

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting

November 23, 2020

7 pm – 9 pm

Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Board Members:

Michèle Hansen
Ann Camara
Andy Greenspon
Bill Cavellini
David Scott
Bill Shelton
Isabella Drago
Pennie Taylor
Sarah Dunbar
Tori Antonino
Gary Trujillo

Community Members:

Cosmo DiSchino
Jessica Eshleman

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Public Comment

Jessica: The holiday stroll is taken from a one day celebration to eight days and nights to allow more people to participate either virtually shopping at home or shopping in person during any of those eight days. A priority for us was trying to create a special sense of place. People need a lot of joy right now and festive lights can help with that. We have a sponsor to provide Santa's Helper Grants to help businesses decorate. Homeslice and Tiny Turns Paperie have also prepared tips and tricks to help businesses decorate at low cost.

The winning business will receive a cash prize. We are going to have members of the public help us judge this year's entries. The business that receives the most votes will receive \$500 prize, bragging rights, a trophy for a year, and a one year membership in Union Square Main Streets. New this year is the Keep Small Strong Challenge: Make three unique purchases from Union Square Businesses, email your receipts to USMS. You can collect three sets of receipts as many times as you want to submit into a pool with anyone who helped judge storefront decorating to win a prize.

We also have the return of the ElfieSelfie promotion. We have over 50 over the top inflatables that businesses will adopt for these eight days. Folks can go out and take a selfie with these inflatables. We have holiday-decorated fluff tubs that will also be moved around the area to take a photo with. Anyone who takes a selfie to submit will be put into the pool with folks who judged storefronts and played the Keep Small Strong Challenge to win a prize: 1st prize \$1,000, 2nd prize, \$500, 3rd prize \$250.

This year's social media campaign is designed to share the stories of each of our business owners and aimed at strengthening the connections between the community and business owners. The holiday stroll will follow small business Saturday.

The Somerville Arts Council is replacing the Trolley Tour with Illuminations Deconstructed, putting illuminated art all over the City and in many business districts across Somerville. Our top sponsor this year is Liberty Cannabis. USQ and DLJ are also sponsoring. Sponsoring again this year is Naveo Credit Union, East Boston Savings Bank. New this year are Thalia Tringo Real Estate and Kristin Chamlers Photography is providing the photographs.

3. Approval of minutes from November 09, 2020

Unanimous approval of meeting minutes.

4. Report back from O&C Committee

Gary: I had hoped to have minutes from that meeting ready, but I was not able to get to it today. I think there was some good energy at the meeting, and we were able to agree on a number of things, both on outreach and communications. We did not get to the issue of the community center and using it as an opportunity for drawing more people in [to our activities]. I'm hoping that at our next meeting we can make that effort a focus. There was a lot about young people and trying to get them involved in our groups, thanks in large part to the help of Yvette and Isabella. We talked about using social media as a vehicle for getting the word out and getting feedback from people. I have some questions about that [subject]. Isabella has set up something on Facebook I believe. All those social media vehicles should point back to the website as the definitive source of information.

Isabella: I made the Instagram account, USNC2017. We don't have content on there yet, but we have over 141 followers, but no content yet; that's pretty good, I think. I have had the account start following some local businesses in Union Square. If you know of a local business I have not added, please let me know. I want to do a segment called "Meet your neighbor," or "Meet the Board," or something, where we ask each board member three questions related to Union Square: *How long have you been in Somerville?, What do you like most about Somerville?, and What do you want most out of the development?*

On Instagram, I am following local sports teams and the Parent-Teacher Associations to get parents involved. We can also work on getting more young people involved in our activities,

possibly with the help of the Somerville Media Center to produce [outreach] videos. Yvette was very excited about helping us, and with trying to get young people to teach others how to use Zoom, so they can participate in our meetings.

Jessica: I think you have a great idea for your campaign to get people to learn about the USNC and get the community together, and it's great that Union Square Main Streets is working in a similar but parallel way in building the Union Square community.

