



City of Somerville
PLANNING BOARD
City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

21 APRIL 2022 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Erin Geno	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Rob Buchanan	Member	<i>Absent</i>	
Debbie Howitt Easton	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Russell Pildes	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Raisa Saniat (Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Daniel Bartman (Deputy Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning), Rebecca Cooper (Planning, Preservation & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:01pm and adjourned at 6:50pm.

Member Pildes announced his resignation from the Planning Board; this will be his last meeting. Chair Capuano confirmed that Member Buchanan has also resigned from the Planning Board earlier in the week.

OTHER BUSINESS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ZONING AMENDMENTS TO CITY COUNCIL

Vivaldo Meneses Sr. requesting the adoption of an amendment to the Zoning Ordinance Map to change the zoning district of 86 Prospect Street from UR to MR5.

Deputy Director Bartman spoke about how sometimes the boundary of two zoning districts fall across one property; with the two lots being owned by one person. He does not feel that if this amendment was recommended for approval, it would undermine planning objectives. However, this amendment is not supported based on the public feedback and there is a possibility to build a building using the split zoning district that the public finds more acceptable and still falls in line with the planning goals for the area. Deputy Director Bartman discussed the difference in setbacks in the two zoning districts, as well as how the owner could navigate the differences successfully. He stated that the recommendation could go either way; therefore, the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division tends to lean toward the planning goals for the area and the public feedback on the matter.

Chair Capuano opened the floor to Attorney Shultz. Attorney Shultz, who represents the property owner, mentioned that the thinking behind up zoning the property from the UR district to the MR5 district was to subject the entire lot to the public design review process for any proposed development, rather than just the MR5 portion of the development, since the UR portion would go straight to ISD for approval.

The Board and Staff discussed the potential Site Plan review process for this double lot, the thought process of establishing these zoning districts, and if Staff considered a step-down area in between these districts.

The Board deliberated; they spoke both in support and against the recommendation of the amendment.

Following a motion by Vice Chair Aboff, seconded by Clerk Geno, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to make a negative recommendation on this zoning amendment to the City Council.

Proposing a zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of the contiguous parcels containing 250-256 Somerville Avenue and 5-27 Allen Street (odd side only: 5-7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 21-23, and 27) from Urban Residence (UR) to Neighborhood Residence (NR).

The Board and Staff discussed if this amendment and the next have been vetted and are valid, how the neighborhood was in strong opposition of both, how the neighbors received very late notice of these two proposed amendments, and how these go against the planning goals for the area. Staff noted that they can follow up with the Legal Department on the legality of the amendments. Chair Capuano stated that this is the deadline to provide a recommendation to the City Council on these amendments, therefore they do not feel it is necessary to have Staff follow up with the Legal Department.

The Board further discussed how these amendments go against the planning goals for the area, how these may be the result of proposed developments although the Board has not seen any plans for such developments, and how the Board is concerned that the fundamental motive of these could possibly be somewhat retaliatory in nature due to negative feedback from the neighborhood, which would be legally questionable.

Chair Capuano stated that the Board should not make assumptions on the motive behind these proposed amendments and should leave it up to the Legal Department to advise the City Council on what actions they should take. The Board should only take into consideration the facts presented to them and the neighborhood concerns that they have heard.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to make a negative recommendation on this zoning amendment to the City Council.

Proposing a zoning map amendment to change the zoning district of the contiguous or abutting-across-a-public-way parcels of 29-31, 33-35, and 37-39 Allen Street (odd side only) and 34 Allen Street from Urban Residence (UR) to Commercial Business (CB).

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (6-0) to make a negative recommendation on this zoning amendment to the City Council.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.