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April 30, 2009

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON LAND USE

The Committee on Land Use held a meeting on April 30, 2009, with Chairman Sean O'Donovan presiding and Committee Members Aldermen Maryann Heuston and William White also present and voting.

The meeting was called to order and adjourned until 7:30 PM, at which time it re-convened in Joint Session with the Planning Board. Vice Chairman Maryann Heuston presided. Committee Member William White was present as well as Aldermen Walter Pero and John Connolly, Members of the Planning Board, Administrative Assistant Jessie Baker, Monica Lamboy, Madeleine Masters and Rob May from SPCD, City Solicitor John Gannon and interested members of the public.

Item #1 - Building Moratorium

Mr. May made a presentation regarding the extension of the building moratorium, noted within, stating that SPCD wanted additional time to study the area for rezoning. SPCD's plan is to meet with the neighborhood on May 7th and submit the proposal to the Board of Aldermen on May 14th. Mr. May stated that the owner of the Star Market property was invited to a public meeting but did not respond. Alderman Pero told those present that this part of Winter Hill has been unchanged for years and now the city has an opportunity to bring an improved zoning picture to the area.

Public Hearing: re an extension of the building moratorium (szo §6.1.21.d), temporarily limiting development for the following parcels located in the vicinity of Broadway and Temple Street (identified by map-block-lot): 58-c-6, 58-c-7, 58-c-8, 58-c-9, 70-d-5, 70-d-10, 70-d-24, 70-d-25, 70-d-27.

Ms. Jean Liberatore inquired what effect the moratorium would have on her building and Ms. Masters replied that Ms. Liberatore wouldn't be able to get a building permit or bring a new use to the site during the moratorium.

Mr. James Cohen, owner of the Walgreens & Star Market properties, spoke against the extension stating that he was never notified about the public meeting referred to by Mr. May. He also said that it is not right that he can't rent the property. Ms Masters stated that the property may be rented as long as there is no change of use.

The public hearing on this matter was closed. The Planning Board accepted the extension of the moratorium.

Item #2 - Bed and Breakfast

Ms. Masters made a presentation and explained that Somerville's proximity to Boston makes it a base for travel throughout New England and noted that it is the home of many major historic events, particularly from the Revolutionary War era. Somerville also is the home of Tuft's University and is close to many other colleges and universities. Presently, Somerville has 2 full-service hotels and 3 Bed and Breakfast/Tourist Homes compared to Cambridge's 14 hotels and 18 Bed and Breakfast facilities.

Owners of historic properties in Somerville are faced with high repair and maintenance costs and limited alternatives for deriving income from the property. Historic outbuildings, e.g., carriage houses, barns and stables, have almost no reuse potential. Bed and Breakfasts are a more viable option and would allow owners of historic properties to generate income while encouraging restoration and maintenance of the properties. They would also provide a use for historic outbuildings, be compatible with residential dwellings and offer an alternative to dividing a property into multiple units

As for the economic impact to the city, this proposal would expand the 4% hotel excise tax, contribute an additional \$1000 or more per room per year, allow new dollars to be spent in the city, increase daytime foot traffic and provide a multiplier effect on local business.

The Review Standards would be as follows:

- Maximum of 9 rooms
- Only one dwelling on site allowed, (for resident operator)
- No kitchens in rooms
- Common spaces must be provided inside
- SPD required in Residential, NB, UN districts
- Design Review under Historic Preservation Commission Guidelines
- Parking Management Plan - tandem parking allowed

The Operational Standards would be as follows:

- Innholder's License required
- State Sanitary Code:
 - property maintenance
 - room furnishings
 - housekeeping
 - enforced by Health Inspectors
- Somerville Licensing Commission regulations:
 - management practices
 - housekeeping
 - enforced by Police

Ms. Masters compared a rooming house to a Bed and Breakfast, noting that a boarding room is long term and a Bed and Breakfast is short term, generally for not more than 14 days at a time. Ms. Masters pointed out that, under this proposal, only local historic districts would be eligible. Chairman Heuston said that she isn't sure that the public fully understands the proposal, since the historic districts are not well known. Chairman Heuston requested a list of the city's Local Historic Districts. Alderman White said that some people who purchased homes in an RA zone might be upset if a Bed and Breakfast were allowed in the

neighborhood and he further stated that this might also prompt people to oppose having their neighborhoods designated as historic. Alderman White said that the clientele of the Bed and Breakfast isn't the issue, it's the turnover of guests/people into the neighborhood. Ms. Masters replied that SPCD doesn't expect people to rush to open Bed and Breakfasts since it's more a labor of love than it is a money making operation.

Public Hearing: an ordinance amending the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to include a new historic bed and breakfast use citywide

Ronald and Linde Dynneson spoke in favor of the proposal. They informed the members that they run a guest house in the city and that they have better than 90% occupancy year round and believe that there is a great demand for this type of accommodation. Presently, they rent 3 rooms, but would like to be able to rent more. Their property is in an RA zone and their neighbors are very supportive and, in fact, supply many of their customers. Two \$1 million condos were just sold in the area with the knowledge that a Bed and Breakfast was operating there. Their clientele is benign, quiet and respectful and the Dynneson's noted that their guests purchase meals at local restaurants.

Alderman White said that the increase from 3 to 9 rooms is huge and Chairman Heuston asked if someone could add on to a structure to make it big enough for a Bed and Breakfast. Ms. Masters replied that significant alterations would draw some concern but a structure could possibly be expanded to maximize the use. Room size would be governed by health, fire and building codes.

There were no speakers in opposition. The public hearing on this matter was closed. The Planning Board and the Land Use Committee will keep the record open on this matter until May 4th.

Item #3 - Design Review Committees

Ms. Masters explained the reason to keep board membership full and said that under this proposal, the board would consist of 7 members with 3 constituting a quorum. She noted that the board serves in an advisory capacity, only. SPCD research indicates that the process would move smoother by easing the burden on board members.

Public hearing: an ordinance amending the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to consolidate the Citywide and Assembly Square Design Review Committees

There were no speakers in favor or against the proposal. The public hearing on this matter was closed. The Planning Board approved the proposal.

No Papers were acted on.

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