writing to voice support of the proposed amendments that Mr. White filed on March 4th and discussed at the April 16th Land Use Committee meeting.

The amendments will protect one of Somerville's core features; it's unique neighborhoods. Triple deckers, 3 families, and old houses are an indispensable part of Somerville's urban fabric, and the development in residential areas that the current SZO allows is destroying this defining identify that makes Somerville such an amazing place to live.

I encourage the amendments to be approved and incorporated into the SZO.

Serena Bodner
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, May 15, 2026 9:28 AM
To: Public Comments
Cc: Planning Board; Ben Ewen-Campen; Matthew McLaughlin; Naima Sait; Jesse Clingan; Lance Davis
Subject: Comments RE Zoning Proposals discussed at the Land Use Committee's 4/16 6pm hearing

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Dear Members of the Planning Board, City Council Land Use Committee, and Other Interested Parties,

I am submitting comments pertaining to matters 26-0327, 26-0328, 26-0329, and 26-0330, submitted by William White and other registered Somerville voters.

(1) **Testimony regarding #26-0327 – Requiring Backyard Cottages to be ancillary to the principal structure:** First, I want to agree with William White that the purpose of the State’s Affordable Homes Act (Sections 7 and 8 of Chapter 150 of the Acts of 2024) was to encourage the creation of affordable housing by allowing by right the addition of a backyard cottage no more than ½ the square footage of the principal residence or 900 square feet, whichever was smaller.

I also agree that the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) definition of an accessory structure, requiring that the accessory structure is “incidental and subordinate to the principal building in terms of area, size, function, and location” and “is operated and maintained under the same ownership as the principal building” would seem to imply that a backyard cottage -- the only accessory building type permitted by right in the Neighborhood Residence (NR) district -- must have the same ownership as the principle building/residence. This would appear to imply that the accessory dwelling, the backyard cottage, can only be a condominium if the units in the principal building/residence are all owned by the same owner as the backyard cottage.

Sections 7 and 8 of Chapter 150 of the Acts of 2024 are not prescriptive as to whether the accessory dwelling unit (ADU) can or cannot be a condominium. The common ownership provision of the SZO therefore seems more restrictive than the State law, which is silent on the matter of the Accessory Dwelling Unit being a condominium with separate ownership than the owner(s) of the principal building or units therein.

Section 7 of Chapter 150 of the Acts of 2024 states that, “no municipality shall unreasonably restrict the creation or rental of an accessory dwelling unit that is not a short-term rental.” I leave to the Land Use Committee and the Planning Board the determination as to whether requiring common ownership constitutes an “unreasonable restriction.” However, in my opinion, **it is no more of an unreasonable restriction than:**

- (a) The fact that the only form that the SZO allows an Accessory Dwelling Unit to take in the NR district is as a backyard cottage, notwithstanding the Mass. Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) website (<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/accessory-dwelling-units>) explaining that an Accessory Dwelling Unit “is a small residential living space located on the same lot as another home.... ADUs can be inside an existing home, like converting a basement into an apartment, attached to a primary residence as an addition, or completely detached, like a cottage or converted garage in a backyard.”
- (b) The fact that the SZO definition of a backyard cottage requires that it be a “detached” accessory building type, given that Section 7 of Chapter 150 of the Acts of 2024 only requires that the ADU be “a self-contained housing unit, inclusive of sleeping, cooking and sanitary facilities on the same lot as a principal dwelling, subject to otherwise applicable dimensional and parking requirements, that: (i) maintains a separate entrance, either directly from the outside or through an entry hall or corridor shared with the principal dwelling sufficient to meet the requirements of the state building code for safe egress; (ii) is not larger in gross floor area than 1/2 the gross floor area of the principal dwelling or 900 square feet, whichever is smaller; and (iii) is subject to such additional restrictions as may be imposed by a municipality, including, but not limited to, additional size restrictions and restrictions or prohibitions on short-term rental, as defined in section 1 of chapter 64G; provided, however, that no municipality shall unreasonably restrict the creation or rental of an accessory dwelling unit that is not a short-term rental.”

(2) Testimony regarding #26-0328 – Limiting the Gross Floor Area to the smaller of {1/2 the Gross Floor Area of the Principal Dwelling – or – 900 square feet}: As noted above, Section 7 of Chapter 150 of the Acts of 2024 clearly indicates that an integral component of the definition of an ADU – and part of the strategy for limiting the cost of the ADU – is that it “is not larger in gross floor area than 1/2 the gross floor area of the principal dwelling or 900 square feet, whichever is smaller.” **I support that goal**, but the way that the SZO measures square footage must be modified to achieve that outcome.

