

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting

April 9, 2019

7 pm – 9 pm

Public Safety Building

220 Washington St.

Board Members:

Bill Cavelini

Michele Hansen

Andy Greenspon

Tori Antonino

Ellie Tiglao

Bill Shelton

Paola Massoli

Shane Clyburn

Ann Camara

Community Members:

Jessica Eshleman

Simon Hill

Gary Trujillo

Joe Beckmann

Wig Zamore

Kana Sethu

Ari Rizzitano

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Public Comment

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Joe:

Is there any meeting scheduled to address the accessibility question at the Union Square Green Line Station to be answered?

Simon:

Three points. 1) The idea of public comment with two 10 min periods at beginning and end doesn't work, especially at the end because there will be no debate or discussion that comes out of it. Similarly with the beginning as well. People make points but they never get discussed as interactive points. This has always been a weakness of this group and the Working Group before though it was better in the Working Group before. I am advocating that for the people who do come and trying to get more people to come, it would help to allow them to give more input. How do you encourage debate and discussion with this group as an interactive setting? People make points that don't get addressed.

2) Executive Session: When executive session was introduced originally, my memory is that executive session might go for 3 or 4 meetings only. Today, I don't see the point because there are no secrets to what's in the CBA in terms of strategic discussion. Everyone knows what's in there. It seems like the function of executive session has lost its meaning to continue.

3) Maximizing Union Labor via a PLA is never going to happen. US2 has been consistent about the fact that they won't sign a PLA. So I don't know why this group takes up time trying to push it. US2 already has in mind specific unions and prevailing wage groups, and other wage groups they are going to use. If you can find out in your next negotiating session what their intention is in terms of those groups, we would like to here what their intention is with regard to all three of these groups.

Gary:

Regarding Simon's first point, I think we should be trying to think of ways to encourage people to participate, whether at these meetings or in new ways. For the benefit of new people here, I want to point out that we have previously allowed discussion during the main portion of the meeting when it's mostly board members speaking. I would like to suggest we do an experiment to see if we can make this work again although it may not have worked that well previously. If we set some ground rules, I think it can work. I have been frustrated because there is often a point of information that is relevant to the discussion that a non-Board member is prevented from articulating.

Announcement – meeting at noon on Thursday at the central library to talk about the MBTA access issues. The previous meeting was 2-3 weeks ago and it was very lively. There were people from City Hall and legislators there, including Denise Provost, Pat Jehlen, Mike Connelly, and Christine Barber. Ann is one of the organizers. The meeting is being chaired by Todd Kaplan,

Bill S:

(offered a few words to help us understand Todd and his experience)

Wig:

Todd was one of the attorneys who brought the Greater Boston Legal Services accessibility suit against the T and won. Judge King oversees an on-going settlement over accessibility on the MBTA. He helped to ensure a second head-house at the Assembly Square T stop.

D2 is the heart and most important part of the US2 development. There are 4 keys to succeed with D2. 1) Get the four layers of underground parking under the office building at the corner. 2) Get the elevator at Prospect St right down to the platform. 3) I would be happy with offering US2 extra built square feet on the D blocks as a whole to ensure the underground parking gets built. 4) The underground parking allows putting the central plaza and green space behind the Prospect Street D2 buildings with a better access and connections for the Allen St. neighborhood.

The most important things in the transformative districts in Somerville is the district design, not the individual building and lot designs. I went to the Rappaport Institute meeting, an all-morning meeting on transportation in MA at the Kennedy School at Harvard. Electric power and transportation dominate climate impact more than residential and commercial buildings. The

best way to lower that impact is to build competent electric transit. Before the Big Dig went far over budget, electric Urban Ring rail would have been the best transportation plan around the Greater Boston area. Urban Ring phase 3 was planned to carry 290,000 people per day, much more than the Green and Orange line, or the total commuter rail ridership. It would have intercepted all major transit lines and highways. This would allow the Gateway Cities to gain evolutionary jobs and more people to live further out from the center of Boston with easy access to it via transit, decreasing the housing price spikes in the core - Boston, Cambridge and Somerville. We are expected to have on average 7 feet of sea level rise by 2090. Buildings built today will be in the water. We have off-shore wind capacity in Massachusetts to generate 20 times our current electric use. This would allow us to electrify our transportation infrastructure easily.

3. Approval of minutes of February 20th and March 12th Meetings

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Updated February 20th minutes: Approved unanimously.
March 12th minutes: Approved: 7 yes, 0 no, 1 abstention.

4. Debrief March 27th Community meeting feedback

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Bill Cav: At the end of the meeting, Senator Pat Jehlen approached Bill Cav and Greg K to ask us to send a joint letter to MassDOT asking for an elevator from Prospect St to the platform of the planned Union Square Green Line Station. She asked us to address the letter to her, so that she could take it to a subsequent meeting with MassDOT Secretary Pollack. After sending drafts back and forth, USNC and US2 sent an agreed upon version that was sent to Senator Jehlen. This version is different from the initial draft sent to Board members.

