



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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MAYOR

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEMO

FROM: Emily Hutchings (PPZ/OSPCD); Josh Eckart-Lee (OSE)
TO: Land Use Committee
CC: Christine Blais (OSE); Kimberley Hutter (IGA); Sarah Lewis (PPZ)
DATE: May 29, 2024

RE: Net-Zero Density Bonus – Final Recommendations

Land Use Committee Members:

Following the public hearing on May 2, 2024, City Staff conducted a review of the number of known projects that would be impacted and an appropriate alternative to the elimination of the density bonus. Staff determined the following information:

- A total of six (6) known projects would be impacted by changes to the density bonus. Four (4) of those projects are proposed in the Urban Residence zoning district and do not require Site Plan Approval. Two (2) of the projects are completing pre-application steps of the Site Plan Approval process and have not yet submitted complete applications.
- If completed and using the density bonus, the development projects would constructed 148 housing units, with the following unit mix:

Studio	1-Bedroom	2-Bedroom	3-Bedroom
62	41	39	5

The development projects contain a range of unit mixes, with some projects proposing all studio/1-bedroom units, and others providing a multiple multi-bedroom units.

- The significant number of the development projects are already pursuing LEED Gold certifiability.

Recognizing the need for an alternative to the removal of the density bonus, and that Staff are in the middle of two research projects that will result in additional policy recommendations to support Somerville's sustainability goals, Staff recommend the following:



- Retain the density bonus, adding the requirement of LEED Platinum Certifiability in addition to the requirement for buildings to be Net-Zero Ready.
 - This will ensure that impacted projects that applied for Building Permits prior to July 1, 2023, will be held to the same Net-Zero Ready requirements as other projects.
 - Staff have confirmed that requiring LEED Platinum Certifiability is not likely to require project redesigns for impacted properties, particularly those that are close to acquiring Building Permits.
 - Adding the requirement for buildings to be LEED Platinum Certifiable creates additional, albeit limited, “bonus” environmental design benefits.
- Do not change the minimum density factor.
 - Staff have confirmed that the current density factor allows for majority (if not all) studio/1-BR unit mix, particularly in mixed-use buildings.
 - Additional analysis with the Housing Division is recommended prior to changes to density factors, particularly in the face of development trends to construct “micro” or “junior” units.

On May 23, 2024, the Planning Board held a Special Meeting to review the zoning text amendments considered at the May 2nd public hearing and make a recommendation to the Land Use Committee. Staff presented this information and proposed changes to the Planning Board at that meeting. Following discussion, the Planning Board moved to recommend adoption of the submitted zoning text amendments, with the changes proposed by Staff to retain the density bonus with revisions.