



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF

GEORGE PROAKIS, *DIRECTOR OF PLANNING*
SARAH LEWIS, *SENIOR PLANNER*
ALEX MELLO, *PLANNER*
SARAH WHITE, *PRESERVATION PLANNER*
CHARLOTTE LEIS, *ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT*

MEMBERS

MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ., *CHAIR*
REBECCA LYN COOPER, *VICE-CHAIR*
DOROTHY KELLY GAY
JOSEPH FAVALORO
GERARD AMARAL, *ALTERNATE*
KEVIN PRIOR, *EMERITUS*

August 14, 2018

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

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

Dear Honorable Board of Aldermen:

In keeping with its lawful responsibilities, the Somerville Planning Board submits to your Honorable Board its recommendation on the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance, as submitted for the January 11, 2018 regular meeting (ID# 17628/agenda item 204953) of the Board of Aldermen.

On April 3, 2018, at 6:20 p.m. the Planning Board and Land Use Committee of the Board of Aldermen held a duly advertised joint public hearing in the Aldermanic Chambers in City Hall. The purpose of the hearing was to solicit public comments on the proposed ordinance and evaluate the proposed ordinance in the context of testimony received and the findings and analysis of the Planning Staff.

This recommendation will focus on the public testimony received at the April 3rd public hearing, the written and online feedback received through May 25, 2018, and multiple Planning Board meetings that followed the April 3 Joint Public Hearing.

The Planning Board met multiple times to discuss the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance and the public feedback received over the first five months of 2018.



PLANNING BOARD RECOMMENDATION

Following due consideration, Joe Favaloro made a motion to recommend that the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance be adopted by the Board of Aldermen, following consideration and potential amendment of the proposal to address the concerns identified by the Planning Board. Rebecca Cooper seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

The Planning Board is extremely supportive of the revised structure of the ordinance and encourages adoption quickly to reduce the unpleasant outcomes that the continued use of the current ordinance sometimes creates, but with the understanding that there are certain issues that will need to be further studied and amended shortly after adoption. The Planning Board also requests that the Board of Aldermen consider the following items prior to adoption of the proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance:

Housing

- Housing affordability in Somerville has reached a breaking point. The proposed new Somerville Zoning Ordinance should permit owner-occupants to create accessory apartments and additional housing options should be strongly considered, including micro-units, rooming units, and other ‘tiny house’ options; carriage houses; and a potential reconsideration of the 4-unrelated rule for certain areas of the city.
- There are many houses that have empty units kept off the rental market. We need to find a way to incentivize the rental of these units to prevent apartments from being vacant when there is such a need for housing in the city.
- Any increases in density permitted in the Neighborhood Residence district should be allowed only within the *form* of each of the building types in the proposed new Ordinance and permitted only under specific circumstances, such as permitting triple-deckers in areas only where they are already preexisting on neighboring lots or requiring additional units (ie. ‘a third unit’) to be an affordably priced rental unit.

Open Space

- Spaces where the community can come together for civic purposes are a scarce commodity in Somerville. Requirements for redevelopment should address this deficit.
- The need for additional civic space can’t be stressed enough.
- Air quality issues along highways should be regulated and enforced.

Parking

- Parking structures built in the Transformational Areas identified in SomerVision should be fee-based ‘public parking’ that can be utilized as a shared resource by a variety of users.
- Before any additional significant new strategies can be established for managing parking, an understanding how many cars the City can reasonably physically accommodate, the rates at which permits should be assessed, and the capacity for enforcement are necessary. The Board should undertake a survey of parking capacity to determine the number of spaces available (private and public) and linear feet of curb.
- Areas of Somerville outside of a Transit Area should not be subject to a parking maximum.
- Residential parking permits should be regulated or restricted for residents of development in a Transit Area (1/2 mile of a rapid transit station) if it is built without parking. Development in a

Transit Area should be Transit-Oriented and residential permits that cost \$0.08/day undermine that planning objective if they are so freely available to those specific residents.

Administration

- The Board of Alderman should consider a comprehensive review of the zoning atlas focused on the areas where higher density residential or commercial uses directly abut residential neighborhoods. Map edits may be required to provide transitions in height and density to protect the character of the Conserve Areas identified in SomerVision.
- The definition of households with more than 4 unrelated individuals as Group Living and requiring a Special Permit to establish that use is important to protect neighborhoods adjacent to Tufts University from abuse by absentee landlords. We should welcome students into the community, but we should also know where they are and monitor their impact on our neighborhoods.
- Dormers, even if dimensionally compliant, can be obtrusive and we should think carefully about how they are regulated and permitted.
- The mechanisms and requirements for enforcing the conditions added to approvals should be strengthened.
- Notice of public hearings should be posted on the City website and the location of all development proposals under review by any of the Review Boards should be posted to an online map.

The Planning Board would also like to acknowledge the energy and commitment of the former Chair, Kevin Prior. Chairman Prior dedicated many years of service to the City of Somerville in varying capacity and roles. This board is extremely appreciative of his longevity, mentorship, fairness, equanimity, and comradery. Kevin will be sorely missed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael A. Capuano". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Michael A. Capuano
Chair of the Planning Board