By comparison, SZO §3.1.12 limits the **floor plate** of a Backyard Cottage to 576 square feet, and limits the height of the ADU to 1.5 stories. At first glance, the 900 square foot limit does not appear to be significantly different than the limit defined by the 576 square foot floor plate and the 1.5 stories cap. But as a lawyer might say, the devil is in the definitions.

As defined in SZO §2.1.1, the **Gross Floor Area** is “The sum floor area of a building, in whole or on part, as measured to the face of the exterior walls, with no deduction for corridors, stairs, closets, thickness of walls, columns, or other features.” Also in SZO §2.1.1, a **Story** is defined as “the portion of a building located between the surface of a habitable floor and the surface of the habitable floor or roof next above,” and the **Ground Story** is defined as “the lowest story of a building with a finished floor at or above the finished ground level next to a building at the facade.”

As defined in SZO §2.4.4(a)(iv), the “**Floor Plate** is measured as the total gross floor area of a single **story** of a building, excluding building components.” And as explained in SZO §2.4.4(a)(viii), “**Basements** are not counted as one (1) story unless the finished floor of the ground story is five (5) feet or more above the average ground level of the lot,” and “habitable space located directly under a pitched roof is counted as a half story.” Furthermore, “the roof rafters must intersect the wall plate or top of wall frame of the exterior walls at a height up to ... four (4) feet above the finished floor of the half-story of an accessory building type,” and “the **ceiling height** of a half story must not exceed twelve (12) feet in height at any point”.

According to [Fannie Mae Standardized Property Measuring Guidelines](#), “All finished areas must have a ceiling height of at least 7 feet. In a room with a sloping ceiling, at least 50% of the finished square footage of the room must have a ceiling height of at least 7 feet and no portion of the finished area can have a ceiling height of less than 5 feet,” so that any portion of the second story floor plate where the height of the sloped ceiling is less than 5 feet would not count as part of the square footage of the second floor. So if the second floor has a maximum roof height of 12 feet and knee walls of 4 feet, its countable square footage would be a little more than 50% of 576, so that the combined square footage of the ground floor and the top floor of the backyard cottage would be very close to 900 square feet.

What about the basement floor? Why is the concept of “Ground Story” important to the question of measuring Gross Floor Area? Because “Basements are not counted as one (1) story unless the finished floor of the ground story is five (5) feet or more above the average ground level of the lot.” And because “**FloorPlate** is measured as the Total Gross Floor Area **of a single STORY of a building, unless the ground story is five feet or more about the average ground level of the lot, the square footage of the basement is apparently not counted**... even if the basement is a beautifully finished room.

So, at first blush, a backyard cottage with a 576 square foot ground floor floorplate, a top floor with a peaked roof, and a beautiful finished basement, all of which have the same footprint, might **appear** to be much larger than the 900 square feet that the Affordable Homes Act prescribes. However, if we apply the rules for counting square footage – which count only a little more than half the square footage of the top floor (because the ceiling is less than 7 feet in the rest of that top floor), and which exclude the 576 square foot footprint of the finished basement (because the floor of the ground floor above it is less than 5 feet above the ground level of the lot) – then that backyard cottage officially weighs in with the compliant 1½ stories and approximately 900 **countable** square feet.

If, as William White’s second amendment proposes (**which I support**), we want to limit the square footage of the ADU/backyard cottage to 900 square feet in order to hold down costs, **we need to clarify/prescribe how those square feet are to be measured**, so that the results we get are the results we intended to get.

- (3) Testimony regarding #26-0329 – Creating transparency and opportunity for public comment on lot splits**: As William White suggests, **and I agree**, lot splits are sufficiently consequential so that we should return to the way they were previously handled by the zoning, that is, requiring site plan review. Eliminating the site plan review process and treating lot splits as a routinely approved administrative procedure has four significant consequences:
- (a)** It enables twice as much of the square footage of the original (pre-split) lot to be developed, or in other words, doubles the amount of (private) open space that is lost to development.
 - (b)** It enables property owners/developers to evade the inclusionary requirements associated with building five or more units of housing. (Note that because the State’s Affordable Homes Act prohibits imposing requirements that would constrain the development of ADUs, the City cannot require an 80% fractional payment when the development of the smaller post-split property entails building a triple decker and adding a backyard cottage.)
 - (c)** It dramatically increases the value of property, driving up acquisition costs and, therefore, increasing the cost of homeownership. (Why would an owner with a property big enough to divide in half and develop both halves sell that property for the lesser amount it might have

been valued at before lot splitting became an expectation? Building the potential added value of lot-splitting into the calculation of a property’s market value inflates its worth, just as factoring in the higher income a robust short term rental business can generate as compared to a traditional tenancy inflates the property’s market valuation (and, in turn, the asking/sale price for the property, and then the rent that must be charged for a traditional tenancy, in order to cover the higher mortgage payments).

