

**Union Square Neighborhood Council
Built Environment Committee Meeting
April 28, 2018, 9:30 am - 11:30 am, Somerville Public Library**

Attendees:

Tori Antonino
Andy Greenspon
Simon Hill
Wig Zamore
Gary Trujillo
Ann Camara
Michèle Hansen
Jessica Eshleman

Meeting Minutes:

Simon: 2nd chance written into CDSP, where the model that passed last year (15.1 acre development). As each Dblock comes up to Planning board, there's a second chance of doing things with it. Design review, 2nd neighborhood meeting, planning board. After approval of planning board, 20 day appeal process.

Wig: Also MEPA.

Simon: True, but the next 4-6 weeks will be crucial.

Wig: The CDSP allowed US2 to lock in all their legal rights to building the square footage entitlements. The City cannot dictate a different design. Unless someone designs an alternate plan at the same level.

Michèle: You could come up with a new plan, but you'd need all the experts to make the plan real.

Wig: Yes, you'd need enough expertise, but it takes a lot more than just suggesting one-off concepts.

If you want to change the underlying paradigm, you have to focus on the broader design.

Tori: What do you mean by underlying paradigm?

Wig: Developers are focused primarily on the amount they can build and the types of buildings they can built (commercial, residential, etc.) So they are always concerned with Master Plan development first to get their legal footing.

Then there is MEPA which is about environmental issues.

Jessica arrives.

City red-lined east of Allen St (i.e. removed it from possible re-development), so US2 dismissed that boundary in back of D2.

D2 superblock - size of 6 small City blocks. 2) key block linking T stop to heart of UNion Square. If D2 is not done well, it has the most impact.

Tori: Should we advocate to the Planning Board or Design Review to make the buildings smaller or change the scale of the buildings?

Wig: 1) Some of us go organize those who live on that side of Allen St - just meet with them, so they aren't feeling pressure. 2) Separately meet with property owners. Mostly residential. Ask them separately if someone would guarantee them 25% larger than market value or convert tax free into a property worth 25% more, and ask residents if they were guaranteed the right to be relocated in new residential units on site that were upgraded at the same rent.

The parking is also a problem in D2. We don't know if the area around Kylee Barrell was cleaned up properly for residential to live. Underground parking would add much more parking

Simon: Questions about parking. In terms of the plaza in front of D2, we should find out whether the community likes that concept or whether the building should be moved. Are there parts of D2 appropriate for a community center. Models: One building model, or multi-building model. One building - where's it going to go. Multi-building model, for example move SCATV somewhere else and put community center there. Or community center elsewhere in D4, D5, etc.

Gary: Thursday, Joanne talked about a site that could be for the community center - where?

Wig: The residential point tower on D2.

Tori: We should see if more clean-up is needed on D2. Joanne might need help researching that. It can be investigated when the MEPA process comes up.

Wig: Joanne and Michèle volunteered to help researching that. Part of it should come from Somerville Redevelopment Authority, and some from MEPA. Generally you cannot build schools or residential on a site that's not been cleaned up. In Assembly they cleaned up

Gary: A couple years ago, people came in during a period of a few weeks to put instruments into the basement on Allen Street to measure any atmospheric contamination that might remain from the toxic materials in the soil in that area which remains from the barrel factory operations. They must have been satisfied with the results, since I heard nothing more following that exercise.

Wig: Kylee Barrel recycled lots of barrels - no idea what was in the barrels - drained into the ground. That's why they checked the buildings and the area.

Most recent spill was on Tufts St - succession of owners of industrial property. A very large company was the last owner - they did not pollute the site. When contamination was found on the site, that company volunteered to clean it up. Mike Capuano School had to close down as contamination had leaked over there.

Simon: Talking to Allen St residents and owners - do we need to do this soon, next week?

Wig: Allen and Merriam will be under intense development pressure after D2 and Target Site redevelopment. Zoning there presents a certain realization of value on those properties.

100% housing w/ twice as many

Michèle: So in reality, how quickly do we need to do this? 2 weeks, 2 months?

Wig: Look for hinge points. Two choices - one at City, one at State. With regard to City, we have great staff, but at

At State, reach out to MEPA office.

Andy: MEPA before or after.

