

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting

May 14, 2019

7 pm – 9 pm

Public Safety Building

220 Washington St.

Attendees:

Michèle Hansen

Bill Cavellini

Ann Camara

Ellie Tiglao

Ben Baldwin

Pennie Taylor

Bill Shelton

Andy Greenspon

Jacob Kramer

Tori Antonino

Community Members:

Jessica Eshleman

Joe Beckmann

Wig Zamore

Gary Trujillo

Greg Hill

René Mardones

Alex Brown

Sandra Brown

Matt Taylor

Laurie Goldman

Joseph Weinstein

Alex Frieden

Cosmo DiSchino

Marie-Elle Merchant

Rachel Weil

Lynx Mitchell (doing audio recording)

Representatives for Elan Sassoon Planned Development:

Elan Sassoon

Richard DiGirolamo

Jai Singh Khalsa

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Public Comment

Joseph Weinstein: Discussing the petition from 263 residents of Beacon / Washington St.

Not a signatory, but was surprised to see response to petition on the agenda

Why should USNC be asked to “declare war” on the opinions of Washington St / Beacon St intersection?

Why should we give weight to letter from 7 people who live outside the area against the will of the people of the neighborhood?

Tone of letter is disrespectful ; referring to “rich white folk”

Letter also seems to imply people against creating parks

People don't want 5 story box buildings that are consistent with MR5 zoning. Should be room for a compromise.

Sandra Brown: Concerned going forward that USNC Board be mindful that we fight for Somerville residents to fight for affordable housing and good living wage jobs, issues that are affecting our community now. It's not just about affordable housing and living wage jobs but also green and open space. We all have the same desires to build up Somerville to be a good community that represents all of us. I don't think it should be divided. It works better when we are united on these issues.

Laurie Goldman: Thrilled to see that this group and those working on the CBA have been making great progress. As you approach the final stages of negotiations, be mindful of a few critical elements of the agreement. As part of the package, we want to ensure that part of the approach to displacement is securing the job opportunities that will come into the area for those likely to face barriers to employment. If we do not go far enough, we will have a not effective or implementable agreement. Want support to go to programs that give the tools for those to acquire the training, and childcare, transportation, and job training. Job training programs that are sector specific related to the jobs that are coming into the area to help the local workforce succeed at those jobs.

René Mardones: SCC, Union United - This is a key moment in the negotiation with the developer. We have to be mindful in the agreement on the issue of permanent jobs. This is the high number of opportunities for Somerville residents. I worked with a coalition to ensure local jobs for those at the Everett Casino. What was key was the technical oriented training for that specific industry, such as culinary skills, for Somerville residents. I'm not saying construction jobs are not important, but of the 60 people applying for permanent jobs at the Casino, only 2 were construction jobs.

Matt – Appreciation for the neighborhood council and negotiating team. Echo what Laurie and René said on ensuring permanent jobs. Also need to push for 40% affordable housing if possible. Affordable for 0-30% median income as well as 30-80% median income. Not just 80-120% median income. US2 only promised 13 or 14 two bedroom units, so not enough affordable family housing too. US2 tactic to say they cannot do all the priorities around open space, sustainability, affordable housing, and jobs. That's just a tactic they are using to divide

us. If they could not afford to do all those things, they would show us why by opening their books and showing their return on investment. So we should feel empowered to get all these goals.

Alex Brown: Here with Union United. Echo all the other things folks have said. Considering how few units will be affordable family (2+ bedrooms) at 3%, this level should be made higher.

Gary Trujillo: I want to speak to agenda Item 6 on public comment. I put most of my thoughts in writing and posted them to the USNC-public mailing list. I'm very happy to see so many unfamiliar faces here tonight, and I'm glad those people have a way to make their feelings known. I'm hoping we can have responses to the kind of things that come up not just here but at all of our meetings. Based upon the discussion last time, I want to acknowledge that it is difficult to go through a long list of agenda items, so it is hard for there to be the kind of participation at meetings that I would ideally like to see. The thing I really want is a mechanism by which we can have more dialogue and back and forth, so that these public comments are not just statements to the Board. I would like there to be an understanding, that the Board has an obligation to respond in some fashion to what is expressed -- perhaps in a (public) written form, if not right at the meeting. If we are modeling ourselves after the City Council, we must take into account that there's an obligation of City Councillors to respond to their constituents. I would like Board members to open themselves up to comments by the community and to provide responses to those community members, both individually, and, to the extent possible, in some public fashion.

