

**Union Square Neighborhood Council
Built Environment Committee Meeting
January 16, 2019, 7 pm - 9 pm, Public Safety Building**

Attendees:

Andy Greenspon
Wig Zamore
Simon Hill
Tori Antonino
Gary Trujillo
Father Richard Curran
Stephenie Harper
Jessica Eshleman

1) Update on [Jan 15 Land Use Committee](#)

[Slides](#)

2) Open space Petition

a. [Shelton/Parsons 10 persons citizens Petition](#)

b. [City's Amended Open Space Petition](#)

c. [Plan of action and outreach for January 29th Public Hearing](#)

Tori: Summarizing the Land Use Committee from Jan 15.

Bill Shelton Open Space HiRise Petition to Amend Zoning Ordinance.

More open space based on height of development.

[Shelton/Parsons 10 persons citizens Petition](#)

Wig: They should do square feet of open space land per square feet of building like in South Boston waterfront. Boston City Staff did this as if water should count towards the square footage when it shouldn't. Fan Pier decision that given the square feet of development over 20 acres land, 4-5 acres water, this would require large amounts of public benefit on the privately owned waterfront. 40% of all land, not including water and sidewalks, to be public green space/public plaza.

So use ratio of building square feet to land. Could confine to transformative districts.

SomerVision Formula is 7.5 million sq feet residential and, 7.5 million sq feet commercial.

125 acres green and open space/15 million sq feet building = 1 acre open space/120,000 square feet of building development.

43,560 sq feet open space/120,000 square foot of building = 0.363 square feet open space per square foot of building development.

Andy: Shelton citizen's petition on development above five stories.

Note: This is additional open space on top of what is required in current (and hopefully new) zoning.

1 sq ft open space /10 sq ft = 0.1 sq ft open space per sq ft commercial development > 85 ft tall.

2 sq ft open space /10 sq ft = 0.2 sq ft open space per sq ft residential development > 65 ft tall.

This is still not enough to keep up with SomerVision. New Zoning will have other open space requirements for 5 or fewer stories.)

Simon: If we built a model where 20% was the old standard for green and open space, and 30% was the new standard, then we still have the same problem of how the % is going to be used--just more so. If developers start with their building space first, because that's their value to create profit on such buildings, then any green and open ideas tend to get left until later, and are often fitted to the margins, and as not so useful frames and borders to buildings, or as 'plaza' ideas to make up the required civic space quota.

So the advocacy is that green and open space be considered first, and at the same time as building models, so that any potential better green and open space can be developed in a real way, and where we might get a quality green park, for example. The D blocks development in Union Sq had this very problem, because buildings were given primary and significant focus, and where the Merriam St park is a good example of a large green space pushed to a margin, and the Prospect St 'plaza' open space suffers because it sits next to a busy traffic street bordered by large D block buildings.

Tori: Hearing for Shelton/Parsons petition and City-submitted open space amendments is January 29. We need to show up for this hearing to advocate for more open space.

BoA supports the petition more or less.

How are we going to finance it? The developers will pay if this amendment is adopted.

Gary: SomerVision 2040 at Armory. Implication is that the City cannot fund the open space. Need to refer to the details we know to push back.

Wig: (said something to the effect that the City's claims are bogus)

Bill Shelton, Tori, Renée, and others with Aldermen will tweak Shelton amendment to make sure it can be passed by the Aldermen.

Tori: Rest of Land Use Committee Meeting. Dan Bartman went over comments from the public on the draft of zoning. 200 pages of people responding.

January 2018 public comment had triple the comments than there were regarding the October 2018 version. But I think this is because the public hasn't really had a chance to respond.

Requests from the public to up-zone some places and down-zone other places.

3) Downzoning Beacon Street Petition

Tori: Beacon St has a 200+ person petition to down-zone (or at least, not up-zone) parts of Beacon St. We need to be able to give Dan Bartman and the Aldermen additional feedback on Beacon St. as a commercial corridor.

Wig: Beacon St. is an important main corridor through the community that compared to other areas would have mixed use and density. There was opposition previously by some long-time neighbors to the cycle track being built.

Dan Bartman said he would do what the public and/or Aldermen want.

Tori: This could limit Beacon St. from being a lively urban residence that can contribute to the entire community.

Wig: We need to match infrastructure development with the density of a given location.

Simon: Beacon has retail from Inman up to Washington St and then a bit more, then is mostly residential until the Star Market.

