

## **Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting**

**July 9, 2019**

**7 pm – 9 pm**

**Public Safety Building**

**220 Washington St.**

### **Attendees:**

Michèle Hansen  
Bill Cavillini  
Andy Greenspon  
Pennie Taylor  
Tori Antonino  
Paola Massoli  
Jacob Kramer  
Ben Bradlow  
Ben Baldwin  
Bill Shelton  
Ann Camara

### **Community Members:**

Joe Beckmann  
Cosmo DiSchino  
Jessica Eshleman  
Ben Ewen-Campen  
Laurie Goldman  
Gary Trujillo  
Wig Zamore  
Joe Sullivan

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

### **2. Public Comment**

**Gary Trujillo:** There seems to be some uncertainty as to the method by which the D2 development process goes forward, whether the Planning Staff or the Planning Board are in charge. I talked to Sue Thomas over the phone, and it is the Planning Staff that writes the Planning Report for the Planning Board. She also pointed out that there's a lot of information on the City website that we might not be aware of such as the Planning Reports. It falls to the outreach and communications committee to make this information and resources known to our members and keep the public aware of them.

**Wig Zamore:** I sent around the new Planning Board agenda, which came out at 3:30 pm this afternoon. Updated from what was sent out in the tinyLetter Sunday night. All the D2 parts are listed on the Planning Board agenda. For the City website, all you need to know is where all the

D2 presentations and reports are, which is surprisingly hard to find on the website.

**Tori** would like to do a write-up on how to find all this important information on the city website so that the public knows how to locate and read it.

### **3. Approval of Minutes of June 18, 2019 Meeting**

*Unanimous approval of meeting minutes.*

### **4. Report on Progress of SomerVision 2040**

**Bill S.** points out that SomerVision 2040 appears to want to significantly increase housing goals and decrease open space goals. 30 months ago, Bill White submitted an amendment that 60% of all square footage in transformative districts should be Commercial (lab, R&D) (minus retail). His colleagues on the Council increased that to 68%. He had a meeting today with Wig, Katjana, and consultants hired by the City to analyze this issue, and the consultants seemed receptive to this change still. Massachusetts General Law says Comprehensive Plan only needs approval from Planning Board, not elected officials. The Committees have not been allowed to talk to each other. There will be a reconciliation meeting among the committees on July 17, but only two people from each committee are allowed to attend that meeting. The City wants SomerVision 2040 draft documents by September and approved by November.

**Ann** is participating in SomerVision 2040 as the representative from the USNC. All other USNC Board members are participating as individuals or representing other community groups. **Jacob** asks if the USNC should take a position on SomerVision 2040. **Bill Cav** has believed from the beginning that SomerVision 2040 is a sham, and that we are sucking time and energy into something negative. **Bill Cav** says we should take a position now that we've given the process legitimacy.

**Tori** states current zoning is based on SomerVision 2030 goals. Mayor says goal of SomerVision 2040 is to increase housing goals from 6,000 to 11,000 or upwards of 18,000 new units and to decrease open space. **Tori** does not believe it is a total sham but a process we can have influence on.

**Wig** states that SomerVision 2030 process was very well done, with everyone in the same room working on it. He believes that the Comprehensive Plan does have to be passed by the City Council. He also argues that the Planning Board decisions must be based in the Comprehensive Plan based on MA General Law, and they have not.

**Ann** thought the group would go over SomerVision 2030 and adapt SomerVision 2040 based on new knowledge, like effects of climate change, not a complete re-structuring of the goals.

**Bill S.** states that SomerVision 2040 housing goals should specify "affordable housing", not just generic "housing".

*Action Item: Ask Dan Bartman if he is writing the Zoning Overhaul based on SomerVision 2030 or SomerVision 2040.*

**Jacob** asks for those USNC Board members involved in SomerVision 2040 to document a list of issues we have with it in order to craft a response to the city as needed. The rest of the Board agrees with this.

