

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting

June 18, 2019

7 pm – 9 pm

Public Safety Building

220 Washington St.

Attendees:

Bill Cavellini

Michèle Hansen

Andy Greenspon

Pennie Taylor

Ann Camara

Ben Baldwin

Paola Massoli

Ben Bradlow

Jacob Kramer

Community Members:

Joe Beckmann

Wig Zamore

Edwidge L Hercule

Gary Trujillo

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Public Comment

Wig Zamore: We have not discussed city-wide zoning in a while. Regarding Union Square, the new zoning circles the residential district of Allen, Linden, Charlestown areas with mid-rise and high-rise. On D2, there is the planned parking garage pushed up against Allen St. There needs to be a district design for how these areas will be developed in the long run, in relation to D2 and the other side next to the present location of Target.

It's helpful to look at characteristics and profiles of different communities (characteristics such as housing-jobs balance, etc.) in relation to our own area in helping guide design of the district. I'm happy with how *SomerVision 2030* came out with a good housing-jobs balance and commercial tax revenue to help with equity issues.

The City Council appears to be giving up on getting valuable large open space from developers. Most of the large open space in Cambridge and Boston has in fact come from large developers. To cavalierly give up on getting this open space from large developers is a mistake.

Joe Beckmann: 1) If we can't stop a three-story garage on D2, we have no power. And if the City doesn't stop it, then they are not listening to us. And this is an election year. 2) US2 is building a lot of tall buildings right near the subway, which have elevators. Why can't they go down to the subway level from the street? 3) The underground parking would be <1% of US2's entire development budget. They could make it back from an investor who invests in the space. So US2's claims of financial inability to do underground parking on D2 are specious.

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3. Approval of Minutes of May 14, and 28, 2019 Meetings

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Motion to approve minutes from both meetings.

7 yes, 0 no, 1 abstain.

Minutes approved.

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4. Report on attempt to get elevator from the MBTA

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At the last Planning Board meeting, George Proakis said US2 and the City of Somerville have come to an agreement on how to build the elevator for the Union Square T stop. It appears that US2 and the City of Somerville will split the cost for the elevator (confirmation still needed). All of this appears contingent on US2's design of D2 being approved.

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Wig suggests that in order to for the elevator to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, it needs to go from Prospect St down to the middle of the platform between inbound and outbound directions. Otherwise, it will just be removed and changed if the Green Line is further extended to Porter Square in the future.

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5. Presentation by Bill Shelton on basic principles for determining support for individual development projects

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No quorum at May 28 meeting. Bill S asked to give his presentation again. Bill S not present to give presentation, so agenda item skipped.

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6. Report & Recommendations of Outreach and Communications Committee

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Andy will make a spreadsheet of dates and times for Farmers Market sign up.

We should agree on what message the USNC will present to the community when tabling prior to the first instance thereof.

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7. Decision on whether to have a third 10 minute Public Comment @ all USNC mtgs

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Gary advocated for a third comment period, stating that some community members often had an important thing to say in the middle of meetings but instead had to wait until the end of the meeting, making their comment disjointed. **Wig** states that this is in fact a representative organization, not just a community grassroots group. He suggests allowing the chairs' discretion

in opening up discussion at the meetings to the broader community when appropriate. **Paola** agrees with chairs having discretion. **Jacob** agrees with the notion of this being a representative body where community members can talk to Board members individually or participate in a committee or working group, not just show up at the main meetings to speak. **Andy** is fine with chairs having discretion as needed to allow community members to speak outside the two 10 minute public comment periods, as time permits. **Gary** likes the idea of having a comment period in the middle to allow people to speak if something in the meeting up to that point moves them to speak. If no middle comment period, then he wants this decision to allow community members to speak in the middle of meetings to be informed based on what the people in the room want at any given meeting, which will require the adoption of a procedure at the start of each meeting to assess such a need (perhaps those making comments during the initial comment period can indicate their desire along such lines as part of their comments), if community members see something important and feel they have something important to contribute. The co-chairs would retain discretionary powers, but exercise them on the basis of what has been asked for by participants during a public proceeding.

Pennie motions to keep the two public comment periods at the beginning and end of meetings, and allow co-chairs discretion to allow non-Board community members to speak otherwise at meetings.

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Ann sees that community members do a lot of work for the USNC and broader community and would like the middle 10 minute comment period instead of dealing with the discretion of the co-chairs. In response, **Michèle** suggests there could be the middle 10 minute comment period but co-chairs have discretion to remove it if a meeting is going over time.

Pennie states she is keeping her motion as is. **Jacob** re-iterates that these meetings should primarily be organizational, and we should not draw community members specifically to speak at these meetings.

Gary reminds us that the USNC is operating on the basis of an increasingly thin mandate, given the lackluster participation by members of the public in the most recent board election. Given such circumstances, the question of how “representative” the board is of local citizens is valid.

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Bill Cav re-iterates that it still behooves the co-chairs to entertain comments from the community as needed to make informed decisions about specific agenda items.

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Vote on Pennie's motion.

7 yes, 1 no, 1 abstain.

Motion passes.

8. Report of last Planning Board meeting & any update on new open space proposal

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Summary: At the last Planning Board meeting June 13, US2 specifically said it does not intend to make any proposals with underground parking and are proposing a possible new additional open space on D2.4. Planning Board asked for an explicit statement on underground parking – George Proakis then explicitly said there is no planned consideration of having underground parking. **Jacob** was asked by Planning Board to speak regarding CBA updates. He noted that USNC has submitted a new term sheet for CBA to US2, and USNC is waiting for a reply. Planning Board offered suggestions for how US2 could move buildings around to minimize pollution exposure from adjacent streets in the open space on D2. They asked US2 to consider some possible alternatives to their current plan. **Jacob** made clear that issues of health and safety from vehicles on the streets are not being negotiated in the CBA, so it's up to the design plan and Planning Board to be firm on this issue.

Discussion about how the community process for the past year or longer has not led to significant changes in the D2 design, as this process was supposed to have led to. As such, there is a question of what was the point of all the public process if no changes occur as a result.

Discussion of what strategy to use in speaking towards the many problems of the current D2 design.

General agreement to outreach to as many people to attend Thursday's public hearing and give comments.

9. Public Comment

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Merged into agenda item 8.

10. Executive Session

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