

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting

January 18, 2021

7 pm – 9 pm

Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Board Members:

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

Developer and Associates:

Richard (Dick) Galvin
Alex Philips
Mike Loughlin
Eric Rubin

Community Members:

Brian
Chris LaRoche
Colleen McGraw
Cosmo DiSchino
DT's iPad mini
Edwidge Hercule
Elizabeth Kubicki
Frank Kautz
Holger Siebrecht
Jessica Eshleman
Jillie
Joyce Wu
Katherine Huang
Kimberly Starr
Brian Scoleta

Murtuza Dhillal
Oliver King
Roger Levy
Sarah Elizabeth Zeiser
Kristin Phelan, Somernova
Stephanie Smith
Tom Bent

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Public comment

Jessica: Please support your local businesses, now more than ever. We are entering into a rough time of the year traditionally, whether COVID or construction or not. Order an extra take-out - call the restaurants directly. Love local.

3. Approval of meeting minutes from December 21, 2020

Unanimous approval, one abstention.

4. Membership Vote on proposed change to bylaws

Brief summary: Bylaw amendment would move elections to May and Board members would serve two-year terms. Elections would be held in May 2021 and subsequent elections every two years.

Yes: 22

No: 1

The bylaw amendment passes.

5. Presentation by CV Properties, the developer of the proposed project located at 64 Webster Avenue (corner of Webster Avenue and Columbia Street)

Dick Galvin, President and founder of CV properties.

Alex Philips

With partner company Columbia Property Trust: **Mike Loughlin, Eric Rubin**

Dick Galvin: Boynton Gateway is a development collaboration of CV Properties and Columbia Property Trust.

Dick gives the presentation of the project.

The site is along Columbia Street, and a large part of the site is behind 80 Webster Ave. The developers also bought the parking garage and garage frontage area on Webster Ave, as a separate development site from this plan.

The site crosses two zoning districts, MR-5 (mid-rise five stories) near Webster Ave, and the Boynton Yards Overlay Zoning of HR (high-rise) in the region toward Columbia St. There is a 20 foot existing access easement for pedestrians, for cars only to access a garage, and for loading with access via Columbia St.

The proposed development: 4-stories by Webster Ave, excluding mechanicals. 12 stories in the high rise district, excluding mechanicals.

335,000 sq ft of development with ground level primarily activated retail, and upper levels as lab and creative office space.

Two levels of below grade parking with 200 parking spaces.

Some example possible architectural designs for the two buildings are presented. Example landscapes for the hardscape, and green and open space are presented.

There are discussions in how to make the separately purchased parcel in front of the parking garage on Webster Ave a passive park. It is a 14,000 sq ft site. The developers want to see if there are ways to connect that park to this development site.

6. Q & A with CV Properties about their proposed development

Bill Cav asks what is the closest distance between the existing residential building [at 80 Webster Ave] and the high rise building.

Dick says ~12-13 feet. The existing buildings are 3-5 feet distance from the existing residential building.

Bill Cav asks about shadow studies and how much of the 2800 sq ft landscape green area is in shadow during different seasons and times of day . Dick says yes to doing shadow studies and has had some discussions with residents of 80 Webster Ave already.

Bill Cav asks about the withdrawn Environmental Notification Form (ENF) submitted to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office. Alex says it may take about 6 weeks to re-file the ENF. Bill Cav asks who they are working with from the City for the Green and Open Space. Dick says Dan Bartman is their project manager, and they will also work with the city Urban Forestry Committee.

Sarah Dunbar asks about making the lab building entrance off Columbia St and making a secondary entrance from the retail to the lab building in order to allow continuous retail along Webster Ave.

Dick says they are currently working on this and want to activate the ground floor retail, and it will depend on the tenants.

Sarah asks if the developer will just present the current option or multiple options. **Dick** says that as part of the planning process, they present three different primary designs to the city Urban Design Committee.

Michèle asks if the high-rise (HR) building will be a single facade after the 14 foot gap from 80 Webster Ave. **Dick** says yes that it is a single facade, and the zoning would allow only a 3 foot gap between the buildings, but they are planning a larger gap between the existing buildings of ~14 feet.

