

## Union Square Neighborhood Council - Meeting May 9, 2018

### Attendance

USNC Voting Members:

Rachel Weil, Ann Camara, Michèle Hansen, Ben Baldwin, Ben Bradlow, Erik Neu, Ganesh Uprety

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Neighborhood Resident Members: Joe Beckman, Peter Insley, René Mardones, Gary Trujillo, Bill Murphy (YMCA), Tom Bent (YMCA), Simon Hill, Kazumo?, Jessica Eshleman

Co-Facilitators: Rachel Weil

### Agenda

1. Welcome and intros
  - a. Rachel started off the meeting with introductions
2. Discussion with YMCA director (1 hr)
  - a. Rachel- to Bill Murphy: Please start us off with a little bit about your future plans for the YMCA in Somerville
    - i. Bill- Somerville YMCA has a \$2.5 million operating budget, and 70 employees. Affiliated nationally but independent. Highland Ave building was built in 1904. There are four child care programs, with 220 kids in licensed care. Many high school students use the Y, as do younger kids. Many youth employees serve as lifeguards (40 during summer, paid \$15/hr). There are 300 kids at camp every summer. 1200 adult & 800 youth members. There is also a pre-school center operated in a house next door to the main building, which is one of several adjacent to one another owned by the Y. Swimming pool was added to building in 1930s. Bill grew up in Somerville and has been with the Somerville Y for over fifty years. He has served as its director for thirty years. National affiliation provides an opportunity for expansion, new building, etc. The current building is owned free and clear, and operations run a small surplus. It is even able to offer swimming lessons to its (youth?) members at no extra charge. Much thought has been put into looking for a new home for the Y in the city, with Union Square being one of several sites under consideration.
    - ii. A new YMCA would ideally be 50,000 sq ft. and would require many parking spots. 350-400 visitors daily.
    - iii. Simon Hill- Has a structural engineer recommended leaving your current building?
    - iv. Bill- No it is still in pretty good shape. Renovating would be expensive and require shutting down program for years.
  - b. Ben Bradlow- Thanks for coming tonight. We've held two summits where we brought together over 150 people in the community to talk about goals for the neighborhood on many topics. There are lots of ideas for a community center. My first question is what you would like to see new or different if you were to move to a site in Union Square, distinct from current operations? What would be the scope of your interest in a neighborhood driven YMCA/community center proposal?
    - i. Bill- My biggest concern would be how much we would change. I don't want to lose the great things we are doing now. For example, new Y's don't have dormitories. Affordable housing is a gigantic issue in this city. We also have all kinds of space that's not laid out the way we use it or want to use it. The Y isn't really a gym and swim place, it's a social service agency. The fitness

- component for kids is important for me, and with a new building we can design the space around our program.
- ii. Tom Bent- There are newer Ys that are built into office buildings taking up a couple of floors. Partners with community health centers. National affiliated organization has helped to design some amazing new spaces. Most YMCAs aren't transit oriented
- c. Simon Hill- Did you get a property tax assessment on Highland Ave?
    - i. We don't get taxed since we're a nonprofit, The city assessed it at 3.5 million.
    - ii. Simon- My sense is that the city said there will need to be community organizational partnerships in order to get a community center.
    - iii. Bill – our plan would be to raise money, get bonds and tax credits. A new Y costs \$20 million.
    - iv. Simon- Do you think you can get the funding together to construct a new YMCA facility?
    - v. Bill- Certainly. The Y is interested in this opportunity
  - d. Joe Beckman-Are you committed to a single new building? My concern is multiple sites. This is a \$2 billion project. The city could push the MBTA to release some extra money to go toward facilities. I'm interested in the partnerships you've crafted. If there were support, there could be different programs at different sites.
    - i. Bill- We would be open to that. We need to figure out where the main location is going to be.
  - e. Erik- You know the D parcels pretty well, Tom. Where would you put a new Y/community center?
    - i. Tom- The reality is we need time to raise funds etc. The present site of the police station would probably be one of the key spots. Good location. Reality is, the timeline for D2 is too short; we'd love to have it happen sooner than would be possible there. US2 has been interested in talking to us. We had a meeting (with Greg Karczewski, et. al.) 6-8 months ago.
    - ii. Ann Camara- We had heard that US2 would want a private YMCA for their buildings.
      1. Tom- I asked Greg about that, I think it was a miscommunication
      2. Bill- The YMCA always makes its facilities open to the general public.
  - f. Peter Insley- You mentioned that US2 wouldn't permit you to put dormitories in a new Y [actually, Bill only said that he thinks that US2 has housing covered, so there wouldn't be a need for the sort of accommodation that's provided by the Y on Highland Avenue]
    - i. Bill- I don't know of a new Y that does dorms. Plus US2 is doing housing there, so I can assume they're handling that instead of a duplication of services.
    - ii. Peter- The current tenants may not have the same opportunities in US2's affordable housing.
    - iii. Peter- How much more space would you need to make a move worth it?
      1. Bill- 50,000 square feet is our ideal size. We have 35,000 right now, including two floors of dormitories
  - g. Michèle Hansen- My brother in law lived in the current Y building before he married my sister, while he was making a personal transition. I think it's important to the neighborhood. We can't get enough affordable housing, so it wouldn't be duplication.
    - i. Tom- It's a difficult mix, with the dorm clientele mixed in with the kids. Especially today a lot of the tenants have issues.
    - ii. Bill- Our housing is 43 single room occupancies. There are no services and I am the resident director.
  - h. Ann Camara- The reason I called Bill is because the Y has everything a community needs. We have been trying to figure out what we want in a community center
    - i. Bill- Visit the Y. Arlington doesn't have a Y, but they do have a Boys and Girls club. Most Ys are in a square, eg Cambridge. Cambridge has built and runs

