



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

MICHAEL F. GLAVIN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To: Board of Aldermen, City of Somerville
CC: Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor
From: Michael F. Glavin, Executive Director, OSPCD
Thomas Galligani, Director, Economic Development Division
George Proakis, Director, Director of Planning and Zoning
Date: January 26, 2017
RE: Requesting an appropriation of \$360,000 for an updated Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan

Summary:

This is a revised funding request to undertake a comprehensive master planning effort for the approximately sixty remaining acres of underdeveloped and underutilized space in the Assembly Square area. This revised request is based upon developing a neighborhood plan, similar to the plan for Union Square, Gilman Square and Lowell Street, and similar to the plan underway in Davis Square. Earlier requests included funding for valuation of property and relocation, with anticipation of focusing on the project as an amendment to the Urban Renewal plan. A more recent earlier plan included consulting services for outreach. With these items removed, the proposed plan will focus on a physical design and related policies for implementation of a design that will maximize the value of adjacent transit while guiding planning and economic development staff in decision making about development in Assembly Square. At this time, the goal will be to create a neighborhood planning document consistent with the standards of the City's Somerville By Design process.

This plan for the balance of the Assembly Row would proceed under the terms of the recently introduced Revisions to the Somerville Zoning Code. Such a planning effort represents the first step in trying to advance this under-developed portion of the neighborhood. This planning initiative will require the retention of outside consultants, consistent with ongoing Somerville by Design efforts in Union Square, Winter Hill and Davis Square. In each case, OSPCD staff works to manage and direct the work of consultants, with public participation and involvement sought at virtually every step in the process. That process would be expected to cover a wide range of community planning and dialogue tasks, including:

Crowdsourcing

- Research, common goals, coordinate existing information, prior actions and baseline conditions.
- Discuss with key stakeholders, both long term and new. Establish lines of communication and dialogue with these stakeholders and the community at large. Examine similar condition in other successful mixed-use TOD areas.

Visioning Presentations

- What are the possibilities? What are the obstacles? How best to achieve SomerVision goals?
- What is the community's position on these various possibilities?
Development Options and Possibilities
- Infrastructure Improvements, street grid patterns, developable blocks, open space.
- What is most important overall objective? What does the community prefer in terms of priorities, i.e., commercial development, market ate and affordable housing, traffic calming, open space, etc.?
- Is current zoning sufficient to achieve our shared values and objectives? Create interactive models to gauge action/reaction between different options. Possible unintended results from each option?
- Series of "open houses" near or on site to present working plans to concerned stakeholders.
- All dialogue to be conducted in multiple languages to reflect diversity of the community.

Design Charrettes

- What do these planned improvements look like? How do they function? How are they paid for? Are the economically viable?
- Create sketch options during phases of the planning effort, evolving into illustrations from aerial and street level perspectives. Photo simulations and street sections. Plan Presentation and Discussion
- Which of these options are most achievable? What is a reasonable time frame for their implementation? What tools/actions do we need to make these plans real?
- Test for economic impact, both in real time and projected economic cycles.
- Sustainability diagrams, guidelines and analysis

Plan

- Create a draft plan for review and debate by public and private stakeholders.
- Create action plan for necessary implementation steps.
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All budget estimates in acquiring professional consulting services in what is expected to be a twelve month long effort are based upon current, ongoing Somerville by Design efforts in Union Square, Winter Hill and Davis Square. Estimates have been adjusted based upon the hiring of the new Outreach Coordinator at OSPCD who can manage community outreach and meeting organization.

Background Information

For all of the progress achieved through the partnership between the City of Somerville, the neighboring community and the Assembly Row project, there remains the lack of a comprehensive plan for that which might occur outside the boundaries of those parcels under the control of Federal Realty Investment Trust. The current Assembly Square Urban Renewal Plan ("the Plan"), adopted more than a decade ago, represents one of the most important actions in the City of Somerville's long history. This remarkable planning and revitalization document established goals for Assembly Square, including:

- The creation of jobs, mixed income housing, tax revenues, amenities and open space;
- The improvement of transportation links between Somerville and major economic centers through Greater Boston, and;
- Perhaps most importantly, establishing Assembly Square as a viable and exciting mixed use development location founded upon the principles of smart growth.

