



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
PLANNING BOARD
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

STAFF PRESENT

MADELEINE MASTERS, *PLANNING DIRECTOR*
CHRISTOPHER DI IORIO, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*
LORI MASSA, *PLANNER/ZONING ADMINISTRATOR*

MEMBERS PRESENT

KEVIN PRIOR, *CHAIRMAN*
LINDA BOHAN
JOSEPH FAVALORO
JAMES KIRYLO
ELIZABETH MORONEY
MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ. (ALT.)

MINUTES

The Somerville Planning Board held a public meeting on **Thursday, December 4, 2008** in the Aldermanic Chambers at Somerville City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA. At **6:00 p.m.** the Planning Board reviewed cases for the Zoning Board of Appeals.

At **6:30 p.m.**, a joint public hearing for all interested parties was held by the Board of Aldermen Land Use Committee and the Somerville Planning Board in the Aldermanic Chambers. The purpose of the hearing was to receive public comments concerning proposed amendments to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.

Review of New Cases for the Zoning Board of Appeals:

52 Thurston St (Case #ZBA 2008-62): Applicant: Mark Kon & Owner: The Convent Preservation Trust, LLC seek a special permit (SZO §7.11.2.b) to convert an existing dwelling to three dwelling units. RA zone. Ward 4. *After discussion, the Board voted 5-0 (E. Moroney absent, M. Capuano voting) to approve the request with conditions recommended by staff.*

9 Belmont Sq (Case #ZBA 2008-63): Applicant & Owner: Moses Blumenstiel seeks a special permit (SZO §4.4.1) to alter a nonconforming dwelling by adding a window and door. RB zone. Ward 3. *After discussion, the Board voted 5-0 (E. Moroney absent, M. Capuano voting) to approve the request with conditions recommended by staff.*

22 Berkeley St (Case #ZBA 2008-64): Applicant & Owner: John Comerford seeks Special Permit with Site Plan Review approval under SZO§7.2 for two principal structures on a lot in order to legalize a dwelling unit in an existing carriage house. RA zone. Ward 3. *After discussion, including questions about whether the occupancy of the structure should be limited to the applicant's family members, the Board voted 5-0 (E. Moroney absent, M. Capuano voting) to approve the request with conditions recommended by staff. Motion made by J. Kirylo, seconded by M. Capuano.*

At 6:20 p.m., the Planning Board went into recess until the Public Hearing was opened at 6:30 p.m. Member Elizabeth Moroney was present for the Public Hearing.

Public Hearing on Proposed Zoning Amendments:

An amendment establishing six New Zoning Districts [Transit Oriented Districts 55 through 135 (TOD-55, TOD-70, TOD-100, TOD-135), Arts Overlay District (AOD), Corridor Commercial District (CCD)], mapping



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those districts in specified areas of the Union Square / Boynton Yards vicinity, and facilitating their creation through other Citywide amendments. The proposed amendment would incorporate changes to the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Somerville with respect to the official zoning map and Articles 2, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Following a presentation by OSPCD staff, including an update on the transportation study and a recommendation to make certain changes to the text and maps, members of both boards directed questions and comments to the staff (staff responses in parentheses):

- Rezoning will give Somerville the center it doesn't have; potential is enormous.
- Could the interim zoning be clarified? (Provisions of the interim zoning were further explained.)
- Is the Planning Board the SPGA in all cases? (The Planning Board would be the SPGA for all Special Permits, SPSRs, and Site Plan Approvals.)
- If no waivers are allowed, how do variances and the ZBA fit in to this? (Only the ZBA can grant variances, but the dimensional standards have been written to allow flexibility and to minimize any need for variances.)
- After developers get use approval, who restricts or enforces changes within a use cluster? (This would be subject to review by Inspectional Services, when new certificates of occupancy were requested for the new use.)
- What will limit the number and size of housing units since maximum floors allowance has been eliminated? (Minimum floor-to-floor heights in the building code and minimum lot area per dwelling standards of the zoning would limit this.)
- Further explain the 40,000 s.f. dedicated parkland provision. (Additional explanation was provided.)
- How will the payments in lieu of parking and open space work? (Additional explanation was provided.)
- Why is the increased ratio of affordable units focused in Ward 2? (Additional development potential is needed and appropriate in this area that requires significant investment for redevelopment, and where this additional development potential is given, developers have a greater responsibility to give back in the form of affordable housing.)
- Where does money for payment-in-lieu of open space go? (Money would go into a stabilization fund specifically for open space in the Union Square/Boynton Yards area.)
- Is parking allowed on the first floor of new development? (It would be permitted but design and use standards would require it to be concealed; furthermore, along many streets, a percentage of the building's front to be given to a "pedestrian oriented" use.)
- When will the transportation study be completed? (This is expected in June 2009.)
- How can this rezoning proposal be completed without a transportation study being completed? (The consultant's analysis of traffic volumes have been completed and have yielded findings that the proposed development under the rezoning would have a marginal effect on the traffic within the square;



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the main concerns is managing the significant volume of cut-through traffic whose destination is not in the square.)

