

Madalyn Letellier

From: Emily Baillieul [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 20, 2025 5:36 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Comment: Zoning Overlay, Ward 2, SomerNova Development

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello. I live on [REDACTED], about 45 Ft from the boundary of Block 1 in this proposed development.

You have received written comment from several of my neighbors with concerns about the size of the project, shadows, traffic, and other neighborhood impacts. Not to mention concerns about the immediate and long term future of this building type (tough tech, lab, office) in our brave new world. I share all these concerns. The ones I want to call out here are those of direct abutters like myself:
-Neighborhood access. If Tyler street is blocked, I cannot get out of my house. St Anthony's Church has lot access on Tyler and Properzi Way. They lease parking spaces. They hold mass every evening and during the day Saturday and Sunday - all day Sunday, followed by bingo on Sunday evening. The lot is PACKED on the weekend and often during the week.

-Loss of solar power due to shade. I cannot have a solar home or electric car - at least not affordably - at the maximum height that has been proposed. A fellow neighbor, Michael Carolson, has a proposal for concrete cash offsets that Rafi can provide and I plan to send that along to the city council when I have his permission.

-Office/work space provided to abutters - anyone in this neighborhood but especially on Tyler street needs to have another place to go, provided during construction. I am 45 feet away. Folks on Tyler Street are more like 15. You cannot work 15 feet away from pile driving unless your job is pile driving.

Thank you for your consideration,
Emily Baillieul
[REDACTED]

--

Emily Baillieul
Somerville, MA
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ilana Krepchin [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 20, 2025 3:59 PM
To: Planning1; All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: Support for zoning changes

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Good afternoon members of the Land Use Committee and Zoning Board,

I'm writing to you today as an artist and long time resident of Ward 2 in Somerville, in strong support of the city's proposed arts and innovation overlay. It is an exciting opportunity to balance the need for arts and cultural spaces with the need for commercial space and good paying jobs in Somerville. I'm particularly excited to see an increase in our commercial tax base and linkage fees, which will create more money for housing, jobs and schools in our city.

Thank you for all the work that you do for our city,

Ilana Krepchin
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Andrew Haidle [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, March 20, 2025 7:56 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Re: Somernova comments - please keep it to 4 stories!

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Sorry, importantly, byt 4 stories I mean a height related to 4 residential type stories. 25 foot ceilings for an R&D floor and 4 stories is way too high for this neighborhood. Thanks!

Andrew

On Thu, Mar 20, 2025 at 6:52 PM Andrew Haidle [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi - my name is Andrew Haidle. I live at [REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02143. I've lived here for 12 and a half years.

I want to comment on the Somernova zoning change proposal. There are many things to oppose, but I will focus on just one. **Please don't fundamentally alter our neighborhood by allowing buildings higher than 4 stories high!!!**

SomerVision 2040 and the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) explicitly prioritize high-rise development in areas with access to mass transit—this proposal ignores that fundamental requirement.

The **proposed zoning does not follow these guidelines**—instead, it allows for **intense, high-rise development in an area that lacks rapid transit access**, creating additional **congestion, increased car dependency, and infrastructure strain**.

These concerns are **not just opinions**—they are **written into the city's guiding policies**, which were developed to ensure **responsible, community-driven, and sustainable urban growth**

Thank you for your time!

Andrew

Madalyn Letellier

From: Michael Carlson [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 9:35 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment – Somernova Zoning Amendments - Michael Carlson | 510 Somerville Avenue | March 20, 2025

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Public Comment – Somernova Zoning Amendments

Michael Carlson | [REDACTED] | March 20, 2025

If it pleases the Chair—good evening. My name is **Michael Carlson**. I'm a **proud Somervillian** and an **active Union Square Neighborhood Council member** living at **510 Somerville Avenue**. My home **shares a property line with Somernova**—literally. It's my backyard.

And I'm genuinely glad it is. Somernova sits at the center of our neighborhood, and **I can't imagine our community without it**. They've been **good neighbors**.

Directly behind me is **Sublime Systems**, a team of scientists quietly curing cement—technology that could reduce global carbon emissions at scale. For now? It's people in lab coats watching cement set. You couldn't dream up a quieter neighbor.

Beside me is **The Dojo**, where kids practice Parkour with laughter and energy. It's the kind of joyful, inclusive activity that **makes a neighborhood feel alive**.

Forgive me if I stumble a bit—I **had oral surgery this morning**, and I'm hoping this public form will be less painful than that for everyone.

Before tonight, I invited the **Mayor and City Councilors** to walk the neighborhood with folks like me. I want to thank those who came and heard us out—and also those who responded but haven't yet joined. Your willingness to listen matters.

Here's where I stand:

As a neighbor, I've walked these streets for years and watched how quickly change can come to Somerville. I'm **not against growth**—but I do believe **neighbors and abutters** haven't had as much say in what Somernova's transformation looks like as we deserve. Despite efforts by the Council, City, and Planning Board, the **needs of actual neighbors** have not been adequately addressed in these proposed amendments.

Specifically:

1. Approve the ACE and Land Use Category Changes

They're not perfect, but they're a real step forward in supporting **arts and creative enterprises** in Somerville. They're also **common sense**—and while I dabble in software development and think there's an art to it, a tech startup is still an office use. It doesn't belong in a space meant for sculptors, performers, and working artists.

2. Approve the Related R&D Overlay Changes—With Safeguards

Please support the **downstream adjustments** necessary to avoid the unintentional de-zoning of businesses like **Greentown Labs**, the incubators this district was designed to help.

3. Reevaluate the Building Standards in the R&D Overlay

I urge the Committee to direct the Planning Board to **revisit the physical form of development** in the overlay, using the **Union Square Neighborhood Council's recommendations** as a baseline. These ideas didn't come out of a vacuum—they were shaped through direct dialogue with Rafi, USNC, and neighbors, including me, at **public forums held late last year**.

These revisions help the district **align with the City's vision for innovation**, while still recognizing that the FAB zone is, by law, a **preserve area**, not a transform zone.

4. Redline the A&I Compliance Amendment

This amendment **goes too far—and doesn't go far enough**. It grants interested parties nearly everything they want while doing little—if anything—to address the concerns of **people actually living here**.

- It allows **too much development** in a district surrounded by homes.
- It ignores the City's own precedent of steering high-rise development toward transit-rich areas.
- For most criteria, it **nears or exactly matches** the developer's original request, including one instance where it allows *more* height than Rafi proposed ([See this chart](#)).
- It accommodates housing in name only, allowing lodging to count as residential. We don't want hotel rooms within Somernova—we need **actual neighbors**. Permanent housing helps **balance the scale of the development** and ground it in the community. If residential units are included, they should be **permanent, integrated, and include affordable options**, including a portion set aside specifically for **artist housing**.

- The design decisions—like building setbacks and stepbacks—are baked into the zoning rather than left open to public input. Neighbors like me, who’ve invested in solar systems to reduce our climate impact, were hoping for **multiple stepbacks** to help limit shadowing. Instead, the zoning allows only a **single stepback**, fixed to specific floors—**codifying a narrow design preference** voiced within the Design Board and, quite literally, **leaving neighbors in the dark**.

In **Boston**, this level of design impact would trigger a full public review by the **Boston Civic Design Commission**. We deserve the same public forum in Somerville. This amendment locks in developer-friendly choices as law and jeopardizes **the opportunity for a thoughtful, community-driven urban design review**.

In Closing

This isn’t just about buildings—it’s about process.

In most cities, decisions like how far a building sits from the sidewalk—or how much it steps back as it rises—are shaped through **collaborative urban design conversations** guided by planning professionals. Despite good-faith efforts by many involved, those conversations **never fully materialized during public meetings**. Those design choices are now **hard-coded into zoning amendments** and finalized **before many neighbors even knew what was on the table**.

I respectfully ask the Committee to:

- Approve the ACE and R&D land use updates.
- Support thoughtful changes to the R&D Overlay form standards.
- Redline the A&I Compliance Amendment.
- And most importantly, **take no action** on these zoning changes **until a Community Benefits Agreement and Project Labor Agreement are finalized and approved**.

Taking this step won’t derail the project—it will **strengthen it**. It will likely give the developer and the City **most of what they need** while giving the public **a process we can believe in**.

We’ll end up with a new Somernova that enjoys what it has today—the goodwill of its neighbors.

Thank you.

Madalyn Letellier

From: bill cavellini <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 1:13 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Somernova rezoning - testimony and requested amendments to the OSPCD's proposal
Attachments: Reasons for opposing city's Somernova Zoning and suggested changes.docx; Speech topics for Somernova zoning public hearing.docx

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Councillors,
Please see my testimony at the public hearing and the Union Square Neighborhood Council's requested amendments to the OSPCD's proposal.
Thank you,
Bill Cavellini
[REDACTED]
Somerville

Reasons for Amending the Zoning Filed by the City

Besides the fact that there is no signed CBA and no signed PLA

1. Base R & D Zone height is too permissive – 78’ instead of 60’ - require a Special Permit to go to 78’ so that the Planning Board can review the reasons and, if necessary, set conditions. Permitting as of right the 78’ height limit will be a signal to owners of other FAB-zoned properties that they can also get an upzone. This threatens existing artist enclaves on Vernon St., Joy St., Central St., Washington St. and Brickbottom.
2. The effort to regulate total square footage of the development by limiting heights and parking spaces is inadequate. The range of possible square footage is 1.45 million square feet to 2.2 million square feet, depending on floor to ceiling heights for each story. The number of stories needs to be regulated.
3. No guarantee that missing mobility management goals will result in altered (diminished in size of) future building plans. If the Mobility Management Plans are not tightened, we feel that we must return to our request for lower allowable parking from 750 to 500 and reduced square footage of the development. Otherwise, there is no answer to the potential dramatic increase in traffic congestion.
4. Setbacks and Step backs are not enough to accomplish a 60-degree angle sky plane with existing housing. We requested two step backs, for a total of 20 feet at the second and fifth floors of all new high-rise buildings that face existing residential structures (NR, UR, and MR4 zones).
5. The zoning fails to establish a new definition of how to handle mechanical equipment on the roofs of the new buildings in this new zone. We asked for those mechanicals that don’t need sound baffling to be exposed and not be boxed in behind baffling. The reason for this is in order to diminish the bulky nature of the 20-30’ of extra height.

Changes to the city zoning proposal that would address these concerns (bold and underlined)

1. Change proposed Section 6.5 Research and Development District
Change Section 6.5.7 Commercial Building- Main Mass, item F. Building Height (max) **from 78’ to 60’.**
2. Change proposed Section 8.4.19 Arts and Innovation Subarea
Change Section h. Building Standards to the following wording:- Massing and Height, **Number of Stories (max), Block 1 -7 stories; Block 2- 9 stories; Blocks 3 and 4 – 12 stories.**
3. Change proposed Section 8.4.19 Arts and Innovation Subarea
Change Section k.i.a) to the following wording:- **The Planning Board shall require that the parking maximum be based on a well-documented transportation analysis that is presented to the Planning Board review prior to permitting.** The Planning Board shall regulate the maximum number of off-street parking spaces in any individual building using a parking demand model established by the Director of Mobility to determine the appropriate number of parking spaces as a condition of each Site Plan Approval.

Change Section k. i. b) Parking and Mobility to the following wording:- The Planning Board **shall** attach conditions and limitations that it deems necessary (**including delaying Site Plan Approval until impacts are mitigated**) to address any individual or cumulative on-site or off-site impacts of from development subject to an approved Master Plan as a condition of each Site Plan Approval.

Change Section k. ii. Parking and Mobility to the following wording:- Mobility management plans must **institute** demand management programs and services to control the percentage of trips made to the development site by motor vehicles at forty percent (40%) or less initially and at twenty-five percent (25%) or less upon full occupancy.

Change Section k. iii. Parking and Mobility to the following wording:- Mobility management plans must propose and **implement** specific adjustments to existing programs and services or specific additional programs and services if monitoring and reporting identifies a shortfall in achieving the plans stated transportation objectives.

4. Change proposed Section 8.4.19 Arts and Innovation Subarea

Change Section h. Building Standards to the following wording:- Massing and Height, Upper Story Step-Back,

Tyler Street, 2nd Story or 50 feet (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet

Properzi Way, 2nd Story or 50 feet (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet

Park Street, 2nd Story or 50 foot (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet.

Alley between Properzi Way and Park Street, 2nd Story or 50 foot (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet.

5. Change Section 8.4.19 (a) Arts and Innovation Subarea, Superceding Building Standards

Change Section: Uses and Features

Change Section j. Development Standards

Add a new **ii. Where mechanical equipment on roofs do not require screening for noise abatement, the baffling used to abate noise shall not be required to screen said mechanical equipment.**

Speech topics for Somernova Zoning Public Hearing 3-20-25

We are thankful for the efforts of the city administration, and especially the Planning Staff, to facilitate negotiations with Rafi Properties and the USNC.

The amendments that we anticipate the city will be bringing to you over the next two weeks are significant. They reflect concerns that the USNC has raised with this proposal before you tonight. We believe that they also try to anticipate the negative impact of these uncertain times for Climate Tech and science in general.

This is a very large development proposed for a neighborhood that is a mix of homes, artist spaces, and innovation companies. In 2019, as part of the city-wide rezoning it was designated Fabrication with the intent of preserving space for artists. Now it is being designated for Research and Development and the Innovation Economy. The developer and the city administration want to make sure that Greentown Labs, MIT the Engine, Form Energy, and Sublime Concrete are permitted as of right in the new zoning. They want to help the developer by rezoning so that these companies can expand without another round of zoning. So do we.

The difference between us is generated first by the failure of Rafi Properties to specifically and accurately share the expansion needs of the four companies, and second by the failure of Rafi Properties to tailor their development plans to minimize the negative impacts on the existing homes and businesses that surround their project area.

The effort to get to a more reasonable size has been largely unsuccessful. This is not a Transformational Zone as described in 2019 Zoning and SomerVision. It is not served by a nearby rapid transit line. It is already an area choked by traffic congestion.

Progress has been made. Our position is that five amendments that we handed out to you tonight are required to get to where we feel a compromise has been reached, Where Rafi Properties is allowed to provide new and expanding space for the four companies and the neighborhood is not inundated with the traffic and congestion that inevitably comes with over 4,000 new employees.

The city's zoning proposal is very close to resembling one that is tailored specifically for Rafi Properties. That is not what zoning was meant to be about. Zoning should be consistent with the city's long-range planning documents, including SomerVision and the goals of the citywide zoning. It should evolve out of goals that the residents and businesses have agreed on in settings where well-thought-out decisions are made for the future of the city. When a specific need arises for a particular unexpected sector of the economy, it is understandable that accommodation would be made. But, they must be based in specific needs of that sector. That hasn't happened here. We never got answers to our questions about the quality and quantity of the space needs of the four companies.

Madalyn Letellier

From: Paula Garbarino [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 3:10 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Somernova Proposal 3/20/25 Testimony

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Paula Garbarino, [REDACTED] living & working one block from the Somernova complex. I am a professional woodworker and Somerville artist who supports "Art Stays Here". I have been on Ivaloo for 51 years first as a tenant and later able to buy.

Here is my model for good process on a development proposal.

Twenty-six years ago a massive apartment building was proposed for Ivaloo to replace a block-long warehouse. Around 25 neighbors worked with city counsellors (then "aldermen") and city planners and the developer to include mixed use and improved design to fit the look of the neighborhood. Traffic studies were done and shadow issues discussed.

Let me point out that we were not nimbys in that we welcomed an overall increased size and mixed use to support the city's tax base.

I am appalled at the scale of the Somernova proposal, totally inappropriate to a location which has limited access by narrow roads. I am deeply disturbed by the city planners neglect of traffic studies and shadow studies that indicate an indifference to livability for the neighbors and the larger mobility needs of Somerville. It is totally at odds with the sensible multi-year effort called Somervision which recognized the location's lack of mass transit.

I support the 2019 Somervision FAB zoning for this area, though it already has had its disappointments. It was hoped that zoning would protect our most valued artist space, Artisan's Asylum. But zoning failed to be a powerful tool when the artisans were faced with excessive unbearable financial demands from the owner. A warning to us. Costs of new building will only put greater financial pressure on tenants. Artists are rarely well paid and consequently need affordable work spaces which should be available at older industrial sites, like this one.

Finally, there is an incredible gamble here to build several buildings for one kind of occupancy requiring extraordinary 18 to 25 foot high stories, unadaptable to any use but as giant warehouses (or for circus arts, as one testifier stated). Somerville is the most densely populated municipality in New England but quite popular. We need better, more careful city planning to continue to preserve its livability and appeal.

Madalyn Letellier

From: William Frese [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 5:08 PM
To: Public Comments; All City Council
Subject: Land Use Meeting Statement 03/20/25
Attachments: letter_somerville_council_word_032025.docx

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Somerville City Council
Land Use Committee,

Greetings & thank you for the opportunity to testify at last night's meeting, 03/20/25.
Attached is my statement, please read & save to your files.

Thank you for listening & all of your community efforts.
William Frese.

[New Alliance Gallery: Multiple Exposures](#)
A Group Photo Show
February 21- April 4.
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA.

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Somerville City Council
Land Use Committee

March 20, 2025

Greetings.

My name is William Frese. I am an Artist working at 438-Rear Somerville Ave, (The Tube Works Building), within New Alliance Studios. I have been affiliated with New Alliance Productions for over 30 years.

This building abuts the historic Milk Row Cemetery that is home to the oldest Civil War Monument in the United States. This distinguished obelisk (1862) must be duly noted & cherished in perpetuity during & after this district's reconfiguration. Our stewardship is vital now more than ever as we witness unprecedented historic erasure efforts.

I appreciate the Union Square Neighborhood Council negotiating a fair Project Labor Agreement & a fair community benefits agreement, however, I request *no zoning approval* until Community Benefits are agreed to & signed.

Art is an existing, essential component here at Milk Row & our greater Union Square community.

Arts & Creative Enterprise, ACE, definitions should be refined to the Visual & Performance Arts specifically. Culinary Art Incubators & design services are more capable of affording market rate rental pricing.

Art Stays Here. FAB stays here.

Sincerely,
William Frese.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of William Frese.

Madalyn Letellier

From: Sofia post [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, March 21, 2025 8:43 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: 25-0131 Amending Articles 8 and 12 of Zoning Ordinances

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hello,

My name is Sofia Post, I am employed at [REDACTED]. I was in attendance at yesterday's (Thursday March 20th) land use/zoning meeting where proposed amendments were (virtually) presented for the Rafi/Somernova project.

As an employee of both community oriented businesses I have a unique perspective on the impact these spaces have on the business traffic and community engagement in the Somerville area.

I firstly want to express that I am generally in support of this project. However, I do not support this project moving forward until the Community Benefits Agreement is finalized before negotiations of this project moves forward. This agreement **must reflect the commitment of Rafi/Somernova to ensuring that the arts are prioritized in this development.**

Secondly, the zoning for this project currently includes a decrease in the height maximum to include affordable housing units. While I am in support of affordable housing units, as a climber and advocate for *inclusive outdoor experience* I feel it extremely pertinent that we (Bouldering Project) can continue to provide the community with access to high walls. For context - there are two types of climbing, bouldering - which is a shorter (about one story) wall and accessible to most people, and high walls - which can be up to 90 feet in height. As a coach of climbers there are two very distinct needs for climbers and if the capacity of Bouldering Project was lowered there would be a significant loss of access for folks who do not have the physical or emotional capabilities to engage in bouldering (the low wall variations). This would also decrease the capabilities of the Bouldering Project to provide education based space for individuals to be appropriately educated to engage with outdoor recreation activities.

