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March 4, 2010

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON LAND USE
MEETING IN JOINT SESSION WITH THE PLANNING BOARD

The Committee on Land Use met in Joint Session with the Planning Board on March 4, 2010, with Chairman Sean O'Donovan presiding and Committee Members Aldermen William White and Maryann Heuston also present and voting. Also present were Alderman Walter Pero, members of the Planning Board, Monica Lamboy, Rob May and Lori Massa from OSPCD, Stephen Mackey from the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, Attorney Richard DiGirolamo and interested members of the public.

188847 – Proposed amendment to the Zoning Ordinances of allowable uses, requirements for special permits and purpose statements in IA and IP zones:

Ms. Lamboy discussed the purpose of the industrial zones, comprehensive zoning and changes in zoning stating that these items are job creators and she discussed the importance of securing future public input. Ms. Lamboy also discussed the IA and IP districts and a conservative approach to industrial uses. Speaking about the Ames Envelope site, Ms. Lamboy said that she would like the Planning Board to have enough discretion on the use of the site.

Public Hearing on item 188847 - an ordinance amending the Somerville zoning ordinance to amend the allowable uses, the review requirements for certain uses, and the purpose statements in the IA and IP zones:

Mr. Mackey discussed the need for a commercial tax base and also discussed the history of Innerbelt Road. He expressed concerns over restrictions placed on property owners and stated that Section 13 could hurt business owners that are currently there. Walter McLaughlin, owner of the Ames Envelope site said that he looks forward to working with the city in utilizing the 200,000 square foot site. Josef Tracy stated his concern about the artists at the Rogers Foam site. The public hearing was closed.

Public Hearing on item 188681 - An ordinance amending the Somerville zoning ordinance to “remove from the Zoning Board of Appeals the authority to grant special permits or special permits with site plan review and to vest it in the Board of Aldermen”:

Teresa Swartzel spoke in favor of the proposal stating that there are areas in the zoning code that must be improved, noting that the proposed ordinances were well thought out and will enhance the city and its neighborhoods. There were no speakers against the proposal. The public hearing was closed.

Public Hearing on item 188682 - An ordinance amending the Somerville zoning ordinance to “down zone to a more restrictive residential district certain parcels of land and the buildings thereon situated near Park Street in Ward 2”:

Josef Tracy spoke in favor of the proposal stating that he would like to see the character of the neighborhood remain the same. There were no speakers against the proposal. The public hearing was closed.

Public Hearing on item 188683 - An ordinance amending the Somerville zoning ordinance to “require development projects seeking a special permit that are a certain minimum size to be subject to water & sewer and traffic studies that are conducted by an independent engineer who has not had a business relationship with the City or the developer during the seven (7) years preceding application submission”:

Josef Tracy spoke in favor of the proposal stating that the planning board did not scrutinize the Park Street project enough. There were no speakers against the proposal. The public hearing was closed.

Public Hearing on item 188684 - An ordinance amending the Somerville zoning ordinance to “suspend the SPGA’s authority to grant density bonus special permits until a comprehensive analysis and report has been prepared and submitted to the Board of Aldermen by an independent land use consultant detailing the impact(s) of the ordinance on the city”:

There were no speakers on the proposal. The public hearing was closed.

Public Hearing on item 188685 - An ordinance amending the Somerville zoning ordinance to “correct a serious flaw in the zoning ordinance that allows the true applicant(s) for special permits or variances to hide behind this loophole and not disclose themselves at the time of application to the SPGA or the Zoning Board of Appeals”.

Teresa Swartzel spoke in favor of all proposals this evening. David Dahlbaka stated the importance of full disclosure of conflicts of interest and Josef Tracy also spoke in favor of the proposal. The public hearing was closed.

Alderman White stated there may be technical and practical difficulties with this proposal and asked if similar ordinances exist in other communities. He also discussed the possibility of have 2 types of industrial zones to account for those that abut residential neighborhoods. Planning Board member Michael Capuan asked how many other communities in the Greater Boston Area give their Boards of Aldermen/City Councils permit granting authority and he asked the Planning Department to research this issue.

Chairman O'Donovan will leave the record open until the close of business on March 31, 2010 to receive written comments.

No Papers were acted on.

Alderman Sean T. O'Donovan, Chairman
Committee on Land Use