

## **Massachusetts House of Representatives Bill Summary**

**Bill #:** H.3923

**Title:** An Act granting the city of Somerville the authority to require the adoption of institutional master plans subject to the review and approval by the municipality

**Sponsor:** Rep. Christine Barber

**Committee:** Municipalities and Regional Government

**Hearing Date:** July 29, 2025

**Prior History:** Refile of H.3745 (2023-2024 - Study); H.2136 (2021-2022 - Study)

**Current Law:** Chapter 40A Section 3 of MGL outlines the subjects that zoning may not regulate. It provides details for exemptions, public hearing processes, and temporary manufactured home residences. The law provides exemptions for specific uses and structures.

A provision in the second paragraph of this section holds that “no zoning ordinance or by-law shall regulate or restrict the interior area of a single-family residential building nor shall any such ordinance or by-law prohibit, regulate, or restrict the use of land or structures for religious purposes or for educational purposes on land owned or leased by the Commonwealth or any of its agencies, subdivisions, or bodies politic or by a religious sect or denomination, or by a non-profit educational corporation; provided, however, that, such land or structures may be subject to reasonable regulations concerning the bulk and height of structures and determining yard sizes, lot area, setbacks, open space, and parking and building coverage requirements.”

Currently, the city of Boston requires institutional master plans to be submitted by hospitals, colleges, and universities having more than 150,000 square feet of property.

**Summary:** Section 1 authorizes the city of Somerville to require the adoption of an institutional master plan, which is defined as a land-use and development plan for all landowners or used by an institution within a community, that identifies growth and development over a number of years, or in several phases. This tool allows the community to address strategies and development impacts through the review and adoption processes for the plan and allows the community to determine predictable outcomes for any planned growth of the institution.

Section 2 authorizes Somerville to adopt local legislation imposing institutional master plan review to regulate the use of land or structures for land owned, leased, or otherwise occupied by hospitals, health care institutions, colleges, universities, and non-profit educational corporations.

Section 3 states that this act shall take effect upon passage.

The bill exempts the city of Somerville from Section 3 of Chapter 40A, and any other applicable laws, to allow the city to adopt ordinances that impose institutional master plan review “to regulate the use of land or structures for land owned, leased, or otherwise occupied by hospitals, health care institutions, colleges, universities, and non-profit educational corporations” for long-term planning purposes.

Such institutions would be required to submit their master development plan to the city for review and approval.

**Notes:**

The language in this bill was re-approved by the Somerville city council on January 26, 2023.