



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 15, 2025

6:30 PM

Joint meeting with the Planning Board

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:30pm and adjourned at 8:05pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

This committee went into recess at 6:31pm and returned at 6:32pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

This committee went into recess at 6:42pm-6:43pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Davis, Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Others present: Michael Capuano - Member of the Planning Board, Jahan Habib - Member of the Planning Board, Lynn Richards - Member of the Planning Board, Michael McNeley - Member of the Planning Board, Luc Shuster - Member of the Planning Board, Brian Postlewaite - Director of Engineering, Brad Rawson - Director of Mobility - Dan Bartman - Deputy Director of Planning & Zoning, Vanessa Boukili - Urban Forestry & Landscape Planner, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Public Hearing

- 1.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0737](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 2 and Article 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise definitions and the green score calculation of columnar trees.

Planner Boukili was present to discuss the requested amendments to the Tree Ordinance definitions, which primarily added widths to all definitions, as outline in the presentation entitled, *Land Use - 2025-05-15 Tree Definitions Presentation (with 25-0737)*, which provides more in-depth explanation of the proposed changes. Councilor Davis inquired if columnar tree is defined in the zoning code. Director Bartman was present to provide a response. The decision was made to use plain language definition of columnar tree as it is seen in the dictionary, so it is not explicitly in the definitions of the zoning code. Planning Board member Richards asked for

specific measurement of where the width is being taken on the trees, Planner Boukili explained the width is the canopy at maturity, which can be included as a range.

Chair McLaughlin opened the public hearing at 6:41pm and closed the public hearing at 6:41pm.

Public comments will be received until May 21st at

publiccomments@somervillema.gov

<<mailto:publiccomments@somervillema.gov>>.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2. Order
(ID # [25-0085](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Davis and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning draft an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances for transit oriented height and density bonuses for additional affordable housing and other enumerated community benefits.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [25-0246](#))

By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning discuss with this Council, Type IV heavy timber construction now permitted in the 10th edition of Massachusetts State Building Code 780 and potential impacts on inspections, development, and the Zoning Ordinance.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-1460](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings.

Director Bartman opened the item sharing the presentation that was submitted to the committee upon request from the committee to see a visual representation of what is permitted with the maximum height limits for zoning. It includes several viewpoints in Union Square where residents could see the development, but this is not the end product. Russell Preston was present to talk through the presentation entitled, *Land Use - 2025-05-15 Somernova Zoning Massing (with 24-1460, 25-0128, 25-0129, 25-0131)*.

Following the presentation Councilor Ewen-Campen sought clarification on what an arcaded sidewalk on Tyler Street is, specifically regarding its impact on sidewalk width and zoning. Mr. Preston was able to elaborate that the façade is going to be pushed back to create a more substantial sidewalk, about 12-14 feet of sidewalk, with additional green space included. Director Bartman clarified that zoning requires a sidewalk, and the arcade would be

an added feature to allow for bike lanes, pedestrian pathways, and other uses like a loading zone and mixed-use space. The discussion also touched on the minimum sidewalk width of 12 feet and why the building wouldn't be pushed back immediately to meet sidewalk requirements, noting that such a move could alter the building's appearance and create private property.

Councilor Wilson inquired about the size of trees to be planted on the streets, and Director Bartman explained that the trees would be planted in a conducive environment for growth, allowing them to mature in height. These trees would also help mitigate heat, while the arcade would provide shade to the sidewalks during summer.

Both Councilor Wilson and Councilor Davis inquired about what projects of this scale have been built in similar environments, located from a transit area, address density around transit zones, staff shared they could look to regional developments to compare and address traffic trends and mitigation. Director Rawson added that city and state planning processes require comprehensive traffic management strategies during development. Mr. Preston highlighted that the current plan includes considerations of how people currently reach the area and how tools could be implemented to reduce driving to this location, thus minimizing traffic impact. In response to concerns about traffic, Councilor Ewen-Campen requested a presentation addressing not only the available parking spaces but also how trucks will interact with the roadways.

Director Postlewaite discussed traffic management during construction. He noted the department does not provide or create specific traffic programs for developers, a standard review process is in place. There is not a good way to look at a project before it has been proposed but the process that has been in place for the last 5 years has shown success in managing projects in denser, or larger areas in the city. He emphasized there are members of the team that continuously monitor traffic during construction, respond to complaints as needed, and as a project continues, they will revisit the needs that are present at the beginning of a project versus the end to review and revise the needs. Councilor Sait and Councilor Wilson expressed their desire for an additional review process prior to approval, rather than the status of reviewing once construction becomes relevant to the proposal. Councilor Wilson also requested further clarification on various points, including employee transportation, ride-share options, shuttle services, and pricing for parking. Councilor McLaughlin echoed the need to explore shuttle services from nearby T stations and to determine whether traffic mitigation is addressed in

the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA). Mr. Preston confirmed that mobility was discussed in the CBA, including potential shuttle routes to Porter Square, Union Square, and Winter Hill. Director Rawson presented traffic data requested by Councilor Sait in a previous meeting and noted that further analysis of future traffic trends would be provided in future updates.

Director Rawson presented a small dataset on traffic that was requested by Councilor Sait in the previous committee meeting, entitled *Land Use 2025-05-15 Traffic Data (with 24-1460, 25-0128, 25-0129, 25-0131)*. In response to the brief presentation requests were made to do some analysis on future traffic trends and staff will return to the committee with more information.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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

This item was discussed with 24-1460.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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

This item was discussed with 24-1460.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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

This item was discussed with 24-1460.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Public Communication (ID # [24-1584](#)) Horace-Ward LLC, Bealm Realty, LLC, Delhi Properties, LLC, and Delhi Properties II, LLC requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 11 Horace Street, 5-7, 9, 13, and 15 Ward Street, and 15 and 21 South Street from Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6).

Councilor Ewen-Campen provided an update that was received from the Ward Councilor and constituents that an agreement has been reached and all

concerns for the project were addressed.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0907](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 8 of the Zoning Ordinance to update Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) references.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

10. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0590](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Article 2 of the Zoning Ordinance to allow the Building Official to waive certain dimensional standards for means of egress.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

11. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0457](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2-5 and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to remove conflicts with the State Building Code.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

12. Public Communication (ID # [25-0200](#)) 15 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend the Zoning Ordinance sections 3.1.8c, 3.1.9c, 3.1.10c, 3.1.13k, 3.1.13l, 3.2.12l. and 3.2.12m.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2025-05-15 TOD Upzoning Updates (with 24-0085)
- Land Use - 2025-05-15 Tree Definitions Presentation (with 25-0737)
- Land Use - 2025-05-15 Traffic Data (with 24-1460, 25-0128, and 25-0129)
- Land Use - 2025-05-15 Somernova Zoning Massing (with 24-1460, 25-0128, 25-0129, 25-0131)