**Madalyn Letellier**

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| **From:** | Jack Connolly [redacted] |
| **Sent:** | Thursday, October 1, 2026 11:34 AM |
| **To:** | Public Comments |
| **Cc:** | Meredith Porter; Jack Connolly; Frank Malsbenden; Denise Provost; Chris Iwerks; Kevin McIntosh; Meredith Porter; Stephen Post; Toby Woll; Alex P; Josiah Lee Auspitz; Tomas Bok; Rachel Rosenberg; Mike Chiu (michael.a.chui@gmail.com); jennifer; Thomas Bent; Adam Dash; Adam Portney; John Wiseman; Richard Brenner; Charlie Ball; Isaac Machado; Richard Digirolamo; Chris Vining; Carla De Lellis; bobbietoner@aol.com |
| **Subject:** | Item 1.4 on the agenda, ""an amendment ... to align with State Law regarding protected accessory dwelling units," File #26-1336. for Land Use Committee Joint Meeting with the Planning Board |

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Somerville City Councilors One and All

I have been alerted by my former longterm Board of Aldermen (now City Council) colleague Bill White to tonight's joint meeting of the Land Use Committee and the Planning Board of the above captioned item submitted by the Mayor.
**Please take no action on this item tonight,** as there is widespread concern throughout the Somerville community of the effect this will have on the availability of rental units in Somerville.

Former Alderman (now known as Councilor) and land use attorney White has pointed out " Since the implementation of the new backyard cottage zoning in 2022, the City has lost 470 rental units in two and three family buildings.
This policy has been a disaster for renters. There are now more luxury condominiums in the City than there are total rental units in all of our three-family buildings. Should the new zoning submitted by the Mayor pass, then it will further incentivize the continuation of the current trend.""

**Councilors and Planning board members should hit the pause button** on this submission by the Mayor , and NOT take any action on this matter due to the likely extreme reduction in available rental

units as developers will likely convert former apartments into luxury condos as a result of this amendment.

As a former elected official (Ward Six and City Councilor at Large) I echo Mr. White's warning not to further the elimination of rental units here in Somerville.

**Please vote to leave this item in the Land Use Committee,** and leave the record OPEN at least two weeks for additional testimony to be submitted by community members who are just being made aware of this potentially disastrous amendment.

Time to go back to the drawing board on this matter.

As Ever,

--
Jack

**John M. Connolly**
[redacted]
**Somerville MA 02144**
[redacted]

## Madalyn Letellier

**From:** Maxwell Shortsleeve [redacted] >
**Sent:** Thursday, October 1, 2026 3:45 PM
**To:** Public Comments
**Subject:** Public Comment Zoning Amendment File #: 26-1336
**Attachments:** Public comment — Item 26-1336, Backyard Cottages (October 1 joint hearing).pdf

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Good Afternoon,

Please find attached my public comment regarding proposed zoning amendment File #: 26-1336.

Thank you,

Maxwell Shortsleeve

Somerville, MA 02145

Chair Ewen-Campen, Chair Capuano, and members of the Land Use Committee and Planning Board,

I am a Somerville resident writing on Item 26-1336. I support the amendment's approach to Backyard Cottage massing: replacing the 24-by-32-foot, one-and-a-half-story box with dimensions tied to the principal building type, while holding total gross floor area to 1,750 square feet. That is a clearer rule than the one it replaces, and it ends the half-story arithmetic that has frustrated neighbors and councilors alike. I would ask the committee to keep the 1,750 cap as written.

I strongly oppose any change, in this amendment or a later one, that would prevent a Backyard Cottage from being sold as its own condominium unit.

The City has been consistent about why cottages exist. When the Council made them by-right in 2022, then-Councilor Wilson said the point was to cut red tape and, in his words, "basically to encourage more of these ADUs in the city." When the Council removed the affordability requirement in 2023, Planning Director Bartman told the Council plainly that "that would be a fourth unit on the lot, just to be perfectly transparent." The Council voted for that fourth unit knowing what it was. The state's ADU law was written for the same reason: to increase housing production. And on September 3 of this month, City staff described the current market to this committee as a period of low housing starts.

A sale restriction would undo all of that. A new, detached, sprinklered cottage on a tight lot costs about what the principal building costs per square foot. If the cottage can only be a rental owned in common with another unit, it cannot be financed and cannot be sold at a value that covers what it cost to build. It will not be built. Very few Somerville homeowners will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on a backyard rental. The cottages that have gone up in the past two years exist because they can be sold. Change that, and the count goes back to what it was before 2023, which was almost none.

That matters because a condominium is how most first-time buyers get into Somerville at all. Councilor McLaughlin said as much to this committee on May 21: he lives in a condo because it was the only way he could afford to buy in the city. Councilors McLaughlin and Clingan agreed that night that the Council should regulate the size of buildings, not whether they are rented or owned, and Deputy Director DiMartino confirmed that the ordinance does not regulate condominium units and that the City cannot regulate ownership under state law. That is the right answer, and it should be written into the committee report so it stops being relitigated.

The benefit does not stop with the buyer. Nearly every household that buys a cottage is moving out of somewhere, and in Somerville that somewhere is usually a rental in an older two- or three-family. That unit goes back on the market, the household that takes it leaves another unit behind, and the chain runs down through the older, cheaper housing stock where many rent-burdened tenants live. This is the best-documented effect in housing economics. The Upjohn Institute study that traced 52,000 movers through six rounds of moves found that 100

new market-rate homes lead 45 to 70 people to move out of below-median-income neighborhoods, most of it within three to five years, without a dollar of subsidy. A cottage sold to a renter is not one new home; it is one new home plus a vacated apartment, and the apartment is the one a struggling family can afford. A cottage that is never built because it cannot be sold is neither.

It also matters because the supply of entry-level condominiums from existing buildings has already collapsed. Councilor Mbah reported that the Condominium Review Board approved 200 to 300 conversions a year through FY2019, a high of 312, then 199 in FY2020 and fewer since, and the Board's own report attributes the drop to the 2019 ordinance changes. The October 2025 changes raised relocation payments and notice periods again. Whatever one thinks of those protections, the effect is that new construction is now the main source of condominiums a first-time buyer can actually purchase, and a Backyard Cottage is the only new detached home at that price point the City permits anywhere.

Please adopt the massing changes and the 1,750 square foot cap, and please make clear that nothing in this amendment restricts how a Backyard Cottage is owned or sold.

Respectfully,

Maxwell Shortsleeve

Somerville, MA 02145