

# Union Square Neighborhood Council

Comments and recommendations from Katie Gradowski

202 Pearl Street #3, Somerville MA \* January 28, 2018

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Dear members of the Board of Alderman,

I support Resolution 17779 and encourage you to recognize the Founding Board of the Union Square Neighborhood Council as the group authorized to negotiate a Community Benefits Agreement with the Master Developer, US2. I have been deeply moved by the time, energy, and dedication that members of the USQNC working group have put in to ensure an open and democratic process in the recent USQNC elections.

Key commitments of the USQNC so far include:

- a willingness to regularly canvass Union Square to ensure that residents and small businesses impacted by this development can be aware of the Council and its role. Canvasses have been regular throughout this process; they continue to play a key role in bringing in new voices.
- the creation of an open election system intended to guarantee representation across a range of areas, including immigrants, homeowners, tenants, business owners, workers, and other key constituencies.
- a set of bylaws that frankly acknowledge that this board is provisional, which were crafted explicitly to empower that board while allowing the Council to evolve naturally with the needs of the community.

These are not minimal achievements. These efforts resulted in over 40 people running for seats on the USQNC Board and over 700 people turning out to vote for them. They have resulted in a board that is over 50% female-identified, with wide representation among homeowners, renters, immigrants, young people, older people, people of color, and lifelong residents. On the small business side, the current board includes a retired day care owner, the owner of an in-house game design firm, a representative from Somerville's youth jobs program, and at least one local service employee with kids in the school system. These connections play a critical role in enriching the perspective of the small business discussion in Union Square, which too often focuses on larger players at the expense of small firms and sole proprietors.

Part of the point of the ABCDE slate -- one of a handful of slates running -- was to lift up constituencies that are less visible but nevertheless critical voices to have in the conversation. I was not involved in this campaign but I deeply respect its premise: namely, to share privilege, to acknowledge diverse forms of expertise, and above all, to bring new voices into the conversation. The ABCDE slate was characterized above all by a willingness to knock doors, which should be the baseline of any organization that claims to be inclusive and democratic.

Those efforts and others have paid off in a board which is diverse, representative, knowledge-based, and above all, committed to equity. It is refreshing, in a city where so many

committees are formed by appointment, to see an all-voluntary group move forward consistently in a transparent and democratic way.

I am deeply impressed with the board that was elected, and I have full confidence that they speak for the interests of the wider community. I hope that you share my enthusiasm, and I encourage you to give the USQNC Founding Board the tools it needs to move forward!

Sincerely,

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