- (d) It deprives the public of a meaningful opportunity to express concerns about lot splitting and to affect the outcome of site plan review.

If creating more affordable housing is the goal, then driving property values up by accelerating the pace of lot splits by treating them as routine administrative procedures is the wrong strategy. **I therefore agree with William White’s proposal to drop the language allowing lot-splitting to be approved pursuant to a “minor Site Plan Approval process.”**

(4) Testimony regarding #26-0330 – Affordable Housing Requirement for Lot Splits in an NR

District: Prior to the passage of the Affordable Homes Act allowing the by-right addition of a backyard cottage (the only building type that the SZO treats as an “Accessory Dwelling Unit”), no more than three units of housing were routinely allowed on an NR lot, so the Inclusionary Ordinance, which typically applies to properties with 4 or more units of housing, was irrelevant in the NR zoning district. As noted in my testimony (above) regarding #26-0329, because the State’s Affordable Homes Act prohibits imposing requirements that would constrain the development of ADUs, the City cannot require an 80% fractional payment when the development of the smaller post-split property entails building a triple decker and adding a backyard cottage.

However, lot-splitting changes everything. As William White suggests, **and I agree**, lot splits mean that 6 to 8 units of (rental or condominium) housing can be legally developed on what once was a single NR lot after the lot is split into two smaller lots. The City currently treats each resulting smaller lot as a separate entity and counts only the 3 to 4 units on those resulting smaller lots in determining that the inclusionary requirement is not applicable.

I strongly support William White’s proposed amendment to 12.1.2 Applicability, as follows:

12.1.2 Applicability

a. This Section is applicable to all development required to provide one (1) or more affordable dwelling units [I suggest not using the ADU abbreviation here, so as not to confuse affordable dwelling units with accessory dwelling units] and to any subdivision or lot split that results in two or more lots intended for residential use, sale, legacy, or development at any time. The number of units of housing for residential units that will be constructed on each of the lots that result from the lot split shall be combined. (“Combined Number”). For the NR District, the Combined Number shall constitute the number of Total Dwelling Units to calculate the required affordable dwelling units as specified in table 12.1.2.d. For all other [zoning] Districts, the Combined Number shall constitute the Total Dwelling Units for use in the Table of Required ADUs applicable to such District.

Add Table 12.1.2.d as set forth below:

Total Dwelling Units Requiring ADUs 5 or more units	Required ADUs 20% of units
--	-------------------------------

Rationale for Support: As William White suggests, this affordability requirement is the same as the UR District requirement. More specifically, since only the owner of the lot can apply for permission to split the lot, and since that owner owns both halves of the split lot, it is reasonable to assume that the intention of that the owner in splitting the lot was to increase the overall development of housing units on the property, and to maximize the revenue from that development.

Does the owner have a financial interest in both halves of the spit lot? Absolutely. If that owner were to build a triple decker on each of the halves of the original lot, there would be a total of six units, which on a single lot in any other zoning district would require that one of those units either be a deed-restricted 50% AMI inclusionary unit or that the owner make a buyout payment to the City's Affordable Housing Trust.

The City's presumption of the owner's/developer's intent to evade the inclusionary requirement by splitting the lot – and the City's effort to disallow such evasion – are clearly evidenced in the following provisions of SZO §12.1.2 “Applicability” in the Development Benefits section:

“12.1 AFFORDABLE HOUSING

12.1.2 Applicability

- a. This Section is applicable to all development required to provide one (1) or more affordable dwelling units (ADUs) and to any subdivision or lot split that results in two or more lots intended for residential use, sale, legacy, or development at any time.
- b. Development may not be segmented or phased in any manner and Applicants may not establish surrogate or subsidiary entities to avoid compliance with this Section.”

William White's amendment simply applies the City's clear presumption and already-codified remedy in §12.1.2 to such a lot split in the NR district:

- If the owner retained ownership of the two halves of the split lot for the purpose of developing each smaller lot separately, **there would be no question that the lot split was pursued to allow development of a larger number of units, and to evade the inclusionary requirement that would result if the number of units developed exceeded the triggering threshold** and the consequent reduction in revenue that could be extracted from the overall development effort.
- Provisions (a) and (b) of §12.1.2 are clearly intended to ensure that **that same presumption should apply** whether the owner creates separate LLCs to develop housing on each of the resulting smaller lots, or whether the owner sells one or both of the smaller lots to another entity (an individual or an LLC) that intends to develop housing on the smaller lot that resulted from the lot split.

