



January 31, 2018

Board of Aldermen, Legislative Matters Committee
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Union Square Neighborhood Council

To Whom It May Concern:

The Executive Committee of Union Square Main Streets ("USMS"), after careful consideration, believes that the newly elected Founding Board of the Union Square Neighborhood Council, if recognized as the negotiator of a Community Benefits Agreement ("CBA") with the Master Developer for Union Square (Union Station Associates, or US²), is not equipped to represent the interests of brick and mortar businesses in the Square.

We are concerned that there is not enough commitment or expertise on the new Board to ensure that the CBA addresses the various needs that will allow businesses to preserve and develop the unique characteristics of Union Square, while facing rising rents and displacement resulting from new construction.

No provision was made in the bylaws of the new organization to ensure that brick and mortar businesses were represented, and none are represented on the Founding Board. Whereas the Resolution before the Alderman states that "*The City of Somerville seeks to ensure that **the community as a whole** secures appropriate benefits from the development of Union Square*", a major component of the community is excluded from the governance of this new private organization. While over the past few days, in response to criticism, efforts have been made by some on the Founding Board to reach out to USMS and to ask for advice, this is no substitute for actual representation. The slate of candidates that accounts for 13 elected members of the 15 member board deliberately excluded representatives of brick and mortar businesses. This strategy was clearly contrary to the mission statement of the organization:

"Our Mission is to shape the future of Union Square as an increasingly inclusive and vibrant neighborhood and commercial center built around the aspirations of the people who live and work here."

For many years, USMS staff, board, and business members have emphasized the current success of Union Square is predominantly dependent on its businesses, large and small. And Union Square's future success, managed wisely, can transform the fiscal situation for the City as a whole, funding schools, services, affordable housing, public spaces, and, of course, business development initiatives. Businesses contribute up to three times as much to the city's tax base per square foot as residential properties, but we

have very few of them. The result is that our taxes are twice as high as those in Cambridge, and this needs to change. We all bear the consequences of weak tax base, whether we own or rent our homes.

We respectfully ask that the Aldermen make any recognition of the Union Square Neighborhood Council temporary and conditional and advocate that the obvious deficiencies of the current situation are carefully examined and remedied to provide for adequate representation of the brick and mortar businesses in the Square.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lindsay Neu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lindsay Neu, President, Board of Directors on behalf of Union Square Main Streets