Bill Cav: It is better to have more than one community building project here.

Michèle: Isabella also suggested that we nominate people for Isabella to talk to in the community to ask the three questions about their relationship to Union Square.

Tori: This is a great way to get more people involved and hopefully running to be on the USNC.

Gary: We did not pick a next meeting date for this committee, so we should pick one and also work on preparing the agenda.

David: We are pretty happy with the email communication system we currently use, but we also thought of the idea of making a WhatsApp messaging group for the Board. There are a number of Mutual Aid groups in Somerville that use WhatsApp exclusively for example.

Discussion about making a Twitter. David says he will make a Twitter account for the USNC. Andy will save all the Usernames and Passwords for all these accounts in a single repository.

David: Yvette Wilkes is a member of the Somerville Media Center and is very on board to collaborate with us as well.

5. Preliminary discussion about Bylaw changes

Discussion about four bylaw changes proposed where the membership was polled during the March 2020 USNC Board election. Results from email dated March 18, 2020 reposted below:

	Yes	No	No Preference or Blank
1) Should the next elected USNC Board pass a By-Law Amendment to set the date of all subsequent Board	36	17	7

elections to the first week in May?			
2) Should the next elected USNC Board pass a By-Law Amendment to set the terms of Board members at two years (instead of the current one year)?	42	13	5
3) Should the next elected USNC Board pass a By-Law Amendment to decrease the size of future Board from 15 to a lower number such as 11 or 9?	25	26	9
4) Should the next elected USNC Board pass a By-Law Amendment to set the times for elections to be during the morning 7 am - 10 am and evening 4 pm - 8 pm instead of the current required 10 hours on a weekday? (Note: Weekend polling times are not required currently by the bylaws, but have been added as extra voting time by the past Elections Committees.)	23	31	6

Andy: Two proposed changes that were generally supported: 1) Moving the elections to the first week in May or spring. 2) Making the Board terms two years instead of one. Proposed bylaw amendment 3 was split ~50/50 and ran into the issue of how to re-order the seat categories if we decrease the board size. Proposed bylaw amendment 4 had more no votes than yes votes. And it did not speak to whether or not we should have a weekend voting time. Weekend voting times are currently not required, but the Elections Committee has chosen to have them to help more people vote.

Gary: None of us anticipated a pandemic when we were discussing these issues, so we should think about how our present conditions affect these kinds of questions. The premise of voting times is that we would have in-person voting. Are we still up for that? Putting things off until spring would give us more opportunity, especially if a vaccine might happen any time soon. Then the longer we can wait the better.

Andy: We should at a minimum first do the two bylaw changes - move elections to the first week in May and make Board terms two years. Then in March, when there's two months until the next election, we can see the state of things (i.e. the pandemic) to figure out how to do voting. Maybe we have to do it virtually, or in May, we could do voting outside.

Gary: Is the proposal to have an in-person referendum on these two questions?

Andy: The bylaws do not require any in-person referendum. The bylaws require us to make the proposed bylaw amendment public two weeks ahead of the vote. Then any member who shows

up to the Zoom USNC meeting where we are voting on the bylaw change can vote on it. Two-thirds of those voting have to approve of a bylaw change.

Pennie: I think we should make it online voting whether we have a vaccine or not [for COVID], as this would broadly increase accessibility. Is there anything in the bylaws that requires in-person voting?

Michèle: I think they do. We had a very long conversation about this and voted against online voting at the time.

Andy: There was possible support for online voting, but we were unsure how to set up the infrastructure for online voting. We considered OpaVote, but we were unsure how to get the voting details to everyone who is allowed to vote. Or how to verify people as members of the USNC to vote. If we want to do this, someone has to be the point person to set up the infrastructure for this. For now, I would just approve these two bylaw changes. We have time until May to consider online voting. We should look at whether to do it definitely by the end of February, but someone should look into it before that.

David: I have some experience with online voting. My union did it at our last election. But we hired the American Arbitration Association to handle it, and it was very expensive.