Katherine Huang (80 Webster) asks if there is room to negotiate how tall the high-rise building is. She just moved here so missed the previous meetings.

Tori Antonino chimes in that she believes there is room to be made always as this is a community journey on figuring out the best development.

Dick says his answer to Katherine's question is that we are all on this journey together and all the different aspects of the development will be taken into account over the next few months. We are here to listen and learn. Whenever we have these public meetings, the project gets better. We may never always agree, but the project generally gets better, especially by hearing from those who live here. The 80 Webster Ave residents have a very particular concern about height.

Tori states that if you are part of the Boynton Yards overlay, does this design qualify for the needed green space.

Dick: Two strategies - buy off-site green and open space, or build the required amount on site. We are thinking about the green space in front of the garage on Webster Ave being the off-site solution.

Tori asks if they could add more on-site open space by adding a bit of height to one of the buildings. **Dick** states that they are trying to thread the needle with the public realm open space while wanting to create about 300,000 sq ft of development.

Tori also points out developing the green space to be used for ecosystem restoration such as native pollinators.

Dick states that addressing those concerns will be at the top of the list in addition to what the community wants aesthetically.

Tori also points out future discussions of green roofs, solar roofs, bioswales, etc.

Roger Levy: I'm a resident and owner at 80 Webster Ave. We've been in meetings with the developers, two so far. I want to give credit to the developers for reaching out constructively and engaging with us. There is very widespread concern about this project because of the height. 230 feet is the planned 12 story HR section. A 230 foot building 20 feet away from the east of our building is going to fundamentally change the environment living at 80 Webster Ave for our 46 units. We are concerned about the long term outcome, both in terms of the shadow, where at least half the building will be affected, and in terms of traffic. Many people in the building don't own a car, but many people won't do that. A couple hundred more parking spaces is concerning. The other concern is the high rise district that even got passed.

The first time we learned about the change from MR to HR was the public presentation by the developer in October. The overlay district is very opaque. There is MR-5 and then an overlay next to it. There's nothing immediately attached to the public documents, which is hugely consequential

Chris LaRoche: I live on Norfolk St nearby. I attended many of the meetings with JT Scott. Until mid-2019 that was all supposed to be mid-rise. Something happened and it got overlaid with HR, and people are going to suffer for it, and it kind of stinks.

Jessica: I'm the executive director of USMS, the nonprofit that supports nearly 200 businesses in Union Square. Those businesses are very excited to welcome more day time customer traffic in their shops. Could you let us know the hopeful timeline for this project. **Dick** replies that he expects to spend time through 2021 to work on and finalize the design of the project. First quarter of 2022 to start building, two years to build, then mid-2024 opening. **Jessica** asks to what degree needing to do remediation work on the site. **Dick** says some - they are old auto-repair shops, but that it is nothing out of the ordinary for urban development - they don't expect anything particularly "dangerous" to come out.

Bill S: I would like to point out that the beneficial owners of this development bought the property based on what they could build out of the zoning. And to meet their hurdle rate, that proposed size is what they are going to build. If there is profound unhappiness with this, I sympathize and I understand, and the question of how this happened lies more in how the zoning came about. There is some balance of responsibility between City officials and neighbors in how to participate. One of the largest concerns of developments of this size is traffic. Lab buildings The only entrances in and out of Boynton are Webster Ave and Medford St. Everybody needs to get together to think creatively about how to solve that problem.

Dick: We take great pride in trying to make great places and come to good resolution with neighbors. Contributions: jobs linkage, infrastructure linkage. It's a lot of money we hope can benefit immediate infrastructure needs and across Somerville. Bill S has a good point, and this has been set up for developers to provide these monetary funds to the community.

Chris LaRoche: I live at Union Place and use the garage on Webster Ave. A lot of the garage is empty right now. Do you plan to use some of the garage for parking for this development? **Dick** responds that they want to make changes to improve that garage, first to serve those who currently use it. The development is a couple years out, so first they want to make that garage useful for those who currently use it. That garage will be separate ownership from this development. Our mission for the traffic is multi-modal - pedestrian, cyclists, bus first, and then cars.

