

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting
July 28, 2020
6 pm – 8 pm
Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Board Members:

Michèle Hansen
Ann Camara
Bill Cavellini
Andy Greenspon
Isabella Drago
Bill Shelton
Danyal Najmi
Phil Privitera
Sarah Dunbar
Gary Trujillo
Tori Antonino

Community Members:

Tom Macone - Developer in East Union Square
Jessica Eshleman
Robin Bradshaw
Ellicott Bradshaw
Chris Mesarch
Frank Kautz
Frank Qui
Joe
Debra Weisberg
Tom Bent
Louis Bennett
Bill Bennett
Cheryl Bakery
Edwidge L Hercule
Ian Murray
Alyson Schultz

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Public Comment

Jessica: The City's economic development staff contacted me last week to let USMS know that it has been awarded the small business liaison contract that the USNC worked so hard on negotiating and accelerating during this incredible time of need. There is one more administrative step needed, that is, the City Council needs to approve the funds. The Council is on recess right now, so it could be as late as late August.

3. Approval of minutes from May 26, June 23, and July 07 meeting

Unanimous approval of May 26, June 23. Postpone approval of July 07 meeting minutes until next meeting.

4. Presentations by Tom Macone about proposed development in East Union Square

5. Q & A to Tom Macone

Tom: We have draft documents working with the City right now to start shaping into a project that we would feel to add to the neighborhood. What we are proposing has not changed much. We have set up lot lines and opened things up a bit. A lot of it is going around the future interchange of McGrath that will be grounded. I'll answer any questions that people have, but we are not there yet in terms of an official presentation yet while we are in the working phase with the City.

Ann: Could you go through the things you feel are important?

Tom: When I went to look at projects in the City, I looked at Opportunity Zones. Areas that were approved by the Federal Govt as such with certain tax advantages that prompt you to develop on that property. It's why a lot of auto shops and junk yards in Union Square are being developed. I have never developed where I wasn't wanted. I identified this site. The site I'm more interested in is the Target site. We would like to generate a lot of important jobs, upwards of 4,000 jobs at different levels. There will be a hotel on the corner, ~275-300 rooms, third phase of the project. The project needs to be done in phases because of the wedge shape of the land. We are working on keeping the shadow lines down. Right now it's used for storing Russell Trash Trucks, and a staging area for the railroad. I had a hard time getting the property from Mr. Torrow (*Tauro??*), who is getting a lease from the railroad. The development along the railroad corridor is going to grow rapidly. The liquor store across the street just went under agreement to develop biotech. It's not strictly lab-lab, but also office-tech use. We just signed an agreement with JLL, Spaulding, and Sly. If anyone has any questions, I can get more focused.

Bill Cav: Can you spell out how Capital Hall Partners and Spaulding and Sly fit into your development plans?

Tom: You saw how it works with US2, who signed with other partners. If I had \$400 million, I would just set up parks and YMCAs and call it a day. But developments need funding. Skansa did it for US2 in Union Square. Capital Hall Partners and I have formed a joint partnership and we have joined forces with Spaulding and Sly. JLL owns Spaulding and Sly investments. They have a good reputation around Somerville - we shopped around for the best joint venture partner.

Bill Cav: Skansa is no longer involved with US2 - they were investment partners but they were general contractors for the lab building - Gilbane has taken their place. Are Spaulding and Sly going to pick the general contractors?

Tom: Skansa brought a lot to the table, with the ability to self-bond for funding. Spaulding and Sly SSI investments, JLL parent company helps also, not so much for construction expertise. Project managers - we have Stantech, etc.
Most of Rich Stein's money comes from USAA.

Bill Cav: You're describing your investment team as a joint venture. Is it a joint venture between Capital Hall Partners, yourself, Spaulding and Sly, JLL.

Tom: We are Capital Hall Partners (*INSERT PEOPLE FROM WEBSITE*). JLL (Jones Lang LaSalle) is the parent company of Spaulding & Slye Investments.
This is a joint venture between us Capital Hall Partners and Spaulding & Slye.
This project has hit \$1 billion. In order to do that, you need to get the expertise you need.

Tori: It sounds like you will be very thorough, and I think we can get really creative and make a very special space, and I look forward to working with you.