Wig: 5 years ago, City filed a plan with MEPA regarding Union Square/Boynton Yards District. Old Boynton Yards district, and new Union Square district formed. And expect a new one at Target/McGrath sites. The degree of legal control on each site depends on whether SRA took control of the property. SRA has only taken a small degree of control of it so far. Said they'd take more control in future. MEPA replied - there are sewer, water, transit investment that all need to be done around. Funds put into some cleanups already, including D2. MEPA expected thresholds traffic, water, sewer will be exceeded by developers. DLJ has consulted who previously worked at MEPA said there's no

Jessica: Who would pay for 25% extra to people?

Wig: Developers unlock value by gaining access to this land, so they would pay for it.

Gary: Can any developer buy land in this area?

Wig: Yes. 9 original developers soliciting Union Square development, 1 was affordable housing developer for example who

Simon: So this cannot be abstract. There must be a reality and a real timeframe. The idea of

looking at the buildings at Allen St for development on the D2 block. It's important to confront this within this period, maybe 2 months or faster for plans of D2. We cannot discuss this forever - it must be acted upon.

Gary: I have heard a sense of urgency expressed. How urgent is it really?

Wig: I agree with Simon that it's fairly urgent. To get this done, we have to know the deciding bodies in the City and State that have the legal authority to work on this matter.

Design Review has no power in this though you should attend. Planning Board probably does not either.

Legal power in Mayor's office and SRA. Reluctance is that I know how hard it is to do things.

Michèle: How many buildings on Allen St boarder D2 block?

Wig: A dozen buildings or so. If you fold West Side of Allen St into D2, you create a lot of value. If not, you lose a lot value that will never be unlocked.

Simon: How are we going to do this?

Michèle: Has this idea ever been discussed in the City before?

Wig: I was very clear in my live presentation and comment letter on the CDSP regarding this. I had slides that we went through and was explicit about this in a short clear letter to the City. I have not gotten any response because engagement by the City would have meant they'd have to deal with the issue.

Simon: Can we bring this up and handle it the next few weeks

Wig: You could bring it up at Design Review committee, but they have no power probably. We would need urban and design professionals to get involved.

Andy: Should we reach out to these professionals and/or public interest law from Harvard Law Schools or other Law School community or other graduate school communities?

Simon: Should we move onto other design issues of D2, like the plaza?

Tori: Should we make a proposal to the USNC Board? Wig, do you want to submit a letter from your previous content to the USNC to make a proposal to engage with the Allen St residents? Maybe establish a working group?

Wig: Stantec is a big architectural firm that. Howler and Yoon working with US2. Pre-eminent designers on the faculty of Harvard and MIT. Characteristics of many designers is they are the

most publicly spirited people when they are not working for a wage and collapse the most when they are working for a wage. Landscape designer for Union Square is also a good designer. For design consultation - to use Assembly Square as a model - we spent 9 months researching its potential and city's needs. Put together a bunch of top notch designers to do conceptual thinking on the area. Community-wide charette was done to get ideas. It has not been done before. Get them together to review the plan to see if there are any stronger approaches. Then ask USNC if they would consider a reconsideration of D2.

Andy: USN did these things years ago - it's all online for reference. Should we combine this with urban and architectural professionals to come up with a new design plan?

Tori: Is this D2 specific or broader.

Wig: D2 defines the whole project in a large way, so that's why it's so important.

Michèle: Individuals can push ahead and explore this while we also talk to the broader USNC at the next meeting about the issues at stake.

Simon: This won't just be a USNC issue. Some people won't work with the USNC Board. It will be a multi-pronged issue. My concern is that with the USNC is that things take too long. If you put this into a process through next Thursday, it will get talked about over a number of weeks, and you will run out of time. It needs to be

Andy: Proposal: Talk to residents/owners on Allen St and talk to City (Mayor's office/SRA). Also get together urban/architectural professionals to discuss design.

Wig: Be discrete - a small group such as people from this one need to talk to them to see if they are even open to the idea.

Simon: Through USNC Board, put an Allen St meeting together to have them come.

Michèle: This idea has to be given to Allen St people first.

Gary: Volunteers as point person! (He lives there.)

Tori: Have a friend on Allen St, should I talk to him?

Wig: Should avoid throwing things out that are vague and leads to miscommunication.

Michèle: Agreed.

Gary: Wig, do you have sketches and proposals I could use as imagery to discuss this with Allen St residents?