Greg Hill: Part of Union United and Somerville Stand Together. Increase the number of family sized units on D2 up to 36 units. More than 20% affordable housing. Permanent jobs and workforce development. Agreement must include a technical oriented skill training such as the First Source Jobs program. And a youth program to train people for such skills. If US2 is moving forward with the lab building, these skills need to be taught. Lower the barrier to employment parents. Need childcare and transportation. Need diversity and inclusionary officer. Also there needs to be a community center with after school and summer school programs for our youth.

3. Approval of Minutes of April 24, 2019 Meeting

Unanimous 10-0.

4. Presentation by representative for developer of the JJ Sullivan site

Elan Sassoon

Lawyer: Richard DiGirolamo

Architect: Jai Singh Khalsa, from Khalsa design.

Richard: 21,000 sq ft site. Been occupied by Sullivan Plumbing for several decades. Extends from Somerville Ave to Lake St.
Current CCD55 business zoning district.

Met with the neighborhood on 3 occasions. First proposal was 2 buildings, 1000 sq ft commercial, 35 parking spaces, 24 bicycle spaces.

Latest proposal is 1 building, size cut down by ~1/3, 94 units, 84 are studios, no 2 bedrooms, 104 bicycle parking, ground floor commercial ~500 sq ft, no parking, with open space and park area on the Lake St. side.

Will be a mid-rise district if the new zoning passes. 100 units.

Jai Singh: Commercial fronting on Somerville Ave, loading bay internal to the building adjacent to trash. Pull the building back on the first floor level to allow outside café/seating area, street trees.

Mid-block connector walkway along side of building with pitch down of 7.5 feet in height to the 7500 sq ft urban park on Lake St side.

Recast finiaures on side of the building via rubber mold on the old building to add on the side of the building to give a historical reference.

All units have balcony or some sort of private outdoor space.

Intend roof-deck for the building, pulled back

Net zero carbon footprint building. Building will be super insulated, no gas. Cook-tops will be induction electric, heating will be electric. Many of these units won't even need to turn the heat on in the winter. A building this big usually needs more cooling than heating. Two of the developers ran a union brick mason company for ~30 years, for the quality and detail of the construction. Their team won an award from the 2018 Somerville Historic Preservation Commission for a building they did.

Bill Shelton: I think this is a very well designed project. I think it's exactly the wrong use for this location. But I cannot in good faith oppose it at this point because the developers have worked very faithfully with the neighbors. I think the neighbors are at a point that they are very comfortable with the design. I will explain why it's a bad use of the space at a later time. I think the Board should not take a position and should just support the neighbors in whatever they want. I would also like 20 minutes at the next meeting to influence the zoning at this location.

Ben Baldwin: Two questions. 1) Is this compliant with the inclusionary zoning? 2) Did the original proposal include multi-bedroom units and if so, why was it changed.

Jai Singh: There will be 20% affordable units, 19 units in total with rental. previous proposal had a few multi-bedroom units but had to be changed with decrease in size to be financially feasible.

Pennie: Echo public comments – the real need for family units in this area. If people are being displaced, can they even afford the studio or one bedrooms at the affordable rate as a single person. I doubt that for 94 of these mostly market rate units, that no one will come in with a car.

Elan: With GLX coming, we had a choice. 68 parking spaces originally. Neighbors did not want that. A choice between a green space park or putting back a parking lot, and we put back the park. We did build multi-family units in other buildings, such as 42 Bow St. Those are all 3 and 4

bedroom units. 263 Washington St, and building next to it, 3 and 4 bedroom units. Also a mini-park there. Specific to this certain building, in order to put in the park and take away the parking, we had to do studio and 1 bedroom units.

Jacob: With US2 also making these types of units, there will be a glut of this type of housing, it will be harder for people with roommates or a family to find places to live. Hope developers find a way to incorporate more multi-bedroom units to represent the mix of people in Somerville. I feel like the current brick façade of the building is kind of bland.

If we were to take an affirmative position on this, then going above and beyond on the inclusionary zoning would be necessary. We are holding US2 to a higher standard beyond the inclusionary zoning.