Sarah Dunbar: It would be helpful in future presentations to show other developments near this parcel to get a better idea of how this development would relate to those other parcels in the neighborhood. **Dick** says this would be good and also provide better context for the height and zoning in the area.

Bill Cav: I second what Sarah said - this would not only show buildings of similar height close by but also show that those buildings are not on top of a 4 story residential building., which is a negative in my book. I'm not surprised the residents of 80 Webster Ave are almost unanimously opposed to that much height that is close to them. I live on Oak St, so the shadows won't be a problem for me, but the traffic will. So I hope you work with us to minimize the number of employees who use private cars to get to work. One of the things other developers in the area have agreed to do is work together on a shuttle service to Kendall Square where other life science buildings are already established. I would be surprised if none of your tenants would want to go to Kendall Square multiple times a day. And it would be bad for them to drive that back and forth multiple times a day instead of a shuttle. I hope you will be as cooperative as some of the other developers in the area in encouraging tenants to take public transit and other methods beyond a private vehicle.

7. Progress in getting a meeting with city planning staff

Tori: I sent out an email this afternoon that I forwarded to the Board.

Bill Cav: We just witnessed another example of why we need to meet with the Planning Staff. For residents of Somerville to say they followed the zoning process almost to the end and this parcel was a mid-rise, and then in the final zoning this parcel became a high-rise is an absolute atrocity that never should have happened. I don't care what the rationale is. And this is at the feet of Joe Curtatone, JT Scott, and the whole City Council. But especially the Planning Staff. The zoning overhaul was a very complex process, where you could easily miss something like this,

especially if it surfaces at the very end. If Chris LaRoche says something stinks, he may be right, but I don't know. Certainly it shouldn't have happened. There's still an opportunity as the City Council said when they voted on it, that this is a work in progress. It was councillors like JT Scott that said "I'll be working in the coming year or two to complete this process". It was councillors like Lance Davis who said "this is a work in progress." This City Council should be working on things that we want changed in the Union Square area, like unlimited height.

Michèle: Ann and I have been trying to figure out how the height changed, and talked to JT Scott and others, and it appears to be something that happened near the end. But we need to have a conversation with the Planning Staff and find the meeting minutes to confirm.

Bill Cav: In the zoning map, you will find little sectioned pieces colored light purple, which are Fabrication zones. Already there's a problem with one of them in Gilman Square, the piano building. Community members are questioning whether the Fab was created as spot Zoning to benefit the owner of the building, Elan Sassoon. Spot zoning is illegal.

Tori: As we learn how development plans are going to look with 3D plans, we could advocate for changes to the zoning maps. Gilman Square recently redesigned what was in the zoning overhaul map and presented it to the City Council. They had architects who could make some re-designs. So that is something we could do in Union Square.

Andy proposes preparing a letter to the City Council within a week if we do not hear back from the Planning Staff.

Unanimous support for this action.

Roger: I think I speak on behalf of most of the 80 Webster Ave residents with our concerns and our gratitude to the USNC for taking on this issue. The original plan in October was 14 stories. Many of us have been following up with JT Scott individually, and he says that it's his bad and he let it slip by, but he has not been very pro-active in calling future meetings.

Andy: In the Zoning, for developments like these, there has to be at least one official neighborhood meeting where notice is given ahead of time to abutters. In the Zoning Overhaul, neighborhood councils are mentioned twice, and the USNC has to be consulted in scheduling the neighborhood meeting. That official meeting is likely going to happen in the next 1-3 weeks. Everyone at 80 Webster Ave should get a notice for it, and if you don't get a notice, you should let us know because the developer would then not have followed the proper protocols.

8. Update on Washington & Dane St - Tom Lichoulas development plan

Andy: A few USNC Board members met with Pat Jehlen who spoke on behalf of the abutters and neighbors to this proposed development. They don't like the current fabrication (FAB) zoning of the corner building and neighborhood residential (NR) of the other building, but they didn't see a benefit to converting the FAB building to mid-rise 4 (MR-4). They could see a benefit if both sites were re-zoned urban residential (UR) for example. But since the parcel was valued in a certain way based on the current zoning, it probably wouldn't be financially feasible for the developer Tom to build both sites as UR. So the neighbors said it will be what it is and will not support any change to MR-4.