Thank you for your time, energy, and consideration.

Kindly,
Sofia

--

Sofia Post
BS, CPT, YT
she/they
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Vicky Peterson [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, March 22, 2025 4:40 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear City of Somerville,

I am writing in support of the Union Square Neighborhood Council's position that the PLA and the CBA should be agreed to before the Zoning Amendments are voted on by the City Council. The USNC is an official neighborhood council recognized by the City. Their main purpose is to craft CBAs. They do an extraordinary amount of work without pay in support of our community and that work should be championed not undermined. We need the protection that will be provided by these contracts before Somernova is allowed to move forward.

Best,

Vicky Peterson
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Vicky Peterson ([she/her](#))
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Aaron Weber [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, March 22, 2025 5:41 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: In support of the city's Central Somerville Ave zoning amendments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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To the Planning Board and the Land Use Committee:

I am writing in support of the Central Somerville Avenue zoning amendments the city presented this past Thursday, March 20th, and in particular allowing housing on the site. Adding housing to a mostly commercial proposal can reduce traffic impacts, as well as mitigate the increase in housing demand from the new jobs located there.

Writing in support of a plan that may benefit for-profit companies in Somerville sometimes feels like supporting the Yankees: they don't really need all that much help. But the climate tech companies within the Somernova project are doing important work not only for Somerville but for the world, so it makes sense to at least allow them to exist and grow.

I am encouraged by the progress made in the negotiation of a Community Benefits Agreement and Project Labor Agreement. With those in place, I believe that the zoning revisions will contribute to a just, equitable, climate-friendly, economically robust plan for the Somernova campus, the larger neighborhood, and Somerville as a whole.

I should also note that, while this location is not within a *quarter*-mile of a train station, it's still a relatively short walk from two different train lines. In any other city, the Somernova campus would be regarded as a prime spot for transit-oriented development, because *every* location in Somerville is closer to transit than *any* location in most other cities that these businesses might locate.

Given the depth and urgency of the climate crisis, we can't afford to wait too long to issue permits for the buildings in which climate change mitigation technology will be developed. Please move forward with approving this plan promptly once the CBA and PLA are in place.

Warmly,
Aaron Weber
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kathleen Francis [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 4:33 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Support housing in the Somernova redevelopment

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hi,

I'm writing to express support for allowing housing in the Somernova redevelopment. Our city, state, and country have a dire housing shortage -- we should be allowing as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan to allow more people to live in this highly desirable location, with lots of public transport and walkability. We also need an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic. I also think the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns -- building more density in this neighborhood is worth the tradeoffs.

Thank you for your consideration,
Kathleen Francis
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ryan [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 4:36 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Voicing My Support for Central Somerville Avenue Zoning Update

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hi there,
I'm writing to show my support for the proposed zoning changes in the Central Somerville Ave/Somernova area. As someone who cares about keeping Somerville affordable and thriving, I think these updates are super important.
Here's what I hope to see:

1. Lots of housing: Please pack in as much housing as possible. Cities like Austin have seen rents drop 20% (!) after boosting their housing supply through zoning changes. ([link](#)) We could really use that here!
2. To ensure sustainable growth, we need a plan that reduces both parking requirements and traffic congestion. This will create a more livable, walkable community while accommodating new development. The transit options in Boston are great and bikeable as well. I'm continually discussing with friends in their late 20's / early 30's about the envy we have for walkable urban communities in European cities like Paris, London, Berlin or even New York City, Queens, Brooklyn.

Austin's success in bringing down rents by allowing more housing is something we should definitely copy. It could help keep Somerville affordable for everyone and attract world class talent to keep the city thriving!

Thanks for working to make our city better!

Best,
Ryan Yordanoff, Resident of Somerville

Madalyn Letellier

From: PJ Santos [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 5:13 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Support for Housing in the Central Somerville Avenue Plan

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Land Use + Planning Board,

I've been following the SomerNova development proposal, and I am writing in favor of moving forward with the updated zoning (pending a CBA and no last-minute surprises).

- Being the center of clean-energy research is something Somerville should be proud of. Climate change is going to be one of the central challenges of the rest of our lives, and nurturing green industry in Somerville is both the right thing to do and could be a great opportunity for the city.
- Personally, I work at a clean-tech company (in Cambridge), and I've put down roots in this area because it is one of the best ecosystems for my discipline
- I especially support the updated version of the plan because of the proposed housing. Somerville's housing shortage is consistently the most important problem faced by its residents, as high rents really suck. Because our vacancy rate is so low, adding the several hundred high-paying jobs at the Somernova campus would have the effect of displacing current Somerville residents. However, adding housing helps offset this influx of people into our city and can help keep housing prices stable
- I've also been impressed by Rafi's willingness to engage with the city. To me, it seems like they've made generous offers to the arts, and have made a good faith effort to address the concerns and disruption their neighbors will face. I know it is impossible to please everyone, but this seems like as good of a situation as we're going to get.
- Gosh, it'd be great if they didn't need to build all those parking spaces, but I understand this is a compromise with the banks that are lending to the project.

Assuming all goes well with the CBA, I hope Somerville moves forward with this project.

Best,
Peter Kim-Santos
[REDACTED] Somerville, MA 02144

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kerrey Kahn [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 5:27 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: In support of housing at Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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I'm writing as a resident in support of the development at Somernova. I hope that the city takes this opportunity to welcome the maximum number of housing units that can be built on the lot, market rate, affordable, or otherwise. I hope that the city understands that parking requirements will be an impediment to the goal of maximizing housing and walkable and transit oriented space in the area and should be reduced or eliminated. If a CBA is in place, it should benefit the wider community in the form of usable space and benefits rather than benefits that are only available to a narrow set of incumbent stakeholders.

Shadows are minor considerations compared with the decades-long deficit of housing that the city has failed to build, but they are easily addressed with set-backs.

Residents and future residents deserve greater housing abundance in this city, please take this as an opportunity to expand housing in this city.

Kerrey Kahn
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA

Madalyn Letellier

From: Jeffrey Finkelstein [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 5:29 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Supporting Somernova redevelopment plan

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Hello,

I'm a resident of Somerville writing in support of the Central Somerville Ave/Somernova zoning proposal. I support

- building as much as housing as possible as quickly as possible to address the massive housing shortage in the greater Boston area,
- reducing parking in favor of investments in alternate forms of mobility (better public transit access, bikes, scooters, pedestrian infrastructure, etc.),
- updated zoning with the Community Benefits Agreement (to support more mixed use zones and greater residential capacity),
- the proposed setbacks to address shadow concerns.

Thank you,

Jeffrey Finkelstein
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Shannon Malloy [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 7:18 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Comment for SomerNova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello, my name is Shannon Malloy at [REDACTED] Somerville, MA 02145 and I am writing to support the following for the SomerNova project:

- I support as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan.
- I support an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.
- I support the city's updated zoning once a CBA is in place.
- I support the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns.

Thanks so much.

Best,
Shannon Malloy

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ian Beatty [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 7:59 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: In support of Somernova rezoning

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

My name is Ian Beatty, and I live at [REDACTED] Somerville, MA 02143. I've been a Somerville resident for 5 years and hope to stay here for many more.

I'm writing in support of growing the Somernova campus, specifically the current proposal to update the zoning in the area. Specifically, I

- Want as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan.
- Want an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.
- Support the city's updated zoning once a CBA is in place.
- Think the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns.

I love Somerville and want it to be an affordable home to many other people who can love it as well.

Thanks for your attention,
Ian

Madalyn Letellier

From: Rachel Leicher [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 8:17 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Central Somerville Ave/Somernova area zoning

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello,

Just wanted to share some key comments on the new projects:

- Want as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan.
- Want an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.
- Support the city's updated zoning once a CBA is in place.
- Think the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns.

Thanks!

Best,
Rachel Leicher
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Anthony Adam [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 9:23 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

I am writing this to share my complete support for this development, and hope you can do all in your power to move it forward.

Anthony Adam
The most average man in the world

Madalyn Letellier

From: Curry Cheryl [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 23, 2025 9:36 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Resident Comment on Central Somerville Ave/Somernova zoning

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello,

I've lived in Somerville since Dec 2022, and I plan to stay. In regard to the updates to the Central Somerville Ave/Somernova zoning, I want zoning that includes housing/residential uses, and builds as much housing as logistically possible, in the Somernova campus. This will reduce the overall need for cars in the area to frequent the businesses and workplaces.

In addition, once a CBA is in place, I support the city's updated zoning. I strongly support these zoning updates include an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.

I moved here purposefully because I didn't need a car, and as I approach age 40, that is how I have found I prefer to live. I worked in the nonprofit housing industry for 10 years and strongly support building more housing, in purposeful locations where people want to be.

I believe the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns. I have experienced many changes in prior cities I have lived in, and worked alongside urban planners, which reinforces my agreement in this.

I already frequent Somerville Bike Kitchen events at the Dojo, as well as events or food/drink at Aeronaut. I am excited about increased options, living situations, and activities in that area.

Best,
Cheryl Curry



Madalyn Letellier

From: Kai Müller [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 6:37 AM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: SomerNova proposal

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Somerville Planning Board,

Regarding the Somernova proposal, I think that:

- We need as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan.
- We need an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.
- We need updated zoning once a CBA is in place.
- the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns.

My name is Kai Mueller and I live at [REDACTED] in Somerville. Thank you for considering my thoughts.

Best,
Kai

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ida Kao [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 8:00 AM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: More housing now!

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hi,

I'm Ida Kao, a resident of [REDACTED] Winter Hill. I'm a 20 minute walk away from Union Square, and I'm writing in to voice my support for the proposal to add as much residential housing to the Central Somerville Avenue plan. In addition, I support the following:

- An aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic
- The City of Somerville's updated zoning once a CBA is in place

I believe the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns. I find housing in Somerville to be the most affordable in an incredibly unaffordable area, and I want it to remain affordable as more people come in and contribute to the prosperity of this community.

Best,
Ida

Madalyn Letellier

From: Thomas Scahill [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 8:34 AM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Cc: JT Scott
Subject: Comments on Central Somerville Ave/Somernova zoning

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear officials,

I am writing to support the redevelopment of Central Somerville Ave, sometimes called the Somernova project. I would like to state my priorities for this project.

- This project should have as much housing as possible.
- This project should have a robust multi-modal mobility plan that would enable reduced parking and traffic.
- This project should not be made any smaller. Shadow concerns have been addressed by the proposed step-backs and height limitations.

I understand that adding housing will require changes to the zoning for this area. I also understand that Rafi Properties and the Union Square Neighborhood Council are working on a Community Benefits Agreement, and that the city will move forward with zoning changes only after a CBA is in place. I support updating the zoning to accommodate all the benefits this project will bring to Somerville.

Somerville residents want lots of things from this project, all of which are understandable and many of which Rafi Properties has worked hard to address. The thing that Somerville needs more than anything right now is more housing. I want this project to move forward with as much housing as possible, so I will support any final plans. I would also like to state for the record that I object to any further modifications to the plan that would reduce the amount of housing this project could offer.

Thank you for considering my comments. Please let me know if you have any questions for me.

Best regards,
Tom Scahill

[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Samuel Bar [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 11:04 AM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Central Somerville Avenue Plan

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hi there,
I'm writing in to express my desire for:

- As much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan.
- An aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.
- The city's updated zoning once a CBA is in place.
- The currently proposed step-backs and reduced height restrictions, as they are sufficient to address shadow concerns.

Thanks!

Samuel Bar
[REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kerry Bowie [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 12:18 PM
To: Alisha Harrington
Cc: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Fwd: Support for Somernova's Campus Expansion & the Arts & Innovation Overlay District
Attachments: Somernova.Somerville.Zoning.LOS.pdf
Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Alisha,

Thank you, Ma'am, and I'm blind copying the City Council as I forward the letter of support to the planning and public comments listservs.

Best regards,

Kerry Bowie
Executive Director
Browning the Green Space, Inc.
[REDACTED] | Boston, MA 02109
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] @BGSMatters

He/him/his



----- Forwarded message -----

From: Alisha Harrington [REDACTED]
Date: Fri, Mar 21, 2025 at 1:25 PM
Subject: Support for Somernova's Campus Expansion & the Arts & Innovation Overlay District
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Kerry Bowie [REDACTED]

Good Afternoon,

Please find attached a letter of support from Browning the Green Space President and Executive Director Kerry Bowie regarding the Somernova campus expansion.

Thank you and please reach out with any questions. Have a wonderful weekend.

Alisha

--

Alisha Harrington

Interim Managing Director

Browning the Green Space, Inc.

[REDACTED] | Boston, MA 02109

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] | @BGSMatters

She/her/hers





Browning the Green Space

*50 Milk Street, 15th Floor
Boston, MA 02109*

March 21, 2025

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
Somerville City Council
Somerville City Hall
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

RE: Support for Somernova's Campus Expansion & the Arts & Innovation Overlay District

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Communities

Isaac Baker
Mary Wambui-Ekop

Dear Mayor Ballantyne and Members of the Somerville City Council,

As Co-Founder, President, and Executive Director of Browning the Green Space (BGS), I am writing to express my strong support for the Arts & Innovation Overlay District and the expansion of Somernova's innovation campus. BGS is a 501(c)3 nonprofit with offices in Downtown Boston at CIC Boston and in Somerville at Greentown Labs, the country's largest cleantech incubator. We have a vision of a just energy transition and a three-fold mission to create jobs, build wealth, and reduce energy burden in underserved communities. We work with dozens of entrepreneurs and small business owners every year through our accelerator program and contractor bootcamp, so over the past few years we have been and still are deeply rooted in the climatetech community here in the Greater Boston Area. Somernova has already demonstrated its immense value as a center for entrepreneurship, emerging industries, and technological advancement - particularly in the climatetech sector, where we urgently need investment and infrastructure to scale solutions that address our climate crisis.

Somerville has a rare opportunity to lead the nation in climate innovation while fostering a more inclusive and equitable green economy. Somernova's expansion represents more than just economic development; it is a necessary step toward creating a sustainable, just, and thriving ecosystem that supports startups, workforce development, and the communities historically left out of the clean energy transition. Somernova is a natural stepping stone or next step for companies graduating from or outgrowing Greentown Labs. By enabling growth in climate technology and energy efficiency, this expansion aligns directly with Massachusetts' climate goals and the broader imperative to create solutions for a more sustainable future.

At the same time, we must ensure that Somerville remains a competitive place for businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive. The city's permitting challenges, rising fees, and regulatory uncertainties pose significant hurdles that could push innovation and investment elsewhere. To build a resilient, equitable economy, we need policies that support, not stifle, climate entrepreneurs who are working on solutions that will benefit all residents.

In addition to an ecosystem member, I am also a greater community member as a Somerville homeowner/resident. Using that lens and BGS' "Community first" value, I do recognize the hardships that increased development can place on communities. In the case of this particular development I know that traffic is of great concern. Thus, our support is contingent upon Somernova working out a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) that includes amongst other things a North-South shuttle route to relieve some of the traffic congestion and better connect the city which would help not only cleantech entrepreneurs but also residents at large.



Browning the Green Space

50 Milk Street, 15th Floor
Boston, MA 02109

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Alicia Calero

Companies

Jeremy McDiarmid

Capital

Julianne Zimmerman

Spencer Irvine

Contracts

Shonte Davidson

Daryl Wright

Communities

Isaac Baker

Mary Wambui-Ekop

All of this said, I urge the City Council to support Somernova's expansion and to continue prioritizing policies that allow climatetech businesses working on renewable energy, energy efficiency, built environment, EV transportation/mobility, food/ag, water, and the circular economy to succeed in Somerville. By fostering innovation while ensuring space for artists, makers, and diverse entrepreneurs, we can position Somerville as a national leader in climate justice and green economic development.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at

[REDACTED] Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue, and we look forward to continuing to work together with Somernova, Greentown Labs, and others to make Somerville a hub for inclusive climate innovation.

Sincerely,

President and Executive Director

Madalyn Letellier

From: Abby Hare [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 1:59 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hi,

My name is Abby Hare and I live at [REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02143. I am writing about Somernova and would like to let you know that I:

- Want as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan.
- Want an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both parking and traffic.
- Support the city's updated zoning once a CBA is in place.
- Think the proposed step-backs and reduced height are sufficient to address shadow concerns.

Thanks!

Madalyn Letellier

From: McKanan, Daniel P [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 4:49 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: bring affordable housing to somernova redevelopment

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Somerville leaders,

As a resident of Somerville, I write to express my enthusiastic support for the zoning changes needed to make housing, and especially affordable housing, a major part of the upcoming redevelopment of the Somernova campus.

It is abundantly clear that the lack of affordable housing is the preeminent challenge facing both Somerville and the metropolitan region. It is also clear that a denser, more populous Boston has a lot to offer a planet facing the twin challenges of climate change and xenophobic populism. We are well-positioned to create zero-carbon, transit oriented housing, and that housing is needed to sustain our role as community that thrives on the unique gifts of migrants from all corners of the globe.

I cannot claim to understand every detail of Rafi Properties' plan, but my impression is that they have acted in good faith, in response to shifting priorities of our city government. I urge you to make it clear to them that housing, especially affordable and parking-free housing, is the priority. To the extent that they are willing to act on that priority, please find ways to remove whatever zoning or bureaucratic obstacles stand in the way.

Best wishes,

Dan McKanan
[REDACTED]
Somerville MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Dylan Vasey [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 6:48 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Support for Somernova Zoning Updates

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello,

As a resident of Somerville, I would like to lend my support to the proposed expansion of the "Somernova" campus owned by Rafi Properties to accommodate new space for local business, reduce suburban sprawl and commuter traffic, and create more housing for Somerville.

I would like to emphasize in particular the need to maximize housing in the proposed development to reduce the high cost and scarcity of housing in the Somerville area and to reduce the traffic and carbon emissions created by people needing to commute long distances by car to work in Somerville. Along these lines, I also want the city to have an aggressive mobility plan to reduce parking, traffic, and general reliance on cars in the area. I certainly approve rezoning the area to allow housing, and I think the proposed step-backs and reduced height requirements are sufficient to address concerns about shadows.

Sincerely,

Dylan Vasey
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kotak, Parth [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 24, 2025 6:51 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Somernova zoning

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hi all,

Thank you for reading my comment on the Somernova/Central Somerville Ave zoning plan. I live at [REDACTED] in Somerville.

I'd like the record to reflect that I would like the Central Somerville Avenue plan to permit as much housing as possible. It's frankly sad that Somerville, Cambridge, and the greater Boston area are such great places to live, but that privilege is limited to a select few, because the supply of housing is so meager that rents and housing prices are astronomically high.

It's also sad that Somerville squanders its heritage by kowtowing to cars and the extensive negative externalities they impose on the community, from noise to pollution to occupying physical space that could be used to build more housing, permit more restaurants, or otherwise beautify the neighborhood. Somerville's mobility plans should include more options for public transit and biking; people will use options that are convenient.