Tom: My partner Bradley Hall took the Hotel Figueroa in Los Angeles and spent twice as much as the hotel is worth today and created something extremely special for the art community out there.

We're going to end up giving the city \$20 million per year in tax revenue, which the City really needs. Hopefully that will help too. I'm not really doing any residential. A neighborhood becomes cool and Union Square has become cool. Outside developers see how cool it is and overwhelm it, and it's not cool anymore and starts to look like Manhattan. With this development, there will be a lot of day time workers and foot traffic in the area to help the local businesses.

Sarah: Questions about density of development and use of the site and traffic.

Tom: We are working with Dan Bartman and the mobility people regarding traffic studies. This will dictate how much gets built on the site.

Bill Cav: Since you are in a draft stage and having extensive discussions with the City - if they have not initiated this, can you initiate - in the mobility discussions, how are 1,000 cars going to get in and out of your garage. Almost any time of day, but particularly in rush hour and the afternoon rush hour, I'm sure that those three City Planners will encourage you, not just for reasons of traffic and congestion issues, but also for sustainability and environmental issues - could you have an in-depth discussion about how to increase use of public transit that is close to this site, both bus the the new green line, but also bicycle and pedestrian modes. Other methods too such as taxi cabs and rideshare. There are ways to encourage this such as protected bike lanes. In the most recent submission, you are decreasing the bike storage capacity. I speak for a lot of people on the Board when I raised this issue. We raised it with US2, we are raising it with Boynton Yards. If we are going to have some level of breathable air, you and other developers that are doing big projects like this have to weigh in on alternative solutions.

Tom: This topic is front and center with the City planners and mobility department. Historically we are using traffic data from a year or two ago. We know that the decreased traffic due to Coronavirus will go away eventually.

Michèle: This is a draft form with placeholders - this is not how the buildings will actually look, correct?

Tom: Yes.

Michèle: Can you explain how you are going to subdivide the lots? In US2, each lot had to go through an approval from the Planning Board separately.

Tom: The City and we are working together for a longer term realignment of Medford St. What becomes are front yard or side yard will change. The City has requested we separate each of the three buildings into a separate build. This makes it easier for development, financing, and planning.

Michèle: I can't visualize the amount of green space here - how will this help with the City heat island effect?

Tom: This is what I have been told - it's above my pay grade. We have met and exceeded everything we have been required to do, whether walkways, bicycle routes, etc.

Debra (typed into chat): Access to and out of Brickbottom is limited. Even with today's bare bones economy, traffic on Medford St mid-afternoon and later on weekdays backs up as far as Gore & Warren streets. We can't afford auto traffic exiting from this new building to further flood the junction and definitely not taking the access road ("Scary Way") toward Linwood St as shortcuts. The BB residents will be choked.

Tom: I don't have anything to comment on this right now, but it has been discussed and issues of traffic are on-going discussed with the City.

Tori: In terms of green space, maybe you can share with the investors, I see lots of vines and trees and expansion of the green space - it seems a little light. I would like this project to commit to bioswales and stormwater management and using greenery as part of the infrastructure.

Tom: We're way ahead of you - this is part of the scope of the work. Part of the problem we are having with the bike lanes is we need easements with the City to make "The Scary Way" safer. But this would put some of the stormwater management things underground.

Tori: There is a requirement for solar roofs and green roofs.

Tom: I won't get into the details we are going to do - this is wrapped around the Platinum LEED standards. For the labs, we use the penthouses for lab equipment.

Tori: Part of complying with the zoning is green roofs or zoning or both. You should have your people look at it. I can send you the section.

Tom: I understand, but it is tied into the LEED standards.

Tori: It is also a separate ordinance.

Tom: We are not going to slip anything by the City. Please send me that information.

Polly (via chat): Could you ask Tom if he could make the document that he gave to your board available to the rest of us at this meeting? Or better, if he could make it available to Brickbottom

Tom: Within 60 days we will be filing the official site plan application. I will share that prior to its publication with Brickbottom, but I don't think it's good to move a document around in the public realm that has not been fine-tuned. It has stimulated discussion at this meeting on details, that will probably be changed next week.

I am available to meet with Brickbottom again. There are some pages addressing the upgrade of "Scary Way" for example that I could share. I can reach out to Brickbottom on this issue.