Elan: 20 Carlton Union Square also 3 and 4 bedroom units. We just completed 20 units that were family units.

Tori: Appreciate that the building is net-zero. Somewhat concerned that all the units are studio and one bedroom. Appreciate what Jacob said on a business model to allow larger units, but understand that with the park it may be financially unfeasible. Maybe in future larger building designs, we can work a bit in balancing this. I appreciate the green space and as many native species as you can do, including milkweed, aster, goldenrod, especially for our pollinator populations. Would you consider assessing the finances of what a green roof would look like in terms of savings for the project. Green roofs will last longer and help with storm water management. How will you handle storm water management? Will that be incorporated into the park? One of the largest issues in climate change will be the heat-island effect.

Elan: underground catch basin in the park to catch as much as we can to irrigate the park
Khalsa: Cultech system to put the water back into the water table. Handle water all on site.

Ann: Beacon St development – meeting with neighbors?
Yes, changed from more modern building to historical designs

Andy: Agree with Bill Shelton USNC Board not to take position, support the neighbors.

Pennie: Any family units affordable in other developments?

Elan: I do not think so. But for context, the original proposal was 94,000 sq ft, since then added park and dropped to 51,000 sq ft. Still a great project.

Jacob: Current status of the project?

Sassoon: Parking and traffic study now, then going before Zoning Board of Appeals meeting in June.

Rich: Seeking variances under current zoning. Then going to the Planning Board.

5. Report on April 25th meeting with the mayor

At the meeting were George Proakis, head of Planning, and Tim Snyder. No plan for future meeting yet. Tori is to follow up for a future meeting.

Addressed 5 areas with the mayor.

A) Asked mayor to take leadership on community center. Mayor affirmed that he would.

B) Issue of accessibility and elevator to the T. Mayor said this is a priority issue, have heard from State delegation on the issue. Would keep progress on that. We asked to be included in any future meetings the City and mayor go to work to get the elevator. If MBTA is not forthcoming, mayor said he would get all parties together, developers of Boynton Yards, US2, City of Cambridge and Somerville to put their heads together to get it to happen.

C) Several areas for Planning staff to consider in assessing recommendation on the project. Traffic and parking, connectivity with Allen St,

D) Sustainability – *SustainaVille* report and asking mayor to assure project follows those goals.

E) SomerVision Goals, and ensuring mayor follows through on those goals, especially in development of *SomerVision 2040*. There was a criticism and a request to change the rule that a resident can only serve on one of the *SomerVision 2040* committees. The mayor took it under advisement.

6. Recommendation from co-chairs on Public Comment procedures

Bill Cav: Michèle and I met to discuss this issue. We thank Gary for the thoughtful letter he submitted on the subject. Recommend to continue the procedure we currently use. 10 minute public comment at beginning and end. All those from USNC-WG experienced a different group process where everyone in the room had a chance to address any issue that came up, and we went around in a circle. Those meetings went 2.5 to 3 hours. This is a not a model we want to go back to.

Andy: Want to allow member of public to be called on to give a specific answer to a question when the Board needs an answer.

Bill Cav: Yes, at the discretion of the chair though.

Tori: I wish there was another solution to this issue. Pennie had a suggestion allowing the public to come a half hour ahead to a meeting to address any concerns they have. We should try to make these meetings feel like we are including the public. Add agenda item to the next meeting to discuss adding a 10 minute comment period in the middle of the meetings.

Pennie: Any members of the public should feel free to reach out at any time.

Michèle: We are not necessarily rejecting Pennie's idea, just speaking towards the specific context of the official meeting.

7. Update on Planning Board deliberations on Site Plan for D2

Jessica (*recognized to give a brief recap*): George Proakis gave overview of process and where things stand. Outside consultant Mr. Abrahamson to look at US2's books to determine feasibility of underground parking with regard to project as a whole. The report from the consultant was expected on June 6.

Michèle: Planning Board was very keen on this understanding relating to the overall project and the costs for the various parts. Cannot look at the project one parcel at a time.

Jacob: US2 currently plans to appear before Planning Board Thursday. In the interim, the USNC latest position to Planning Board was letter sent about health and safety, the alleyway and pollution concerned related to location of plaza. Do we want to send delegate to Planning Board meeting to seek an audience to speak in front of the Planning Board. Or should we let that letter sit as our position? I've been to an SRA meeting and was able to be recognized. I think we should work to be recognized to speak in front of these City Boards. This USNC was created in part to allow a space for the community to speak.