I don't mind upzoning the site before a CBA is negotiated. I also don't mind upzoning after a CBA is negotiated. I just want the upzoning, period. I would prefer the project not include setbacks and reduced heights from that originally proposed, but I think the proposed setbacks and reduced heights, as stand, address any concerns about shadows. (I've also never understood concerns about shadows—has anyone ever been outside in the summer? Even shadow-haters have to concede shadows are heat lifesavers. In the winter, it's all cloudy all the time anyway.) (Nor do I understand where someone who doesn't own a plot of land feels they have a right to chime in on what someone else builds on their land, so long as it isn't physically dangerous, but perhaps that's a longer comment.)

The most liveable real estate in the world, the heart of cities like Paris, Vienna, etc., largely manage to retain their charm while permitting many more people per square foot and many fewer vehicles per square foot than American cities do; I would like our community to take every step to mimic their beautiful examples.

Best,
Parth

--

Parth Kotak
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: St. Anthony of Padua Parish [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 8:41 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: REFERENCE: Somernova Project

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this email to express some concerns that the Church has regarding this 10-year project. One of the biggest concerns is that we do not see any guarantee that we will have access to the parking lots and main entrances on Properzi Way and Tyler St., which would be a major inconvenience in all of our activities FOR OVER 10 YEARS. Every day we receive people of all ages who come to our church with great fervor and as everyone knows, the church is sustained by its parishioners. There is no Church without parishioners.

Even though these are not major streets and not too busy, there are times when without any construction taking place it is difficult to drive on these streets. When winter arrives, it gets even more complicated. These are the only entrances that all the buildings of the Church have. Another concern: it is VERY important to coordinate building action with the Church schedule. Pile driving during Mass would not be good.

We are also concerned about the access of the neighbors on Properzi Way, Tower Ct and Tyler St. We believe that there should be a plan with guarantees presented by Rafi and reviewed in detail by each of the neighbors.

We are willing to discuss possible solutions to ensure access to the Church, Church buildings and parking lots, such as having entrances directly from Somerville Ave.

Art is important, the welfare of our dear neighbors is important and having the access to be able to go to church is also important.

May God bless you. Thanks.

Regards,

Jorge Navarrete Tejada
Business Manager
Saint Anthony of Padua Parish
[REDACTED] Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Tim Buntel [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 8:47 AM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Cc: Cynthia Graber
Subject: Supporting housing at Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

To whom it may concern,

I am a Somerville resident writing to strongly support the plan to update zoning for the Somernova site, particularly regarding the addition of housing to the site. This is an ideal transit area and many people will want to live and work at that location. Putting homes directly on the Somernova campus will reduce traffic and provide much needed housing in our city. As a Somerville resident who shops and commutes through that neighborhood daily, I support adding as much housing as possible in the plan.

Thank you,
Tim Buntel

[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02145

Madalyn Letellier

From: Kate Lila Wheeler [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 10:47 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Mid Somerville Avenue Somernova Plan

Hello, I'm writing to object to the gigantic size of Somernova's plan and also, the way city planners seem to be writing the new zoning overlay to fit the developer's design; and the way the project is represented as some kind of humanitarian effort when there is also a naked profit motive behind even that.

.
As a consequence of relative distance from public transport and the nature of the grid at capacity and also small streets surrounding the development, traffic planners' argument that more friction is healthy ring false, Traffic doesn't bring its own end without external measures like public transport or congestion pricing. This has been disproven ever since the Roman Empire (you know I'm exaggerating but honestly, think of I-93 south in summer). These buildings will serve an important purpose, but ironically the climate tech will create fumes and stress and other noxious effects on real people living near it. The reason is that the project scale is excessive for this location. Anyone with half a brain can see it unless blinded by dollar signs.

Shadows, also due to the immensity, will stun the neighboes.

So pior to any CBA please please we ask that the scale be reduced to appropriate size. Please don't allow concessions like green roofs to substitute for actual open space. No off site amenities to allow the massive ambition for this development. Open space and no shrunken sidewalks at ground level. Please let the community center serve all ages, not just youth who live far enough away that it's not walking distance. Make sure speed bumps and other traffic mitigation is installed to reduce the danger of speeding cut throughs in Duck Village and on the other side of Park Street. Somehow stop all the excess curb parking that will turn streets into head to head honking confrontations. Talking about Duck Village, the Beacon to commuter rail track slice, and of course Tyler Street/Properzi/Tower Court neighborhoods. Why don't people on the other side of Somerville ave know how shadows will engulf them?. Build in more step backs Design to support existing thriving businesses and communities like Aeronaut, Boulderling Project, St Anthony's Church instead of bonking them into nothing. .

Scale, scale, scale.

It doesn't matter whether it's housing or arts space or a community center, let every amenity be of an appropriate SCALE

Kate

--

Kate Lila Wheeler

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Stephanie Galaitsi [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 3:03 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Supporting housing in the Somernova development

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Planning,

I'm aware of all the work that has gone into the Somernova development in the last two years, and I extend my gratitude to all the people involved in that work.

I'm writing to express my support of building more housing in Somerville. I think, especially given the broader politics of this moment, that making it easier for people to live in Somerville is going to make a positive impact on many people's lives. I would like to help welcome those future neighbors by building the housing they need to live here. **The Somernova development is a great opportunity for more housing.**

I also think that a deliberate mobility plan is necessary to avoid a parking and traffic crunch in this area. I know that adding a train stop on the Fitchburg line isn't feasible at this time, but I'd love to see incentives for biking or other micromobility, or deliberate public transport that enables people to live there without a car.

I'm not too concerned about the height and shadow - I think about the 16 or 17 story building that Harvard has on Washington St, and it doesn't seem horrific. Plus shadow will be valuable in the future as summers get hotter. That's my take.

Thank you for all your work on this,

Stephanie Galaitsi
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: John Brock [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 25, 2025 8:18 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Good day,

My name is John Brock and I live on [REDACTED] Somerville, MA 02144. My partner and I moved here in 2020 and have gotten used to the lively and colorful community, transit options, and, unfortunately, high housing prices. My partner and I have been renting since 2020 and fantasize about one day owning a house or condo but aren't sure how that will even be feasible because of high housing prices. The best way to lower housing prices is to build more homes. That's why I hope you all will approve as much housing as possible for the Central Somerville Avenue plan.

My partner and I also take classes down at Esh. She's actually there right now! My partner doesn't drive and personally I try to drive as little as possible. Biking options in Somerville are better than they've ever been but I still fear for my well being on some of the roads because of people in cars. I have that your mobility plans will be aggressive to reduce parking and traffic as a whole. I love all the investments that Somerville has taken into public transit, bikeability, and walkability and I hope that prioritization continues.

In addition I support the city's updated zoning once a CBA is in place.

Lastly, I know some people have concerns about shadows being cast. I heard similar concerns for the Davis Tower proposal. From the mockups I think the step-backs and reduced height are enough to take care of concerns about casted shadows.

I hope you all will continue to help make Somerville a great place to live.

Sincerely, John

Madalyn Letellier

From: Mollye Malone [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 26, 2025 4:11 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: In Support of Housing in Somernova Development

Hello,

I am a Somerville resident writing in support of pro-housing negotiations for the proposed Somernova development. I support:

1. as much housing as possible in the Central Somerville Avenue plan
2. an aggressive mobility plan to reduce both traffic and parking
3. an updated zoning plan
4. the proposed set-backs and reduced height negotiated

Thank you,
Mollye Malone
[REDACTED], Somerville, MA 02144

Madalyn Letellier

From: Allison Tanenhaus [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 26, 2025 5:39 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: FAB Artist Comments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello!

My name is Allison Tanenhaus (she/her) and I've lived at [REDACTED] for 21 years. I'm an active visual artist in Somerville, particularly with New Alliance Gallery in Union Square.

I'm writing in regards to the following Agenda Items:

25-0131

25-0129

25-0128

I'm excited about the potential to expand cultural opportunities for our arts/music ecosystem. However, it's essential that the City Council not vote until the CBA is signed and we are able to see whether the proposed overlay district along with the Community Benefits Agreement is a win or a loss for creatives.

In addition, I am concerned that developers will always choose culinary arts incubators and design services over other arts uses, since culinary arts and design services can more often afford market rate rents.

Lastly, the R&D proposed building height is currently higher than FAB. This does not disincentivize redevelopment enough. It will threaten arts uses by enticing property owners to seek Zoning Map Amendments for their FAB zoned parcels into this new base district. If the city wants to upzone, I'd prefer the city undertake a comprehensive citywide approach at a later time instead of starting with one new district today. Please only vote in favor of this amendment once the height is made equal to the FAB District height.


We need affordable spaces for creative use in all artistic disciplines. Art is here. Art stays here. Please continue to protect the Fabrication District and support the Somerville creative economy.

Thank you,
Allison



allison tanenhaus (she/her)

trippy art • quippy copy • cats



Madalyn Letellier

From: Robin Amos [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 26, 2025 5:41 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: FAB public comments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello,

My name is Robin Amos (he/him) and I've lived at [REDACTED] 28 years. I'm an active musician in Somerville. (Formerly in Boston, before I was displaced from the Fort Point area in the '90s.)

I'm writing about these current Agenda Items:

25-0131

25-0129

25-0128

I'm excited about the potential to expand cultural opportunities for our arts/music ecosystem. However, it's essential that the City Council not vote until the CBA is signed and we are able to see whether the proposed overlay district along with the Community Benefits Agreement is a win or a loss for creatives.

In addition, I am concerned that developers will always choose culinary arts incubators and design services over other arts uses, since culinary arts and design services can more often afford market rate rents.

Lastly, the R&D proposed building height is currently higher than FAB. This does not disincentivize redevelopment enough. It will threaten arts uses by enticing property owners to seek Zoning Map Amendments for their FAB zoned parcels into this new base district. If the city wants to upzone, I'd prefer the city undertake a comprehensive citywide approach at a later time instead of starting with one new district today. Please only vote in favor of this amendment once the height is made equal to the FAB District height.

We need affordable spaces for creative use in all artistic disciplines. Art is here. Art stays here. Please continue to protect the Fabrication District and support the Somerville creative economy.

Thank you,
Robin

Madalyn Letellier

From: Jenny Rood [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, March 30, 2025 11:39 AM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Comments on Somernova zoning amendments (re: 3/20 Land Use Committee meeting)

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello,

I wanted to share two major concerns with the city's current proposal for changes to the zoning around the Somernova development.

1) Building height. The last version of the developer's zoning proposal suggested a maximum height of 185 feet; the city's proposal is even taller, at 200 feet. This is completely out of scale with a primarily residential and small business neighborhood, where buildings -- including a hotel -- are no more than four stories. In other parts of Somerville where tall towers have been built or proposed (for example, Union Square and Davis Square), towers above this height are at least for residential purposes; here, most of the floor space, aside from the relatively small carve-outs for arts and community space, will be industrial. Given that the same developer already has a three-story building nearby on Somerville Ave that appears to still be available for lease for lab space, including for tough tech, it is unclear that the demand exists to fill buildings that are more than three times this size. Somernova has presented shade studies that argue the impact on surrounding neighborhoods will be minimal; it would be important to have these independently verified by someone not paid or commissioned by the developer. If allowed to proceed, both the construction process (in an already noisy neighborhood impacted by traffic and the commuter rail) and the size of final product will negatively impact the neighborhood as a whole, for years to come.

2) Traffic impact. The major streets around the development, including Somerville Ave, Park St, and nearby Beacon St, already suffer from massive congestion - these roads were not built to handle the volume of traffic they are already seeing. Every day during rush hour, an accident is waiting to happen at the railroad crossing on Park St, where for nearly every red light at the T-shaped intersection at Somerville Ave, at least one car stops on the railroad tracks. Adding an additional several hundred cars to these roads every day (to fill the "scaled down" 750 parking spaces) to serve this development will further decrease both air quality in the neighborhood and pedestrian and bicyclist safety, in addition to making the traffic congestion even worse. Somernova has supposedly done studies that indicate the traffic impact will be minimal; as with the building height projections, these should be independently verified by a disinterested party. To my knowledge, no one has assessed the environmental or air quality impacts of building a development of this size, even if it is LEED certified.

Unlike the large towers in Union and proposed in Davis, the development is not near to a T stop (~1 mile to green or red line); the buses that serve this area and connect from the T stations, the 87 and the 83 (and also the 109 on Washington St), already run significantly behind schedule on a regular basis due to the lack of proper infrastructure to handle the traffic volume. Adding hundreds of cars on top of this will further compound this problem, for residents of the area (including the new residences proposed by

Somernova) and for the people commuting to work there. The proposed allowable size of a development in the zoning area should be scaled to the ability of the existing infrastructure to serve the development.

Thank you for incorporating these thoughts and comments into your considerations when deciding if and how to rezone this area.

Jenny Rood

car-less Somerville resident, pedestrian, and public transit rider

Madalyn Letellier

From: Cameron Fischer <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, March 30, 2025 4:30 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: A vote against Somernova's zoning proposal

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Somerville City Council,

I don't believe you should approve the zoning changes proposed by the Somernova project. It's sheer scale is entirely inappropriate for our small neighborhood.

Instead, let Somernova build whatever they want within the confines of the existing zoning laws, which were passed as recently as 2019, and which were designed to serve the businesses and communities in this neighborhood. Somernova's zoning proposal is designed to serve Somernova, not the neighborhood, and I don't believe any Community Benefits Agreement will compensate for constructing a colossal mountain range of high rise buildings that would dwarf every other house in the neighborhood, and bring enormous amounts of traffic to the tiny roads they'd abut (Tyler Street and Properzi Way). Those roads already struggle to be two-way streets as it is.

I'm all for developing Somerville farther, but please, let's do it in a way that's reasonable for the neighborhoods, and save larger projects like this for places that can handle it, like major roads close to the T.

Thank you for listening,
Cameron Fischer
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Andrew Haidle <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Sunday, March 30, 2025 9:24 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: opposed to zoning changes for Somernova

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Hello,

I live at [REDACTED] and have lived there for 12 years. Please don't allow any zoning changes that would allow Rafi properties - or anyone else! - to build more than 4 stories on the Somernova site.

Our neighborhood is not set up for the increased traffic and congestion that will occur if high rise buildings are allowed here. The city's comprehensive plan is clearly against allowing this, I don't understand how a larger than 4 stories building is even under discussion.

Thanks for listening!

Andrew Haidle

From: Michael Carlson [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 10:52 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Op-Ed Submission: A Zoning Overlay—for Whom?

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Op-Ed Submission

Title: *A Zoning Overlay—for Whom?*
Byline: *By Michael Carlson*
Word Count: ~965

Author Bio: Michael Carlson is a Somerville resident and former chair of the Somerville Ward 2 Democratic Committee.

A Zoning Overlay—for Whom?

By Michael Carlson

As the Somernova development barrels toward approval in Somerville, Mass., with the promise of transforming a quiet industrial campus into 1.6 million square feet of commercial, research, and so-called innovation space, it's worth asking a basic question—Who is this for?

I first became aware of the proposal last October, when the city announced a series of public meetings to discuss proposed zoning changes. At the very first session, a senior city staff member asked me to move to the back of the room. The front, they said, was “reserved for stakeholders.” The irony wasn't lost on me: I live within 30 feet of the project site and had introduced myself as a direct abutter. But somehow, I wasn't considered a stakeholder. That moment stayed with me.

I've lived in Somerville for years. I've walked these blocks, watched triple-deckers turn into condos, and seen the arrival of high-end coffee shops, new rail stations, and growing corporate footprints. Change is part of life here, and I'm not opposed to it. In fact, transformative change is needed to build the affordable housing Somerville desperately needs and to create space for new enterprises. If that change happens in my backyard, so be it. But residents and longtime community members deserve a voice in what that change looks like. And from my very first meeting, it's felt like we've been quietly, consistently told to sit down and stay out of the way.

Public Process Meets Private Interest

The irony is that we've already had this conversation—at length. When Somerville overhauled its zoning ordinance in 2019, it followed nearly a decade of workshops, working groups, and public hearings. It was, in other words, a public process. The resulting code emphasized clarity and predictability. It prioritized height and density near major transit hubs—not in the middle of residential neighborhoods.

Now, just a few years later, a single project seeks to bypass that work entirely.

The proposed Somernova redevelopment covers 7.4 acres between Union and Porter Squares. It would introduce buildings up to 200 feet tall into a neighborhood largely defined by triple-deckers and modest apartment buildings. It would replace the city's Fabrication (FAB) District—zoning initially intended to preserve old industrial spaces for artists and makers—with new zoning that does little to protect either. Just eight percent of the site would be reserved for arts-related uses, and even that figure can be negotiated down. Gone is the emphasis on adaptive reuse and local creativity. In its place: glass towers, corporate R&D, and a developer-led master plan—positioned as a hub for climate-focused and so-called tough-tech enterprises.

And the timing is curious: commercial real estate is still facing headwinds, and even as climate-focused enterprises gain urgency, public and private investment in tough-tech continues to retrench.

The developer is seeking a tailor-made zoning overlay that would sidestep many of the public review mechanisms that typically apply to developments of this scale. It would enshrine the developer's preferences into the city's zoning code—without offering a detailed final plan. And once granted, this zoning relief isn't easily undone. With their real estate value dramatically increased by the upzoning, the developer could revise the project or sell it altogether. The city loses its leverage the moment it rewrites the rules.

When Housing Means Hotels

One provision deserves special attention. The proposed ordinance reclassifies “lodging”—think hotels and motels—as residential housing. That language matters. Under the Massachusetts Housing Choice Act, zoning amendments that include residential uses can pass with a simple majority—just six of eleven City Council votes—instead of the two-thirds supermajority typically required. The inclusion of lodging as residential housing in this overlay triggers that threshold. The result is a faster, quieter path to approval for a project that will reshape an entire section of the city—without the kind of consensus-building or scrutiny that similar efforts once demanded and without requiring the developer to build a single residential housing unit.

Growth Deserves a Public Mandate

Concerns about this approach—and the project more broadly—have been voiced by the city's own appointed experts. In an August 2024 letter to the Planning Board and City Council, the Somerville Urban Design Commission, a panel of design professionals, warned that the plan prioritizes building mass over open space, pushes public areas to the margins, and risks establishing a new precedent for density in the Somerville Avenue corridor—all without sufficient public debate. Their concerns are not abstract; they speak directly to how we build community, share space, and determine who benefits when the rules are rewritten.

The City Council and Planning Board will ultimately decide whether this zoning amendment moves forward. While the Union Square Neighborhood Council—an all-volunteer group recognized by the city—has worked in good faith to represent community concerns, it does not have the political power or legal authority to shape

zoning outcomes. Its role is limited to negotiating Community Benefit Agreements, which offer some mitigation but do not address the deeper structural questions at play—or substitute for a true public mandate.

This isn't a debate about whether Somernova should grow. It's about how it grows—and who gets to shape that future. Somerville doesn't need to rubber-stamp growth to prove it welcomes it. But it does need to honor the public process it worked so hard to build. This proposal asks us to bypass that process in favor of a single, developer-authored vision. If adopted, the new overlay would create ripple effects—in traffic, affordability, civic precedent, and neighborhood identity—for decades.

Before we rewrite the rules for 7.4 acres of Somerville, we should be clear about what's being given up—and by whom. When neighbors are literally asked to move to the back of the room, it's worth asking again:

Who is this for? Are we rewriting zoning to serve Somerville residents—or a developer?