several top notch community centers. Somerville has relied on the Y to do all that. You could make the point that Somerville needs to invest more in this kind of thing. There hasn't been a capital campaign for new community centers in over 100 years.

- i. Gary Trujillo- I'm glad to hear you'd be interested in a partner like CHA. Union Square doesn't presently have one (since the one in the building where SCC has its offices was closed a couple years back). The Built Environment Committee has been looking at what we want in a community center. One consideration is that there are advantages to having all these facilities located in close proximity to one another, principally with respect to the synergistic effects relative to the community-building capacity, though not all in our group place emphasis on that idea. In addition to athletic facilities, we've looked at meeting space, performing arts, branch library, and SCATV. At some point, maybe we could bring you that into the conversation.
  - i. Bill- Yes.
- j. Erik- Do you have 2-3 examples of a Y making a big capital project shift in a hot real estate market.
  - i. Bill- I can ask the Y about this.
  - ii. Erik- And partnering with a big development. Cost-sharing, being creative, etc.
  - iii. Bill- Got it.
- k. Joe Beckman- Curious about partnerships with the city in some empty schools, or the less active churches. It's harder to imagine a single site anymore.
  - i. Bill- We use St. Catherines on occasion. Used to run a program out of the Cummings School. We have looked at other sites. Generally, older schools, I think the city has plans to redevelop.
  - ii. Michèle- St. Anthony's would be good for that.
  - iii. Bill- It's an interesting site, I wonder what they use the school for.
  - iv. Gary- Though the school itself is vacant, there are young people living on the top floor – young people serving in something like Vista or Peace Corps.
  - v. Michèle is a thriving parish, serving the local Brazilian community
- l. Peter Insley- You serve Arlington as well
  - i. Bill- Yes, a lot of Boston area Ys are independent. It's different in other parts of the country
  - ii. Peter- Where do people live?
  - iii. Bill- About 75% are still from Somerville. Some have moved out but continue to be members.
- m. Simon- How much parking did you ask US2 for?
  - i. Bill- We asked for a lot. At least 200
  - ii. Tom- We have 400 daily users now and only 40 spaces, and it works.
  - iii. Simon- The problem is there isn't space for what you're asking for.
  - iv. Bill- We know we're not going to get all the parking we want.
  - v. Tom- The attraction of Union Square is that you can walk, bike, transit, etc. This is a huge amenity for hte people living and working here.
- n. Ann Camara- Would St Anthony's allow you to do everything you want?
  - i. Bill- We haven't really explored it yet
  - ii. Tom- Greentown Labs is using a lot of their parking lot.
  - iii. Ann- What about hte police station itself?
    - 1. Bill- I don't think it will work. It's in pretty bad shape.
- o. Bill- Lynn is bulding a \$27million development next to their current building. Grants, fundraising, tax credits.
- p. René- This neighborhood council will soon enter a negotiation with US2. Any thought you have about what this group should bring to that conversation? They want to advocate for a community center.