Wig: And there would need to be a near-universal agreement.

Michèle: Will help facilitate meeting once it exists.

Ann: Will help also.

Wig: I can be point person to reach out to urban/architectural professionals. Could also talk to Ann Tate.

Tori: Need suggestions to Design Review.

Andy: Will make a Google document for people to put in suggestions on Design Review of D2.

community center:

Tori: Get working group started on community center. Ann has done a lot of legwork calling people - huge first step.

Simon: Two ways to look at community center - one unit building, a number of different buildings.

Number of different buildings. US2 would move SCATV into their development and put part of community center in current SCATV building. Walnut St building. US2 also could agree to having floors for community center in D2, D5, D6, D4.

D1.2 is 3 story parking garage with 5 story podium office tower on top. If we could remove that, move hotel into middle of D1, Ricky's could stay, and introduce community center building at end of D1 by one neighborhood park. US2 will be so resistant to that because it would remove a huge building from them and put it somewhere else. D6 isn't wide enough for a similar building. That's a work in progress I have been pursuing.

Michèle: Who is paying for this community center??

Gary: Agree with Simon on the two models he identifies, but the question of which model is better in our case can be answered only after we figure out what we want this community center to be. What are we asking for? I haven't done the leg work Ann has done and just described, but I have been thinking about and working on the ideas. I like the idea of integrating a number of different functions - SCATV, performing arts theatre, meeting space, library. Etc. Into a single space or having them in very close proximity to one another. We should consider the important synergistic effects of using this model. If there is an argument for splitting things up, we have to address that loss of synergy. Spoke with head of Somerville Media Center (SCATV) who agreed with an integrated type of place. We also should focus on what we mean by community and how to resurrect and revitalize it and do what we can to restore the area to what Bill Shelton has spoken of on many occasions regarding the sort of place he remembers it being at one time.

Ann: Complex across from Cambridge City Hall, senior center on one side, theatre on the other side, Cambridge YMCA next to it. This is a model to work from. I called the YMCA and spoke to Bill Murphy, we have a connection. He is interested by it is big money. I have been researched YMCAs that have been newly built and am looking at how they raised the money. Bill is thinking of closing the one on Highland. I think we need two. But there will be money from selling that. Called Glenn Ferdman from the library who is interested in Union Square. Also discussed Walnut St building. Glenn would really like a teen center there.
(Clarification: Recreation Department Building on Walnut St.)

Wig: If garage is pushed back to the property line, could make a much bigger neighborhood park. Middle of block is very quiet. Cost - need serious co-sponsorship for community center. Their co-work space (Workbar) could work as community center. Large dance space above in separate structure. Old Somerville Journal Building. Multiple locational options, including D1. Need money or else get very creative.

Simon: I've talked a lot with Ann about what a community center is. In England, people would go to pubs. Community centres were central areas where people of all ages could go to. We need intergenerational community centre. Activities that tie different ages together. When people get older, they see no reason to go out. Community centre provides that opportunity. YMCA and library are the main possible partners we've talked to so far, but there are a lot of partners possible. What really annoyed me is George Proakis told us to figure it all out, but I'm going to jump back on them and say they can do some work on this. They can't just throw it to the community. Let's talk to the Aldermen - they all said they supported

Michèle: To clarify - when we are talking about a community center, we are asking from US2 to have space, not that they build the center.

Gary: There was a proposal that the City would own the space, instead of renting it from a commercial landlord. D1 has not been sold to US2 yet, and we can establish the conditions under which the sale takes place, according to Alderman Mark Niedergang. Also, are we establishing a working group to discuss these issues in a focused manner?

Ann: When I talked to the separate areas in Cambridge, they had a lot of help from the City. We need that in Somerville.

Jessica: We need some coalescing on how to bring about this community center.

Simon: Community centre idea has been around for a while now. Return to the next 4-6 weeks as an important timeline. We need to resolve a number of these issues at these BEC meetings, in particular with regard to D2. If community centre isn't going to be a part of D2, we don't need to worry about the immediacy of this effort. But we need to figure out how to resolve that question before establishing working groups.

Andy: Others to just work on this as point people instead of working group.

To-Do:

Simon and Gary with Ann. Jessica also involved for USMS.

Allen St: Gary, Wig

Design/contact urban professionals: Wig and Ann Tate

Community: Ann, Simon, Gary, Jessica