Ann: Came from a meeting called R-TAG of those who are physically challenged. MBTA gave a presentation for all the stations planned in Somerville and they made the designs seem glorious, contrary to the reality on the ground.

Bill Cav: Negotiators asked how often US2 talks with MBTA. US2 said they meet every week. US2 says they raise the elevator issue.

Paola: Hopefully many groups will send feedback on the design issues of D2 and MBTA accessibility.

Bill Cav: A good amount of people came to the meeting and many made comments that were very helpful for the negotiating team. This is the kind of thing that helps when sitting down across from US2. We got some press to attend. The video is now online.

Paola: Katjana Ballyntine wanted to come to the meeting, but was at the Vision Zero meeting. She wanted to meet at a later date to talk about the issues at hand.

5. Decision whether to invite Scott Hayman, SCC to describe preliminary plan for Allen St/Charlestown Street development adjacent to US2's development

- US2 will have control over D2.4, but Scott Hayman of Somerville Community Corporation has had discussions with US2 about developing on that parcel. Plans for a mixed-use development, dozens of units of housing planned, with the potential for a health clinic from the Cambridge Health Alliance, with one public meeting room.

Tori: Disappointment that Scott Hayman has not kept the USNC involved in this process.

- **Michele:** It is not entirely clear the details of a possible civic space in the negotiations for the community benefits agreement.

- *Motion to invite Scott Hayman to discuss this issue at the next USNC meeting for a maximum of 30 minutes. Approved unanimously.*

Andy points out condition 27A of the Coordinated Development Special Permit, which requires the Applicant US2 to work with the USNC and community on finding a spot for an indoor civic space. US2 is supposed to update the Planning Board on this process whenever they present Design and Site Plan Review for one of the D block parcels.

6. Decision on draft of letter to Planning Board about underground parking and D2 site plan

- **Paola:** I prepared a draft letter based off of Andy's initial shared Google Document. After the Planning Board meeting last Thursday on D2.1 and the Built Environment Committee on Sunday, I revised the draft letter.

- *Motion to approve drafting and approval of letter to Planning Board on behalf of USNC via email vote.*

Approved unanimously.

- *Letter due by April 19 at noon.*

Andy: Sending it sooner may allow Planning Board to read it before April 18 meeting. Although the Planning Board will not be approving D2.1 until May at the earliest.

- **Bill Cav:** Planning Board on April 18 will discuss new item, the Alley design for D2 block, which means there will be public testimony again at that meeting.

- **Tori:** The Planning Board surprisingly was very critical of the current D2.1 plan. I encourage everyone to watch video of that meeting. It is [linked](#) on the home page of our website.

7. BEC report – update on SomerVision 2040.

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Bill S. There are 70 people on the committee, most being people I have not met before, despite having lived in Somerville for many years. The City had already picked out their objectives and goals before even getting feedback from the people. The City doesn't understand systems thinking. SomerVision 2030 was 6,000 housing units. SomerVision 2040 has a range, with low end of 11,000 new housing units, which is a third of the housing units already in the City. If they did this alone, we wouldn't be able to do any of the other goals in the City. This would remove progress on Affordable Housing in the City for example. Cambridge 16% of all housing units deed restricted, Boston 18%, Somerville 9.7%. Cambridge and Boston can do it because they have an immense amount of money from commercial development, which Somerville is lacking.

Tori: SomerVision 2030 goals: 125 acres, 6,000 housing, 30,000 new jobs. A bunch of people kept saying we cannot get 125 acres of open space. Nobody spoke about the details in the numbers, such as the number of developable acres and how many could be open space. There was a feedback form that lacks detail after the meeting – asking on a scale of 1-10 how happy everyone is with each goal. They want to separate everyone into interest groups, but you can only be in one interest group. It's very silo-ed thinking. And the City wants to rush this to be finished before the end of the year.

Wig: The second day of the 2040 meeting, with attendees expected to give numerical planning preferences without any context, was very disappointing.

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Bill Cav: I felt the City Planning Department was begging the USNC and other existing neighborhood groups to send reps to the pre-meeting of this process. And we designated **Ann**, who attended these meetings. But this is clearly not what we bought into. It is not participatory planning.

Tori motions that everyone who was at this SomerVision meeting prepare a letter to the Mayor and City regarding the many problems with the SomerVision 2040 planning process.

Ann: I'm not sure a letter is going to get us anywhere. This is already done – the City already has its ideas. We need to rally the people who were at the SomerVision meeting to get behind this.

***Bill S** proposed that those interested in developing and proposing a response from the USNC to SomerVision 2040 meet before the next USNC meeting. Ann, Ellie, Michele, Tori, and Wig volunteered. Bill S will send them a Doodle poll to schedule a meeting.*

Andy: BEC needs help. Also Outreach Committee needs to be re-started with help from more Board members to step up.

Ellie: A central calendar of meetings and events would be very helpful for me to keep track of everything.

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Gary: There is a calendar on the website – I am happy to give anyone access to add events.

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8. Meeting with the Mayor – Thursday 4/25, 10:30 am

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Andy: Everyone who replied to the Doodle Poll could attend at this time.

