



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

7 MAY 2026 MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation via Zoom.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS	ARRIVED
Michael Capuano	Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Amelia Aboff	Vice Chair	<i>Present</i>	
Jahan Habib	Clerk	<i>Present</i>	
Michael McNeley	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Luc Schuster	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	
Lynn Richards	Member	<i>Present</i>	
Coralie Cooper	Alternate	<i>Present</i>	

City staff present: Lexie Payne (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning); Steven Nutter (Director of the Office of Sustainability & Environment); Josh Eckart-Lee (OSE Sustainability Planner)

The meeting was called to order at 6:04pm and adjourned at 7:36pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the 2 April 2026 meeting minutes.

RESULT:

APPROVED

PUBLIC HEARING: 222 Broadway

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to continue this hearing to 21 May 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC HEARING: 1 McGrath Highway

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to continue this hearing to 4 June 2026.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

OTHER BUSINESS: Discussion with the Office of Sustainability & Environment

Staff introduced the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE), established 10 years ago to improve environmental performance across Somerville City Government and the community. Some of the Office's goals include to reduce climate change contributions, particularly from buildings. The Climate Forward Plan has 77

actions, of which OSE is actively working on projects that address approximately 70% of these. Climate-resilient zoning actions include adopting a Specialized Energy Code in 2023, with upcoming updates to sustainability-related zoning code sections in 2026. Staff provided an update on the ongoing work to align the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) with the Specialized Energy Code, including research conducted with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) on a gap analysis between the SZO and LEED standards, a Fossil Fuel Free incentive study, and efforts to incentivize additional electrical capacity in new development. The team has been working with the Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) team to align recommendations across different legislative pieces, particularly regarding native planting and tree preservation ordinances.

Staff explained that the Fossil Fuel Free study research concluded in February and has been shared with colleagues in the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) and the Planning Division. The report contains 15 areas of focus, including updates to flood zoning, green building regulations, EV-ready parking requirements, and resiliency-related challenges. The goal is to create actionable recommendations with plans for additional engagement opportunities and workshops throughout the summer and fall.

Staff confirmed that Somerville remains a candidate for the 10-City Pilot Program, with two bills currently considering expansion options.

One Board member expressed concern about implementing environmentally focused zoning requirements in Somerville, particularly regarding LEED certification and affordability. These high requirements on developers could drive up housing prices, creating a gap between luxury and subsidized affordable housing while eliminating the "missing middle." Staff explained that LEED requirements from 2019 were replaced with density bonus program incentives due to state preemption concerns and implementation challenges. There is a challenge with balancing sustainability performance standards with affordability. There are performance standards that must be met. Current work includes studying unintended consequences through various studies and workshops. The Board member suggested reviewing the "Growing Cooler" report and requested access to the Fossil Fuel Free Incentives Program executive summary.

One Board member emphasized the importance of a cost-benefit analysis in renewable energy deployment and suggested finding ways to make environmental upgrades more financially feasible for developers through incentives and shared costs.

Another Board member raised concerns about the affordability impact of green building mandates and LEED requirements, urging a study to understand the per-unit cost increases and how they interact with inclusionary zoning requirements.

There was further discussion from a Board member highlighting the importance of balancing affordability and sustainability goals, suggesting that other development burdens should be addressed before compromising on sustainability measures.

One Board member suggested allowing denser housing independent of LEED Platinum requirements, emphasizing the importance of broader climate goals beyond City-specific emissions.

Staff acknowledged the feedback regarding affordability and sustainability being top priorities and mentioned ongoing work on the consumption-based emissions inventory.

OTHER BUSINESS: Recommendation to the City Council

- o 26 registered voters requesting a Zoning Text Amendment to amend the Zoning Ordinance sections 3.1.8c, 3.1.9c, 3.1.10c, 3.1.13k, 3.1.13l, 3.2.12l, and 3.2.12m. (File#26-0287)

The Board noted that it would like to hear feedback from Staff and/or a recommendation from Staff prior to taking a vote on this item. Also, the Board asked for additional information regarding the involvement of the City on this revised version.

There was discussion regarding the proposed zoning amendment in terms of dormers that would allow buildings to increase from 2 ½ stories to 3 stories. The Board expressed concerns about the process, noting that this was a matter that was previously debated and decided through public process around 2016-2018. There were questions regarding whether the current proposal aligns with the City's previously stated position. Some Board members noted that the fenestration changes seem reasonable and could be considered separately from the dimensional allowances.

Following a motion by Chair Capuano, seconded by Vice Chair Aboff, the Board voted unanimously (7-0) to recommend, with the discussion points raised this evening, for adoption to the Land Use Committee the amendment to Section 8.1 of the Zoning Ordinance.

RESULT:	RECOMMENDED
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OTHER BUSINESS: Board Administration Open Discussion

None at this time.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. A recording of these proceedings can be found online here: [Agendas, Minutes, & More.](#)