I talked to Tom Lichoulas [who wants to develop these two parcels] last Friday, and he was very understanding about this. He thinks MR-4 would be better for the community but understands that if the neighbors prefer the current zoning, then he has to decide what he will do with the parcels.

Michèle: The neighbors said they could possibly support a change to MR-4 if they were all affordable housing units.

Andy: Tom said he wishes all affordable were financially feasible here, but he said it is not.

Ann: I received an email update from Pat and Tom today. Tom says he came to the red house on these parcels and found squatters and COVID positive people and is cleaning it out now. I think Tom also came to some sort of agreement with Pat involving building under UR zoning. I'll forward the email.

Andy: Reading the email, if the setbacks would be the same on the FAB building as with the current adjacent NR house, the neighbors might consider supporting changing the NR parcel to UR. We will follow up on this.

9. Report on neighborhood meeting at Brickbottom on 28 Fitchburg Street

Bill Cav: This meeting was held at Brickbottom. There is a proposal for low-rise to mid-rise on Fitchburg street that would be a life science, total commercial use. Maybe over 200,000 sq ft. It is a much smaller development than some of the others proposed in the area. For reference, the proposal at Glass Stop is ~1.3-1.5 million sq ft. US2 is 15 acres. Boynton Yards is 6.5 acres. But this development is right next to Brickbottom, a large residential building. I don't know who owns the land or who is the developer.

Andy: JT Scott emailed some of the USNC Board members in late December and let us know about it. This development is outside the boundaries of the USNC, but it is connected insofar as all the traffic in the area from development is connected. The developer is North River, and they had their official neighborhood meeting in January. The proposal is a 300 ft long 4 story commercial/lab building.

Ann will call the people who live at Brickbottom for details.

Bill S: LLC Lawrence Realty owns this property. 28 Fitchburg St is right across the street from the Brickbottom section that is on Fitchburg St.

Tori: Part of the Administrative Process in the Zoning is that the USNC hosts one of the meetings. What is the size of a development that triggers this process?

Andy: Clarification - In the zoning, setting up the neighborhood meeting requires consultation between the Ward Councillor, the USNC, and City Staff. The City Staff runs the meeting and takes notes. I think this is required for any development in the USNC boundaries. Councillor JT Scott emailed a few USNC board members, including myself, about consulting for when CV Properties would host their neighborhood meeting.

Bill Cav: The City is responsible for notifications of abutters and neighbors for these meetings.

10. Any updates on US2 construction plans

Bill Cav: We have a meeting with US2 tomorrow night. It will be the 4th CBA Monitoring Committee meeting, an appointed committee of the USNC Board with 6 people. I am on that committee. Ann and Michèle are also on it. We sent US2 a list of 25 questions to answer before the meeting. We got partial answers and expect the rest tomorrow.

The site work should be starting before the end of the month. They have permits for the site work. They do not have permits for vertical construction yet. They anticipate getting those permits in March and that construction will start very soon after those permits are pulled and approved. The pulling of the permits triggers a release of community benefits money above and beyond what has already been released by US2. Instead of the roughly \$175k that has come out of a deposit they put with the City, there will be as much as \$400k more community benefit dollars that can be disseminated in March. The general contractor for the lab science building is still Gilbane. The general contractor for podium and high rise housing is Cranshaw Construction. The answers from US2 leave me with some anxiety about the timeline for the affordable housing on D4.3.

11. Schedule the next USNC meeting

Feb 1 or 8 depending on when CV Properties public meeting will occur.

Bill Cav: The CBA Monitoring Committee has been meeting with Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), and Feb 8 is the date of the next proposed meeting with them. That meeting is scheduled for 6 pm.

12. Public comment

This was included in Q and A to CV Properties.

13. Executive Session for the purposes of developer negotiation strategies

Unanimous vote to go into Executive Session.