



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Land Use Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 1, 2025

6:30 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair McLaughlin at 6:30 pm and adjourned at 9:15 pm on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, and McLaughlin), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Others present: Dan Bartman - Director of Planning, Brad Rawson - Director of Mobility, Stephen Cary - Senior Planner, Samantha Carr - Land Use Analyst, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

Absent: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0722](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of April 3, 2025.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

2. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0826](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Land Use Committee Meeting of April 17, 2025.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

3. Order (ID # [25-0085](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Davis and Councilor Wilson That the Director of Planning, Preservation and Zoning draft an amendment to the Zoning Ordinances for transit oriented height and density bonuses for additional affordable housing and other enumerated community benefits.

Analyst Carr presented a slidedeck which is available in the referenced documents titled "*Land Use 2025-05-01 TOD Upzoning (with 25 0085).*"

Midway through the presentation, Councilor Ewen-Campen asked a clarifying question regarding permits for dwelling units. Analyst Carr explained that for each permit, there is a differential number of dwelling units that can be associated based on the specific unit, allowing for variation. Councilor Ewen-Campen inquired whether there is an increase in density in transit-oriented areas, to which Analyst Carr confirmed she could work to extract the information and come back to the committee with more information. Chair McLaughlin also raised a question regarding the zoning goals and whether the intent is to make zoning "by right" for renovations, based on existing city structures. Following the presentation, Councilor Wilson asked about the potential for downzoning and whether it could be related to variances. Analyst Carr noted that specific scenarios need to be addressed on an individual basis. In response, Councilor Ewen-Campen stated that the downzoning was related to residents wishing to build additions to their homes.

After, Planner Cary presented their slide deck, titled "*Land Use 2025-05-01 Broadway Corridor Zoning Study 20250403 (with 25-0085)*." Councilor Sait inquired about future concerns related to sewer capacity for the proposed up-to-date meeting and requested an additional meeting for the community to review the proposal and provide another opportunity to hear the communities comments and feedback.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-1460](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 4-6, 8, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for laboratory uses and buildings.

Director Bartman presented a shortened slide deck, previously shown at a Land Use meeting, detailing the four amendments taken up together (items 24-1460, 25-0128, 25-0129, and 25-0131). Matthias Rudolf from the Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) was introduced by Chair McLaughlin to highlight the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA), which just recently agreed upon based off revisions that were submitted to the amendments. The CBA will require a two-thirds vote to pass. Chair McLaughlin expressed his intent in this meeting to accept the submitted revision of the amendments and begin high-level discussion. Both Councilors Ewen-Campen and McLaughlin highlighted that this is the first discussion that is being had in committee on these amendments and there will be no vote on the items this meeting. Director Bartman later clarified the revisions did take into consideration notes from Rafi, USNC, and the Planning Boards recommendations.

Chair McLaughlin made a motion to replace the current document with the amended version listed in the referenced documents, *Land Use -*

2025-5-01 Laboratory Uses and Building Types
20241007 Corrected 20250428 (with 24-1460).

The motion was accepted on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Councilor Ewen-Campen requested a visual representation of the area's build-out, including tables and maps, to better understand the final product. Director Bartman responded that Rafi's architecture firm could create models which would be shared before the next committee meeting. The councilor then inquired about traffic and parking concerns related to the developments, specifically how parking permitting works. Director Bartman explained that no development would exceed 750 parking spaces and that the Planning Board would regulate parking demand models, determining the required number of spaces as part of each Site Plan Approval. Additionally, a Master Plan would be required for each approval, considering each stage of development and the specific building uses. Director Bartman also highlighted the mobility management included in the amendments, which would require regular reporting from parking facilities, property owners, and employers regarding travel behaviors, drop-offs, and deliveries. This data would allow the Planning Board to impose conditions on permits, aimed at encouraging users to shift their modes of transportation. Councilor Ewen-Campen continued with questions about what tools the city has if developers meet their mobility goals, but traffic still increases. Director Bartman stated that if the goals were not met or if off-site issues could not be addressed, the Planning Board could prevent additional parking construction. Additionally, the Master Plan is a discretionary permit, and non-compliance could lead to denial. Councilor Ewen-Campen also raised concerns about the lack of traffic studies and analysis before the amendments. Director Rawson clarified that parking studies are typically done during the development stage, and the committee is currently reviewing only the zoning changes. Councilor Sait inquired whether current traffic data for Somerville Avenue could be presented to the Council. Director Rawson confirmed that the city collects traffic data, which can be made available. Councilor Wilson also raised concerns about the increased traffic flow, which could impact commuter routes. Director Rawson explained the use of standard processes in private development, including benchmarking neighborhood trends and using available data, as well as trip modeling techniques.

Councilor Wilson inquired what was left of the public process to garner

feedback, and Chair McLaughlin explained the voting procedure. Director Bartman elaborated on the multi-step process for zoning, master planning, and development before building permits are granted, noting the expected delays between zoning adoption and other stages.

