

## **Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting**

**December 07, 2020**

**7 pm – 9 pm**

**Zoom Meeting**

### **Attendees:**

#### **Board Members:**

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

#### **Community Members:**

Jessica Eshleman, USMS  
Frank Kautz  
Aaron Weber  
Nicole Eigbrett  
Cassie White, CAAS  
Cosmo DiSchino  
Kristin Phelan, Somernova  
Bob McWatters  
Tom Lichoulas

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

### **2. Public Comment**

**Jessica:** Thank you to the USNC for helping to get the word out about the Holiday Stroll. This year the holiday shopping season is so important to our local businesses, but also to our community, which is seeking opportunity for joy. We have set up a lot of ways for people to get involved. There are cash prizes for people who take a selfie along the Festivus Trail with inflatables outside different businesses. Also, the “Keep Small Strong” challenge, where people take pictures of at least three receipts from local businesses. The festivities last through this Saturday.

**Kristin:** Somernova is giving a \$25 donation to the SNAP match program for every “Elfie Selfie” taken on the holiday stroll.

**Bill S:** Could Kristin say more about her organization?

**Kristin:** Somernova stands for Somerville Innovation Hub, former Ames Business Park, bought in 2015, and renamed as such.

**Gary:** Could we move the Tom Lichoulas agenda item to the front, since Tom is currently present at this meeting?

*Bill Cav motions to move agenda item 7 to take just before item 3. Everyone agrees.*

### **7. Report from neighborhood meeting with Tom Lichoulas on Dane & Washington Streets Site and further discussions**

**Sarah:** Take-aways from that meeting: 1) The overall square footage if re-zoned to MR4 should stay under the square footage if the parcel was kept as NR + FAB. 2) Move the parking entrance off Dane St onto Washington St due to current traffic pressure on Dane St. 3) Include set backs on Washington and Dane St of 6 feet to allow retail seating and planters and to not be built out further than the neighbor on Dane. 4) Reduce the square footage of the top fourth floor by some amount. 5) Do not have roof terraces facing Dane St abutters. 6) The current amount of parking seems too large - decrease that somewhat. 7) Setback of 15 feet off the neighboring parcel on Dane. There was also talk of giving an easement to the neighbor to allow them to have a driveway.

**Michèle:** Tori, Sarah, Ann, and I were at this neighborhood meeting.

**Tori:** If you do reduce the parking, then also do not allow city permits to park on the street. There is precedent for this in other developments. Personally you would get my support if there were less parking.

**Ann:** I think parking is important, especially since 75 spaces are being taken on Washington St for bus and bike lanes. And cars will be going electric soon.

**Bill Cav:** Were the visual drawings at this meeting enough for the neighbors at the meeting to understand what was being presented? Up until this last meeting, it appeared the neighbors did not have enough visuals of the development to make a decision on it.

**Michèle:** I believe the answer is yes.

**Tom:** Going back a few months ago I didn't spend a lot of money on plans. I finally did spend the money. I had a meeting with Pat Jehlen and other neighbors in person three weeks ago and presented those plans. The plans cannot get any more detailed at this point until there are construction drawings.

**Tori:** I am wondering if the neighbors understand that the alternative by right development could be more objectionable.

**Andy:** Should we ask Tom if all of these things are feasible.

**Tom:** This feedback is huge for me. I think a lot of the items Sarah listed are connected. What I can do as a matter of right is 30,000 sq ft. The building I presented is 10% bigger than that. If we increase the set-backs to five or six feet, it will decrease the footprint of the building and decrease the number of parking spots. And maybe we can do something to decrease the fourth floor size a bit. I'm not against moving the parking entrance to Washington St. Sometimes it's out of my control. But if that can work, I'm not against it. I think the sweet spot for units is 24.

**Tori:** There is a bike lane near there and a bus near there.

**Tom:** I don't mind asking. My position on cars is a bit different. I have four kids, so I cannot imagine getting around without cars.

**Michèle:** We are not asking for no parking. Affordable housing units need parking. Family sized units need parking. If you cut the parking in half, the people who rent there will know that they cannot get a parking permit. I personally wouldn't rent a unit without parking, but I know there are people who would.

**Andy:** If we condition the project on something that isn't by right, we need to give full-throated support to the project with that requirement.