Michèle: Concerns from the USNC, that can be discussed once the project is further along with a detailed presentation:

Construction situation and jobs for residents of Somerville, and how many people of color, women in these jobs.

Will you use opportunity zone money to help attract businesses to the building.

Environmental issues.

Other issues brought forward in the future by the community.

Tom: I will be happy to come back at a later date when the plans are further made concrete.

Alyson Schultz (via chat): I have a trustee in a Brickbottom meeting right next to me and yes, the Brickbottom Trustees would like to see any updated documents available. Randal Thurston is Zooming with the trustee's right now.

Tom: Yes, I will reach out to Brickbottom.

6. Updates on Demo and Construction at 71-72 Union Square (Laxmi N. Prahan, Trustee of Everest Realty Trust)

Phil: I got the notice about this, and it was the first I had heard about anything being developed on that site. Have we discussed this in the USNC before? It will be three stories.

Andy: I believe this is the site for a future marijuana dispensary.

Jessica: Union Leaf is the name of the adult use dispensary that went through the public process and neighborhood meetings last year. It was formerly Union Square Beer and Wine and a Subway before that. It is the same owners still, a family that moved here from Nepal in the late 1990s. They live in the Teele Square area and own a number of businesses. They were approved for an economic empowerment cannabis license for adult use recreational marijuana. They are planning a three-story redevelopment. It is a historic building, so it is under review before any demolition. It will be a bottom floor dispensary storefront, a meeting space open to adults in the community, and a third commercial use. It's the same family that owns Masala Restaurant in Teele Square. They are building the hotel in Teele Square. They also recently acquired Ryles, the old dance hall in Inman Square, and are in the midst of an impressive restoration project.

*Jessica says she will introduce **Phil** to the owner/developer.*

Bill Cav: The Volkswagen repair place on Bow Street was demolished last week. That was a site that came to the USNC about a year ago. It has an historic cottage building on it that has not been demolished. Does anyone know about anything new going on there?

Jessica: As I understand it, the project moving forward is very similar to the one presented to USNC, which includes a passive house, commercial use on the bottom floor, and preserving that historic building.

7. Scheduling next meeting with DLJ

Meeting time: July 30, Thursday, 1-3 pm. Deciding who is attending this meeting.

John Fenton and Nick Barker will be at this meeting.

8. Follow up on letter to organizations about Boynton Yards

Michèle, Ann, Bill Cav: ~Five organizations have gotten back to us since we sent out the outreach letter to them for feedback on DLJ development in Boynton Yards: Climate Coalition, Jessica from Union Square Main Streets, YIMBYs, First Source, Somerville Community Corporation, Union United. A number of them simply responded that they needed to discuss the issues with their organization and get back to us. A number of them were also trying to set up independent meetings with John Fenton and DLJ.

Once we get more feedback from these organizations, we can do a similar approach to what we did with US2 in preparing a list of items to be addressed.

Tori: John Fenton is coming to the next Climate Coalition meeting on Monday, August 10

9. Announcement of grants to USMS & First Source – Next steps

Bill Cav: In the communication from Ben Sommer, Economic Development Specialist, in Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) - Economic Development Division, they announced that both Union Square Main Streets (USMS) and First Source had been sent contracts to sign as designated awardees for funding of the two employment positions set out in the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) to help these organizations. However, the City through Ben Sommer was describing the contracts in such a way that the USNC had no role to play. The CBA Monitoring Committee has drafted a letter to go to Ben Sommer to ask that the USNC be inserted into both contracts along with the City Economic Development Division as recipients of the required quarterly reports about the progress of each position. We also ask that the contract wording of the possible suspension of quarterly disbursements of money be changed to have the USNC be involved in any possible revocation of the contract or altering of the amounts of the quarterly disbursements. We will send this letter to Ben Sommer in the next day or two.

10. SST's/350.org's Climate Summit

Bill Cav: A planned summit co-sponsored by 350.org and Somerville Stands Together (SST) - there is no date set yet. I assume it will be a virtual summit. I don't know if it will occur before the summer ends or in September. They have drafted two documents and are looking for support at the summit. I was not involved nor have I read those documents. One of the goals is that the deadline to reach net zero be changed from 2050 down to 2030, a big change.