USNC unanimously approves Jacob to speak on behalf of the USNC at the Planning Board, speaking toward the content of letters the USNC has sent to the Planning Board.

8. Response to Beacon St. residents zoning petition - decision on Letter to Planning Board

Tori: Brought this matter to people's attention because the Beacon St petition partly goes against what we are trying to achieve as a city, such as keeping all surface parking lots and one floor retail.

The purview of the USNC includes Beacon St. As stewards of Union Square and the boundaries, I felt like we needed to weigh in on this.

Michèle: Full disclosure – my husband grew up in this neighborhood. Took offense at the phrase “shielding wealthier white people.”

I don't think all surface parking should be removed.

Pennie: Love community participation. Personally there are parts of the petition I don't agree with. Thank you for addressing the concerns with me. I see the USNC as a forum for drawing attention to two perspectives, but I don't think the USNC should take a position on this. I think it would be hard to take a stand on one or the other.

Ann: I agree with Pennie that we should not take a stand on the issue addressed in the petition. Beacon St people took a stand on this matter and created a petition. This letter is really disrespectful. We don't have a USMS for Beacon St. Construction has taken away lots of parking. These people don't want these buildings to be touched. There are other places to build large. Big buildings are happening such as those being designed and built by Elan Sassoon.

Andy: I did find parts of the Jeff/Aaron letter offensive. Agree generally with the specific factual concerns of zoning that locks in surface lots. We will have to thread the needle on this issue of local neighbors having views on specific areas within our constituency in the future.

Bill S: The larger issue will be something we have to come to terms with in the future. *SomerVision 2040* is proceeding apace. City is now proposing 11000-18000 new housing units down our throats, which is more than 1/3 of all current housing units. We really need a lot more commercial development and jobs.

I think of the ugliness that divided us 5 years ago regarding 197/181 Washington St. Changing from 5 stories to 4 stories. I did not like people dictating that decision because of concerns about height.

So sooner or later we will have to discuss this and take a position on it.

Jacob: There are a lot of questions about what development paradigms affect our neighbors. These are issues of real estate development under capitalism. Larger development may make more housing units but they become more attractive and expensive. Then you try to fix it with inclusionary, etc, etc. It's a very difficult puzzle to solve. I don't think we have it solved as a group, and that we should try to talk about it as a group.

Andy and Tori will work on a compromise letter and talk to the appropriate parties on Beacon St.

Bill Cav: It is my sense of the Board that we want to find a compromise

Jacob: Include themes in a letter as they relate to affordable housing, parking and transportation, green and open space.

9. Decision on whether to support Rob Buchanan's Community Preservation Act pre-application Proposals

Jacob: Personally looking at them – Cupola not that enthusiastic about. The park is a nice amenity but maybe that could be funded by the businesses that are moving in there. Concern about taking away from CPA funds for affordable housing.

Bill Cav: CPA funds are designated from the property tax bill and matched by the state, to be limited to 3 areas, 1 is affordable housing, 2 passive open space but can be expanded, 3 historic preservation. Certain amount of money that cannot go to each of these. All 3 areas will be funded by CPA money each year.

Andy: Strongly support both projects, 197/181 needs open space. Cupola support and will vote for. Rob came to us as his constituent, we should support. Others can come to us.

Michèle: Wholeheartedly support the fixing of the clock and the cupola. Not sure I understand outdoor space – why not businesses?

Andy: No business at 181 for a while, no one to do it. Think it would be nice.

Vote: 9-1 (Jacob against)

USNC added as supporter of both CPA applications.

Andy email Rob to let him know.

10. Decision on whether to meet with Seth Grady, Union Sq. Partners. – Post Office site

Grady from Post Office would like to meet with us about developing that parcel.

Background: The federal government sold the property to a private developer.

Bill S: Grady was in LOCUS or another process – met him. His values seem to align with ours. His partner is Don Law. His interest is not on profit maximization, but something he can be proud of and that will make a great contribution to this community

Bill Cav: Suggest that BEC meet with him.

Jacob: I would like to see his plans, with a letter that we can review. And then we can see if we want an in-person meeting. Related, I felt like from the meeting tonight I could have understood this all from a letter and slides, and left the meeting for questions.