## **5. Report & Recommendations from Negotiating Team**

*Negotiating team has reached an agreement in substance with US2 as of last night. The details will be in writing hopefully in less than 10 days. A piece that has not been written and agreed to yet is the monitoring and enforcement mechanism for the community benefits agreement. It is agreed that such a process will exist though. The Negotiating Team expects to have something in writing that they can look through before the next USNC meeting.*

**Bill S.** states that the USNC Board and USNC members have been kept apprised of the issue areas being negotiated on over the past 11 months, but there will be specific details in some areas that have not been seen until now.

**Ben Bradlow** states that US2 anticipates being asked about the status of the negotiations by the Planning Board on Thursday. The Negotiating Committee agreed that US2 could state what has been said here tonight.

**Jacob** states that this agreement represents our best efforts given our negotiating power and leverage. The D2 design itself is still being determined outside of the CBA via the Planning Board Process, including the issue of underground parking.

*Next steps: A prepared CBA document will be shown to the USNC Board, which will have to approve it to be released to the public to read. There then has to be at least one public meeting to present the agreement before a referendum can occur for the community to vote on the document.*

A discussion occurred about whether signing a CBA means the USNC would support the US2 development going forward. What does “support” mean in this sense?

**Ben Bradlow** points out that the CBA does not short-circuit the Planning Development Process for all the D blocks that is required under Zoning. Michèle’s understanding is that there are specific things in the CBA that require the USNC to go forward

**Bill S.** points out the issues with Mystic View Task Force negotiating with Federal Realty (FRIT) on Assembly Row development, and that the group would not oppose the plan that was agreed to. But at every step of the way, Mystic View was allowed to oppose the design and protest

when FRIT reneged on its promise to pay for public infrastructure there such as the 20% affordable housing. For US2, we have to make a commitment to the CBA terms while reserving our right to criticize the design. **Paola** and **Tori** agree with Bill S's understanding of what the commitment to the CBA does and does not require of the USNC. **Andy** agrees with Bill S's understanding and suggests the clarification that the USNC only needs to support specific required approvals by City Boards and the City Council that are detailed in the CBA in order to achieve the agreed upon CBA terms, not broader design concerns about individual D block development plans.

**Jacob** states that the Negotiating Team can make sure the CBA agreement clarifies what terms are not necessarily agreed too. **Michèle** states that this could box the USNC into a tricky position. **Pennie** states that the community gets the benefits of the CBA, US2 gets the monetary benefits and our time that they've already gotten long ago, that we have gone above and beyond what they have put on the table. **Michèle** says that we have to see what is in the document before hashing out these details and the implications.

**Bill Cav** – paragraph in draft term of CBA – “approvals from City Boards required in order to fulfill obligations within the CBA”. Example, for affordable housing on D4.3 to be built in the time frame within the CBA, an amendment to the zoning and the CDSP has to be made so that there can be a greater percentage of housing allowed there as compared to commercial.

**Ben Bradlow** clarifies that we are not committing to supporting any design elements apriori, but there is a certain give and take in order to get what we asked for.

**Ben Bradlow** asked for Julia from Somerville Journal to come to this meeting, but she could not attend. He will talk to her tonight or tomorrow morning to get an article out before the Thursday Planning Board meeting.

**Ben Bradlow** also talked with Tom Logan from Boston Globe to ask him to attend.

*Action Item: Ben Bradlow will give a statement to Andy to send to tinyLetter before Thursday night.*

*Bill S will have his editor from The Somerville Times contact Ben Bradlow as well.*

## **6. Report of last Planning Board meeting and any update on new open space proposal**

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### **Summary of June 20 Planning Board meeting.**

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#### **Andy gives summary of June 20 Planning Board meeting:**

US2 presented on D2.2 and D2.3 because technically each parcel must be considered separately. However, almost everyone gave public comment on D2 overall. A lot of people came out in support of the project, including union workers who will be involved in the construction of the development, the Somerville Chamber of Commerce (SCC) and local businesses, local developers, some residents, and the Somerville Community Corporation. A number of people said that while they support this project design, they still don't want it

approved until a Community Benefits Agreement is signed with the Union Square Neighborhood Council.