Supporting Sources

(For Editorial Reference Only)

- **Somernova Development Scale and Program:** Figures cited (1.6M sq. ft., 200 ft building height, 8% ACE space) are drawn from the proposed **Arts & Innovation Overlay District ordinance** submitted to the City Council/Land Use Committee by the Somerville Planning Board.
→ [March 20, 2025 Planning Board/Land Use Meeting – City of Somerville](#)
- **Fabrication (FAB) District Intent and Requirements:** Somerville Zoning Ordinance, §10.10 (Adopted Dec. 12, 2019).
→ [Somerville Zoning Ordinance \(2023\)](#)
- **Massachusetts Housing Choice Act:** Chapter 358 of the Acts of 2020; codified in M.G.L. c. 40A.
→ [Summary from Mass.gov](#)
→ [Full text of Chapter 358 \(via malegislature.gov\)](#)
- **Definition of Lodging as Residential Housing:** Language from the proposed Somernova Arts & Innovation Overlay District ordinance.
→ [Somerville Legistar: Proposed Zoning Amendment \(File #24-0490\)](#)
- **Somerville Urban Design Commission Letter** (August 2024):
→ [UDC Letter – Google Doc](#)
- **Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs):** Background on CBAs in Somerville from prior neighborhood planning efforts and agreements.
→ [Union Square Neighborhood Council – CBA History](#)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Caitlin Morris [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 11:32 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Letter from SomerNova neighbor

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Members of the City Council,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed SomerNova development in our beloved neighborhood.

My family has set deep roots in this community. We moved to the neighborhood a decade ago, and when our family grew to include several children, we chose to invest in a house just one block away from our previous multifamily building because we value the unique character of this neighborhood so deeply. We've even encouraged friends to join us in this corner of town – families who are committed to being actively involved in our public schools and community life.

What draws us to this area is precisely what the proposed development threatens to eliminate: a dense but human-scaled neighborhood where people know each other, where children can safely play and ride their bikes to school, and where a genuine sense of community thrives. The introduction of urban-scale towers would fundamentally alter this character and create an overload of vehicles on our already busy streets.

As someone who has worked in a different neighborhood that has been transformed by similar development focused on science and tech real estate, I'm highly aware of the consequences of prioritizing developers' interests over community vision. Many of these imposing buildings now stand half-empty, with stakeholders actively downsizing, and building tenancy changing hands every couple of years. Equally concerning is how these developments have created streetscapes that are unwelcoming to families – the very residents who support our local businesses, grocers, restaurants, and arts and hardware stores.

Somerville deserves better than becoming another generic landscape of high-rises. I urge you to avoid setting a precedent of accommodating developers' desires at the expense of established neighborhoods. We and our friends deeply hope that we are not in a position of having to leave Somerville due to the logistical realities of a proposed decade of construction, and the drastic shift of character and congestion to our neighborhood when the construction is complete.

I respectfully ask that you reject this proposal and instead support development that enhances our community's existing strengths while addressing genuine housing needs in a manner consistent with our neighborhood's character.

Thank you,
Caitlin Morris

Madalyn Letellier

From: Maya Honda [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 12:01 PM
To: Mayor; Planning Board; Public Comments
Subject: Zoning Overlay for Rafi Properties' Somernova Development

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Mayor Ballantyne and Members of the Planning Board,

I am writing to express my opposition to the zoning overlay under consideration for Rafi Properties' proposed Supernova/Central Somerville Avenue development.

I have made Somerville my home for over 25 years and I have seen many positive changes across those years. I do not own a car, so it is important to me to be able to walk places safely. I appreciate the efforts of the City of Somerville to improve the pedestrian, cyclist and driver experience, and also to plant trees to increase urban greenery. I also appreciate the City's efforts to support much needed housing throughout Somerville. Supporting small businesses, innovation industries, and maker spaces have led to a lively urban and commercial environment in Ward Two, where I live.

But the zoning overlay under consideration for Somernova would bring negative changes to this neighborhood and to the City of Somerville.

I am dismayed by the scale of the proposed development that the zoning overlay would allow. Office buildings up to 200 feet tall and thousands of new car trips into this already dense residential neighborhood are ludicrous possibilities. The building height and vehicle/population density being considered are out of proportion to the neighborhood. The increased traffic will negatively affect the health and safety of pedestrians, cyclists and drivers, from children to senior citizens, during commuting hours. All of this is contrary to the City's comprehensive plan to preserve this area and concentrate dense development near T stops.

I am also dismayed by other significant, long-term changes that the proposed zoning overlay would allow, most especially replacing FAB zoning with zoning that does little to protect maker or artist spaces that have been important to the life and growth of the neighborhood and that are part of the City's vision for development. Another proposed zoning overlay change is redefining residential housing to include hotels and motel; redefining "housing" does not create much-needed new housing for Somerville residents.

What I find most egregious is that the zoning overlay would, if accepted, favor Rafi Properties' needs and goals over the City of Somerville's comprehensive plan for development and it would allow Rafi to proceed with little if any review of its final plans. Acquiescing to Rafi's requested zoning overlay would set the precedent that the City of Somerville values private developers' interests over its citizens' needs and concerns.

For these reasons, I am opposed to the zoning overlay under consideration for Rafi Properties' proposed Somernova development.

Sincerely,

Amy Maya Honda

[REDACTED]

Somerville MA 02143

From: Pat Jehlen [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 12:08 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning Board; Mayor
Subject: Somernova comments

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

To the Planning Board and City Council,

Please oppose rezoning and master planning for the Somernova development. Here are my primary reasons, with further detail on each below:

1. **The proposal is in opposition to Somervision, the city's Comprehensive Plan, developed by hundreds of residents and city leaders over untold hours. Somervision advocated, and zoning changes provided for, dense development in transformation districts, preservation and protection of residential neighborhoods, and protection of naturally occurring artist spaces.**
2. **The PLA and CBA are important, but far from adequate to protect abutters or the city's interests.**
3. **Before voting you should receive and make public realistic visual representations of the maximum that could be built according to the proposed new zoning. This proposal is not described accurately in city presentations.**
4. **Before voting, you should receive and make public a realistic plan for traffic, mobility and parking for an additional 4000 workers, plus customers, visitors, parishioners, delivery vehicles, and neighbors. The plan should include a ban on additional buildings if added vehicle trips, or congestion on surrounding streets, exceed *publicly* adopted targets.**
5. **The proposal creates a precedent of tailoring zoning to a developer's needs, with the potential for displacing artists from other FAB districts.**
6. **The Planning Board and the Council should request a report/input from the Urban Design Commission (UDC) before they make their recommendation on the zoning.**
7. **The artist spaces and housing should be built onsite, and housing should not include lodging. The proposal should not allow "in lieu of" payments for either artist spaces and housing.**
8. **This process commits a large area to a particular kind of development, which may not be feasible due to Trump administration actions.**
9. **Standards in any new zoning should not be inferior to those in other high-rise developments.**

MORE DETAILED EXPLANATION:

1. **This proposal is in opposition to Somervision, a vision developed by hundreds of residents and city leaders over untold hours. Somervision advocated, and zoning changes provided for, dense development in transformation districts, preservation and protection of residential neighborhoods, and protection of naturally occurring artist spaces.**

This proposal is too big and in the wrong place. It contradicts Somervision and the zoning based on it. Hundreds of people, including council and Planning Board members and mayors and staff, worked so hard on Somervision 2030 and 2040. That vision and the zoning that followed it have produced very dense, high-rise development around T stations at Assembly Square, Boynton Yards, Brickbottom, and Union Square. It has led to over 2000 new units of housing and lots of businesses. It has not disrupted residential neighborhoods.

The area proposed for the overlay district was to be “preserved,” not “transformed.” ***These zoning proposals would locate one of the largest and densest developments in the City next to a small scale neighborhood that is farther away from a T stop than most of Somerville.***

There are many new buildings in the transformation zones. Except for three, none are nearly as large as these. In Union Square, the Darth Vader building is much shorter than the Bacon building, allowing a transition to Union Square.

Please read the “intent” of the zoning ordinance, which starts: “To implement the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Somerville and enforce officially adopted plans and policies.” Somervision is the city’s comprehensive plan!

2. The PLA and CBA are important, but far from adequate in protecting abutters or the city’s interests.

Abutters’ interests are not adequately represented. Neighboring homes and businesses face many harms and disruptions, during and after construction.

USNC has done incredible, dedicated, and thoughtful hard work, but they do not have enough power, mandate or resources to negotiate more than a CBA. They have to consider not only immediate neighbors but also issues like arts, civic space and sidewalks that are usually part of zoning, without the power of the city planning department or the council.

Our congresswoman says “Those closest to the pain should be closest to the power.” But the benefits don’t reflect the needs of the abutters and immediate neighbors: the effect on neighboring homes and businesses, the noise and disruption of 10 years of construction, limited green space, traffic and pollution, and the potential displacement of current valued tenants, as has happened with Artisans Asylum, Aircraft Aerial Arts, and others. **The community benefits will not offset the harm to those most affected.**

What would make such rezoning more palatable to abutters and would avoid a dangerous precedent would be something like Medford’s zoning provision: “No structure within 100 feet of the boundary of an SF-1, SF-2, GR or APT-1 district shall exceed four stories, or 50 feet, in height.”

3. Before voting you should receive and make public realistic visual representations of the maximum that could be built according to the proposed new zoning. This proposal is not described accurately in city presentations.

I requested those visual presentations in November and January, and other neighbors have as well. We were promised those during the Central Somerville Avenue meetings. There are some updated views on the city’s website, but **none from the front of homes on Tyler Street or Properzi Way**, or from the rear of abutting homes on Somerville Avenue.. This continues a disregard for abutters by Rafi and the city. The city’s images do not include shadow studies. Rafi’s presentations are completely unrealistic, and don’t show the actual height of buildings, or a street level view of that height.

The city's visual presentations assume no civic space unless there are high-rise buildings. The inclusion of civic space should be decided in zoning, not assumed based on collaboration with the developer.

During last week's hearing, JustAStart presented visuals showing their proposed much smaller building at Gilman Square in context, including shadow studies, although no views from the street.

The Somerville Times (<https://www.thesomervilletimes.com/archives/139284>) reported, apparently based on city presentations, that

"This change intends to steer large-scale laboratory buildings away from mid-rise neighborhoods and concentrate them in appropriate districts... Create a new R&D zoning district that supports mid-scale commercial development for hardware and climate tech innovation, such as startups coming out of Greentown Labs and MIT's Engine"

This is not true at all. It steers large-scale, high-rise buildings *into* a neighborhood of 2 and 3 family homes.. It is not "mid-rise commercial" development.

4. Before voting, you should receive and make public a realistic plan for traffic, mobility, and parking for an additional 4000 workers, plus customers, visitors, parishioners, delivery vehicles, and neighbors. The plan should include a ban on additional buildings if added vehicle trips, or congestion on surrounding streets, exceed *publicly* adopted targets.

Somernova is farther from MBTA stops than 70% of Somerville.

The initial requirement is that only 40% of employees would drive. That would mean 1600 new drivers a day, plus Ubers and Lyfts and delivery vehicles, as well as customers and visitors to civic spaces. Despite promises, there have been no projections of the effect on traffic, which often backs up several blocks. Residents of especially Tower Court, Tyler Street, and Properzi Way will have difficulty reaching their homes.

The final goal in the proposal is 25% of trips to be by car when the project is fully occupied.. Even that would be 1000 new round trips just for employees, let alone customers, deliveries, etc. It's more than the allowed onsite parking; just like now, many employees will park on surrounding, overcrowded streets.

Already, Rafi has at least 300 reserved parking spaces in the area, and many employees park on the street.

During ten years of construction, there would be lack of access to already congested Tyler Street and Properzi Way. In Kendall Square, construction of a similarly tall building has required three lanes of traffic to be closed off for months to provide space for cranes and other construction equipment. How will residents access their homes and where will they park during and after construction? How will emergency vehicles access the construction site and neighborhood? St. Anthony's parishioners need access at least to their own parking lot.

Neighbors should be provided with free parking space by Rafi.

5. The proposal creates a precedent of tailoring zoning to a developer's needs, with the potential for displacing artists from other FAB districts.

If the proposal is adopted, the city will be sending a clear message that it is prepared to abandon its comprehensive plan to accommodate an investor's desires. That precedent would be especially dangerous for other FAB areas like studios on Vernon Street, Central Street, and Washington Street that abut neighborhood residences, where upzoning would encourage investors to spend more and evict or price out artists.

If high rise is allowed here, it could encourage developers to pay more for FAB spaces, expect and demand rezoning, and eliminate affordable artist spaces. The plan should ensure that new artist spaces are at least as affordable as the existing ones. If payment in lieu is allowed, it should ensure that the payment can *permanently* replace the existing space, because new spaces will certainly be more expensive.

If accepted, this plan will also be a precedent for allowing high rise development next to residential neighborhoods.

6. The Planning Board and the Council should request a report/input from the Urban Design Commission (UDC) before they make their recommendation on the zoning.

This zoning proposal will set precedent and shape Somerville's public realm and the physical environment of the people who live around it. The UDC exists to provide a forum for Somerville's professional design community to evaluate this.

In Boston, the Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) would provide a similar review and recommendation prior to approving this type of zoning. Somerville deserves at least the same.

(From the city website: The Urban Design Commission (UDC) conducts design review of development proposals, provides advice and recommendations to the other Review Boards concerning how the design of proposed development will affect the quality of Somerville's public realm, and provides advice and recommendations to City Staff when required by a permit condition issued by the Review Boards.)

7. The artist spaces and housing should be built onsite, and housing should not include lodging. The proposal should not allow "in lieu of" payments for either artist spaces and housing.

One goal is to preserve and expand existing affordable artist space. New construction is far more expensive than existing space, as FAB zoning recognized. There may not be equal replacement available, or the money may sit and wait for space to become available.

Housing in the plan can mean "lodging," such as a hotel. A hotel would not increase the supply of housing. The plan should absolutely not include "lodging."

8. This plan commits a large area to a particular kind of development, which may not be feasible due to Trump administration actions.

Funding of green industries is highly problematic under the new administration. Rafi's new tough tech lab building on Somerville Ave is empty, and the Darth Vader building has not been fully tenanted.

9. Standards in any new zoning should not be inferior to those in other high-rise developments.

For example, in Assembly Square, 25% of the lot area must be for open space.

Finally, before voting, please review the July 2024 memo from Anne Tate, Stuart Dash, and Tim Talum, which makes many more critical points. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18ykY4ZTHaex4I5-Ob65oXhNgaV7DFDav/view>

Respectfully submitted,

Pat Jehlen, [REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Denise Provost <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 1:49 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Fw: Testimony

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

Begin forwarded message:

On Monday, March 31, 2025, 1:39 PM, Denise Provost <denise.provost@verizon.net> wrote:

Honorable Members of the Somerville Planning Board and City Councillors,

I consider the Spot Zoning which has been filed to enable Rafi's current redevelopment plans is hasty and imprudent. The hurry to enact it is artificial and unwarranted. The city should not consider fast tracking as-of-right permission for such an oversized and speculative project.

As has been pointed out, this proposal contradicts the principles of Somervision, our city's comprehensive plan. That plan was born of a long process of consensus building. There is no consensus among those most affected that the Rafi proposal - or the zoning that would enable it - are acceptable, let alone desirable.

Rafi's untenanted building on Somerville Avenue symbolizes the mismatch between its concepts and the state of the market. A 25% tariff on steel has gone into effect and research funding has been sliced. Many tech companies were already in contraction, even before President Trump ordered regulatory and economic chaos into being.

It's unrealistic to think that Rafi can build the project it has outlined in any foreseeable future. But the unlikelihood that this bad project won't be built increases the likelihood that an even worse project will be built instead, soon or in future. The broadly generous zoning covers a multitude of oppressive structures and uses.

As a matter of responsible planning, the city should not even consider providing Rafi with zoning relief at this point. Rafi's project has not been fully vetted. Its impacts must be measured; empty assurances that it can be shoehorned into this petite neighborhood are not sufficient.

The only definite outcome of this zoning change will be an enormous increase in the development value of Rafi's real estate. Period.

Once the city has handed Rafi what it wants, the city loses all bargaining power. Rafi can tell the city that the original plan was financially unviable, and that it has to build

something else instead. Rafi can sell its value-enhanced property at a profit to another developer who has different plans.

But even if this development were to go forward as proposed, it will ruin people's lives in the process. The construction process will effectively displace them from their homes. Is that what Somerville's city government wants to do ?

Respectfully submitted,

Denise Provost



Somerville, MA 02143

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ethan Dussault <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 2:09 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Public Comment: #25-0131, #25-0129, #25-0128, #24-1460

Dear Councilors and Planning Board,

Ethan Dussault here. Live in Ward 4, Operate an ACE small business in Ward 2.

First, applause must be given to all those who followed through on the recommendation to revise our ACE definitions made in the Somerville Arts Council/Metropolitan Area Planning Council's joint *Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment* document. While the new definitions are not perfection—and I have come to learn that in zoning perfection is nearly impossible—these revisions (#25-0129) are a vast improvement upon the existing language and I believe more adequately represent the intent of the category and its relationship to the SZO's FAB District and ACE Requirement.

Affordable arts workspaces are a core necessity to a vibrant city life. Shielding these uses from displacement through land use regulation is just one incredibly important step we can take. A painting studio, an independent music recording studio, a boutique bag maker—these types of uses simply can not compete with restaurants, offices, housing, labs, etc. for space. Yet they are a huge part of what defines our cultural identity. Market rates are not universal and if we want a diverse landscape we have to provide space for all corners of our community, not just the ones who can pay the highest rent.

This is why in addition to celebrating the new definitions, we must also make a change to the proposed R&D District (#25-0128). We should keep the height comparable to the FAB District height. This feels like a premature upzoning attempt that could welcome FAB District property owners to seek Zoning Map Amendments which could put what affordable arts spaces we still have at greater risk. We should instead take up a taller height in R&D alongside a conversation with how it relates to its FAB District big sibling and the city-wide ACE requirement. If we want R&D to be taller, we need more protections for ACE uses elsewhere.

It is my understanding that a comprehensive upzoning effort is going to be explored in depth by the Land Use Committee and I would prefer any height above FAB for R&D be explored then instead of granting the allowance today. Otherwise, I have no objections to R&D and am incredibly supportive of the ACE requirement for this new district rising to 10%.

Next, it is impossible to separate the Arts and Innovation sub-area (#25-0131) proposal from the community conversation. This overlay covers over 7 acres of what is currently zoned as FAB District. The FAB District is only about 2% of our map in a city that is overwhelmingly zoned residential. One of the primary goals of FAB is to be the workspace for folks who live in (or near) Somerville who don't have that spare garage or basement space that you find in the suburbs. It's a place to be loud and messy without waking up the neighbor. It's a place where passions are explored and dreams are born. Makers, artists, musicians, dancers, craftspeople—however folks see themselves as creatives—come from all walks of life and we need to have these spaces for any of this creativity to happen.

Every resident and worker in Somerville contributes to the value of our city and our city can only thrive if it provides them diverse accessible land uses. When faced with a request to dramatically transform a valuable resource such as the FAB District acreage in question, we must make sure to return as much of the value back to the community that created it.

