



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 16, 2023

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:31 pm and adjourned at 6:58 pm on a Roll Call Vote: 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Gomez Mouakad, Ewen-Campen, Davis, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present: Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Daniel Bartman – Senior Planner - Zoning & Urban Design for the City of Somerville

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Matthew McLaughlin, Vice Chair Lance L. Davis, Ben Ewen-Campen, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad and Jake Wilson

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0204](#))

Approval of the Land Use Committee Joint Meeting with the Planning Board Minutes of February 2, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson McLaughlin, Vice Chair Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Five City Councilor Gomez Mouakad and City Councilor At Large Wilson

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1771](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 6.1 Commercial Districts: Fabrication of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to permit additional uses for ground story commercial spaces fronting a Pedestrian Street.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated he was in support of the amendment and proposed an amendment to Section 11B: “[For any building with two (2) or more stories,] occupancy of a ground story commercial space fronting a pedestrian street is permitted as specified in the second column on Table 6.1.11 Permitted Uses.” The purpose of the original amendment is to allow retail on the first floor of Fabrication District buildings when they are fronting a pedestrian street, and Councilor Ewen-Campen’s subsequent amendment would exclude one-story buildings from that because failing to do so would effectively remove one-story buildings from the Fabrication District. Councilor Ewen-Campen continued that his amendment would have no legal bearing on the lawsuit the Council has been made aware of, and it is not relevant to the building in Gilman Square.

Vice Chair Davis clarified that the reason for Councilor Ewen-Campen’s

amendment is that there are several buildings that are both in the Fabrication District and also mapped as pedestrian streets and the pedestrian streets language was not present in the Fabrication District section.

Senior Planner Bartman added that he reviewed the amendments with the legal department and no concerns were raised. Bartman continued that the purpose of both amendments is to provide additional rights for Fabrication buildings that front pedestrian streets, but not if doing so would remove buildings from the Fabrication District in total.

Vice Chair Davis made a final point that although he supports the amendments in this context, he would not be willing to approve similar zoning exceptions more broadly without additional discussion of the impact of doing so.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to amend the item by inserting, “[[For any building with two (2) or more stories,]]” before “occupancy of a ground story commercial space fronting a pedestrian street is permitted as specified in the second column on Table 6.1.11 Permitted Uses” in Section 11B. The amendment was approved on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Gomez Mouakad, Ewen-Campen, Davis, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

AYE: Chairperson McLaughlin, Vice Chair Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Five City Councilor Gomez Mouakad and City Councilor At Large Wilson

- 3. Public Communication (ID # [22-1769](#))

David Einis requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 14 White Street Place from Neighborhood Residence (NR) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4).

Applicant requested to withdraw the application. Chair McLaughlin tabled the item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

- 4. Officer's Communication (ID # [22-1645](#))

Planning Board proposing an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances Section 15.1.3, Neighborhood Meeting.

Councilor Ewen-Campen indicated that this is a proposal to clarify what happens if a ward councilor is unable or unwilling to host a neighborhood meeting, and that the proposed amendment says that if the ward councilor cannot host a neighborhood meeting, the President will appoint an at-large ward councilor. However, Councilor Ewen-Campen had some concern that this would prevent the President of the City Council from appointed a ward councilor from an abutting district, whose residents would likely have

overlapping interests. As such, Councilor Ewen-Campen proposed a further amendment, to section xi, which states, “A councilor-at-large [[or Ward Councilor from an abutting ward]] who will take on the role.”

Vice Chair Davis added his support for Councilor Ewen-Campen’s amendment, and further stated that adding a virtual option for applicants to have easier access to ward councilors seeking approval for projects, particularly smaller ones.

Councilor Wilson agreed with his colleagues’ points and stated that Councilor Ewen-Campen’s amendment makes sense given that the interests of a ward councilor’s constituents from an abutting district would often align. Councilor Gomez Mouakad followed with agreement on this point.

Chair McLaughlin concluded the discussion by stating that the President of the City Council would be able to determine whether or not a ward councilor was unable or unwilling to facilitate a meeting with a constituent, and therefore determine when it would be appropriate to designate a different ward councilor to attend to that constituent’s request.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to amend the item by inserting, “[[or Ward Councilor from an abutting ward]]” between “A councilor-at-large” and “who will take on the role,” reading in full: “A councilor-at-large [[or Ward Councilor from an abutting ward]] who will take on the role” to Section xi. The amendment was approved on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Gomez Mouakad, Ewen-Campen, Davis, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

AYE: Chairperson McLaughlin, Vice Chair Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Five City Councilor Gomez Mouakad and City Councilor At Large Wilson

5. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0095](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Section 10.8 Commercial Signs, of the Zoning Ordinances, to permit commercial signs by right.

Chair McLaughlin indicated support for this measure and stated that professionals are capable of determining whether a business’s signage is appropriate or not.

Vice Chair Davis added that there really is no reason for city councilors or the planning board to be involved in business design decisions.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson McLaughlin, Vice Chair Davis, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Five City Councilor Gomez Mouakad and City Councilor At Large Wilson