



Sustainable Zoning 2024: What's next for Somerville?

A Presentation for the Honorable City Council
Presented by the Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Environment
City of Somerville



Vision for *Climate Forward*



BUILDINGS
& ENERGY



TRANSPORTATION
& MOBILITY



NATURAL
RESOURCES
& WASTE



COMMUNITY
HEALTH &
RESILIENCY



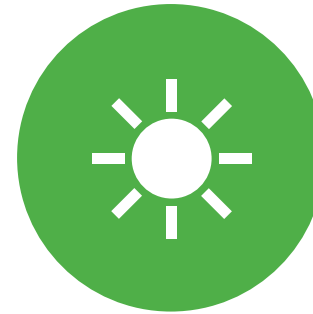
LEADERSHIP



THRIVING



EQUITABLE



**CARBON
NET-NEGATIVE**



RESILIENT



What is this? Looking for new ways to lead

- Somerville is leading on sustainable zoning practices
- Good news – state has caught up.
- The changes to the code are pushing us forward, while some are restricting us
- Exciting opportunity to analyze the Zoning Ordinance and lead once again
- We have a plan to address restrictions



Process

1. Remove conflicting language
2. Research and develop new language
3. Priority recommendations submitted to Mayor
4. Priority recommendations submitted to City Council



The 2019
Somerville Zoning
Ordinance
Amendments
created the State's
most stringent
sustainability
requirements.

By doing so, the state
caught up to Somerville's
2019 Zoning requirements
and goes beyond.

Somerville immediately
adopted and enacted the
new code.



In 2023 the state
enacted the
Specialized Energy
Code.

By doing so, the state
caught up to Somerville's
2019 Zoning
requirements, and went
beyond.

Somerville immediately
adopted and enacted the
new code.



A 2021 opinion from the Attorney General's Office clarifies the State's authority.

This was released after the 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance update passed





Where we are today

Now that construction methods and energy efficiency are included in the Stretch and Specialized Energy Codes, Somerville's 2019 Zoning Ordinance conflicts with 2023 Specialized Energy Code and 2021 Attorney General opinion.

- Building and Energy codes cover:
 - Building materials
 - Construction methods
 - Energy Efficiency
 - Electrification Requirements
- The 2019 Zoning Ordinance covers:
 - Land use
 - Design (appearance)
 - Interaction with public realm
 - Construction methods
 - Energy efficiency





Opportunity for Progress: Jurisdictional amendments to the Zoning Ordinance

1. Definition: Net Zero Ready Building
2. Density bonus
3. Master Planned Development overlay
4. Sustainable Development: Green Buildings



Benefits

1. Long-term solution
2. Improve upon state requirements
3. Leverage City authority to influence design and implement community vision and goals





Expected Timeline (Subject to Change)

1. February 2024: Remove conflicting language
2. January 2024 - January 2025: Research and develop new language
3. February 2025: Priority recommendations submitted to Mayor
4. March 2025: Priority recommendations submitted to City Council



February 2024: Remove conflicting language

1. Reduce confusion, administrative burden, and costs for constituents, developers, and staff
2. Remove discrepancy with density bonus



Section	Section Name	Proposed revisions (summarized)	Reasons for revisions
2.1.1	Glossary	Remove definition of “Net Zero Ready Building”	Eliminate confusion, defer to Building Code definition, as Building Code regulates what qualifies as net zero ready.
2.4.5.b	Uses and Features: Density Factor	Revise one sentence based on new requirements for Net Zero Ready Buildings.	Net Zero Ready Buildings should no longer be used to determine density.
Multiple	Urban Residence Mid-Rise 3, 4, 5, and 6 High Rise	Update “purpose” statements for each district.	Specialized Energy Code now requires relevant buildings to be Net Zero Ready.
	Purpose and Density Factor for each district	Remove density bonus for Net Zero Ready Buildings.	Density bonus is no longer a reward – all new buildings in relevant districts will now qualify.
8.4.8.a	Master Planned Development Overlay District: Development Standards	Amend language, reserve section for future use.	Current language is superseded by the Specialized Energy Code. Retaining the section will allow for the development of new regulations that support sustainability goals.
10.10.1	Sustainable Development: Green Buildings	Amend language, reserve section for future use.	Current language is superseded by the Specialized Energy Code. Retaining the section will allow for the development of new regulations that support sustainability goals.



Phase 1: Language Summary



February 2024 – February 2025: Research and develop new language

- Existing Projects
 - Projects that have applied for a Building Permit on or before June 30, 2023, will not need to adhere to the Specialized Code
- New Projects
 - Projects that did not apply for a Building Permit on or before June 30, 2023, will be required to adhere to the Specialized Code
- Research
 - Gap analysis of City codes/ordinances and LEED/other green building programs.
 - Apply for technical assistance grant to build code/ordinance recommendations based on the gap analysis.
- Advocacy
 - Regional coordination
 - State legislative engagement
 - State regulatory engagement

February 2025:
Priority
recommendations
submitted to Mayor



March 2025:
Priority
recommendations
submitted to City
Council



Thank you

Mayor's Office of Sustainability and Environment
City of Somerville
ose@somervillema.gov

Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division
Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development
City of Somerville
planning@somervillema.gov



somervillema.gov/ose

Appendix



somervillema.gov/ose



Topic	Ordinances	Impact
Energy & GHG emissions	Building Code: Specialized Energy Code	High-performance buildings, limits fossil fuels, reduces emissions
Building standards	Building Code: Specialized Energy Code	High-performance buildings, limits fossil fuels, reduces emissions
Heat reduction	Code of Ordinances: Tree Preservation Ordinance (Ch. 12, Art. VI) Zoning Ordinance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Green Score (§10.4)• Heat Island Reduction (§10.10.3)	Retains tree coverage Zoning Ordinance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• High-value plantings and reduced hardscape• Roofs and parking lots must achieve level of solar reflectance
Biodiversity and ecosystems	Code of Ordinances: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tree Preservation Ordinance (Ch. 12, Art. VI)• Native Planting Ordinance (Ch. 12, Art. X) Zoning Ordinance: Green Score (§10.4)	Code of Ordinances: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protects high-value trees• Native species requirements that facilitate habitat creation/expansion Supports native species and habitat creation
Open space	Zoning Ordinance: Master Planned Development Overlay District (§8.4)	Civic spaces required in high-priority areas
Mobility: Low/no-carbon and EV	Building Code: Specialized Energy Code Code of Ordinances: Complete Streets Ordinance (Ch. 12, Art. VII) Zoning Ordinance <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vehicle parking maximums (by district and §11)• Bicycle parking requirements (by district and §11)• Mobility management programs (§11.4)	Electric vehicle requirements Prioritizes pedestrians, transit, bicycles, deprioritizes private vehicles Zoning Ordinance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deprioritizes private vehicle use• Supports bicycle use• Supports walking, biking, transit use over private vehicle use
Stormwater management	Code of Ordinances: Stormwater runoff ordinances (§11-145/146/165) Zoning Ordinance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Landscaping (§10.3)• Green Score (§10.4)• Green Roofs & Storm Water Management (§10.10.2)	Limits & reduces runoff; facilitates stormwater quality rules for site construction/operations Zoning Ordinance: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Landscape requirements that prioritize stormwater management• See above• Incentivizes green roofs that reduce runoff
Flood mitigation	Zoning Ordinance: Floodplains Overlay District (SZO) Engineering standards	Limits development in floodways. Minimal impact, no developable land in 1% FEMA flood zone Construction and infrastructure requirements