



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 29, 2021

REPORT OF THE LAND USE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Ben Ewen-Campen	Chair	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Ewen-Campen at 6:03pm and adjourned at 7:45pm.

Others present: Dan Bartman - OSPCD; Rebecca Cooper - OSPCD.

Planning Board: Michael A. Capuano - Chair, Amelia Aboff - Vice Chair, Jahan Habib, Rob Buchanan

The Committee entered into recess at 6:05pm to allow the Planning Board to open its meeting. The Committee reconvened at 6:07pm.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that he is working with Planning staff for items 211611 and 211693 and will be inviting experts to speak at the next meeting on May 18.

Chair Capuano shared that the Planning Board will keep the written comment period for all items until May 28.

Public Hearing on the following items:

211170: Sam Judd proposing a zoning amendment to re-zone his property at 256 and 278 Elm, 58 Day, and 7 Herbert Streets to a mix of Civic and CC4.

Councilor Davis noted that this is a big project, which will have a significant impact on Davis Square. There has been one neighborhood meeting thus far, and there will be many more opportunities for public feedback. Chair Ewen-Campen added that the **written comment period will remain open until May 28**, and Chair Capuano agreed that the Planning Board will do the same, and testimony received will be considered at its June 10 meeting.

Welch Lyles of Asana Partners, a real estate investment firm, is the main point of contact for this plan, and was joined by the architect Guatam Sundaram of Perkins & Will. Mr. Lyles presented a map of the Davis Square area, with the project being the "7th spoke" in the intersection. The existing plaza is currently zoned in the MR4 District, and the request is that the plaza be changed to Civic, with the properties on either side changing to CC4. This allows for a taller ground floor and upper level floor heights, with the floor count remaining the same. The proposed setback would help align the buildings

with structures already in place. The Civic designation reflects the plaza area as an amenity to the neighborhood that will be preserved. Mr. Sundaram added that the Civic space would be the heart of the project, enabling additional active facades to support new storefronts that provide for more diverse uses and programming options. Mr. Lyles recapped that the focus is on preserving the public realm, eliminating barriers, and creating a more inclusive environment for year-round programming, as well as including additional commercial space and renovating existing commercial space.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the Public Hearing at 6:34pm.

Carlos Sainz shared that changing these parcels makes sense and aligns with Davis Square. Lee Auspitz expressed support for the revitalization of Davis Square and wondered how many jobs would be added, noting that there is already a Post Office, which should remain in the Square. Ulysses Lateiner commented that the substantive change seems minimal, and the City should ensure that the developer is ensuring a positive impact on the community before granting the request. Larry Yu added that a shadow study has not yet been conducted and requested that this be done before a decision is made on this item. Gavin Robb echoed the comments about community benefits and shadow studies and also requested additional information about the ongoing management of the civic space. Tori Antonino supported the shadow study request and added that the Squares should not be afraid of height, and adjusting to additional and sustainable density is needed.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the Public Hearing at 6:46pm.

The Chair noted that the purview of this Committee is the zoning, but there is a dedicated site plan approval process and the neighborhood meeting process to address other building and management issues.

Mr. Lyles addressed some of the comments, noting that the skybridge and other elements are highly conceptual and unlikely to be included as the design progresses. The trellis structure is being considered, as it would enable some lighting and heating elements for multi-season use. He also noted that shadow studies have been completed, and can be found on the project website at www.7thspokesomerville.com. The Post Office will remain in place; the current lease lasts for four more years, and they are looking for a smaller space. The management, including safety, security, insurance, maintenance, and cleanliness would be covered by the property management company.

Chair Ewen-Campen asked what mechanisms are available to the City Council to enshrine commitments from developers. Mr. Bartman noted that he will confirm with the Solicitor's office and provide a response. Ms. Aboff elaborated that the Davis Square Neighborhood Plan and the Zoning Overhaul both reflected uncertainty about the community's vision for the area, and expressed wariness about making piecemeal decisions without an adopted plan to provide guidance. Chair Capuano requested more information and context about the surrounding buildings and Mr. Bartman will research and provide more detail.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211433: Requesting amendments to the Zoning Ordinance as contained within.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the Public Hearing at 7:14pm.

Tori Antonino agreed that civic spaces should not be near highways, but worried about losing the physical spaces that could be transformed into urban forest and green infrastructure. She suggested that a 10% in lieu fee and a focus on a type of civic space that adds green space to those corridors could be an option. She added that using funds for maintenance should be restricted, and athletic fields should not be a

focus, but rather more general open space, community farms, or other activities should be prioritized with the funds.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the written comment period will remain open until May 7.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the Public Hearing at 7:43pm.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211693: Requesting approval of proposed amendments to the Zoning Ordinances at Article 8.2 - Small Business Overlay District, and to the Zoning Map.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the Public Hearing at 7:14pm.

Ulysses Lateiner supported including the red-outlined lots into the Small Business Overlay District, adding that the soul of Davis Square is small businesses. Meredith Porter added that this is confusing and the language is unclear as to where it is applicable.

Mr. Bartman explained that currently, there is an optional Small Business Overlay for UR or NR Districts. The amendment uses the Small Business Overlay differently, with slight edits to the applicability and a requirement (rather than option) if mapped over an MR, High Rise or Commercial District. He added that Body Art Services was an unintentional oversight, and is included in another document.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the written comment period will remain open until May 21.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the Public Hearing at 7:43pm.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211611: Requesting approval of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance Body Art Services use standards and Table 9.1.1 Permitted Uses.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the Public Hearing at 7:14pm.

Aisha Rasool and Aaron Yan noted that the current amendment does not include the Small Business Overlay District, but this inclusion is helpful and if the Small Business Overlay was included, it would have immediate benefits. Sarah Hoskins also supported this item, noting that more diversity and integration of businesses is important. She agreed that the Small Business Overlay District should be included. Tori Antonino expressed support for anything promoting small businesses. Kate Merna added her support to this item, agreeing that the Small Business Overlay should be included.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the written comment period will remain open until April 30.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the Public Hearing at 7:43pm.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211612: Requesting approval of amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to regulate rooftop mechanical systems and mechanical penthouses.

Chair Ewen-Campen opened the Public Hearing at 7:14pm.

David Ellowitz, a mechanical engineer involved with several lab projects, shared that this would make it difficult and in some cases impossible, to develop lab properties. Not allowing the equipment

on the roof would also reduce the opportunities for green features. Stephen Mackey of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, added that he is also hearing that this pits space against sustainability. LEED certification requires more mechanicals, which is difficult to manage with space constraints. Joe Lynch specifically spoke to the rooftop mechanical systems, sharing that they have been known to emit odors, noise, and vibrations to residential properties that they abut. He added that they exhaust systems employed by many businesses such as restaurants, are not necessarily on the roof. Tori Antonino elaborated that if this would limit commercial development in certain squares, she would be skeptical, as the City cannot afford to overlook opportunity for commercial spaces.

Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the written comment period will remain open until May 21.

Chair Ewen-Campen closed the Public Hearing at 7:43pm.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Material:

- Public Comment (with 211170)
- Public Comments (with 211170, 211433, 211612)
- Public Comment (with 411433)