Chair McLaughlin suggested extending the Green Line to the area, based on community feedback, and asked whether this had been discussed. Director Rawson responded that there are two possible transit solutions: a Green Line extension and an improved commuter rail, both of which are part of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) commitment to providing higher frequency and efficiency in the coming years.

Councilor Ewen-Campen questioned the limited amount of accessible outdoor civic space, asking why more was not included. Director Bartman explained that the space is spread across four blocks, and the proposal includes building upward to accommodate desired spaces and uses, such as a youth center, which the community had strongly requested. Although adding 10% civic space was a constraint, the city worked to ensure its inclusion alongside other requests.

Councilor Wilson asked about definitions in the zoning ordinance regarding bakeries and cafés. Director Bartman explained that these terms are already defined in the ordinance, and there needs to be clarity in how they are applied and not just how the public thinks they are different. Councilor Wilson also questioned why 460 Somerville Avenue was included in the Research and Development (R&D) area, to which Director Bartman explained it was part of a larger strategy for the sub-area, which involved multiple considerations. Councilor Wilson asked questions about the 5% rule, and Director Bartman clarified that this rule is standard in communities to allow flexibility and avoid the use of variances.

Councilor McLaughlin inquired how the amendments align with the city's larger SomerVision plan. Director Bartman outlined some of SomerVision's goals, noting that although the original vision has evolved, the zoning amendments align with the plan's long-term objectives. Councilor Sait asked when a mobility management plan would be available to the public during construction. Director Bartman confirmed that developers must submit mobility management plans as part of their Master Plan, which will be publicly available as the buildings move through the permitting process. Director Rawson elaborated that there are multiple avenues for engineering reviews, and the permits, including mobility plans, will be accessible on the

city website.

Lastly, Councilor McLaughlin asked how the city could ensure that approved zoning is completed as promised. Director Bartman explained that this issue arises in many projects, and through the Master Plan Permitting process, developers can be conditioned with special permits. If another developer acquires the land, they will need to obtain their own permit, which differs from past processes.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0128](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 6, 9, and 10 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Research & Development zoning district.

This item was discussed with ID #24-1460. **Chair McLaughlin made a motion to replace the current document with the amended version listed in the referenced documents, *Land Use - 2025-05-01 6.5 RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (R&D) Updated 20250420 (with 25-0128).***

The motion was accepted on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0129](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 2, 3-6, and 9 of the Zoning Ordinance to revise the regulations for arts and creative enterprise, office, and residential uses.

This item was discussed with ID #24-1460. **Chair McLaughlin made a motion to replace the current document with the amended version listed in the referenced documents, *Land Use - 2025-05-01 ACE and Office Use Changes 20250117 Correction 20250428 (with 25-0129).***

The motion was accepted on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0131](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Articles 8 and 12 of the Zoning Ordinance to establish a new Arts & Innovation sub-area of the Master Planned Development Overlay District.

This item was discussed with ID #24-1460. **Chair McLaughlin made a motion to replace the current document with the amended version listed in the referenced documents, *Land Use - 2025-05-01 AI Subarea &***

Alternative Compliance 20250120 Updated 20250430 (with 25-0131).

The motion was accepted on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Sait, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin), 0 opposed and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

- 8. Public Communication (ID # [24-1584](#))

Horace-Ward LLC, Bealm Realty, LLC, Delhi Properties, LLC, and Delhi Properties ll, LLC requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 11 Horace Street, 5-7, 9, 13, and 15 Ward Street, and 15 and 21 South Street from Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) to Mid-Rise 6 (MR6).

Councilor Ewen-Campen and Chair McLaughlin expressed interest in hearing from the Ward Councilor about the work that has been done with the community on this project, and if there is community support to move forward before voting. Councilor Wilson inquired what restrictions can be placed on the developers to deliver on their plans, Director Bartman shared conditions are something placed by the Planning Board.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

- 9. Public Communication (ID # [25-0269](#))

John Fragione and Agostino Feola, Trustees of Frala Realty Trust, requesting a Zoning Map Amendment to change the zoning district of 295-297 Medford Street and 93 Walnut Street from Mid-Rise 3 (MR3) to Mid-Rise 4 (MR4).

Chair McLaughlin conveyed enthusiasm regarding the upcoming affordable housing development planned for construction near transit. Councilor Ewen-Campen recused himself from this matter due to his involvement with a volunteer land trust that is directly connected to the issue at hand.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

RECUSED: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

Referenced Documents:

- Land Use - 2025-05-01 TOD Upzoning (with 25-0085)
- Land Use - 2025-05-01 PermittedSomervilleVisionDwellingUnits_2019-2024 (with 25-0085)
- Land Use - 2025-5-01 Laboratory Uses and Building Types 20241007_Corrected_20250428 (with 24-1460)
- Land Use - 2025-05-01 6.5 RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT (R&D)_Updated 20250420 (with 25-0128)
- Land Use - 2025-05-01 ACE and Office Use Changes 20250117_Correction_20250428 (with 25-0129)
- Land Use - 2025-05-01 AI Subarea & Alternative Compliance 20250120 Updated 20250430 (with 25-0131)