



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

February 13, 2018
REPORT OF THE LAND USE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Lance L. Davis	Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	Vice Chair	Present	
Stephanie Hirsch	Alderman At Large	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Ward Two Alderman	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	Alderman at Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	Alderman at Large	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Ward Four Alderman	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Ward Three Alderman	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven Alderman	Present	
Mark Lawhorne	Operations Manager	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One Alderman	Present	

Others present: All members of the Planning Board, George Proakis - OSPCD, Wig Zamore, Melissa Woods, Charles Sillari - Clerk of Committees.

The meeting took place in the Aldermen's Chamber as a Committee of the Whole and was called to order at 6:13 PM by Chairman Davis and adjourned at 8:18 PM.

This meeting was recorded and is available for viewing on the city's website at <https://www.somervillezoning.com/>

204953: Requesting the adoption of a New Zoning Ordinance (1/2018 update) to supersede the current Zoning Ordinance as originally adopted on March 23, 1990.

The proposed zoning is reflective of the city's SomerVision and neighborhood plans and the zoning map indicates how SomerVision's goals are being transformed into zoning strategies. Lowell Street, Winter Hill, Gilman Square and Union Square Neighborhood Plans are embedded in the overhaul. Working towards SomerVision's goal of achieving 125 new acres of open space, overlay and special districts will include open space and open space districts and civic uses will be preserved. There will be 4 commercial only zoning districts and the new format allows for easy addition of new overlay districts after neighborhood planning. The new zoning proposal is not trying to grow residential districts but move growth to where the city wants it to be.

Other points of the proposed zoning mentioned were:

- allowing a density factor adjustment for 100% affordable developments,
- promoting transportation via walking, bike and transit,
- including bicycle parking requirements (that will be developed with the Bike Committee),
- having new development in transformative areas as opposed to residential neighborhoods,
- lessening the parking requirement,
- eliminating the requirement for a Floor Area Ratio calculator,
- the ability of property owners to finish basements and how this may or may not impact neighborhoods,
- accessory dwelling (there is nothing in the current draft about this, however, the Planning Staff is interested in having a conversation about it),
- converting the Arts Overlay into a new district to preserve space for makers and protect spaces from residential uses,
- creation of a new board called the Urban Design Commission,
- creating new jobs by requiring 325 sf of commercial space for each new dwelling unit in overlay districts,
- civic space requirements and sustainability goals,
- ways to prevent the underbuilding of properties as a way of avoiding affordable housing,
- the code and the rule regarding more than four (4) unrelated persons living together in a dwelling unit

SomerVision statistics are reviewed every 6 months to determine if its goals are being achieved. Housing and jobs goals are being met and developments are being guided towards the transformative areas. Future neighborhood plans are in process for Davis Square, Brickbottom, Grand Junction and Innerbelt. Growth is going to be focused in transformative areas with a lesser extent in squares and main street areas and an even lesser extent in neighborhoods. The minimum mixed used ratio in transformative districts is 60/40 in Union Square and 100% in commercial districts where there is no neighborhood plan. At Union Square East and Boynton Yards, the ratio is 60/40. The Board will finalize mixed use ratios before overlay districts are finalized. Long range planning in the city is framed around SomerVision's goals, which will need to be adjusted over time as the city changes.

The committee was told that the proposed zoning code constitutes a new operating system and would allow the city to flexibly work with it and provide an opportunity to include components such as Building Type, Special Districts, Overlay Districts, Green Area Ratio, Sustainability and a system for establishing Subdivision and Thoroughfare Standards. The proposed code emphasizes building in residential districts only as consistent with what currently exists, and will allow people to make modest alterations by-right, whereas now most things require a special permit.

This proposed code differs from the 2015 proposal in that the document was completely re-written with a new focus on usability. Although the new draft is much longer and includes technical reports, it is much easier to use. The zoning map was changed from the 2015 version after considering the map change requests from 2015 and a Commercial Business District was created. A change in terminology from “mixed-use” to “mid-rise” better addresses the building type, which is the key factor (in the “form of the building”). Three-family homes will be put into the Urban Residence District and will preserve those areas. Affordable Housing is increased to 20% and will be monitored for its efficacy. Neighborhood meetings will be done earlier and will be triggered by a site design review process. (A discussion regarding the formalization of a community process relative to the zoning proposal will take place in later meetings.)

There was a concern about city property being exempt from zoning, but not being exempt from mobility requirements and it was explained that cities and towns are left to exempt themselves from zoning, as the state does not exempt them. Community input and the BOA decision making process is enough to make sure controls are met. A variance appeal could put millions of dollars of public money at risk. Alderman Rossetti requested a list of communities that do not exempt themselves.

There will be a Public Hearing on the proposal on March 13, 2018.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Handout:

- Zoning Presentation (with 204953)