A number of residents spoke against the current design of D2, still advocating for underground parking, moving the plaza open space away from Prospect St, improving the side of the D2 block facing the Allen St neighborhood, and improving the design of the garage if it is to be above ground.

US2 now has an open space proposal on D2.4, maybe up to 10,000 sq ft. But this has not been presented explicitly yet, and it is unclear when this would be approved and constructed in the timeline of the rest of D2. There is an open question of how to organize the D2.4 parcel: The order of objects could be train tracks, building, open space. Or train tracks, open space, building. SCC would prefer the latter configuration to allow more space to have a building and to separate the building from the train tracks.

So far, US2 has made no changes to the flat wall of building façade that will face Allen St. US2 said they would show their plans for it on July 11. Mike Capuano Jr specifically expects a difference in the design of that at the July 11 meeting. Mike Capuano Jr wants Bennett Court to be pedestrian and permitting delivery vehicles only. Dorothy Kelly Gay is still upset that they are not doing underground parking and are having the plaza adjacent to Prospect St, especially because of health concerns.

**Tori** suggests emphasizing the health hazard concerns, which could give legal standing for the Planning Board to reject the current plans. **Tori** also wants us to emphasize that this is Richie Stein's design and plans, as a media strategy.

**Bill S** stated that Mark Niedergang called me to ask if I would apply to the Planning Board. I encourage others here to apply. Paola states that there are two openings on the Planning Board

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## **7. Public Comment**

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**Ben Ewen-Campen:** I have gotten used to the fact that a lot of important decisions happen in tiny rooms like this. I think this is unprecedented in Somerville history. Mine and other people's impression is that if this had happened, the development would have happened anyway and would have been much worse. It wouldn't have had the extra affordable housing, the good jobs, etc. So much work has gone into this. My personal opinion on the public support aspect – if I was on the Planning Board, and 6 months from now after the CBA were ratified, if you then said you wanted to kill the development, there would not be credibility. But if you just want to improve the project but have specific criticisms about specific plans, then there is a great amount of credibility. You are gaining a lot with the CBA and not losing a ton. You can still have a significant amount of impact on future phases of the development.

**Joe Beckmann:** If we get a giant wall of the parking garage and no elevator down into the station, then we still haven't won. *(The group clarifies that there will now be an elevator on the*

*Union Square Green Line station).*

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**Gary Trujillo:** I would like some help figuring out what resources we should provide directly on the USNC website in order to give guidance to the public about what is genuinely important. I expected someone from Ayanna Pressley's office tonight based on my communication with them, but they did not come. I hope that they will come to future meetings. I want to get some idea of the plans for getting the CBA approved in the future and the outreach efforts expected. If D2.1 is approved as is, this will still lock in the rest of D2. Question – does the CBA include all the D parcels or just D2?

**Ben Bradlow** clarifies that the CBA is a set of specific commitments made around specific issue areas. Once the document is shown to the public, it will be clearer what things must be done to allow certain commitments to be realized. Example – how the D7 park will relate to other buildings on D blocks.

**Bill Cav** states that bylaws require the one public meeting ahead of the bylaw referendum. The Negotiating Team has not committed to a time table for ratification of the CBA yet. Asks the Board members to think about what timeline would work. And ask the public to tell Board members what they want.

**Laurie Goldman:** Publicly apologize for not making the SCC support for the CBA clearer. People are not always sharp and perceptive, so we need to be sharp and perceptive for the time period when spreading the word about the CBA.

**Jessica Eshleman:** In relation to displacement of local businesses, Third Life Studios is not getting their lease renewed and has to be out at the end of July. Have lunch and go to the businesses where the construction detours are happening – they have seen a growing dip in business traffic. And this is on top of rising rents.

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## **8. Executive Session**

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