



# City of Somerville, Massachusetts

## City Council Land Use Committee

### Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 2, 2023

6:30 PM

Others present: Planning Board Members Michael Capuano, Amelia Aboff, Deborah Howell, Jahan Habib, Michael McNely, Erin Geno and Luc Schuster, Dan Bartman – Deputy Director of Planning and Zoning, David Shapiro – Assistant City Solicitor, Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison, Neha Singh - Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:31 PM by Chair McLaughlin and adjourned at 8:00 PM on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Gomez Mouakad, Ewen-Campen and McLaughlin), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

The meeting was recessed at 6:32 PM and reconvened at 6:35 PM, during which time the Planning Board convened it's meeting.

#### Roll Call

**Present:** Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ben Ewen-Campen, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad and Jake Wilson  
**Absent:** Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [22-2054](#)) Approval of the Land Use Committee Minutes of November 17, 2022.

**RESULT:** ACCEPTED

#### Public Hearings

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1771](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 6.1 Commercial Districts: Fabrication of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to permit additional uses for ground story commercial spaces fronting a Pedestrian Street.

Director Bartman explained the amendment, saying that it is being proposed to allow changes that are permitted in other areas and to correct an unintended consequence that resulted from the planning and zoning overhaul. Only four properties (55 Bow Street, 2 Bradley Street, 343 Medford Street, 600 Mystic Valley Parkway) are affected by the amendment, which provides equal rights when fronting a pedestrian street. Attorney Shapiro told the members that the city is being sued in Land Court on a spot zoning challenge and that the case is set to be heard in mid March. In the meantime, the judge has asked the parties to try to work the matter out. Chair McLaughlin opened the Public Hearing at 6:43 PM

Ward 4 Councilor Jesse Clingan spoke in favor of the change, stating that 2 of the affected properties are in his ward. Mr. Bill Cavellini commented that he hasn't heard any opposition from neighbors to commercial space being located on the first floors of buildings. He also noted that the Union Square Neighborhood Plan sought to create/save artist spaces, which he believes should be "as of right". He asked that the Council and Planning Board consider this to attract artists. Ms. Tori Antonino thinks that work/live should be allowed on first floors, just not on a pedestrian street. Ms. Becky Donner inquired if there is a way to keep arts alive in commercial spaces.

The Public Hearing will remain open until noon on February 10, 2023 to receive additional written comment. Comments may be emailed to [cityclerk@somervillema.gov](mailto:cityclerk@somervillema.gov) <<mailto:cityclerk@somervillema.gov>> or [planning@somervillema.gov](mailto:planning@somervillema.gov) <<mailto:planning@somervillema.gov>>

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked what this would mean for 59 Bow Street and Director Bartman replied that providing additional uses could lead to preservation of the building. He will talk to OSPCD staff to determine scenarios and report back to the committee. He noted that Planning staff is having weekly meetings with the Arts Council to determine how to move forward. Planning Board Chair Capuano requested a formal recommendation from the Law Department to make sure that any changes fall within the agreement of the court case.

**RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

3. Public  
Communication  
(ID # [22-1769](#))

David Einis requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 14 White Street Place from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4).

Mr. Garrett Einis, representing the applicant, told the members that the property was purchased in September and that his client wants to match the zoning on lot 59 and merge the 2 lots to allow for trans-oriented development, thereby enhancing neighborhood.

Chair McLaughlin opened the Public Hearing at 7:11 PM

Mr. James Williamson stated his concern about what the owner has in mind, asking if he wants the zoning change to build something more consistent with a lab. He also addressed the need for affordable housing and suggested that the lots be combined for the existing residential zoning. Mr. Corey Purcell stated his preference for mid-rise residential 4 zoning. He also asked that if the property is as dilapidated as described, that proper protections be taken, e.g., removing any hazardous materials. Mr. Paul Butler asked that members consider UR zoning. Ms. Joan Jordan commented that she loves the space and architecture as it is now and would prefer it to remain residential without increasing its height. Mr. Joseph Vieira, a direct abutter,

wants to know what’s going to be developed there and Mr. Einis replied that plans won’t be drawn until the amendment is approved, adding that the property is currently non-conforming, preventing the owner to do anything with it. Mr. Einis stated that the thinking is for residential and perhaps some office space. Chair McLaughlin suggested that Mr. Einis schedule one or more community meetings to hear from the neighborhood and to explain the situation.

Mr. Bill Cavellini asked why 2 slots are being upzoned on 1 piece of land. Ms. Kate Burns noted her concern about parking and the busy traffic in the area as well as the impact on low-rise residential property behind White Street.

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Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked how NR ended up on an island and said that this is a narrow side street and doesn’t lend itself to some of the considered uses. Director Bartman recalled that there was a previous effort to zone according to building type and that it might have all been NR and then changed to UR. Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked the property owner to flyer neighborhood.

**RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

- 4. Officer's Communication (ID # [22-1645](#))

Planning Board proposing an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances Section 15.1.3, Neighborhood Meeting.

Planning Board Chair Capuano stated his support of the amendment. Councilor Gomez Mouakad commented that different developers use different software for meetings and she would like city to provide links for meetings to standardize them, thereby creating more equity. Director Bartman explained that the main challenge is that developer meetings are not city sponsored, but rather held by developers with invites to residents and staff and as such, they are not treated as public hearings. Having the city provide standardized software would make them city sponsored.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad also commented that having meetings controlled by developers leads to confusion among residents. Councilor Ewen-Campen spoke about the requirement to have 3 meetings and inquired if this document would amend that requirement.

Chair McLaughlin opened the Public Hearing at 7:48 PM

Mr. Bill Cavellini suggested that the words “at large” be stricken since he believes that the having the councilor closest to the development has worked well and he would like the Council President to designate a

councilor to take on the role. Ms. Tori Antonino commented that it would be a heavy lift for a councilor to undertake duties in 2 wards.

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Ms. Aboff noted that the Planning Board did consider using a ward councilor instead of an at-large, but their thinking was that ward residents also voted for at-large councilors.

**RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

5. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [23-0095](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 10.8 Commercial Signs, of the Zoning Ordinances, to permit commercial signs by right.

Director Bartman explained that applications for signs come into the Planning Department and when approved, go to ISD for another approval. This process could take 2 months, so this amendment would make it efficient for applicants and would also free up staff time by eliminating redundancy.

Chair McLaughlin opened the Public Hearing at 7:56 PM

There were no speakers on the item.

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The meeting was recessed at 7:57PM and reconvened at 7:58 PM, during which time the Planning Board adjourned its meeting.

**RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**