*Consensus that Tom should ask the ZBA about options for less parking.*

### **3. Discussion about Gateway Innovation Center/Macone Neighborhood Meeting and MEPA ENF filing**

**Michèle:** This is a very large project on a postage stamp. There's not enough space for it, and no matter what they do, it's a traffic bomb. There's 1,000 underground parking spaces. The traffic studies were not done as far out from the project as necessary. The amount of traffic caused through Union Square and the City will be extreme. What will they do for the community of people stuck in the traffic and construction? Macone said that we would be in discussions about that. If there is a hotel, will there be a union, will Somerville people have a first chance to get the

jobs, will there be people of color getting jobs, etc.

**Bill Cav:** I want to hear if Local 26 will be involved in negotiations as to whether the hotel will have a union. Also, they didn't study the intersections of Medford St and South St, Medford St and Cambridge St, Medford and Warren St in their traffic study. These are all already failing intersections, where traffic backs up such that you cannot get through in one light cycle, if not multiple cycles. Some of these intersections are not even signalized today, Medford and South St, Medford and Warren St. In the City plans for Boynton Yards, they will signalize Medford and South St, but this development should be involved in that, and there should be infrastructure payments made for these areas from this developer. The letter we sent as the USNC for the MEPA ENF included the issues I mentioned here and other things, such as will the developer cooperate with other developers in the area to sponsor a shuttle service to Kendall Square. This is an ask we made to John Fenton/DLJ in Boynton Yards, and it's an ask we should make to Tom Macone/Gateway Innovation Center as well.

**Bill S:** Some of these intersections are covered in the DLJ filing and their traffic report. There's a build and no-build assessment of these intersections and some of them list the wait time at intersections as "infinity". I think we should ask that a condition of permitting DLJ's future developments and the Macone DEvelopment is that they collectively form a Transportation Management Association, which would, among other things, operate shuttles to public transit areas. In 2007 in the Assembly Square settlement, we put that as a condition. The various developers there are now quite happy with that, as it's working well for them.

**Aaron:** The Macone project is of interest to Somerville YIMBY. Our view is that something should get built there, but that is way too much parking, and the traffic management issue is the sticking point.

**Tori:** There is a woeful amount of open space and no contribution to the open space fund. Should we come up with a list of things we want the City to incorporate in a Covenant? Like a contribution to the community center, and other things that somehow did not make it into the zoning.

**Bill Cav:** Many of the mobility problems I identified myself in walking the area multiple times are those identified by the developer. But their solutions are not what I would do ideally. There was some criticism of the proposed solutions by those who advocate for bike access. If they are going to accommodate 18 wheeler trailer trucks, there will be problems with bike access. Their solutions in getting good access to the East Somerville T station seem reasonable and are improvements from earlier meetings. The real problem is traffic, and they are not talking about shared parking, in the way DLJ and even US2 talked about it. We should not budge on pushing this project to be scaled down. I want to see their mobility management plan. Will their tenants give discounts for T passes, etc?

**Ann:** Tom Macone called me after his last meeting. I keep telling him to come to our meetings and talk to us. He says that he wants to finish dealing with the City first, and then deal with us. He has the US2 CBA and wants the list we gave to DLJ. I said we'd give him that after we make a deal with DLJ. But he won't come onto our meetings yet.

**Bill Cav:** I would like the Board to consider not giving Macone a list until he scales down the project. The Planning Staff is smirking at the ridiculous size of this development. Many of them don't live in Somerville, and they would care more if they lived in Somerville.

**Michèle:** At the neighborhood meeting, Macone did say publicly that he would meet with us. But we don't necessarily need to give him a list.

**Pennie:** I would support what Bill Cav said. We are a volunteer organization. If they won't come to a meeting, why should we put in the effort to prepare a list.

**Sarah:** I agree we should ask them to show us other scales and massing. I do think it's a good site to build something that is sizable. It may be hard to build open space there. They should be able to come to us and show a different version.

**Michèle:** They said 1,000 parking spaces is the bare minimum they would require to make the site marketable at its current size.

**Andy:** I agree with Bill Cav that we have finite time, and we should not put in time on a planned development until a developer is willing to talk to us. I could believe the developer argument that at the current planned size of development they would need 1,000 parking spaces to be marketable. But that does not take into account use of the T properly and that just shows the site should be scaled down.

**Bill S:** I feel ambivalent about both proposals, because we are lacking information in order to make a decision. This is essentially talking about negotiations with a developer, so I would be more comfortable discussing this in Executive Session.