Tori: USNC should set the agenda for the meeting.

Bill Cav: From the email, it appeared that the mayor wanted to be updated on Union Square concerns. Tim Snyder stated that he could not discuss specific issues of the Community Benefits Agreement, since that is a private, non-City issue.

Jessica: Just as a point of information, Union Square business community leaders are meeting at that same time with Councilor JT Scott.

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Paola: We should come to the meeting with some action items we want the City to do.

Michele: We need to be specific in asking for what we want and when we want responses with details.

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Tori will prepare a draft of the agenda and send it around to the rest of the Board for additions and edits. USNC Board will solicit community members to also send ideas for agenda items.

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9. Discussion of status & latest plan by Elan Sassoon for JJ Sullivan lot Lake St/Somerville Ave – 346 Somerville Ave.

Bill Cav: I was at meeting when community peppered Sassoon, head of construction, architect, lawyer with questions about the development. He presented a plan that was presented similarly before with two bulky buildings and a narrow alley way that connected Somerville Ave with Lake St. The neighbors rejected that plan for a second time, stating it was out of scale with the neighborhood. The underground garage would come off onto Lake Street, and there are 100 units in the building. Sassoon said he would go back to the drawing board. He said that he would present a building in the front of Somerville Ave with 9 stories to have a park on Lake St. that was presented before. The neighbors said that they wanted a smaller project.

April 16, 7 pm, 220 Washington St Public Safety Building.

Presenting a plan with 95 units in a 6-story building that covers the site facing Somerville Ave, with a park that has a distance of 80 feet from the lot line of the building and Lake St.

I would point out the contrast between how Sassoon keeps changing their design in response to community feedback while US2 has not changed their design in many years despite community feedback.

I told JT Scott that USNC is watching what the neighbors say about the development and want to ensure their concerns are heard and adjust the development accordingly.

Tori: Sassoon reached out to me about possibly getting support for no parking on the development.

10. Public Comment

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Wig:

There are an increasing number of developers interested in Union Square. The D2 parcel is coming up fast, we need to rally people with at least 1 week notice to prepare their own comments, with an own op-ed piece, for example, to inspire individual comments.

SomerVision 2040 start is ominously worse than SomerVision 2030. But it's on a longer timeline than the D2 design which is upon us now.

Transportation details that go beyond Somerville are determined by the Metropolitan Planning Organization, which meets twice a month for half a day each time.

I put out a suggestion to the Built Environment Committee list that the City require 3D GIS and built models to show neighbors and interested citizens to allow the neighbors and businesses to see the context of each development. In Cambridge that is mandatory.

The two meetings I went to of City Council subcommittees recently that were most interesting and concerning were the Opioid Meeting with the Suffolk District Attorney, and the meeting on Autism in the City. When you live next to a highway, the chances of having children with autism is significantly increase due to the pollution. And our governments and the communities have not provided enough resources to date to help the affected families with autistic children.

Gary:

I understand that the priorities of the board are dealing with nuts and bolts considerations such as those that have been discussed tonight, but it's also super important to deal with issues of how we are seen in the broader community. I want to have as much of our energy as possible directed toward getting the Outreach and Communications committee going again. I'm really happy that there are a couple of new faces here tonight. I know these meetings might not be as engaging as those people may have expected, but the committees are a great place to get engaged.

The [Planning Board meeting before the last one](#) (March 21) was primarily a discussion of a plan for retail/residential construction at 300 Somerville Ave. This proposed development, on the site of what was erected as an Episcopal Church in the 19th century, will be discussed at the Planning Board on April 18. I plan to put an audio recording of the meeting onto the web site soon.

We have a calendar on the website, which could provide a central repository of all Union Square activities and meetings. Visitors to the calendar page can select a category of events to display (e.g. USNC-related only).

I think there should be a meeting of interested parties ahead of The April 24 presentation to prepare and coordinate questions to ask Scott Hayman and SCC about their development plans, especially with respect to how well what they are proposing satisfies our need for high-quality civic space, and how it compares with what might be possible on the D1 parcel (where the public safety building is now located).

Jessica:

We are celebrating the life of Jane Jacobs at Remnant Brewery on May 2, 7-9 pm with screening of Citizen Jane: Battlecry for the City. No cost to attend and a great opportunity to get to know your neighbors.

Joe:

April 27, Somerville Media Community Summit meeting. Organized by a wide range of people, including Digg Boston, Somerville Media Center, Boston Free Radio, and invited Tufts Housing League, and other kinds of community organizations. They are very concerned with the GLX as a whole, community organizing, the overall budgetary impacts. They are your natural allies and we need to build bridges.

Simon:

Examine the two points I said at the beginning of this meeting seriously regarding public participation and executive session. I am betting that this will not happen. For example, Sullivan development 100 units would yield 20 affordable units, and no one talked about it at the meeting.

Motion made to add as an agenda item at the next USNC meeting a discussion of Simon's suggestions.

8 yes, 1 no (Bill Shelton)

11. Executive Session

Unanimous vote to go into executive session for the purposes of discussing strategy around community benefits negotiations with US2.