- Under the Use Cluster system, could commercial space be converted to residential space by right? (Staff would look again at the language to see what constraints there were.)

The Boards then accepted testimony from the public, and 28 persons spoke. Of these, 15 clearly expressed support for the proposal and three spoke in opposition. Many speakers recommended potential changes to the proposal or made general comments. Comments included (repeated comments are indicated by number of speakers endorsing idea shown in parentheses):

General:

- Increased economic activity and tax revenues are positive and will aid schools, parks, jobs. (5)
- The proposal is a good example of best practices, and will encourage vibrant, walkable, mixed-use development. (2)
- This is greatest opportunity in a long time to create a city center. (3)
- Proposal reflects creative compromises.
- Proposal will support independent and locally-owned businesses by addressing existing challenges. (5)
- This is opportunity to mix new and old development, which is good but difficult.

Process:

- Focus Group process was inclusive and thoughtful with intensive discussion. (4)
- Focus Group was not representative. (3)

Use Component:

- Removal of inappropriate uses is positive.
- Ratio of commercial to residential development should be higher to address structural deficit. (2)
- Interim uses proposal is not a good idea.
- Cultural and architectural diversity and lack of chain stores in square are valuable.
- Existing junkyard and similar uses are acceptable.
- Union Square needs 24-hour presence.

Design Component:

- Height and FAR of proposal are too great. (4)
- Setbacks from roadway and residential properties should increase. (2)
- Height and FAR of proposal are positive. (2)
- 30-foot minimum frontage and bays may be too restrictive.



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- Quality of design will be critical to success of district.
- Height and FAR of proposal should be greater.
- There should be less density in the square, and more density outside of it.
- Height will create shadows. (3)

Artist Component:

- Arts component is positive and will generate economic development.
- Artist component is problematic, shows preference for artists. (3)
- Expansion of Artist uses is good, and should maybe be broader.

Affordable Housing Component:

- Affordable housing component is positive.
- Affordable housing should not be segregated. (2)
- Higher affordable housing subsidies may reduce total number of units if they discourage construction.
- Affordable housing component does not do enough for lower income families. (2)
- Local Median Income should be used for affordable housing. (5)
- 15% affordable housing should be required in all districts. (4)
- Anti-displacement plan is needed. (4)
- Revisions to linkage program should be explored in district, e.g., lowering threshold and fee.
- City should purchase and stabilize existing units in City as affordable units. (2)
- Citywide affordable housing plan is needed.
- City should consider real estate transfer tax to fund affordable housing.
- Proposal should encourage family-size housing units. (3)

Open Space Component:

- Open space proposal is positive.
- An open space plan is needed. (2)
- More open space is needed.

Parking/Transportation Component:

- Multi-modal aspects of proposal are positive.
- Parking component is major improvement. (2)
- Traffic will increase more than traffic study suggests.

Other Specific Comments:

- Twin City Plaza should be removed from proposal. (2)



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- Union Square should not be like Kendall Square. (3)
- Union Square should look like Davis Square.
- Incentives are not needed for Green building.
- Urban Renewal Plan is frightening idea.
- \$30M in linkage is not a lot over 30 years.
- Union Square should be welcoming of disabled persons.
- Teenagers need activities.

Spoken testimony was closed at 9:45 p.m. and was followed by additional comments from the Planning Board and members of the Board of Aldermen.

- Alderman Heuston recommended that the Land Use Committee explore potential uses of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program CDBG funds for affordable housing.
- Alderman White requested data on the number of families in the study area, broken down by number of members of household.
- Alderman Heuston requested data on the ratio of renters to owners in the study area.

Kevin Prior stated that the Planning Board record would be kept open for written comment until noon, January 2, 2008 and continued the discussion to the Planning Board's meeting of January 15, 2008. Alderman O'Donovan stated that the Land Use Committee record would be kept open for written comment until noon, January 30, 2008. The meeting was then adjourned.

A recording of this meeting may be obtained in the Planning Division.