Wig: Net negative tax to the City for residential development. Retail is quality of life to the community but doesn't necessarily give net positive taxes to the community because of infrastructure and public safety cost from the City. Commercial office and lab space is the primary net positive tax to the City.

Look through Beacon St. petition to see what their requests are and how we feel about it.

Heard that the Aldermen are working on a compromise zoning type that allows retail/commercial in places that historically have held businesses but otherwise would have NR form factor.

4) Getting more people involved in Zoning Overhaul and Built Environment Committee (BEC)

Tori: City Council Land Use Committee will meet every other Tuesday, so we have to stay on top of that.

Joint meeting between BEC and Outreach Committee to plan?

Have more announcements for important meetings and development meetings, neighborhood meetings, current development proposals, etc.

Have a website development committee. Gary cannot do it all alone - he needs support.

January 25 is last day to be on Steering Committee of SomerVision 2040. USNC Board Representative?

5) Upcoming and Ongoing Developments in Union Square

*20 Inner Belt: Development by the Holiday Inn - hotel and residential with parking garage - hopefully shared parking with different uses in day and night.
All they need to do to get approved now is go to the Zoning Board of Appeals.*

Tori: Went to last neighborhood meeting for this development. Questions: Open space, sustainability. Developers fairly responsive about sustainability and trying to satisfy the green score in the draft new zoning. Solar on the roof.

Wig: Always need one person to check agendas for these development meetings and then one person to attend to report back and ask questions.

Gary: Alternative Community Center being proposed along Charlestown Street between Allen and Merriam Streets. The group working on the proposal plans to make a formal presentation within a couple months to USNC. *(The co-chairs approved inclusion of this subject for consideration at the next BEC meeting, so we can develop a good set of questions and concerns well in advance of the presentation to be made by Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) and their consultant.)*

65 Bow St plans - plan to move historic auto-shop building somewhere else.

6) Commercial Spaces in Union Square - how to handle vacancies, get more businesses affordable space.

See reference here: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2018/12/28/from-pop-permanent-strategy-save-local-retail/KdNIHKMe5KpEAgiM1oar8L/story.html>

Jessica: Current vacancies are often a result of land-banking - the property owners are not motivated to fill it with a tenant. Want to wait for Green Line and then sell and make a huge profit.

2.6% vacancy rate in a ½ mile radius of the Somerville Ave/Washington Street intersection as of last June - Union Square Neighborhood Plan district??? So in theory vacancies are not that high.

Landlords holding the handful of spots available are currently working with brokers to find tenants.

Under SCC there is a large restaurant space.

NU Kitchen has a barbershop being built in the adjacent space.

181 Washington St (ABG) has had many showings.

Union Wellness Center in Barrister Hall - 1 year short term lease after fire.

Bow Market leases are primarily 1 year with affordable units- good model for other businesses.

Landlords land-banking are absentee - need to get in touch with them and ask about getting short term tenants.

SomerNova - new branding of Ames building that was purchased last year (area where Aeronaut, Brooklyn Boulders, Artisans Asylum [<https://artisansasylum.com/>])

Tori: Can there be a vacancy tax?

Some discussion of vacant storefront display initiative. Put art in storefronts for people to walk by or even go into the storefronts to look at them.

Jessica: USMS facilitating vacant storefront pop-ups with Culturehouse.
<http://theculturehouse.org/>

Wig: Big concern about small businesses getting pushed out.

Jessica: Figure out which businesses own their buildings and which do not.
Prepare a Google Doc of Commercial Concerns related to Zoning or other Ordinances.

Discussion of other projects:

Tori email Sarah Lewis to get second cost analysis of proposal for D2 underground parking.
slewis@somervillema.gov.

DLJ in Boynton Yards has underground parking.

*Developer that bought JJ Sullivan (MR5) wants to include a park on Somerville Ave.
But would need 9 stories of development to make it financially feasible.
11,000 sq ft green space park. Carless development. Or high cost of parking permits.
Trade off between parking, height, and green space.*

7) Deadlines for contingencies in Union Square CDSP

*Condition 30, regarding parks on D1 and D7.
Email [Sarah Lewis](#), cc [JT Scott](#).*

8) MEPA – EIR (Environmental Impact Report)

“The DEIR will be noticed in the Environmental Monitor to be published January 23, 2019. The Public Comment period will extend through February 22, 2019, and the Secretary’s Certificate will be issued on March 1, 2019.”

Spend time at next meetings figuring out how to analyze this document, how to divide up sections.