*Further discussions on this issue in Executive Session.*

#### **4. Boynton Yards and John Fenton's request for a meeting; and discussion of response to his letter**

**Ann:** We have a meeting with John Fenton/DLJ Wednesday

**Bill Cav:** There continues to be an exchange between the USNC and John Fenton. We got a response from John Fenton that was pretty detailed, and the USNC wrote, reviewed, and voted to

send him a letter back with an extensive list of things Fenton did not answer completely or in a clear way in his initial letter. And we wanted further clarification on those items.

#### **5. Progress on getting meetings with Tom Galligani, Melissa Woods of OSPCD**

**Ann:** I wrote twice to Melissa Woods and Dan Bartman on the same email and got no answer.

**Bill Cav:** This is really important as it came up in the discussion of the Macone development on the Glass Stop site. This is the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development with Tom, Melissa, Dan, Sarah Lewis, George Proakis. They created this zoning that is allowing this amount of development with this amount of parking. They are the same people negotiating the covenant with Tom Macone for this development. They are the same people that didn't complete the Boynton Yards Master Plan development. We need to meet with them and tell them we are not happy with this. When they have someone to take the place of Melissa Woods, they need to meet with the USNC and have a very different planning process. It's not just East Union Square. It's Brickbottom, Inner Belt, which have many more acres than Boynton Yards. If we do not put our foot down with these folks, then they are going to go on their merry way and do whatever they want. We have to say it's not enough what they've done.

**Tori:** Thank you for the efforts Ann. We could get a City Councillor on board to get a meeting with OSPCD. JT Scott is the councillor for this Ward (Ward 2).

**Bill Cav:** I would like Councillor Ben Ewen-Campen from Ward 3 and Matt McLaughlin from Ward 1 invited to any meeting as well.

**Ann:** Tom Galligani wrote Bill S and said that he thought he answered all our questions when we met last time, which we don't believe is the case.

**Ann** will email Sarah Lewis and Dan Bartman again, and cc those three ward councillors so that they are aware.

*Bill Cav will talk to Matt, Ann will talk to JT, Michèle will talk to Ben E-C about the issue.*

#### **6. Discussion of when to meet with CV Properties, the developer of the project located at 64 Webster Avenue (corner of Webster Avenue and Columbia Street)**

**Bill Cav:** Paul Trane, who is associated with these developers in some way, spoke to Alexandra Philips, the Columbia Ventures Properties person, and told her to contact me. Alex Philips contacted me to ask about a possible meeting with the USNC. Ann, who is making contact with this developer.

*Ann will send the US2 CBA and USNC mission statement to them.*

**Gary:** I sent them a note last night that they could be expected to be contacted tomorrow. I said they could be present at this meeting tonight, but we would not be discussing their development in detail at this meeting.

**Bill S:** Paul Trane was early on director of communications in Mayor Mike Capuano's administration. He negotiated two contracts with He parlayed that into a consulting career, stating that he is a communications expert. That market seems saturated, so he appears to be working with developers now, stating that he's good at getting things done with cities. He is the brother of the Ward 7 Alderman that Katjana replaced.

**Bill Cav:** This is the first developer who says they are going to use opportunity zones. So this is the first chance to state that while the federal govt provides no guidelines for what to do with opportunity zone investments, the mission statement of opportunity zones nationwide says they are supposed to help poor and working people, so we in the city should provide some guardrails on this and set a good precedent for dealing with opportunity zone venture capitalists.

**Ann:** Macone said that he is using the opportunity zone option also.

**Michèle:** He said he *\*would\** use opportunity zones on the Target site in the future, but he does not own that site yet and may never own it. We have a process set up on how to deal with developers. So if any developer contacts you, forward it to the co-chairs or the secretary who can send the appropriate documents.

*Ann will invite them for the meeting on December 21.*

## **8. Update on assembly row revised neighborhood planning**

**Bill S:** There was a week of virtual charette on Assembly Square development. There was a kickoff last week Monday. You could then go on throughout the week to get progress reports and talk to designers. And there was a final presentation last Friday. I find this design team to be much better than the Union Square design team. They are responsive in real time. They have a real sensitivity to sustainability and environmental concerns. They are also working within the constraints the City imposes upon them. What they presented Friday was not perfect, but was better than what I expected. In the beginning of their presentation Friday, they put up my column about the issue of commercial development.

**Tori:** By Friday, they were saying things like "family housing", pollinators, space for cyclists and pedestrians, and the passion with which they spoke suggested that they understand the issues. Sarah Lewis said the City reached a bit further afield to find these consultants than they have in the past.

