

**NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the Committee Report as APPROVED by the Board of Aldermen. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure that this is the Committee Report that was presented at a meeting of the Board of Aldermen, you should check the Minutes of that meeting in order to confirm its approval, rejection or amendment. Do not rely on the accuracy of this information without first checking with the City Clerk.**

December 3, 2009

**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 December 3, 2009, with Chairman Sean O'Donovan presiding and Committee Members Aldermen Maryann Heuston and William White also present and voting. Also present were Alderman Rebekah Gewirtz, members of the Planning Board, Monica Lamboy, Phil Ercolini and Lori Massa from OSPCD and interested members of the public.

The meeting was held in the community room of the VNA, 259 Lowell Street. The purpose of the meeting was to conduct a public hearing on a proposed amendment to the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to include a Senior Housing Use Citywide.

Ms. Lamboy addressed the members regarding the proposal and the need for senior housing. Since 1970, the number of seniors in Somerville has declined steadily while the country and the state have seen an increase in the number of seniors. This indicates that Somerville's reduction is the result of an out-migration of seniors to other parts of the country. When seniors leave, they take with them their skills, expendable time and economic resources so it is important for Somerville to plan for the needs of its current and future senior population. Projections indicate that the percentage of seniors will rise over the next 30 years to the point where seniors represent 20% of the population.

In Somerville, approximately 35% of seniors live alone, possibly leading to isolation, depression and poor nutrition. Presently, most of Somerville's 1,475 dedicated senior housing units are provided by public or non-profit agencies and were permitted through the provisions of 40B, exempting them from current zoning regulations. Current zoning does not acknowledge the unique needs that seniors may have and does not consider their expectations and desires, such as access to home health care, nutrition and medication assistance, social activity in communal spaces, safety and security, property maintenance, mobility, "real" kitchens, proximity to friends, on-site open space, storage space and access to shopping, etc.

Studies have shown that the four main reasons seniors migrate are: housing, environment, family/social networks and accessibility to services. Nationwide, communities are amending their zoning ordinances to facilitate the provision of senior housing. The city recognized and made known the need for additional senior housing in its Five Year Consolidated Plan (2008-2013).

The proposed amendments would create a new principal use named "Senior Housing" with categories for assisted living facilities, congregate senior housing and independent senior housing and would allow development to be permitted in most commercial districts and in Resident C districts.

The committee requested that:

- 40B regulations and associated data be provided (Chairman O'Donovan),
- OSPCD consider including RA and RB zones in the amendment (Chairman O'Donovan),
- OSPCD provide written data on the square footage of proposed units vs. the SHA and VNA units currently in the city (Alderman White),
- a parking analysis under the current senior housing zoning be provided (Alderman White),
- a summary of the SHA's waiting list for seniors for the past 2 years be provided (Alderman White),
- data on senior trends in Somerville and an analysis of why they are leaving the city be provided (Chairman O'Donovan),
- parking data per unit be provided (Alderman Heuston) and
- data be provided regarding similar zoning in other communities (Alderman White).

**Public Hearing:**

Speakers expressed concern about density, gentrification and the need for larger living spaces in the proposed amendment and also about senior housing not being near public transportation. The public hearing was closed.

Chairman O'Donovan will keep the record open until the close of business on January 29, 2010 to accept written comments on the proposal.

No Papers were acted on.

---

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