



City of Somerville

# PLANNING & ZONING DIVISION

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**TO:** Prospective Cannabis Establishment Applicants  
**FROM:** Sarah Lewis, Director of Planning & Zoning  
**DATE:** August 3, 2020 (updated June 5, 2023)  
**RE:** Zoning Advice

Zoning review occurs after the Host Community Agreement and local license have been granted, but you should be reviewing zoning requirements early in the process to ensure that you can propose a compliant project when the time comes to apply for zoning approval.

On December 12, 2019, the Somerville City Council adopted a new zoning ordinance (SZO). This ordinance requires that all development in Somerville show compliance with the SZO through the development review process. The development review process varies depending on what type of development is proposed; an overview of the process can be found at <https://www.somervillezoning.com/developmentreview/>.

This memo highlights key points about the SZO that you should consider early in the process. This is not a complete review of the zoning requirements with which you will need to show compliance prior to receiving a building permit, but these items may have a profound impact on your selection of a location.

## Zoning District

The most basic requirement to consider is whether a cannabis use is allowed in the district. Cannabis retail uses are only permitted in the Mid-Rise, High-Rise, and Commercial districts by Special Permit. Different types of cannabis establishments are permitted in different districts. See Table 9.1.1 of the SZO for a full list of what uses are permitted in each district and §9.2.4 for the review criteria that will be used to evaluate each type of cannabis establishment that requires a Special Permit.

## Proximity to Educational Uses for Retail Sales

SZO §9.2.4.d.i requires that cannabis retail uses must be a minimum of three hundred (300) feet away from certain educational uses. It is your responsibility to select a location that complies with this requirement. If the location you have chosen does not comply with this requirement, you cannot be granted a Use Special Permit.

## Storefront Design

Zoning requires that every ground story commercial space have at least one storefront. Per the SZO, "a storefront is a non-load bearing assembly of commercial entry doors and windows providing access and light to a commercial space and a place to display goods, services, and signs." See page 127 of the SZO for an illustrated example of a storefront; this building component is present in all Mid-Rise, High-Rise, and Commercial districts.

A storefront is required to have either a) an unobstructed view of the interior space of the store or b) a lighted and maintained merchandise display that is at least four (4) feet deep. This requirement cannot be met by installing opaque film over glass. It is your responsibility to propose a façade and floor plan that complies with both local zoning requirements and the 935 CMR 500 Cannabis Control Commission restrictions on product visibility.

If you have additional questions about local zoning requirements, please email Emily Hutchings, the liaison to the Marijuana Advisory Committee at [ehutchings@somervillema.gov](mailto:ehutchings@somervillema.gov).