Zoning alone can not do this.

We must come together in each of our roles to ensure that we do not sell-out the value and wealth that we—as working class Somervillians—created, and instead ask everyone to buy-in.

Admittedly, there are more than two paths we could take but I will explore just two for now.

Path one is simple and devastating. Approve everything as is, right now, independently of any other consideration and cement the transfer of wealth out of our community to the tune of countless millions of dollars (countless because the public will never see that balance sheet).

Path two is also simple but requires just a little extra patience and solidarity from all involved to make for the best possible—though not perfect—outcome. To get this right, we must assemble three pieces in the right order.

1. **Amend the zoning applications as requested by the Union Square Neighborhood Council** who is making its request based on countless hours of engagement with community stakeholders.
2. **Realize a signed Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)** which can ensure a return of the value back to the community that created it in ways other efforts can not.
3. **Realize a signed Project Labor Agreement (PLA)** which can ensure workers protections

Once these three steps are complete, then we should feel prepared to move forward on approving the R&D District and Arts & Innovation sub-area overlay.

This is the difference between an epic success and an epic failure for our community.

Please choose path two.

Sincerely,

Ethan Dussault



Madalyn Letellier

From: Adaline Lining [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 2:12 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning Board; Mayor
Subject: Public Comment SomerNova
Attachments: Public Coment Somernova .docx

Please see my attached public comments.

Thank you,
Adaline

Adaline Lining



March 31st, 2025

To the Planning Board and City Council,

I urge you to oppose the proposed rezoning and master planning for the Somernova development as put forth by Rafi Properties.

I am a resident of Tower Court, and I enjoy living in a mixed-use area that includes residents, church parishioners, patrons visiting Aeronaut Brewery, Boston Boulderling, the pop-up sauna, restaurants, and more. It is a vibrant area. That said, there are issues. Parking is constantly challenging, and the vast amount of paved parking makes this area one of the hottest in Somerville. Having lived in several areas of Ward 2 over the past 10 years, from 102 Line Street and 15 Harold Street to 279 Washington Ave, I have come to appreciate Tower Court and the unique quirks of this small pocket of Somerville that I call home.

As a resident, I am bitterly opposed to the proposed development as it now stands. I am eager to see a plan that aligns with the needs of all community stakeholders and the current plan does not meet that expectation. The fact that there is no signed CBA and no signed PLA is a significant red flag. The lack of a nexus study to evaluate the pros and cons of this development and the lack of an independent traffic study are also concerning. This is a project that could take over a decade to complete and yet the full implications of its impact are unknown.

Currently, Ward 2 has the highest percentage of residents who work at Somervoa, and with the proposed project, this percentage will increase and put increased pressure on the already insufficient housing stock. In addition to the strain of adding more people in need of housing, the median salaries that are predicted for the cafe and childcare workers working at SomerNova will not allow people to afford to rent, let alone buy, in this area. As people of color and particularly women are the most likely to work in childcare and food service sectors, this pay to housing disparity will reinforce economic racism. A further disservice is the lack of housing in this plan. Adding to the affordable housing trust will not offset the

increase in need, nor will it have a timely impact. The housing included in the proposal is not scheduled to be completed in time to be accessed by SomerNova workers, nor does it provide sufficient housing to meet the increase in density that would be required to support all the people with new jobs.

Not only will there be pressure on the housing market, but the already challenging parking issue will be further exacerbated by this development. The largest percentage of people using transit to commute to SomerNova are predicted to use private cars and in an area that is already coping with disproportionate health impacts from the heat island effect of this area, the increased pollution will create further disparate health outcomes while also putting Somerville further away from its goal of becoming more environmentally sustainable and healthy. Planting street trees, microforests, pollinator gardens, rain gardens, and seed corridors are insufficient solutions for offsetting the increase in air pollution from cars, nor will they solve the light pollution from these buildings.

Another element to consider is that the revenue projection only goes through 2037, which leaves most of the future impacts of this project unexplored. It is unclear how this project will adapt to the booms and busts of the tough tech sector in the long term or how this project will remain lucrative in the face of increasing tariffs on needed building materials in the short term. The Ames Envelope complex has successfully housed multiple organizations since leaving behind its original historic purpose and anything built now must be similarly flexible in being able to meet the needs of today's industries and those of the future. It is concerning that the proposed development does not include propositions for how the space can be used in multiple ways as demands shift. This challenge has already been faced in neighboring areas, such as at the Rafi properties development at La Ronga Bakery on Somerville Ave, which remains unused, or in Kendall Square, which is busy during the day but does not serve the community outside of business hours. Any project that decreases the vibrant mixed-use activity of this area will be doing a disservice to the city and the people of Somerville.

The SomerNova project includes thoughtful plans around connecting Park Street with Properzi and around adding a needed Community Center. However, without

adequate funding for the community center, it will fail to serve the needs of the community as intended. The construction for the project will also have catastrophic impacts on foot traffic, cyclists, and vehicle users. During my residence at 279 Washington Street, I lived with the construction on Washington Street and Hawkins. We saw an increase in rats, headaches from the machine exhaust, headaches from the noise, parking issues, and other environmental stress. Noise, construction, and rodents are all part of living in an urban environment but Somerville has a duty to ensure that residents can maintain a reasonable quality of life. The construction needs of this development will result in unreasonable negative impacts to residents and visitors of this neighborhood. From noise pollution, air quality issues, parking consideration, the disruption of rodent environments, and issues of access to businesses and homes, there are numerous issues that Rafi Properties has provided inadequate or no solutions for. Without Rafi Properties clarifying how they will ensure the health and safety of residents, patrons, and visitors to the areas, it is unconscionable to support this development.

There are a myriad of issues with the proposed rezoning and master planning for the Somernova development. Their demand for rezoning, along with their failure to finalize a CBA or PLA, shows that Rafi Properties does not respect the input, concerns, or needs of the people of Somerville. Please use your power to oppose the proposed rezoning and master planning for the Somernova development.

Madalyn Letellier

From: Pat Jehlen [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 2:18 PM
To: Public Comments; All City Council; Planning Board
Cc: Denise Provost
Subject: comments from Denise Provost on Somernova

Dear Planning Board and City Council,
Denise Provost, former long-time state rep and alderman, is in Scotland without a computer and asked me to forward her comments.

Comments from Denise Provost:

« The Spot Zoning which has been filed to enable Rafi's current redevelopment plans is hasty and imprudent. The hurry to enact it is artificial and unwarranted. The city should not consider fast tracking as of right permission for such an oversized and speculative project.

As has been pointed out, this proposal contradicts Somervision, our city's comprehensive plan. That plan was born of a long process of consensus building. There is no consensus among those most affected that the Rafi proposal or the zoning that would enable it are acceptable, let alone desirable.

Rafi's untenanted building on Somerville Avenue symbolizes the mismatch between its concepts and the state of the market. A 25% tariff on steel has gone into effect and research funding has been sliced. Many tech companies were already in contraction, even before President Trump ordered regulatory and economic chaos into being.

It's unrealistic to think that Rafi can build the project it has outlined in any foreseeable future. But the unlikelihood that this bad project won't be built increases the likelihood that an even worse project will be built instead - or in future.

As a matter of responsible planning, the city should not even consider providing Rafi with zoning relief at this point. Rafi's project has not been fully vetted. Its impacts must be measured; empty assurances are not sufficient.

The only definite outcome of a zoning change will be an enormous increase in the development value of Rafi's real estate. Period.

Once the city has handed Rafi what it wants, the city loses all bargaining power. Rafi can tell the city that the original plan was financially unviable, and that it has to build something else instead. Rafi can sell its value enhanced property at a profit to another developer who has different plans.

But even if this development were to go forward as proposed, it will ruin people's lives in the process. The construction process will effectively displace them from their homes.
Is that what Somerville's city government wants to do ?

Denise Provost
[REDACTED], Somerville 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Ami Bennitt [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 2:29 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning Board
Cc: Ami Bennitt; dontfwithfab@gmail.com
Subject: Public Comment : 25-0131

Dear City of Somerville, Planning Board, Land Use Committee, Arts Council & Office of Strategic Partnerships & Community Development,

I write with public comment in response to zoning amendment 25-0131, the proposed Arts & Innovation Sub-Area Overlay.

#ARTSTAYSHERE is a volunteer-run arts space advocacy nonprofit committed to preventing artist displacement through preserving existing and creating more affordable artist workspaces and live/workspaces. We've spent over two years educating, organizing, and activating the creative sector of Somerville—both regarding arts space overall and specifically in relation to Rafi Property's Somernova development & its impact on Somerville's Fabrication District.

We applaud Rafi, the City, OSPCD, the USNC, and community and arts stakeholders (including the Don't F with FAB! team) for continued engagement in this lengthy but valuable community process, as it will surely yield a development project that is beneficial to businesses, residents, and creatives—once a Project Labor Agreement & Community Benefits Agreement are signed by the Building Trades & Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC), respectively as well as implementing the proposed amendments to the zoning applications put forth by the USNC.

Thank you,

Ami Bennitt
#ARTSTAYSHERE

Ami Bennitt
Motor Media, The Shout Syndicate, #ARTSTAYSHERE Coalition

Madalyn Letellier

From: Camille Stubbe [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 3:32 PM
To: Public Comments; Mayor; All City Council
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Public Comment - Somernova

Hello City Council and the Mayor's Office,

My name is Camille Stubbe, I live at [REDACTED] directly across the street from the Block 1 and Block 4 as referenced in the file number 25-0131. **I am asking you to reject the proposal as it stands.** I am a direct abutter, but in addition to this, over the past two years, I have worked to organize community feedback on the proposed Somernova development. I run a mailing list of 140 community members, working to inform them on this project and enable them to share their voices in the process. As part of this work, I ran a meeting with Counsitor JT Scott in October 2023 to collect unbiased community feedback on the proposal, the summary of which can be found [here](#). The main points included: 5-6 stories (human scale), 10% arts, full transportation study, transition plans for all existing small businesses, guaranteed housing (NOT a hotel), and many more key points we do not see reflected in the current proposal. To say that the current proposal we look at is a result of community feedback is inaccurate, and directly contradicts what has been voiced meeting after meeting for the last 2 years. Quite frankly, the community feedback process from the fall on the Central Somerville Avenue run by the Mayor's office was inaccessible (during the day, long hours), and did not give proper audience to neighbors, who were not included as stakeholders (USNC, arts groups, Rafi, were included). Additionally, a majority of the development is not even on Somerville Ave., but small, overcrowded side streets.

Additionally the proposal lacks the fidelity we need to demand from such a large scale project. **I am asking you to send this project to the Somerville Urban Design Commission for a formal review before any new agreement is reached.** This is a process that is standard practice in Cambridge and Boston. The previous informal review by members of this commission ([here](#)) found significant issues with the proposal, many of which have NOT been addressed. Additionally, if the city is taking over this process, a review by this commission is CRITICAL. We need a process in which we do not just adopt a developer plan as the city's own. There are significant flaws with the proposal in terms of scale, transportation, requirements with housing, shadows - and these need to be thoroughly reviewed prior to approval of a zoning change.

Lastly, I speak to you as a direct abutter of this proposal, and patron of the Boulderling Project, Aeronaut, Somerville Bike Kitchen, Somerville Chocolate, Carolicious, and Mimi's Diner - all small businesses that reside in this complex. This corner of Somerville - bound by Dane St., Tyler St., Somerville Ave., and Properzi Way is home to ~150 residents and an extremely well attended church. This is not just a few houses impacted by the project, this is a neighborhood. One that will quite literally be surrounded on all sides by 130-200 ft buildings. I am not complaining about one shadow; there is a reason they haven't shown us the shadow study in a year or so - it's total darkness for many months. Additionally, these are small side streets, and with the creation of 750 new parking spaces, the area will not be able to function. 750 new spaces is more than the Market Basket, Porter Square, and Forge Bakery Complex lots COMBINED. As it stands the area is choked by traffic. The area is ~0.9 miles to the nearest train stop and was not designated as a site for major development in the Somerville 2040 vision for this reason. As part

of that vision, the FAB district was created to protect spaces and buildings for artists and small start ups. Although the Ames complex may not be an architectural masterpiece, it is home to rich community spaces and local businesses. We are abandoning the vision of the FAB district (created just 5 years ago) with this proposal because a developer is asking us to - what type of president does this set?

So, in conclusion, I ask that you reject this zoning amendment. Before resubmitting, I ask that a transparent and thorough planning process take place, led not by the developer, but by folks with best intentions for Somerville in mind.

Thank you,
Camille Stubbe

[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Emily Baillieul [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:15 PM
To: Public Comments; All City Council; Mayor
Subject: Re: SomerNova - Can we do this a different, better way?

While I support redeveloping the old Ames campus - I think the current zoning overlay before the council should not be approved. It's a given, for me, that *nothing* should progress without a CBA and PLA - though I think even those are insufficient.

I have been following the plans to develop the SomerNova parcel in Ward 2 for the past couple years. As someone who lives inside the proposed development area, I appreciate the push to rebuild the old, light industrial buildings that comprised the Ames Envelope factory and the work of the USNC and public process to add community needs and concerns to the project. I understood little about the process for new development approval and build until I began following this project - it's been fascinating. And that brings me to my concerns.

Why is this neighborhood-specific rezoning being tailored to a developer's master plan rather than a typical build-approval process?

My understanding is that usually a developer would present a master plan to the city that would then go through a process of being reviewed by the Urban Design Commission and Planning Board, a process that would define needed mitigations and amendments to existing zoning - as opposed to being submitted simultaneously with a zoning change request that is tailored to the master plan. This approach would make the city go through a holistic process of assessing community impacts and the outcomes of the development to help ensure what was ultimately approved was feasible for the developer and for Somerville. I don't grasp why this process has been abridged and flipped. There is confusion about the zoning versus the developer's stated plans for the project. People conflate those. That's because there isn't a master plan on the city level. Will there be housing? The developer says so but the zoning doesn't require it, for example.

Separately, my personal, selfish concerns from within the development zone have been: daylight for solar power, and access to my home during construction. I am pleased that the height of building 1 has been lowered though future construction is still up to 200 ft. So far, I am not aware of any measures to ensure access to the neighborhood residences and St Anthony's Church. For the larger community - it's comical, living here, to note the lack of concern from the city on traffic impacts. Have you tried to clear Park Street or Washington Street at Beacon in a car at 5:15 lately?

Thank you for your attention.
Emily Baillieul [REDACTED]

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Emily Baillieul
Somerville, MA
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: jenn harrington [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:21 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Public Comment: #25-0131, #25-0129, #25-0128

Dear Somerville City Councilors and the Planning Board,

Here I, Jenn Harrington (she/her), am with another letter! I have been a renter at [REDACTED] in Somerville for over 20 years. I have been a volunteer for the local visual arts and music community throughout that time. I appreciate the dedication and hard work by city staff and community members to get to this point.

That said,

- **(#25-0131) I request that the City Council not vote on a zoning overlay until the USNC's CBA and PLA are signed and we are able to see whether the proposed overlay district along with the CBA is a win or a loss for creatives and workers.** If this zoning overlay and this project go through, we are losing a big portion of the Fabrication District. This loss is monumentally painful. It is up to all of us to ensure that this sacrifice is not asking for too much.
- **I ask that the City Council never vote for zoning changes of this kind without seeing a story of losses in the area.** You need verified and complete information 1.) To make wise choices. 2.) To respect those who made Somerville an amazing place to be. 3.) To not encourage developers to create blight ahead of zoning change requests so it looks like their plan is a good deal. I would appreciate it if the City Council could make inquiries so that this important data is included in this zoning overlay proposal and in any future zoning change proposals.
 - Incomplete documentation includes
 - **Losses on the Somernova campus: An Incomplete List**
 - [Aircraft Aerial Arts](#), 3760 square feet, Union Square
 - [Artisans Asylum](#), 40,000 square feet, Union Square
 - [Harvard Book Store](#) Warehouse, 6000 square feet, Union Square
 - [Hemlock Ink Custom Screenprinting](#), 3500 square feet, Union Square
 - [Michael Spenser Studio](#), square footage unknown
 - Any other losses unknown by the one person (me) documenting this list.
 - **Other Losses in Union Square: An Incomplete List**
 - [Bull McCabe's Pub](#) and Tir Na Nog, 780 square feet, Union Square
 - [DreamStar Studio](#), 864 square feet, Union Square
 - [Fringe Union](#), 7500 square feet, Union Square
 - [JamSpot](#), 5000 square feet, Union Square
 - [Pink Noise Studios - Somerville](#), 1500 square feet, Union Square
 - [Somerville Media Center - SMC](#) (90 Union Square), 2500 square feet, Union Square
 - [Sky Bar](#), 3900 square feet, Union Square
 - [Starlab Studios](#) (32 Prospect St), square footage unknown
 - [Starlab Studios](#) (453 Somerville Ave), 1300 square feet, Union Square
 - [Third Life Studio](#), 900 square feet, Union Square

- **Club Choices/Radio/Thunder Road**, Union Square, square footage unknown
- **Precinct**, square footage unknown
- **Cantina la Mexicana**, square footage not included because they hosted music occasionally
- Any other losses unknown by the one person (me) documenting this list.
- **(#25-0129) I remind you that ACE will not save affordable creative space.** While there are positive changes to ACE, even with these ACE revisions, affordable studio space is not the priority. I am concerned that developers will always choose culinary arts incubators and design services over other arts uses since they can more often afford market rate rents. **With that in mind, I am asking the City Council and the Planning Board to hold the FAB line!** We need affordable spaces for creative use in all artistic disciplines. Please protect the Fabrication District! Ways to commit to it:
 - City staff and many community members went through two months of hard work to talk about one development. The Fabrication District, which turned 5 years old in December, deserves that kind of attention, especially since a thoughtful discussion was forgotten during the pandemic and especially now at a time where we are considering damaging it. Please make inquiries for this vital zoning district to be given its due.
 - Make inquiries about whether the Fabrication District can expand elsewhere in the city to make up for the space lost. Can't do that? Then all the more reason to support our current FAB with time and funding for affordable arts spaces!
- **(#25-0128) I ask for a change to the proposed R&D District.** The height of R&D should be comparable to the FAB District height. I agree with USNC: "This change is meant to discourage copycat requests in other Fabrication [Districts] where artist clusters exist."

I realize this is a lot to ask from you right now, but after much pain and more surely to come for the creative economy, it at least deserves an honest story. In the end, the Somernova campus might not actually be a win, or much of a win, for the community. It is up to you to make sure that the narrative that is presented depicts a frank account so that we all can at least have the power to ask, "Where do we go from here?"

At a time where there is national distrust of politics and a call for people to hold their local communities tight, we need to be able to trust the City of Somerville. Please do not let exaggerations of the "success" of this zoning change/development plan cause a lack of confidence in our electeds, our hard-working staff, or even in deep pocket developers. Let us speak with accuracy, good numbers, and a valid accounting of history. And who knows! Maybe this is a good story....it's just hard to tell without valuable and transparent information.

Cities do not work without art. Art is here! Art can only stay here with your strategic help! Please support the Somerville creative economy by being creative masterminds, by asking for something different from our current government planning processes, and by working hard to protect affordable creative space!