Michèle: When the date of this event gets closer and their documents are publicly released, we can discuss this further.

Tori: The document also included an ask for commitment to green jobs for local residents, sustainability, more open space for underprivileged areas, a few other things.

11. Winter Hill Urban Renewal Process Update

Tori: The City has decided to restrict the redevelopment plan to the Star Market site and adjacent properties and two parcels on Sewall St. One development parcel will be for affordable housing. Another will be for a Sewall Common Park. The Star Market, Walgreens, and Temple/Broadway Business property to be redeveloped will be decided through a community process. A community center would be really great for this area. The City staff will come back with a draft in July, followed by a public process. They hope to choose a developer in 2021, followed by more community meetings.

Michèle: Does Winter Hill have a community advocacy group similar to our USNC that we can contact?

Bill Cav: There's a Ward 4 Neighborhood Association. I met some members of that two years ago. They had some events in the Star Market parking lot. I don't know if they still meet. Ward 4 City Councillor Jesse Clingan is involved.

Ann: I've been to the Winter Hill Association meetings. I can contact them. I went to the Winter Hill Association previously to see if they needed help with a community benefits agreement.

Phil: Is this basically a done deal - is the City going to steal that land? I have an interest in one of the buildings on Temple. In the building, there is a hairdresser who is very vulnerable due to COVID. He invested his life savings in that business. We have that beautiful building there that we renovated/gut rehabbed. The City is doing eminent domain of the area for "urban renewal", but we did the urban renewal already on that parcel.

Michèle: You own the building on the corner?

Phil: That is Salari's. I have interest in the building next to it. They are going to take the building that I have interest in also.

Michèle: We need to figure out how we deal with this according to our policies. I'm not comfortable talking about this right now.

Tori: It will be important to stay on top of this, and I'll let everyone know about the meetings. In order to receive an urban renewal certificate, the City has to have a relocation plan for all the businesses.

Michèle: We are a board and one of our board members is directly impacted by what we are talking about, so I need to understand what that means for our board, so we should not continue this conversation right now.

Ann: This affects **Phil** and his conflict of interest, but not the board as a whole.

Phil: They're probably going to give me a check for the property but that doesn't help the people who live there.

Gary: We have spoken of ourselves previously as a prototype for other neighborhood councils since we are the first and now only neighborhood council that exists within the city. This fact might provide a justification for reaching out to a neighborhood organization in the Winter Hill area that might form the nucleus of a neighborhood council there.

Michèle: We will reach out to the Winter Hill Association, and we will address conflict of interest issues - and everyone needs to sign our Conflict of Interest Form.

12. Public Comment

Gary: I would like to make sure that everyone is aware that the Commonwealth is going to extend the moratorium on evictions until at least October 17, so this gives us some breathing room to get behind Mike Connolly's bill. I spoke with a staff person at this office who said that his bill is not likely to get any traction until after the August recess. And it's unknown how long that recess will be. I'll prepare a list of questions for Mike himself that I can share with everyone.

Jessica: Fluff goes virtual this year on Saturday, September 12. This year's theme is "In Fluff We Trust - Sticking Together Through Fluff." The in-person festival will be re-jiggered for computer screens and targeted to promote Union Square businesses and make connections of activities and sales at the businesses. We have an opportunity for a local artist to design the graphics if you know anyone. We are particularly interested in partnering with artists of color.

Michèle: Will the restaurants in Union Square be doing fluff-related things?

Jessica: Yes. We are reducing the length of the festival from four hours to two, but there will be take out and other options related to fluff at the local businesses. We will be super focused on the heart of Union Square while allowing people to experience their worldwide fluff pride. Mike Katz will impersonate the inventor of marshmallow fluff and present fluff games.

Gary: Jessica reminded me that the director of the Somerville Media Center (SMC), Brian Zipp, is having a meeting by *Zoom* tomorrow to announce what is happening at SMC. Brian has said that the plan to move the SMC operation out of the old firehouse, which is owned by the City, so needed repairs can be done, has been put on hold for at least another year. So SMC does not have to worry about moving out of that building as they had been just prior to the start of the COVID-19 crisis.

USNC sets next meeting in 3 weeks, August 18, 6-8 pm.

13. Executive Session for purposes of developer negotiation strategies

Unanimous vote to go into Executive Session.