In large part, most of those goals have either been met or are well on their way to being met. These achievements within the approximately 129 acres that comprise the Assembly Square Urban Renewal



Area can trace their success back to three essential elements:

- Community based planning;
- The commitment to invest in much needed infrastructure improvements as a means of attaining the Plan's goals; and
- A strong partnership between the public and private sectors with the shared purpose of creating and capturing new economic value.

One of most important goals set by the current 2002 Plan is “to improve the utility infrastructure in Assembly Square and encourage (environmental) remediation of former industrial sites to a level suitable for the proposed mix of uses.”

The current 2002 Plan lists as among its goals twelve (12) different infrastructure upgrade items including roadways, public transit, utilities, open space and long term items such as coordination with improvements to the adjacent Sullivan Square area. What is consistent throughout the Plan, made more noticeable by the ambitious elements of infrastructure improvements (i.e., the “New Main Street” as part of the extension to Assembly Square Drive with its new street grid system, new sidewalks, below grade water and sewer upgrades, Baxter Park along the Mystic River, etc.) that have contributed so much to the success of Assembly Row and the Assembly Square Marketplace, is the lack of an action plan for those properties below Assembly Square Drive and along Middlesex Avenue, from the Courthouse to the City of Boston line.

Today, many of those long term plans such as coordination of improvements to the Sullivan Square area are beginning to come to fruition. The fact remains, however, that the current 2002 Plan provides no strategy to successfully transform the remaining sixty (60) acres, to a size and scale that is being achieved next door at Assembly Row. Note that for all the planning that went into the current 2002 Plan and all the actual improvements that have been completed to date, none of those plans address the properties below Assembly Square Drive and along Middlesex Avenue to the City of Boston. The evolving vision that was anticipated in the 2002 Plan leaves us currently unable to see these affected properties reach their full economic potential.

Planning Goals and Benefits

The most important goal in this initiative is to continue and extend the professional and community based planning efforts that has led to the success of the Assembly Row portion of the project area. A second goal is to unlock the full economic potential and value of those properties below Assembly Square Drive and along Middlesex Avenue through planning followed by a mixture of private and public investment.

Previously, the City of Somerville's Assessing Department was asked to analyze the projected revenue changes that might occur if the sixteen affected properties were to be built out to their full potential. Using figures compiled from FY14, the last full fiscal year, the sixteen affected properties collectively generated tax revenues of just over \$1.8 million. Using both the current zoning from the City of Somerville Zoning Code's Assembly Square Mixed Use District (ASMD) and the goals set by SomerVision as to a preferred commercial/residential split, the Assessing Department projects a projected annual yield in excess of \$21 million, more than an eleven-fold increase

Current zoning under the ASMD provides for density (Floor Area Ratio) of 10.0 and heights of up to 250'. The possibility of any modifications to the existing ASMD zoning as a means of enhancing potential economic benefits and incentives could be discussed as part of this planning effort.



The third goal of this planning effort would be to design a workable development grid system for the remaining acreage, examine the types of infrastructure needed to support additional development and look towards the most likely means of funding these improvements. The recent submittal of a development plan for the site at 5 Middlesex Avenue highlights the need for this sort of review. Placed in context of a district-wide plan, the proposal could be evaluated for consistency with planning efforts. Private development interest in the remainder of Assembly Square is high. The city will benefit from having an updated understanding of priorities and development strategies for this land.

Budget Update

The requested budget for this project is \$360,000. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the total budget and highlights the change from the original proposal to the current proposal.

Item	Original Budget	First Revised Cost	Updated Revised Cost
<u>Project management:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event scheduling, coordination and presentation • Project marketing and implementation • Ongoing project support 	\$125,000	\$120,000	\$80,000
<u>Design:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Base plan for charrettes • Graphics and design for plan • Architectural guidelines • Placemaking tools and designs • Various plans and documents for working and final plans 	\$255,000	\$240,000	\$200,000
<u>Economic Development Studies</u>	\$35,000	\$0	\$0
<u>Transportation Study</u>	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$35,000
<u>Sustainability Study</u>	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
<u>Translation Services</u>	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$5,000
<u>Material Production</u>	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
<u>Contingency</u>	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Total	\$500,000	\$445,000	\$360,000