As a resident,

- I am wicked wary of the massive amount of parking allowed. Not cool for "climate" tech. Tighten the requirements for mobility and traffic management within the zoning.
- I am uncertain about height since a real-life example hasn't been provided. "What does that feel like?" can not be imagined with a picture. Please provide real examples that we can stand by.

Thank you for your time and advocacy,

Jenn Harrington
Ward 3

Postscript:

At the Central/Somerville Ave meetings, the City collected email addresses from all attendees. This meeting series, which lasted months, asked a lot from city staff, residents, community advocates, and other stakeholders. Yet, the City did not send an email to attendees about the public hearing for these items. I ask the City Council to inquire about how we can strengthen the communications chain on the City's side so that community advocates aren't constantly doing the work to inform. There has got to be a better way of welcoming and encouraging our community to actively participate in civic engagement. If this cannot be done, the City should not be collecting private information (it's creepy).

For anyone bcc'd on this email, the deadline to submit public comment on these items is today at 7pm.

Madalyn Letellier

From: Patrick Conte [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:41 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning Board; Mayor
Subject: Somernova Rezoning
Attachments: USNC amendments (1).docx

To whom it may concern,

I have already voiced my opinion to the City Council directly, but I am emailing to you all to voice my strong opposition to the pending R&D and A&I zoning amendments. The lack of focus on mixed-use development and lack of housing will have drastic detrimental effects on traffic, displacement, economic inequity and light. This kind of single focused design over such large parcels and such large buildings feels out of touch with urban planning goals that focus on mixed-use design, with dense housing approximate to transit.

The loss of incredible community hubs like Boulding Project and Aeronaut will be immense, and there is no promise that the replacement FAB uses or Community Center will be able to deliver the same sort of rich engagement within our community. Boulderling Project regularly sees 1,500 people a day come through its doors; that sort of rich community building is rare these days, and should be preserved.

I am also worried that the changes to FAB zoning regulations do not go far enough to ensure that actual art-forward uses are achieved in FAB districts. Please consider adding greater restrictions on bakery and production uses that would require a % of sales to come from goods baked on-site and products produced on-site to ensure there isn't wiggle room to allow for the kinds of businesses that aren't intended to be allowed under the spirit of FAB.

While I oppose the R&D and A&I zoning amendments, I am in support of the spirit of the amendments the USNC has proposed (see attached).

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Patrick Conte
[REDACTED]
Somerville, MA

Reasons for Amending the Zoning Filed by the City

Besides the fact that there is no signed CBA and no signed PLA

1. Base R & D Zone height is too permissive – 78’ instead of 60’ - require a Special Permit to go to 78’ so that the Planning Board can review the reasons and, if necessary, set conditions. Permitting as of right the 78’ height limit will be a signal to owners of other FAB-zoned properties that they can also get an upzone. This threatens existing artist enclaves on Vernon St., Joy St., Central St., Washington St. and Brickbottom.
2. The effort to regulate total square footage of the development by limiting heights and parking spaces is inadequate. The range of possible square footage is 1.45 million square feet to 2.2 million square feet, depending on floor to ceiling heights for each story. The number of stories needs to be regulated.
3. No guarantee that missing mobility management goals will result in altered (diminished in size of) future building plans. If the Mobility Management Plans are not tightened, we feel that we must return to our request for lower allowable parking from 750 to 500 and reduced square footage of the development. Otherwise, there is no answer to the potential dramatic increase in traffic congestion.
4. Setbacks and Step backs are not enough to accomplish a 60-degree angle sky plane with existing housing. We requested two step backs, for a total of 20 feet at the second and fifth floors of all new high-rise buildings that face existing residential structures (NR, UR, and MR4 zones).
5. The zoning fails to establish a new definition of how to handle mechanical equipment on the roofs of the new buildings in this new zone. We asked for those mechanicals that don’t need sound baffling to be exposed and not be boxed in behind baffling. The reason for this is in order to diminish the bulky nature of the 20-30’ of extra height.

Changes to the city zoning proposal that would address these concerns (bold and underlined)

1. Change proposed Section 6.5 Research and Development District
Change Section 6.5.7 Commercial Building- Main Mass, item F. Building Height (max) **from 78’ to 60’.**
2. Change proposed Section 8.4.19 Arts and Innovation Subarea
Change Section h. Building Standards to the following wording:- Massing and Height, **Number of Stories (max), Block 1 -7 stories; Block 2- 9 stories; Blocks 3 and 4 – 12 stories.**
3. Change proposed Section 8.4.19 Arts and Innovation Subarea
Change Section k.i.a) to the following wording:- **The Planning Board shall require that the parking maximum be based on a well-documented transportation analysis that is presented to the Planning Board review prior to permitting.** The Planning Board shall regulate the maximum number of off-street parking spaces in any individual building using a parking demand model established by the Director of Mobility to determine the appropriate number of parking spaces as a condition of each Site Plan Approval.

Change Section k. i. b) Parking and Mobility to the following wording:- The Planning Board **shall** attach conditions and limitations that it deems necessary (**including delaying Site Plan Approval until impacts are mitigated**) to address any individual or cumulative on-site or off-site impacts of from development subject to an approved Master Plan as a condition of each Site Plan Approval.

Change Section k. ii. Parking and Mobility to the following wording:- Mobility management plans must **institute** demand management programs and services to control the percentage of trips made to the development site by motor vehicles at forty percent (40%) or less initially and at twenty-five percent (25%) or less upon full occupancy.

Change Section k. iii. Parking and Mobility to the following wording:- Mobility management plans must propose and **implement** specific adjustments to existing programs and services or specific additional programs and services if monitoring and reporting identifies a shortfall in achieving the plans stated transportation objectives.

(OVER)

4. Change proposed Section 8.4.19 Arts and Innovation Subarea

Change Section h. Building Standards to the following wording:- Massing and Height, Upper Story Step-Back,

Tyler Street, 2nd Story or 50 feet (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet

Properzi Way, 2nd Story or 50 feet (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet

Park Street, 2nd Story or 50 foot (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet.

Alley between Properzi Way and Park Street, 2nd Story or 50 foot (min), General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet AND 5th Story, General Building 10 feet, Commercial Building 10 feet.

5. Change Section 8.4.19 (a) Arts and Innovation Subarea, Superceding Building Standards

Change Section: Uses and Features

Change Section j. Development Standards

Add a new **ii. Where mechanical equipment on roofs do not require screening for noise abatement, the baffling used to abate noise shall not be required to screen said mechanical equipment.**

Madalyn Letellier

From: Will Hetzler [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:23 PM
To: Katjana Ballantyne; Planning1; All City Council; Public Comments; [REDACTED]
Subject: Somernova Expansion Support Letter
Attachments: Bouldering Project Support Letter_3.19.25.pdf

To whom it may concern,

I am attaching to this email a letter from Boston Bouldering Project in support of the proposed campus expansion at Somernova.

Regards,
Will

--
Will Hetzler
[REDACTED]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Tim Talun [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:57 PM
To: All City Council; Mayor; Planning1; Planning1; Thomas Galligani; Sarah Lewis; Daniel Bartman; Planning Board; Public Comments
Subject: Comment on Proposed Zoning Section 8.4.19
Attachments: 24_0710 Memorandum on Somernova Zoning Amendment.pdf; Memorandum on Rafi Properties Dec. 6, 2023 "Somernova" Zoning Text Amendment - Feb. 12, 2024.pdf

Dear Members of the Somerville City Council and Planning Board,

In July 2024, we submitted the attached letter outlining a number of significant concerns with the proposed zoning amendment affecting the properties known as Somernova. This followed a similar letter we submitted in December 2023 written together with members of the Union Square Neighborhood Council that outlined similar concerns about the first iteration of this zoning.

The currently proposed 8.4.19 Arts & Innovation (AI) Subarea zoning not only fails to address most of these concerns, in some ways it has gotten worse. Open and civic space has been reduced - the 10% civic space (which includes areas that will be open to vehicles) is inadequate, inconsistent with Somervision goals and far below comparable master planned developments in the region. Buildings have a strikingly inappropriate scale, negatively impacting neighbors and the environment in surrounding neighborhoods. As a result of this most recent update, morning shadows will even cover Conway Park. There appears to be a lack of ANY understanding of how traffic will work/not work. This site is not proximate to public transit, one of many reasons it was not designated as a 'transform' district. The community center component has been steadily eroded, and while we have not reviewed arts related requirements in detail, there seems to still be an inadequate strategy for creating the type of unique spaces that FAB districts were intended to protect. This is a breach of the public effort that long ago established the planning principles for this area, as described in Somervision and the original FAB zoning.

We believe it is possible to refine the current zoning and develop a vision for the future of Somernova that accommodates the goals of the current property owner and the goals the Somerville community has spent years establishing, but that is not what is proposed here. What is proposed with this zoning would be a radical transformation that abandons many of the standards that apply elsewhere in Somerville, is inconsistent with basic principles of good urban design, and would set a terrible precedent for surrounding properties and other future master plan districts.

The message to residents is clear: their years of planning efforts are being easily jettisoned. Recently a community member asked if we knew someone they could hire to visually depict what could be built under this zoning. It is shocking that a proposal of this magnitude is even being considered without a basic understanding of what it would result in. This is unfair to the community, and is inconsistent with the value Somerville claims to place on inclusive civic engagement. Neighbors should not have to hire their own consultant to understand how proposed zoning would affect them. It is not clear how this zoning could even be fully evaluated without a professional design review.

It is worth remembering that **zoning applies to property, it does not apply to property owners.** Once passed, the zoning will remain even if the property is sold, and could result in different outcomes than have been conveyed in the many private conversations between the current property owner's consultants and your constituents. This is all the more reason to ensure a clear understanding about what would be possible under the proposed zoning and ensure the concerns in the attached letter are addressed.

We ask that you please vote 'no' on the proposed Section 8.4.19.

Thank you,

Stuart Dash
Tim Talun
Anne Tate

Memorandum on Rafi Properties “Somernova” Zoning Text Amendment (v.2)

July 10, 2024

This past February the Union Square Neighborhood Council forwarded a set of concerns to the City Council and Planning Board gathered from a group of residents who discussed and reviewed the master plan and zoning changes proposed by Rafi properties in December 2023 affecting the properties known as Somernova. This letter expands on those concerns, and reflects the most recent zoning submission of May 6, 2024. Those who participated in writing this contributed a strong variety of physical planning backgrounds, with knowledge and expertise in different areas. All have been active in various City planning processes and share a concern for the well-being of Union Square and all of Somerville.

While Rafi Properties has continued to engage actively with various stakeholders, the specifics of the recently submitted revised zoning amendment and the physical plan it is based on still do not reflect the goals, concerns and values of the Somerville community and are also inconsistent with the long-term plan of the City of Somerville.

Below is a summary of some specific concerns:

1. Somerville’s process for reviewing this type of proposal is flawed – It has been frustrating to watch the process of developing this proposal play out over the past 18 months. There is no doubt that this has been frustrating to Rafi Properties and community members as well. In the absence of a structured process to review a master plan proposal that would inform zoning, Rafi Properties has been forced to undertake a long and expensive process of trying to determine and accommodate the interests of individual stakeholders. The Union Square Neighborhood Council has felt compelled to try and negotiate zoning changes in the absence of a public process to work this out. Zoning should happen as part of an inclusive and iterative public process based on a clear understanding of what it would enable.

Somerville’s process requires that specific form-based zoning first be passed and a Master Plan Special Permit then be sought based on the requirements of the already-adopted zoning. This is backwards; a master plan should first be created and zoning should then be adopted which enables and incorporates this shared vision. This would provide the certainty that both the developer and the community desire. It is beyond the scope of this letter to provide a complete recommendation for what such a process would look like, but this needs to be addressed.

2. Proposed changes in approvals process make it important to get the plan right - the proposed zoning would remove the requirement for the adoption of an Urban Design Framework. The premise of this change is that the proposed master plan, rather than an Urban Design Framework, would provide the basis for a Master Plan Special Permit proposal. We have found Urban Design Frameworks to be of little value in other districts and are not opposed to a change which would expedite the permitting process. If this change was adopted, it makes it all the more important to get the Master Plan right prior to the adoption of the zoning, and ensure the zoning being adopted is consistent with it,

3. The proposed master plan is inconsistent with Somerville’s “SomerVision” comprehensive plan - Somerville residents have spent countless hours articulating a vision for the City’s future in the Somervision and Neighborhood Plans. These plans call for different levels of density in different locations, with the greatest density immediately adjacent to transit stops and away from existing neighborhoods. Both Somervision 2030 and 2040 identified the location of this proposed overlay district as an area to ‘Conserve’. What is planned would be contrary to years of public planning discussions and decisions, creating the scale and density of a regional urban center in a peripheral neighborhood location. This is not a designated “Transformative District”, but what is proposed would locate one of the largest and densest developments in the City next to a small scale neighborhood which is farther away from a T stop than the majority of locations in Somerville, negatively transforming this part of the city. Why can’t a development be proposed that is more consistent with the planning goals that Somerville already established? Many of the comments below follow from this inconsistency.

4. The proposed zoning overlay is inconsistent with the intent of the underlying Fabrication district zoning - Fabrication districts were created *“to protect buildings that are key assets to the creative economy of Somerville...”* and *“to create, maintain and enhance areas appropriate for small- and medium-scale buildings (and) activities common to the arts & creative enterprises...”*. What is proposed would demolish buildings with unique spatial qualities that house arts & creative enterprises and replace them with more conventional, high rise commercial buildings. While a full build-out under the proposed zoning would result in a large amount of space for Arts & Creative uses, it would not necessarily result in the large, tall, unique and affordable spaces housing these uses

which FAB zoning was intended to preserve. For example, plan graphics show a new location for the Bouldering Project, but there is nothing in the proposed (or our current) zoning that would require the creation of a space anywhere close to the size and scale of their current space. The affordability of space for the arts is critical to its viability, and the proposed zoning also lacks sufficient detail and commitments regarding the affordability of arts and creative spaces.

- The proposed zoning appears to modify the Arts and Creative use categories in the current ordinance. A full analysis of this and A&C space requirements is beyond the scope of this letter, but for any overlay district which would modify FAB zoning, this is particularly important to get right.
- The proposed zoning would also allow 50% of the Arts and Creative space requirement to be met off-site (8.4.19.iii.c, page 3). It is also beyond the scope of this letter to fully assess and provide a recommendation on this, but this should be carefully considered to ensure the original purpose of the FAB district is met.
- We generally support and appreciate the proposed requirement that each building include public art in some form

5. This is not a district and not a campus, it is a neighborhood - the proposed plan is located on properties that have historically been used for light industrial and commercial uses, which are immediately adjacent to the predominantly residential neighborhoods of Duck Village and Spring Hill, and surround the small neighborhood of Tyler Court. The low scale nature of the buildings and the light industrial activity made this adjacency workable. The proposed master plan is insufficiently sensitive to this context. After years of construction noise, vibration and inconvenience, these neighborhoods will be left with unworkable traffic patterns and deteriorated environmental conditions including long hours without sunlight, wind impacts, noise, and ever-present views of buildings instead of the sky. It will leave a campus distinct from what is around it and buildings not suited to be within a block of 2 and 3 family homes.

6. The plan included with the submission does not show the full extent of what could be built under the proposed zoning - The proposed zoning overlay allows significantly more density than what is shown in the plan included with the submission. The disconnect between the plan and renderings included and the technical details of zoning as proposed will inevitably lead to confusion.

- The plan shows the existing storage building at the corner of Dane and Somerville Ave., but as currently proposed, the overlay would allow a 185 foot tall commercial building with a 45,000 SF footprint to be built here. This is double the size of the recently-built building at the corner of Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street next to the Union Square T Stop (the so-called "Darth Vader building"). Setbacks along Somerville Avenue would be required by 8.4.iv.d, but this has not been represented graphically in a way that would allow the public to understand what would actually be allowed. Allowing such unplanned adjacencies in scale and use is a significant problem with the plan.
- The maximum floor plate sizes allowed in the proposed Section 8.4.19 (b) in some cases appear larger than the footprints shown in the plan
- Proposed 'Development Standards' would allow additional stories beyond those listed in 8.4.19 (b).
- The plan and associated renderings show architectural characteristics including building setbacks which would not be required by the proposed zoning.

7. This location lacks the transportation infrastructure to support anything close to development at this scale - A new regional business cluster, whether R&D, traditional office, or climate-tech focused companies, will draw employees who will commute from around the greater Boston region. This location lacks proximity to a train station and is accessed via two-lane local streets that are already at capacity. Park and Dane Streets, adjacent to the properties included in the Plan, are the only two streets providing a north/south connection over the commuter rail tracks between Union Square and Porter Square. They experience significant backups today, with traffic piling onto Somerville Avenue and Beacon Street and into neighborhoods plagued with cut-through traffic. The impact of increased traffic cannot be ignored, and is more than an inconvenience, it is a health and climate issue because traffic congestion increases vehicle emissions and degrades ambient air quality. This is one reason why significant density is best located in places with immediate proximity to mass transit, as anticipated by Somervision. It is unclear whether the master plan has taken into consideration the truck traffic that will be required to service these buildings in ongoing operations.

The recently submitted plan diagrammatically shows a future train stop, which is an improvement over the originally submitted plan. A train stop would likely be needed in this location to support this level of density. However, it is not clear if the configuration of the station is feasible or whether additional building setbacks would be needed to accommodate the station. While creating a new commuter rail stop or extension of the green line is outside the scope of any private development project, the applicant should demonstrate the technical feasibility of a station and commit to working with the MBTA to realize it, as was done at Boston Landing. Prior to approving zoning that would allow this density, this should be worked out as part of a master plan review process.

8. The required number of parking spaces should be arrived at after careful assessment of the transportation needs of the project - The zoning proposes to allow for up to 750 parking spaces to be created, a significant reduction from the 1,250 originally proposed. However, at full build-out under the proposed zoning these buildings could have more than 5,000 employees in them. Without a comprehensive review of a proposed master plan, the feasibility of this mode split remains unclear and the impact on surrounding streets worrisome.

9. The proposed master plan lacks quality open space - Somervision has identified the creation of new open space as a key priority impacting everything from resident health, wellness and happiness to climate change preparedness and heat island mitigation. Somerville has struggled to create enough open space to meet Somervision goals and this zoning would be a step backwards. This is unfortunate as any “climate and equity” district should lead in the creation of quality public open space and connecting people to nature.