Michèle: I agree with **Andy** that we should propose the first two bylaw changes, putting the election in May and setting up two year terms for Board members. We need a committee to write the language for the amendment. We also need a committee to look into online voting so that we can be prepared [to implement it if needed].

Isabella can draft the language for these two bylaws. Andy can check over that language. Pennie will check in with Our Revolution Somerville about OpaVote to see how that could work. Gary will do research into voting systems to see if it's something we can do ourselves.

Tori: Should we make the research into the voting [method] a working group that would allow the membership to [participate]?

Andy: Anyone can be on a committee. There just needs to be at least one board member.

Michèle: I think if we were to add online voting, we should still have an in-person voting option.

David links in chat:

Here are some links I found to systems that we could consider.

<https://securedvoting.com/Online-voting-system/>

<https://electionrunner.com/>

<https://www.capterra.com/voting-software/>

<https://www.eballot.com/>

<https://www.goodfirms.co/blog/best-free-open-source-voting-software-solutions>

6. General Announcements

a. SST Food Drive 12/12

Ann: I thought it would be nice if we do this community work, and it would be easier to do it in collaboration with another group. December 12, 12:30-2 pm, in the Dilboy area. There will be music - they need people to play. On December 11, they need help picking up donated food. They are looking for a 501c non-profit organization to put the donations into so that it's tax free. But they will probably do that through either The Welcome Project or CAAS. You can donate anything you want. You can make food to donate also. I'll go to some local restaurants that donate all the time who would contribute. Feel free to ask local restaurants or bakeries that you know if they can donate food. They will have increments of 10 people at a time on December 12 to help pack all the boxes. Distribution is 12:30 pm - 2 pm. I'll send more details in an email.

Pennie: We did not elect a Treasurer for the Board this year.

Ann: Ask your children to make cards or prepare Christmas ornaments to put in boxes for donation.

Tori: Is there any particular food that is needed more than anything else?

Ann: They didn't specify. You can bring anything though. There are so many people in Somerville that are desperate for food. We have hungry people in Somerville.

Andy will put this info in the tinyLetter once he gets the email details from Ann.

Michèle: There is always food insecurity in Somerville and the United States, mostly children. We do these food donations during the holidays, but it's really important during the rest of the year. The government gives out very specific things that are very limited, such as peanut butter, so broader food donations are very important.

Bill Cav: I volunteered for “Food for Free,” doing delivery of food to those in need during the pandemic and stocking food pantries. Protein rich items are very in demand, such as canned tuna and canned meat. We should find out if the Dilboy post will have any refrigeration capacity. If so, we could include some fresh vegetables, which are always in short supply.

Pennie: There is Somerville community fridge opening. I can circulate where that is going to be. They are currently raising money for that, as a Mutual Aid resource.

<https://linktr.ee/SomervilleFridge>

b. Tom Lichoulas Meeting 11/22 @6pm

Ann: I forwarded the zoom meeting link to neighbors and asked it to be forwarded to anyone for whom it would be relevant. Tom reached out to Michèle and I with new plans, and we told him to have a meeting with the neighbors specifically to go over the new plans.

c. Capital Hall Public Meeting 11/30 @6pm

Michèle: This is considered a “make-up” neighborhood meeting, which we expect to be the last one.

Bill Cav: Macone filed for the Environmental Notification Form and the comments are due December 3.

Andy: Is Macone planning to start building this development next year? I thought it would take longer.

Bill S: There’s this huge stampede to build life sciences uses in Somerville because Commercial Developers have realized that demand for Office Space is going to be substantially lower. Right now there are between 6 and 7 major life sciences projects in the pipeline in Somerville. Katjana Ballyntine and I had a conversation about this last weekend and asked me to write up a memo about this. The memo lists all these proposed projects, who owns them, the intended square feet, and other key details.

Gary: Can we put a notice of this meeting in the tiny Letter? (**Andy will add it.**) Are we planning to submit a joint USNC comment on the ENF?

