



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor

FROM: Michael F. Glavin, Executive Director

DATE: February 14, 2013

SUBJECT: Proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to require special permit approval to switch between general merchandise or department store uses and a supermarket and add definitions of these uses

The Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) respectfully requests that you forward the attached ordinance amending the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to the Board of Alderman (BOA) for their review and consideration. The ordinance would require discretionary approval when changing between general merchandise or department store uses and a supermarket of a certain size. The ordinance also adds definitions of supermarket and general merchandise establishment.

BACKGROUND

Currently supermarket, general merchandise stores and department stores are all listed within the same use in the Zoning Ordinance. This means that a building that is used by any of these types of stores may change to another one of these types of stores by-right, without notification or input from the neighborhood or vote by the Planning Board or Zoning Board. Since departments stores and general merchandise stores have different impacts than supermarkets at sizes of over greater than 5,000 square feet, these uses should be listed as separate uses in the Use Table. By separating supermarket from stores selling general merchandise, a special permit and public hearing will be required for stores of 5,000 to 10,000 square feet depending on the zoning district, to switch from a supermarket to a general merchandise store or conversely from a general merchandise store to a supermarket.

Two key differences between general retail stores and supermarkets are in the products that they sell and the traffic that is generated by them. Supermarkets provide access to fresh food, an essential need, and although general merchandise stores can sell groceries, they primarily sell different lines of merchandise. General merchandise stores often attract customers from a regional area and single-occupant vehicles are often the mode of travel. Supermarkets typically draw customers more locally and in an urban context customers arrive by foot, bicycle, public transportation, and single-occupant vehicles. The impacts that

each use has on the neighborhood should be evaluated through the special permit process so that the unique circumstances of each use can be considered and mitigated if needed.

PROPOSED ORDINANCE

In order to allow for supermarkets and general merchandise and department stores to required special permits to switch between these uses over certain sizes, the Use Table in Section 7.11.9.2 is proposed to change to add supermarket as a separate line item in the table and strike this use from where it is currently located. The size and districts where general merchandise, department stores or supermarkets are allowed by-right, by special permit, or not allowed, has not changed, simply the ability to switch between them will require a special permit in most cases.

Section 2.2 is also proposed to change to add definitions of supermarket and general merchandise establishment to ensure that retailers are properly categorized. Many grocery stores sell apparel and equally general merchandise stores sell groceries; therefore, establishing clear differentiation between the stores will enable the City to classify them appropriately and retailers to clearly understand the regulations.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Aldermen adopt the ordinance amending Sections 2.2 and 7.11.9.2 to separate supermarkets from the general retail and department store use and define these types of stores.