- Excluding thoroughfares, approximately 11% civic space is proposed, far below the 17.5% required in the Union Square overlay district, 20% required in the Boynton Yards overlay district and 25% required in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.
- Somerville’s current definition of open space excludes “surfaces intended for the maneuvering of motor vehicles”. The proposed zoning refers to the connecting space between Properzi and Park as a thoroughfare. Assuming this would be a shared street, this would allow motor vehicles, and thus not be a civic space. Calculations included with the submission appear to count this as open space and civic space.
 - If this was to be designed as a through-block plaza, approximately 16.5% civic space would be proposed, still below the minimum required in other overlay districts.
- The first standard for civic space in Somerville’s current zoning notes “Civic spaces must be sited and oriented to maximize their inherent exposure to the sun... (13.2.a.i)”. The majority of the proposed civic space is located to the north, east and west of tall buildings on the block between Properzi Way and Park Street and will receive little sunlight. The plaza on Block 2, which is the main outdoor open space, will be in almost complete shade from October through March. The through-block space labeled ‘courtyard’ (which may actually be a shared street) will be in almost complete shade from September through April.
- Two parks are shown facing onto Dane Street where there is significant grade change. Further review of the quality and usability of these spaces is needed as part of a comprehensive master plan review. It may be that Dane Street wants to have a more active edge, particularly if redevelopment of the storage building is anticipated.
- Proposed master plan standards would allow for indoor spaces such as a community center and “public room” to be counted towards civic space requirements. This may be appropriate, but it is beyond the scope of this letter to assess the specifics of this. This should be carefully considered as it would be a different approach than in other districts in Somerville and will no doubt set a precedent. Indoor public space, while welcome, is not a substitute for quality outdoor space.
- The original proposed name of this district was the “climate and equity sub-area”. A guiding principle of any place that claims to prioritize climate and equity should be re-connecting people to nature and some degree of habitat restoration. The majority of open space shown in the plan appears to be hardscape, not landscaped open space. While the details of open space design can be worked out in the future, an overall master plan should include a framework that allows for more landscaped open space.

10. The Community Center is a good idea - We appreciate the proposal to include a Community Center in the project, and respect the commitment Rafi Properties has made to engage the Somerville community, especially the city’s youth. The fact is that the Community Center, as the project itself, is not well served by public transit and will be challenged to provide its services to more than the local neighborhood. We also note that this has been reduced in size by more than half as compared to the original proposal, while the overall reduction in building sizes as compared to that proposal is marginal. We hope to see this continue to be included in a revised plan.

11. The massing results in bulky buildings with limited potential for adaptive reuse - The floor plate sizes that would be permitted under the proposed overlay are large and deep. Block 3 would be more than double what is currently permitted in other commercial districts in Somerville. Block 1 would nearly equal the size of the two large buildings recently built in Boynton Yards combined together. Block 3 is almost as large as the Partner's Healthcare building in Assembly Row. Rafi's justification for this project is creating space to house companies focused on sustainability. If this is the case, then the buildings that are built should embody principles of environmental sustainability by minimizing energy use, prioritizing the health and wellness of building occupants through providing access to light and air, and designing to allow for future reuse. Buildings should have a variety of sizes and scales, accommodating a diversity of uses. The Master Plan should foster building design that is as innovative as the work produced by the companies housed within them.

- Allowable building heights and number of stories in 8.4.19 (b) appear to anticipate 20' tall floor to floor heights. This is much taller than typical high-rise buildings for any use. We understand the unique space requirements for tough-tech companies may require some floors to be taller, but it is unlikely this will be required on all floors. In addition to creating even bigger buildings, taller floors require more energy to heat and cool the larger volume of space, an important consideration for a district that purports to be climate-focused.

12. The sidewalks are too narrow - Somerville's current zoning requires 18' sidewalks next to high rise buildings. The proposed zoning overlay would decrease this to 12' in this district, which is not acceptable.

13. Housing should be permitted only in limited circumstances - One of the stated purposes of Fabrication districts is "to prohibit residential principal uses." The Plan included with the zoning proposal shows one residential building and the zoning appears to allow residential buildings to be built in place of some of the commercial buildings shown. The original intent of FAB districts - having predominantly commercial uses, should be maintained. Residential uses should only be permitted if consistent with the intent of the District and Somerville's overall planning objectives. This could include artist live/work housing or housing in which the majority is designated as permanently affordable.

Given everything noted above, this group recommends that the proposed zoning changes be withdrawn or denied in their current form. Significant and wholesale changes to the Plan are needed before considering any zoning changes based on it. Again, we appreciate Rafi Properties willingness to engage with the community. We continue to recommend that the City and Rafi move forward with an inclusive process to create a master plan consistent with Somerville's established plans and principles of good design. This would in time contribute to the creation of revised zoning for Somernova. We believe that it is possible to preserve the original intent of the Fabrication districts while also supporting Rafi's goals and the aspirations of Somerville.

Respectfully,

Stuart Dash
Tim Talun
Anne Tate

Memorandum on Rafi Properties Dec. 6, 2023 “Somernova” Zoning Text Amendment - Feb. 12, 2024

In recent weeks the Union Square Neighborhood Council gathered a group of residents to review the master plan and zoning changes proposed by Rafi properties affecting the properties known as Somernova. Those who participated come from a variety of backgrounds and have knowledge and expertise in different areas. All have been active in various City planning processes and share a concern for the well-being of Union Square and all of Somerville.

Leading up to their December 6 proposal for a zoning change, Rafi Properties engaged extensively with the Somerville community. While we appreciate their desire to listen, the submitted physical plan and the specifics of the zoning amendment do not reflect the goals, concerns and values of residents and stakeholders who have engaged in this process, and are, in many cases, inconsistent with the long-term plan of the City of Somerville. Below is a summary of some specific concerns:

1. The proposed master plan is inconsistent with Somerville's “SomerVision” comprehensive plan - Somervision identified the location of this proposed overlay district as an area to 'Conserve'. What is planned would be contrary to years of public planning discussions and decisions, creating the scale and density of a regional urban center in a peripheral neighborhood location. This is not a designated “Transformative District”. Many of the comments below follow from this inconsistency.

2. The proposed zoning overlay is inconsistent with the intent of the underlying Fabrication district zoning - Fabrication districts were created *“to protect buildings that are key assets to the creative economy of Somerville...”* and *“to create, maintain and enhance areas appropriate for small- and medium-scale buildings (and) activities common to the arts & creative enterprises...”*. What is proposed would demolish buildings that already house some creative uses and replace them with more conventional, large-scale multi-story commercial buildings. These proposed buildings appear to reduce the lower overall amount of the type of unique spaces housing the arts and creative uses.. For example, plan graphics show a new location for the Boulderling Project, but there is nothing in the zoning that would require the creation of a space anywhere close to the size and scale of their current space.. The affordability of space for the arts is critical to its viability, and the proposed zoning also lacks sufficient detail and commitments regarding the affordability of arts and creative spaces.

3. This is not a district and not a campus, it is a neighborhood - while the proposed plan is located on properties that have historically been used for industrial and commercial uses, they are immediately adjacent to the predominantly residential neighborhoods of Duck Village and Spring Hill, and surround the small neighborhood of

Tyler Court. The proposed master plan is insufficiently sensitive to this context. After years of construction noise, vibration and inconvenience, these neighborhoods of mostly two family houses will be left with unworkable traffic patterns, long hours of shadow, wind impacts, noise, and ever-present views of buildings instead of the sky. .

4. The master plan does not show the full extent of what could be built under the proposed overlay - The proposed zoning overlay includes properties not shown on the master plan, and allows significantly more density than what is shown in the master plan. As currently proposed, for example, the overlay would allow a 25-story 300 foot tall residential tower to be built at the corner of Somerville Avenue and Dane Street, similar to the one recently completed next to the Union Square T station. Allowing such unplanned adjacencies in scale and use is a significant problem with the plan. The disconnect between the master plan as drafted and the zoning as proposed will inevitably lead to confusion. The city is being asked to approve a zoning change and a master plan as a single package. We recommend that these be considered separately.

5. This location lacks the transportation infrastructure to support anything close to development at this scale - A new regional cluster of climate-tech focused companies will draw employees who will commute from around the greater Boston region. This location lacks proximity to a train station and is accessed via two-lane local streets that are already at capacity. Park and Dane Streets, adjacent to the properties included in the Plan, are the only two streets providing a north/south connection over the commuter rail tracks between Union Square and Porter Square. They experience significant backups today, with traffic piling onto Somerville Avenue and Beacon Street and into neighborhoods plagued with cut-through traffic. The impact of increased traffic cannot be ignored, and is more than an inconvenience, it is a health and climate issue because traffic congestion increases vehicle emissions and degrades ambient air quality. This is one reason why significant density is best located in places with access to mass transit, as anticipated by Somervision. It is unclear whether the master plan has taken into consideration the significant truck traffic that will be required to service these buildings in ongoing operations.

6. 1,250 parking spaces is too much parking for this location - The zoning proposes to allow for up to 1,250 parking spaces to be created, which would incentivize travel by car and exacerbate the issues noted above. It is worth noting that the proposed parking ratio of approximately .75 spaces per 1,000 SF is not unreasonable for a location adjacent to the highways - as we have in Brickbottom. Rather, it is the overall proposed density and resulting number of parking spaces at this location that is problematic.

7. The proposed master plan lacks open space - Somervision has identified the creation of new open space as a key priority impacting everything from resident health,

wellness and happiness to climate change preparedness and heat island mitigation, but the City has struggled to create enough open space to meet Somervision goals. This Plan would be a step backwards, proposing the lowest proportion of open space of any major development area in the City. Approximately 8% civic space is proposed, far below the 17.5% required in the Union Square overlay district, 20% required in the Boynton Yards overlay district and 25% required in the Assembly Square Mixed-Use District.

8. The Community Center is a good idea, poorly executed - We appreciate the proposal to include a Community Center in the project, and respect the commitment Rafi Properties has made to engaging the Somerville community, especially the city's youth. However, the proposed location of the Center along Dane Street with a small open space across the street is impractical and poorly considered, even given the suggestion of pedestrianizing Dane Street. As noted above, Dane Street is already a busy vehicular street and will only become more so with this redevelopment. It cannot be casually removed from the transit portions of the plan. The fact is that the Community Center, as the project itself, is not well served by public transit and will be challenged to provide its services without creating additional risk and cost. If it is to be included at this location, the Center should be located with primary frontage on one of the internal low traffic streets immediately adjacent to an outdoor open space.

9. The massing results in bulky buildings with limited potential for adaptive reuse - The floor plate sizes that would be permitted under the proposed overlay are large and deep, representing a more than 50% increase over what is currently permitted in other commercial districts in Somerville. What is proposed on Block 3 would be like combining together the two large buildings recently built in Boynton Yards. It would be almost as large as the Partner's Healthcare building in Assembly Row. Large scale buildings such as this are typically created to accommodate the requirements of lab users, yet Rafi's justification for this project is creating space to house companies focused on sustainability. If this is the case, then the buildings that are built should embody principles of environmental sustainability by minimizing energy use, prioritizing the health and wellness of building occupants through providing access to light and air, and designing to allow for future reuse. Buildings should have a variety of sizes and scales, accommodating a diversity of uses. The Master Plan should foster building design that is as innovative as the work produced by the companies housed within them.

10. The sidewalks are too narrow - Somerville's current zoning requires 18' sidewalks next to high rise buildings. The proposed zoning overlay would decrease this to 12' in this district, which is not acceptable.

11. Housing should be permitted only in limited circumstances - One of the stated purposes of Fabrication districts is “to prohibit residential principal uses.” The zoning as proposed would permit residential uses and the proposed Master Plan Standards appear to allow up to approximately 70% of total built area of the development to be residential. This is yet another inconsistency between the proposed zoning and the proposed master plan, which shows no residential. The original intent of FAB districts - having predominantly commercial uses, should be maintained. Residential uses should only be permitted if consistent with the intent of the District and Somerville’s overall planning objectives. This could include artist live/work housing or housing in which the majority is designated as permanently affordable.

12. Proposed changes in approvals process make it important to get the plan right - the proposed zoning would remove the requirement for the adoption of an Urban Design Framework. The premise of this change is that the proposed master plan, rather than an Urban Design Framework, would provide the basis for a Master Plan Special Permit proposal. We have found Urban Design Frameworks to be of little value in other districts and are not opposed to a change which would expedite the permitting process. If this change was adopted, it makes it all the more important to get the Master Plan right and ensure the zoning being adopted is consistent with it, prior to the adoption of the zoning.

Given everything noted above, this advisory group recommends that the proposed zoning changes be withdrawn or denied. Significant and wholesale changes to the Plan are needed before considering any zoning changes based on it. Again, we appreciate Rafi Properties willingness to engage with the community. We hope to follow up on this letter in the weeks to come with suggestions about how to move forward with an inclusive process. This would, in time, contribute to the creation of a revised plan for Somernova We believe that it is possible to preserve the original intent of the Fabrication districts while also supporting Rafi’s goals and the aspirations of Somerville.

For the advisory group, Feb 12, 2024

Tori Antonino
Ann Camara
Stuart Dash
Chris Dwan
Michele Hansen
Matthias Rudolf
Tim Talun
Ann Tate

Madalyn Letellier

From: MICHAEL RASKIN <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 5:00 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Sumernova

From: Michael Raskin, [REDACTED], around the corner and about 350 feet from the proposed development. 40 year Somerville resident.

I took a propaganda course years ago, given by a public relations executive. Recently, I've watched Rafi's campaign follow the procedures I had learned then. Public relations campaigns should not be treated as genuine representations of interests.

We hear a lot of PR words, like 'priorities,' and 'commitments,' rather than specifics. That's worrisome.

The UNC and residents have continually raised specific questions without getting clear answers, while, if anything, in opaque processes, the plans get worse.

Rafi is getting a lot for a ten year commitment to a (10,000 sq. ft.?) youth center, a few trees, and maybe a small pollinator garden.

Some comments in no particular order:

Instead of the completely unlikely and expensive idea of extending the Green Line, what about adding a stop to the commuter line that already goes to just where it will be needed. A few minutes longer commute for passengers continuing on, but it would offer not only traffic alleviation but access to all the communities on North Station terminating commuter lines. Or perhaps a shuttle.

If Rafi is so committed to the arts in Somerville, why is Artisan's Asylum gone? If it is so committed to Somerville why are talks with the USNC so difficult? How did it manage to do, as it once claimed, hundreds or more interviews, without, apparently, managing to talk to anyone in the neighborhood, or even Market Basket?

At the afternoon community meetings on zoning we've been told that car traffic will be reduced by making the commute more painful. We've seen how well this works on our ever more crowded highways. I suspect that since there is nothing that can be done to ameliorate traffic increases the idea is simply pretend that it doesn't matter.

As far as I can tell, the city has supported Rafi's campaign, not demanding that it give clear answers to questions that concern the neighborhood. No traffic studies; no shadow studies; a backing off of promises to retain Aeronaut and Boulderling Project, to say nothing of encouraging similar enhancements (no street facing shops and display windows); no commitment for affordable art spaces (which usually requires reuse of old manufacturing spaces) so who will end up renting them (artisan bakers, etc?); public meeting where planning talks about zoning changes that don't seem to be applied to Rafi; and no explanation of why the reasons for recent zoning laws are suddenly irrelevant. So people have to ask, what is does the city want that it doesn't want to talk about.

It may be tax revenue, but if so, let's discuss it up front. It may be a vision of what the city should be in ten or twenty years, but if so that should be discussed up front too. Whatever it may be, it is certainty not SomerVision—all that work bulldozed by big money.

The city has shown little commitment to protecting the neighborhood's interests. As it stands, it just looks like big money came in and the city bowed down.

This is not opposition to development, this is about scale, and of retention of some affordable space in older buildings (See Jane Jacobs' *The Economy of Cities*).

If the Mayor and City Council are not willing say no, they are giving up their negotiating power. If the CBA is inadequate or has no teeth, however, voters can say no to current office holders.

Apologies if this comes across as unduly angry, but unlike some years ago where the city was genuinely helpful in supporting the community in it's negotiations with RCG's about Park Street Lofts, producing major changes in the plans and commercial space added to increase the tax base, this time the city just seems to be going through public involvement motions while pursuing an agenda of its own.

From: QSM <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 9:10 AM
To: Public Comments
Subject: Per SomerNova / Zoning

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

- (#25-0131) **I request that the City Council not vote on a zoning overlay until the USNC's CBA and PLA are signed and we are able to see whether the proposed overlay district along with the CBA is a win or a loss for creatives and workers.** If this zoning overlay and this project go through, we are losing a big portion of the Fabrication District. This loss is monumentally painful. It is up to all of us to ensure that this sacrifice is not asking for too much.
- **I ask that the City Council never vote for zoning changes of this kind without seeing a story of losses in the area.** You need verified and complete information 1.) To make wise choices. 2.) To respect those who made Somerville an amazing place to be. 3.) To not encourage developers to create blight ahead of zoning change requests so it looks like their plan is a good deal. I would appreciate it if the City Council could make inquiries so that this important data is included in this zoning overlay proposal and in any future zoning change proposals.
 - Incomplete documentation includes
 - **Losses on the Somernova campus: An Incomplete List**
 - Aircraft Aerial Arts, 3760 square feet, Union Square
 - Artisans Asylum, 40,000 square feet, Union Square
 - Harvard Book Store Warehouse, 6000 square feet, Union Square
 - Hemlock Ink Custom Screenprinting, 3500 square feet, Union Square
 - **Michael Spenser Studio**, square footage unknown
 - Any other losses unknown by the one person (me) documenting this list.
 - **Other Losses in Union Square: An Incomplete List**
 - Bull McCabe's Pub and Tir Na Nog, 780 square feet, Union Square
 - DreamStar Studio, 864 square feet, Union Square
 - Fringe Union, 7500 square feet, Union Square
 - JamSpot, 5000 square feet, Union Square

- Pink Noise Studios - Somerville, 1500 square feet, Union Square
 - Somerville Media Center - SMC (90 Union Square), 2500 square feet, Union Square
 - **Sky Bar**, 3900 square feet, Union Square
 - Starlab Studios (32 Prospect St), square footage unknown
 - Starlab Studios (453 Somerville Ave), 1300 square feet, Union Square
 - Third Life Studio, 900 square feet, Union Square
 - **Club Choices/Radio/Thunder Road**, Union Square, square footage unknown
 - **Precinct**, square footage unknown
 - **Cantina la Mexicana**, square footage not included because they hosted music occasionally
 - Any other losses unknown by the one person (me) documenting this list.
- (#25-0129) **I remind you that ACE will not save affordable creative space.** While there are positive changes to ACE, even with these ACE revisions, affordable studio space is not the priority. I am concerned that developers will always choose culinary arts incubators and design services over other arts uses since they can more often afford market rate rents. **With that in mind, I am asking the City Council and the Planning Board to hold the FAB line!** We need affordable spaces for creative use in all artistic disciplines. Please protect the Fabrication District! Ways to commit to it:
 - City staff and many community members went through two months of hard work to talk about one development. The Fabrication District, which turned 5 years old in December, deserves that kind of attention, especially since a thoughtful discussion was forgotten during the pandemic and especially now at a time where we are considering damaging it. Please make inquiries for this vital zoning district to be given its due.
 - Make inquiries about whether the Fabrication District can expand elsewhere in the city to make up for the space lost. Can't do that? Then all the more reason to support our current FAB with time and funding for affordable arts spaces!
 - (#25-0128) **I ask for a change to the proposed R&D District.** The height of R&D should be comparable to the FAB District height. I agree with USNC: "This change is meant to discourage copycat requests in other Fabrication [Districts] where artist clusters exist."

I realize this is a lot to ask from you right now, but after much pain and more surely to come for the creative economy, it at least deserves an honest story. In the end, the Somernova campus might not actually be a win, or much of a win, for the community. It is up to you to make sure that the narrative that is presented depicts a frank account so that we all can at least have the power to ask, "Where do we go from here?"

At a time where there is national distrust of politics and a call for people to hold their local communities tight, we need to be able to trust the City of Somerville. Please do not let exaggerations of the "success" of this zoning change/development plan cause a lack of confidence in our electeds, our hard-working staff, or even in deep pocket developers. Let us speak with accuracy, good numbers, and a valid accounting of history. And who knows! Maybe this is a good story....it's just hard to tell without valuable and transparent information.

