Planning Division

Proposed Zoning Amendment Fact Sheet

Principal Entrances Amendment

Proposed Zoning Amendment Summary

This proposed zoning amendment impacts principal entrance requirements in the following three ways:

1. Allow for principal entrances on the side of a building, as long as there is an entrance to the ground story dwelling unit on the building façade
2. Increase flexibility for the location of principal entrances for external accessory dwelling units
3. Remove principal entrance spacing requirements on commercial buildings

This recommendation was informed by research and engagement, including review with external stakeholders, such as Reframe, internal staff experts in SDD, and analysis of past permits.

Proposed Amendments Related to Principal Entrance Requirements

In Somerville's dense urban environment with narrow parcels, it may be more appropriate to locate the building's principal entrance on the side rather than the façade. This amendment allows a side principal entrance where the ground-story dwelling unit still has its own entrance on the façade.

The goal is to preserve street facing access and character while giving property owners more design options on tight lots.

Similarly, it may be appropriate for accessory dwelling units to have side or rear facing principal entrances. The goal is to allow property owners more flexibility to site entrances for ADUs, while maintaining the primary structure's street presence and preserving privacy between the primary unit and the ADU.

2.4.5 Uses and Features

b. Use & Occupancy

i. Pedestrian Access

a). Buildings must have at least one (1) principal entrance. ~~Principal entrances must be located on the facade, provide both ingress and egress, and be operable at all times.~~

i). The principal entrance may be located on the front or side of the building provided that at least one (1) entrance is provided on the front facade.

~~a).~~ ii). The principal entrance of an external accessory dwelling unit may be located on the front, side or rear of the building.

Proposed Amendments Related to Street Address Location

As a result of the text update to SZO 2.4.5, Development Standards will also be updated to allow street addresses to be located on the façade wall, regardless of where the principal entrance is located.

3.1.17 Development Standards

a. Signs

i. A sign, individual numerals or letters, or a nonelectrical nameplate identifying the property address is required for all real property as follows:

a). Each ground story non-residential use must identify the street address either on the principal entrance door or above or beside the principal entrance of the use.

b). All residential building types must identify the street address either on the principal entrance door, above or beside the principal entrance, on the facade wall, or on a mailbox.

This will impact the following portion of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance for Development Standards of different zoning districts:

Neighborhood Residence (NR)	3.1.17
Urban Residence (UR)	3.2.16
Mid-Rise Districts (MR)	4.1.14 4.2.14 4.3.14 4.4.15
High-Rise Districts (HR)	5.1.16
Commercial Districts	6.1.12 6.2.13 6.3.12 6.4.15
Special Districts	7.2.9

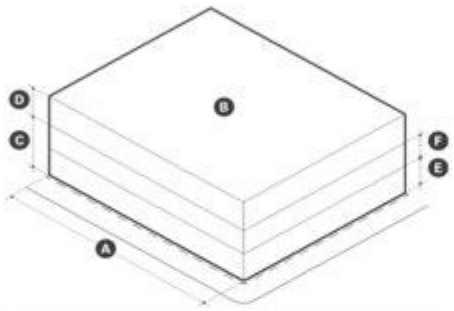
Proposed Amendments Related to Principal Entrance Spacing

The current principal entrance spacing requirements for commercial building are designed to indirectly control the number of commercial units on the ground floor. However, this approach has shown to be ineffective, as the requirements can be satisfied by adding non-functioning doors, rather than the desired number of commercial units. Removing this requirement reduces unnecessary design constraints on commercial principal entrances.

By removing the 30 foot maximum principal entrance spacing requirement, the SZO better allows smaller commercial unit footprints.

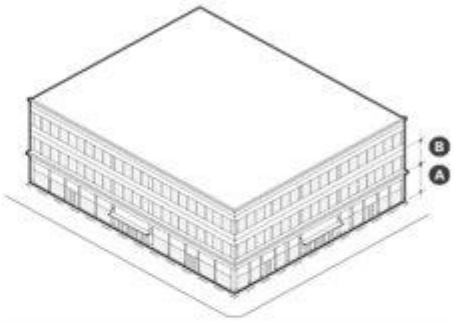
4.1.8 General Building

m. Massing & Height



Main Massing	
A Building Width (max)	200 ft
Facade Build Out (min)	–
Primary Front	80%
Secondary Front	65%
B Floor Plate (max)	15,000 sf
C Ground Story Height (min)	14 ft
D Upper Story Height (min)	10 ft
E Number of Stories (min/max)	2 3
F Building Height, Feet (max)	42 ft
Roof Type	Flat

d. Uses & Features



Facade Composition	
A Ground Story Fenestration	–
Primary Facade (min)	70%
Secondary Facade (min/max)	15% 70%
B Upper Story Fenestration (min/max)	15% 70%
Blank Wall (max)	20 ft

Use & Occupancy	
~~Ground Story Entrance Spacing (max)~~	~~30 ft~~
Commercial Space Depth (min)	30 ft

Roof-mounted Mechanicals	
Mechanical Equipment, Screening, Penthouse Height (max)	10 ft

This will impact the following portion of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance Uses & Features of General and Commercial Buildings:

Mid-Rise (MR) General and Commercial Buildings	4.1.8 4.1.9 4.2.8 4.2.9 4.3.8 4.3.9 4.4.8 4.4.9
High-Rise (HR) General and Commercial Buildings	5.1.7 5.1.8 5.1.9
Commercial District General and Commercial Building	6.2.7 6.2.8 6.4.9 6.5.7