Tori: It is good to make face-to-face contact with the developer. If we don't want to have them at the main meeting, the BEC could pick it up. It is good to make connections with developers.

Michèle: Both things can happen – he can send the letter and info ahead of time, and then we can talk about it.

Andy: Agree with Jacob and Michèle. Developers should send info ahead of time before meeting for questions and clarification.

USNC Co-chairs will email Grady to ask for information first on any proposals before meeting.

11. Public Comment

Wig: At some point, this group will have to think of a 50 year plan for this district and for integration between neighborhoods and the hi-rise district.

CPA presentations are great. Jacob has a great idea that you should all go see them.

There was about \$1 million spent on an elevator with CPA money in the past, for reference.

The regional economy controls the housing, jobs, and transportation balance, including the transfer of taxes from job intensive properties to residential. Cambridge has all the commercial taxes for green space and affordable housing, and Somerville has all the housing.

The issue of affordability is largely going to be an issue of senior citizens, not necessarily kids and families.

The Boynton Yards commercial buildings did underground parking without any requests. So US2 should be able to do it.

I did not see that one sentence in the Aaron/Jeff letter and if I had, I would not have signed off on it.

SomerVision 2040 presentation the other night showed the districts that were red-lined. The non-white races were generally in East Somerville, for much of Somerville's history. The Eastern Arc of Somerville is taking all the large development and impact. Where is Davis Square and the other areas that could take some of this development?

Marie-Elle Merchant: Member of Union United. Something a couple of my fellow members brought up is a barrier fund to reduce barriers for people to get jobs. Support a workforce development/inclusionary officer to link the people looking for those jobs with training. Without this distinct effort, it's all going to be useless.

Joe Beckmann: I want to congratulate the group. This has been one of the most collaborative meetings this group has had. Some of the issues we've been challenged with from developers could be alleviated by inviting these developers to these meetings. People are so dug in on certain positions that they cannot see room for collaboration.

Issue of ownership – we should be thinking about affordable ownership, not just affordable rentals. Some of that discussion could have come up with the presentation by Sassoon. The fewer ownership opportunities, the more regressive it becomes. If there is a vehicle to finance affordable housing, and there are many but they are not very organized, there are ways to give the developer cash up front for partnerships that are feasible for ownership. Though they are difficult to put together.

Tufts PILOT problems do not directly affect Union Square but the current numbers for Tufts have significantly increased for those paying without having on-campus housing.

No new housing since 2006, but have increased number of students significantly. There will be a new subway station there, which will have significant impacts. I am having discussions with the Tufts Housing League for setting up a student co-op, that are easy to finance and go around Tufts. These can also be partnered with other groups and affordable housing initiatives.

Alex Frieden: Ward 2 Lake St – Somerville Bicycle Advisory Committee. But speaking as a resident. Thank you for all the work that you do, this is incredible. Thank you to Tori for her statement on public comment in the middle as a compromise. This feels like a City Council meeting

Thank you to Bill Shelton and Andy in supporting the neighbors on this project. I have been involved in the JJ Sullivan lot plans 5 neighborhood meetings over 6 months. Went from a project that is terrible to a project that is palatable.

Beacon St represents the multi-modal highway for Somerville, so we have to think about what

Commercial Corridors look like. These are not just squares – these are the arterials that link our squares. There are neighborhoods off of those, but it's a question of where people shop. If you live in Union Square, you shop there easily. If you do not live in USQ, then where do you go for your commercial needs? We need to think about these issues.

Joseph Weinstein: Suggest between now and then Andy and Tori drafting compromise letter get together with Elaine Koury. How to preserve outdoor space, which MR3 and MR5 does not do? Develop a mutually beneficial solution.

Gary: Planning Board meeting Thursday. Meeting here tomorrow with mayor, Ward 2 *Resistat* meeting. Could be a chance to give feedback to the mayor and staff.

Third meeting, a week from today, probably here, long awaited first meeting since about a year of Outreach and Communications Committee. Hoping we can talk about some of the larger issues surrounding methods of back and forth communication and ways to improve our relations with the broader community. I would also like to see the O & C committee formulate recommendations about ways to improve communications with local citizens to present to the board.

12. Executive Session

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