I therefore support this amendment.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Fred

Fred Berman (he, him, his)



Comments on Attorney White's Proposed Amendments to the SZO
May 15, 2026

To the Somerville Council Land Use Committee and the Planning Board,

We the undersigned think that the city of Somerville's approach to zoning has been remarkably insensitive to the uniquely dense character and lack of quality public open space that are hallmarks of the city, not to mention disrespectful of the conclusions of the public process that produced SomerVision 2030 and 2040. The approach has also produced rampant gentrification, while reducing public input that could mitigate some of the most negative environmental consequences from the standpoint of safety, noise pollution, drainage, access to sunlight, and loss of wildlife habitat.

Attorney White's proposed amendments concerning backyard cottages and lot splits would go some way toward redressing these harms.

Amendments 3 and 4 aimed at restoring transparency, fairness, and affordability to lot splits are crucially important.

- (1) Such splits should not be considered a minor plan change, as is currently the case. They should be decided by the ZBA in accordance with all due process requirements, starting with appropriate notification to abutters and a meaningful way to comment on site plan issues.
- (2) A lot that is split should be treated as a single entity with respect to the 20 percent affordability requirement, thus attaching the requirement to the number of units to be built.

Further, a menu of issues to be taken into consideration during site plan review -- runoff/drainage, effect on tree coverage, wildlife habitat, noise and air pollution, access to sunlight, and access by public safety officials -- could profitably be developed for consideration on all splits across the city.

Amendments 1 and 2 regarding "backyard cottages" are also important but may need further consideration by city staff to achieve effective implementation.

- (1) These units should obviously conform to the state's square footage requirements, but also, the basement and roof calculations need further thought, in order to avoid developer manipulation and the sorts of monstrosities now going up and crowding tiny lots.
- (2) Of course such units should be meaningfully accessory, but how is this to be achieved without creating additional perverse incentives for developers, e.g. in

cases where a principal, owner-occupied dwelling has been turned into
condominium units?

With thanks for the opportunity to comment,

Jane Bestor
Jane Bestor
[REDACTED]

Somerville

Lynn McWhood
Lynn McWhood

[REDACTED]
Somerville

Madalyn Letellier

From: Tori Antonino <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, May 15, 2026 12:00 PM
To: Planning Board
Cc: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment on White/Provost amendments to backyard cottages, lots splits, ADUS, ZBA

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Hello Planning Board, City Council and staff,

I support the 4 White/Provost amendments to make sure backyard cottages are the ancillary structure, to make backyard cottages smaller, to apply the inclusionary zoning to lot splits, to put the decision making of lots splits back into the ZBA's purview.

I believe the intended use of backyard cottages was to prevent displacement, to create intergenerational housing opportunities and to make more affordable housing. Alas, what has happened is not what was intended. Since removing the inclusionary requirement for backyard cottages, it has become a cash grab for developers. Housing that was affordable since it was naturally occurring, has become too valuable for owners to say no to selling. This is in part due to the size of these cottages which can fetch more money.

I support lot splits be subjected to inclusionary. I have seen multiple instances of Elan Sassoon doing this where I just thought "This person should not be getting away with not providing inclusionary housing." On that, since lot splits are no longer under the purview of the ZBA, there is no notification to neighbors as to what changes are being made to their neighborhood. Some may view this as slowing the process down, I see this as putting guardrails back on.

A main concern around the ADUS, in addition to removal of natural occurring affordable housing, is the removal of naturally occurring greenspace. The majority of our greenspace is on private property. Our backyards with their trees and truly permeable landscaped area, help to absorb and retain stormwater, provide habitat for other life (birds, foxes, opossum, raccoons, pollinators etc), purify the air, provide cooling, and help de-stress from city living.

Limited (or no) setbacks for ADUs, the increased floor-plate and a poor greenscore are creating impermeable surfaces (supposed 'permeable' pavers are no longer permeable in 3 years if they are not maintained), removing huge amounts of greenspace, increasing flooding, taxing our stormwater capacity, removing habitat and trees, and providing little respite from the city that greenspace brings. If we are not creating true affordability, sacrificing the things that improve our lives makes no sense.

We are also in an affordability crisis. It is not just an affordable housing crisis. With stormwater fees on the horizon, water and sewer rates increasing, our need to reduce our CSO discharge, Somervillians are being stressed to the max.

I want to live in a Somerville where we invite new people to live, and we make true concerted efforts to keep people who want to stay in Somerville.

With hope,

Tori Antonino