Bill Cav: The notice for comments on this ENF was only put out *today*. It is only the ENF, not the final environmental review. We should definitely say something about this project. If any project is an environmental question, this one is. It’s a 23 story building, an 18 story building, and a 17 story hotel. There is underground parking planned for 1,000 cars. The streets bordering this project are Medford St and the ramp to McGrath Highway. And those streets are already

gridlocked. That project really needs to be scaled down. It's not going to be scaled down by the Planning Department, or the City. It will only be scaled down if we back up Brickbottom to demand it be scaled down.

David: Why is Councillor Balyntine turning to Bill S for a report on these developments? Shouldn't she be turning to the City for this information?

Bill S: 45 months ago Councillor Bill White submitted a zoning amendment that would specify the amount of Commercial Property in the five transformational districts. He requested 65% commercial, and his colleagues then amended it to have it increased to 68%. But then they asked the Planning Staff to first analyze this amendment. The Planning Staff decided they needed to hire consultants to look over this amendment and a committee to oversee this process. The committee includes myself (Bill S), Bill White, Katjana Ballantyne, a person who works for FRIT, someone who helped prepare the NEXUS report for the City. Katjana asked me if there is something we should do about this. Katjana had a conversation with George Proakis. Proakis said there are six biotech projects in the pipeline. Katjana asked why she doesn't know about them. I replied that you won't know about them until they go before the Planning Board or the Zoning Board of Appeals. Only the Ward City Councillor is directly informed ahead of time, and most of these projects are in Wards 1 and 2.

Michèle: The Macone/Capital Hall development planning is going too fast. People are taking advantage of the City of Somerville and the community is getting screwed over. None of this should move forward because not enough people are involved and the technology is not good enough to get the community involved during the pandemic. People are going to wake up and there's going to be a 20+ story building next to the Target, and no one is going to know where it came from.

Bill Cav: I would not push back on all the developments at once. I would push back one at a time as we see the specifics of their proposals. So even if we have to rush it, we should make some comments and get our foot in the door on the ENF for Capital Hall Partners/Macone. When the next development comes into the public process, we should comment on that project. There may be 6 or 7 projects planned right now, but there could be 8 or 9 in the end. I think the final number will be less, and some will be weeded out.

Michèle: To clarify, I'm talking about this specific development Capital Hall Partners/Macone that is out of control and taking advantage of the situation the community is in, and it's wrong.

Bill S: I understood Michèle that was your intention. This project is just so egregious that going after them could set an example. The massing they are proposing on such a tiny plot on such a strategic intersection speaks nothing but greed. Those poor people at Brickbottom testified one after another. The Capital Hall Partners engineers proposed solutions, but none of them seem

feasible. When we met with Tom Galligani and Melissa Wood, while they were a bit coy about showing their cards, they could not believe the size of this development themselves. We need to talk about what we can do about this development at a future meeting.

Gary: Neither of my questions were answered. 1) Can we send notice about this development neighborhood meeting in the tinyLetter? 2) Should we form a group to prepare a comment on this ENF?

Andy will send out the tinyLetter as frequently as needed to send out important announcements with deadlines.

Michèle, Gary, and Bill Cav will work on a comment for the ENF.

Tori: Should we push on the community center, that Macone promised he would put a community center on the Target site?

Michèle: Macone does not own the Target site, and he is just speaking words, without anything to back them up right now.

d. Time of our next meeting

Agreement for now to hold USNC meetings on the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month. The next meeting will be Monday December 7, 7-9 pm.

e. Other

Ann: I wrote to Tom Galligani and Melissa Woods. I haven't heard back from Tom. Melissa has responded. I am still working on scheduling.

Tori posts in the chat: Somerville is going to be doing Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan community input: <https://somervoice.somervillema.gov/assemblynp>

7. Public comment

None

8. Executive Session for purposes of developer negotiation strategies

Unanimous vote to go into Executive Session.