**Bill Cav:** When I see a design that resembles Las Ramblas, I will cheer. Until then, I will stay in my fantasy desire within Bill Shelton's Somerville Times columns.

**Tori:** It is a relief that this Master Plan is being updated by planners, not developers. The Last Ramblas design got a 70% support in an online poll.

**Bill S:** This team had an urban economist. He and I did a lot of backchannel communication, and he took into account my information and data.

**Tori:** This will be part of an approval process, and there will be more opportunities to comment. They are going in with sustainability and green roofs, which means we can re-tweak the zoning to reflect these goals.

**Andy:** I attended some of the Assembly Square meetings, and I think it is promising. The consultants seemed better, and because there is not an immediate push to build on the entire area of Assembly Square (some specific sections are already being built up), I'm optimistic there will be fewer pressures in the short term to rush, compared to what happened in Union Square.

**David:** Lots of the immediate Assembly Square neighbors talked about the importance of green space and related issues.

### **9. Progress on developing language for proposed Bylaw changes, setting date for a vote by membership**

“The Board Elections Committee shall determine the date(s) of the election during the month of May, approximately two years after the previous Board election. There will be an exception for the board that was elected in March 2020, whose term will last until an election that will take place in May 2021. Subsequent elections will be held approximately every two years after this in the month of May.”

*(Note: This language was later adjusted over email and sent out via the tinyLetter and put on the website by January 2:*

“The Board Elections Committee shall determine the date(s) of the election which will be held during the month of May, approximately two years after the previous Board election. There will be an exception for the board that was elected in March 2020, whose term will last until an election that will take place in May 2021. Subsequent elections will be held approximately every two years following the date of that election in the month of May.”)

**David** asks about the idea of staggering terms with half the board turning over every year, while allowing continuity year to year.



**Andy** states that no one has suggested that amendment in detail, but that would require elections every year again, which would be hard for the Election's Committee that is all volunteer. And it could decrease voter turnout.

**Bill Cav** points out that the USNC has designated category seats, so it would be hard to decide which seats would be up for election in which years. If everyone was voted into an at-large seat, Bill doesn't think it would be a problem.

**Gary** wants to make sure a large number of people from the community know that they have a say and can vote on these bylaw amendments.

**Bill Cav** wants the bylaw amendment to be taken up in January after the holiday season, to make sure the membership has enough notice to weigh in on this subject.

**David** wants the notice of this amendment to also be used as a push to call for more community members to run for board seats during the next election. **Bill Cav** adds that we should advertise to ask community members to join the Elections Committee as well.

*Andy will send a tinyLetter advertising the planned amendment vote, noting that all USNC members present at the January 18 meeting can vote on this. Andy will send a note at least two weeks ahead to satisfy the bylaws and work with Gary to put the amendment on the website at least two weeks ahead of the vote.*

**Gary:** What has happened to the other proposed bylaw tweaks?

**Andy:** The other two suggested bylaw changes were split or majority "no" vote by the community when polled in March, so we should not try to do any changes to those parts of the bylaws at this time, until we can meet with the community again.

*Andy will send tinyLetter by Wednesday - get all notices to him by then.*

## **10. Somerville Stands Together Good Drive announcement and involvement**

**Ann:** I'm going to go to Costco to ask for donations. I was also given \$500 to go food shopping for the drive. I called restaurants and bakeries, and it's very hard for these businesses, which are not doing well and so cannot help at this time. 8:30 and 9 am SST needs help to bag things, but they can only have 8-10 people bagging things at a time. 12:30 - 2 pm. The Police and Fire Stations are donating plastic police badges and fire hats for toys. They'll take anything - toilet paper, paper towels, diapers, but they are mostly focused on the food.

**Bill Cav:** There will be four tents set up in front of the Dilboy VFW post in Davis Square. I think distribution will start at 12 pm.

**Michèle:** The notice says food pickup 1-2 pm.

**Bill Cav:** Then that is correct. There will be live performers and recorded music. There is a 501c(3) you can donate money to, \$1500. A big chunk came from the unions behind SST, but also Climate Coalition of Somerville. The poster I sent out says how to donate money. The person organizing the most is Marianne Walles from Local 509 in Boston.

**Jessica in chat:** USMS can donate kids sized Fluff Festival T-shirts.

### **11. Scheduling next USNC meeting**

*Scheduled for Monday December 21, 7-9 pm.*

### **12. Public comment**

*None*

### **13. Executive Session for purposes of developer negotiation strategies**

*Unanimous vote to go into Executive Session.*