Cities do not work without art. Art is here! Art can only stay here with your strategic help! Please support the Somerville creative economy by being creative masterminds, by asking for something different from our current government planning processes, and by working hard to protect affordable creative space!

As a resident,

- I am wicked wary of the massive amount of parking allowed. Not cool for "climate" tech. Tighten the requirements for mobility and traffic management within the zoning.
- I am uncertain about height since a real-life example hasn't been provided. "What does that feel like?" can not be imagined with a picture. Please provide real examples that we can stand by.

Thank you for your time and advocacy,

Gregory W. Hill



Somerville 02143

Madalyn Letellier

From: Salome Shunamon [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 9:11 PM
To: Public Comments; Planning1
Subject: Public Comment: #25-0131, #25-0129, #25-0128

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Dear Somerville City Councilors and Planning Board,

As a renter in Somerville for three years, I appreciate the dedication of city staff and community members in shaping our policies. However, I urge you to delay voting on the zoning overlay (#25-0131) until the USNC's CBA and PLA are finalized. We must fully understand whether this proposal benefits or harms creatives and workers before proceeding. The loss of a large portion of the Fabrication District is a significant blow, and we must ensure this sacrifice is justified.

Zoning changes of this scale should never be approved without a full accounting of what is being lost. The City Council must have complete and verifiable data to make informed decisions, honor those who have built Somerville's creative community, and prevent developers from allowing spaces to deteriorate to justify redevelopment. I urge the City to document these losses thoroughly before making decisions that will shape the city's future.

ACE (#25-0129), even with revisions, does not guarantee affordable creative spaces, as developers will likely prioritize profitable ventures over artistic uses. I ask the City to protect the Fabrication District by ensuring affordable creative spaces remain available and by considering ways to expand or strengthen this zoning designation. If expansion isn't possible, then more resources should be directed toward preserving what remains.

Regarding the R&D District (#25-0128), its height limits should align with the Fabrication District to prevent setting a precedent that could threaten other artist hubs.

Somernova's redevelopment may or may not be a win for the community, but without transparent data, we cannot know. The City must present a full and honest picture so that we can thoughtfully determine our next steps. Overstating benefits without addressing losses risks eroding trust in city leadership, staff, and developers. A city without artists is a city without identity. Please take decisive action to protect affordable creative spaces.

Additionally, I am concerned about excessive parking allowances, which contradict claims of climate-conscious development. Mobility and traffic management requirements should be stricter. Height increases should also be demonstrated with real-world examples rather than renderings, as they fail to capture the true impact of such changes.

Finally, the City collected email addresses during the Central/Somerville Ave meetings but failed to notify attendees of this public hearing. Given the extensive time and effort invested by all involved, this lack of communication is unacceptable. The City Council should investigate how to improve outreach so that

the responsibility of informing the public does not fall entirely on community advocates. If proper follow-up cannot be ensured, the City should not collect private information at all.

Thank you for your time and advocacy.

Salome Shunamon

[REDACTED]

Somerville MA 02145

Madalyn Letellier

From: Daniel Goodwin [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 9:46 AM
To: Madalyn Letellier
Subject: RE: On the Somernova construction: 10-year neighborhood resident

Thanks Madalyn!
Name:: Dan Goodwin
Ward: 02

On Tue, Apr 01, 2025 at 8:41 AM, Madalyn Letellier <mletellier@somervillema.gov> wrote:

Thank you for your comments. Unattributed comments cannot be included on the City Council's agenda. If you would like to resubmit to include your name and Ward or address (address will be redacted for public view on the agenda), they will be conveyed to the City Council on its next agenda. Alternatively, you can contact your Ward and At Large Councilors directly. Their contact information can be found at the City Council's webpage here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/city-council>.

Madalyn Letellier

Legislative Services Manager

City of Somerville

93 Highland Avenue

Somerville, MA 02143

Office: 617-625-6600 x4114

Fax: 617-625-4239

<http://www.somervillema.gov/>

From: Daniel Goodwin <dgoodwin208@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 4:56 PM
To: Public Comments <publiccomments@somervillema.gov>; Planning Board <planningboard@somervillema.gov>
Cc: somernovaneighbors@googlegroups.com
Subject: On the Somernova construction: 10-year neighborhood resident

Dear City of Somerville and Planning Board,

First - thanks a lot for serving our city. I love this place. Frankly, I couldn't have expected staying here for 10 years when I first arrived to do my PhD at MIT.

I know this proposed development very well. How well you may ask? Well, I walk my dog around this building ~2x a day, so after 10 years that at least 5000 times I've walked this block.

Here's the other thing: I know business. I've started companies, I've invested in companies. So I totally get the idea of a business thesis. You need to have one to make a sustainable venture. But I don't like the thesis of Somernova one bit.

It grosses me out that a developer would buy a building with the value-creation thesis of bullying around a small town council to bend their zoning laws. I mean, it's a great way to buy low and sell high, but are we really going to let him play this game?

It's bad enough that the Zero Dane Street disaster project ever came to fruition. I went to those meetings too and I remember thinking "gee that developer really listened to us and maybe this building won't be a disaster." Then it was the silliest mess of construction and poor design that I've ever seen. Now across the train tracks we're going to fall for the same thing but on a grander scale.

I'm super pro progress and investment into somerville and many of these ideas for renovating the Union Square are could one day be a good idea. But let's do that on the timeline of our residents not some developer.

Our default path is Developer will ram this through with platitudes and "big stack" plays (a poker metaphor), but once the city approves it we're going to be stuck on the developer's whims as the project design creeps into lameness.

The Zoning Commission has reasonable rules that have done pretty well so far. Let's bend our rules on our own timeline.

Here's the last thing to consider: Work patterns are changing rapidly. It's very possible that this high-rise building is going to be very very empty.

Cheers,

Dan

City of Somerville Public Records Notice

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Madalyn Letellier

From: Jessica Eshleman [REDACTED] >
Sent: Monday, March 31, 2025 3:10 PM
To: Planning Board; Public Comments
Cc: Zachary Baum; V (Voravut) Ratanakommon; Mike Katz; Laidy Saenz; Jim McGinnis; [REDACTED] Jacob Taylor; Adriana Fernandes; Mary Cassesso; Debbie Musnikow; Jen Palacio; Union Square Main Streets
Subject: Union Square Main Streets comment on amendments to the Zoning Ordinance relevant to Central Somerville Avenue
Attachments: USMS Mail - Union Square Main Streets comment on Somernova's ZTA 08.30.2024.pdf



Dear members of the Somerville Planning Board and Land Use Committee,

Union Square Main Streets is writing to you with conditional support of the 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; amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings; amendment to Articles 6, 9, and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Research & Development zoning district; and 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. We are enthused by the additional process undertaken and the precise though complicated layering of changes being proposed.

Since 2005, Union Square Main Streets, Inc. (USMS) has worked to strengthen the dynamic neighborhood of businesses and people in Union Square, Somerville. We promote and celebrate the character of Union Square, advocate for and assist ~200 local businesses, work to create welcoming public spaces, and foster connection and collaboration among diverse stakeholders and partners. Through this lens we offer the following considerations:

Elements in need of improvement

Specific to the Research & Development zoning district: As a stated goal of this suite of zoning changes is to memorialize the commercial activity that already exists on the site, we propose that "Fitness Services" be a "Permitted Use" as opposed to a "Special Permit" use, this would ensure that The Boulderling Project is acknowledged as being an essential part of this building.

Regarding the entirety of the process

We want to restate the crux of our conditional support included in [our previous letter delivered to these boards on August 30, 2024](#)* (linked here and attached to this email):

The strength of our neighborhood of businesses relies heavily on strong relationships between property owners and tenants. It is imperative that current tenants be given written documentation of

any verbal commitments. Our expectation is that all existing tenants in good standing would be offered the following:

- a) A guarantee for quiet enjoyment of their current space until new, suitable space is available
- b) If quiet enjoyment is not possible during construction due to noise, access, or safety issues, appropriate tenant allowances must be made available to existing businesses
- c) An offer of a lease in new space with appropriate terms including generous tenant improvement allowances for relocating businesses and lease rates scaled and set appropriately to existing uses. Somernova's current success has been built on the reputations of the small businesses that are tenants there.

Simply put: USMS would not consider supporting future permissions for this project if our small business community is not treated as the asset that they are or if future negotiations are not conducted in good faith.

Lastly, the continued and lasting success of USMS' program area will rely on the Somernova buildings being a full part of Union Square and not an insular campus. To this end, amenities such as childcare facilities and any housing should be made available and accessible to everyone in the community.

These zoning changes could be the first step toward exciting growth for Somerville. We would be excited to welcome to Union Square all the individuals who would start and grow their lives, their studios, their careers, their businesses, and our community in this area of Somerville. As this process continues, we see opportunities for improvement but more so for this area to become a model of what responsible growth looks like: supporting the neighborhood of businesses and residents that make Union Square such an incredible place to be.

Sincerely,



Zachary Baum, USMS Board President

* Please note, since the previous comment was written, Blake Evitt, owner of Parkour Generations Boston and longtime collaborator with the Dojo, has joined our Board of Directors.

Submitting on behalf of the USMS Board of Directors,

*Jessica

Jessica L. Eshleman
Executive Director

PS - Congrats to Union Square's business leaders for making our neighborhood one of the very coolest in the WORLD!

You, Me, Them, Us

We are in this together, Union Square.

Keep it local, keep it kind, keep Union vibin', keep Union thrivin'

[#LoveUnionSquare](#)

Union Square Main Streets

PO Box One

Somerville, MA 02143

www.unionsquaremain.org

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Jessica Eshleman <jessica@unionsquaremain.org>

Union Square Main Streets comment on Somernova's ZTA

3 messages

Jessica Eshleman [REDACTED] >

Fri, Aug 30, 2024 at
12:25 PM

To: Planning Board [REDACTED]

Cc: Philip Parsons [REDACTED]

, Zachary Baum

, "V (Voravut) Ratanakommon" [REDACTED]

Mike Katz [REDACTED]

, Laidy Saenz [REDACTED]

, Jim McGinnis

<[REDACTED]>, Jacob Taylor [REDACTED]

Adriana Fernandes

, Mary Cassesso <[REDACTED]>

Debbie Musnikow [REDACTED]

, Jen Palacio

, Union Square Main Streets [REDACTED]



Dear members of the Somerville Planning Board and Land Use Committee,

Union Square Main Streets is writing to you with conditional support of Somernova's zoning text and zoning map amendments. We are enthused by this plan's potential for our growing neighborhood but are concerned by the lack of concrete assurances for the future provided to the small businesses that are currently tenants at Somernova.

Since 2005, Union Square Main Streets, Inc. (USMS) has worked to strengthen the dynamic neighborhood of businesses and people in Union Square, Somerville. We promote and celebrate the character of Union Square, advocate for and assist ~200 local businesses, work to create welcoming public spaces, and foster connection and collaboration among diverse stakeholders and partners. Through this lens we offer the following considerations:

Successes of the plan

Several elements of this plan will have a positive impact on the continued success of Union Square's small business community. Most notably, their amendments allow for a great variety of commercial uses that will become home to many new Union Square

businesses. Their plan caters to businesses seeking a variety of floor plates, relationships to the street, and relationships to their neighbors.

The public courtyards, and Public Room, and the improved streetscapes along Park and Tyler streets can all play host to events and activations that will enliven the neighborhood and support small businesses.

Additionally, this plan shows a real investment in making this area – which is currently outside any quarter and half mile transit oriented walkshed – multi-modal and creates a real opportunity and incentive for the creation of either a commuter rail or green line extension stop. We are especially supportive of the fully funded north-south shuttle service that will be free for all riders.

Focuses to ensure success

To ensure the realization of these potential positive outcomes, it is important that firm commitments to construction mitigation are made to ensure existing, open businesses are able to operate as closely to “normal” as possible.

The proposed phasing of this project should allow for responsive decision making. We expect strong community engagement will continue to ensure the spirit of the current community benefits commitments are honored while allowing for the flexibility to respond to future conditions at the time of construction.

We also believe it is important that ground floor space is not prioritized for upper storey tenant purposes such as storage, loading, or mechanical uses. Ground floor retail uses benefit greatly from proper provisions for and potential co-location of:

- Publically accessible bathrooms
- Trash storage
- Loading zones
- Delivery driver accommodation
- Rideshare
- Propane storage

Additionally, ground floor retail uses should be given broad permissions to engage with outdoor areas, especially those that are privately owned.

Elements in need of improvement

These zoning amendments can be improved in several ways. First: more attention needs to be paid to the Somerville Ave streetscape to ensure a stronger and more intentional connection to the center of Union Square. The stretch between Park St. and Carlton St. are especially unfriendly to pedestrians and would benefit from proactive intervention.

Though this plan does not engage heavily with Somerville Ave. frontage, relatively small investments along this corridor will have outsized impacts on connectivity. These could take the form of improvements to street planting and lighting, investments in shade structures, additional wayfinding, and investments in public art.

The strength of our neighborhood of businesses relies heavily on strong relationships between property owners and tenants. It is imperative that current tenants be given written documentation of any verbal commitments. Our expectation is that existing tenants in good standing would be a) guaranteed the quiet enjoyment of their current space until new, suitable space is available b) offered a lease in new space with appropriate terms including generous tenant improvement allowances for relocating businesses and lease rates scaled and set appropriately to existing uses. Somernova's current success has been built on the reputations of the small businesses that are tenants there. Simply put: USMS would not consider supporting future permissions for this project if our small business community is not treated as the asset that they are or if future negotiations are not conducted in good faith.

Lastly, the continued and lasting success of this project will rely on the Somernova buildings being a full part of Union Square and not a campus appended to its west side. Care and consideration should be made to ensure employees, residents, and patrons of Somernova are folded into the wider Union Square community. To this end, office amenities such as childcare facilities and eateries should be made available and accessible to everyone in the community.

These zoning changes could be the first step toward exciting growth for Somerville. We would be excited to welcome to Union Square all the individuals who would start and grow their lives, their studios, their careers, and their businesses at Somernova. As this process continues, we see opportunities for improvement and for Somernova to model what responsible growth looks like: supporting the neighborhood of businesses and residents that make Union Square such an incredible place to be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JB' or similar, written in a cursive, stylized font.

Zachary Baum
Union Square Main Street Board President



Jessica L. Eshleman
Executive Director

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Madalyn Letellier [REDACTED] >

Fri, Aug 30, 2024 at 12:28
PM

To: [REDACTED]

Your comments have been received. They will be conveyed to the City Council at its September 12 meeting.

Madalyn Letellier

Legislative Services Manager

[City of Somerville](#)

[93 Highland Avenue](#)

[Somerville, MA 02143](#)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

<http://www.somervillema.gov/>

From: Jessica Eshleman [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, August 30, 2024 12:25 PM
To: Planning Board [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>; Public Comments [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Cc: Philip Parsons [REDACTED] >; Zachary Baum [REDACTED] >; V (Voravut) Ratanakommon [REDACTED] >; Mike Katz [REDACTED] >; Laidy Saenz <info@quanta.llc>; Jim McGinnis [REDACTED] >; Jacob Taylor [REDACTED] >; Adriana Fernandes [REDACTED] >; Mary Cassesso [REDACTED] >; Debbie Musnikow [REDACTED] >; Jen Palacio [REDACTED] >; Union Square Main Streets [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Subject: Union Square Main Streets comment on Somernova's ZTA



This email is from an external source. Use caution responding to it, opening attachments or clicking links.

[Quoted text hidden]

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "ZB".

Zachary Baum

Union Square Main Street Board President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jessica L. Eshleman".

Jessica L. Eshleman
Executive Director

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Planning Board [REDACTED]

Fri, Aug 30, 2024 at 12:54 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Received. These will be included in the comments transmitted to the Planning Board ahead of their meeting next week.



Stephen Cary

Planner | Planning, Preservation, & Zoning

Office of Strategic Planning & Community
Development

[City of Somerville](#)

[93 Highland Avenue](#) | Somerville, MA 02143

Email: scary@somervillema.gov

Phone: (617) 625 6600 2558*

*Please be advised that Staff has limited access to work phones. The best way to reach me is via email.

From: Jessica Eshleman <jessica@unionsquaremain.org>

Sent: Friday, August 30, 2024 12:25 PM

To: Planning Board <planningboard@somervillema.gov>; Public Comments <publiccomments@somervillema.gov>

Cc: Philip Parsons <philipjparsons@gmail.com>; Zachary Baum <zach@bowmarketsomerville.com>; V (Voravut) Ratanakommon <spicyv@gmail.com>; Mike Katz <narishkup@gmail.com>; Laidy Saenz <info@quanta.llc>; Jim McGinnis <jim02143@gmail.com>; Jacob Taylor <jacobstaylor@yahoo.com>; Adriana Fernandes <afernandes@somervillema.gov>; Mary Cassesso <marycassesso02143@gmail.com>; Debbie Musnikow <debbie.musnikow@gmail.com>; Jen Palacio <jen@tinyturnspaperie.com>; Union Square Main Streets <usms@unionsquaremain.org>

Subject: Union Square Main Streets comment on Somernova's ZTA



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Dear members of the Somerville Planning Board and Land Use Committee,

[Quoted text hidden]

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "ZB" with a stylized flourish.

Zachary Baum

Union Square Main Street Board President



Jessica L. Eshleman
Executive Director

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[Quoted text hidden]

Madalyn Letellier

From: Guss, David [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, April 1, 2025 10:53 AM
To: Madalyn Letellier
Subject: RE: [External] RE: Somanova vote NO

Dear Madalyn, thank you for alerting me to the fact that my letter concerning Somanova's application for a special zoning permit was not properly signed. I thought that as the listed sender, it would be sufficient. I appreciate your help in resubmitting it. Please let me know if there is anything else I need to do.

David Guss
[REDACTED]

Somerville, MA 02143
Ward 2

Subject: Somanova vote NO

There's a reason great cities of the world limit the heights of buildings. Clustered together in large sections of the oldest and most attractive parts of a city, these areas are as popular with tourists as they are with the families who have dwelled there for generations. They offer a unique livability maintained by both the architecture of place and the social relations that enforce them. Four to five stories is the norm. Beyond that, relations change. Neighborhoods become backdrops for real estate investments. But the livable city – Paris, London, Washington, D.C. – seem to know just how high buildings can go before they start to crumble from both inside and out.

The proposal we are looking at today would radically increase the permissible height and density of the five buildings Rafi would like to construct. Packaged in the user friendly language of campuses and youth clubs, it's a sordid proposal, barely held together by vague promises of social good. But where's the substance? We are being asked to approve a proposal with no drawings or illustrations of what these massive, over-sized structures will look like. This is more than a little worrisome. Images of Rafi's other local project on Somerville Ave. offers us little comfort. Still unoccupied, Rafi made a bet on the continued bio-tech boom. But it was a bet they apparently lost, at least up to now. Will Rafi's Somanova bet also fail? With its massive and unwelcome plan, we ask that the councilors make sure that it does. The project -- hopelessly cynical and poorly defined -- is simply too big and the rewards of taking a sledge hammer to this community, far too small.

David Guss
Ward 2
[REDACTED]

Somerville, MA 02143