



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

July 6, 2015
REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Tony Lafuente	Chair	Present	
Maryann M. Heuston	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven Alderman	Present	
John M. Connolly	Alderman At Large	Present	
William A. White Jr.	Alderman At Large	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One Alderman	Present	
Robert J. McWatters	Ward Three Alderman	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five Alderman	Present	
Rebekah L. Gewirtz	Ward Six Alderman	Absent	
Dennis M. Sullivan	Alderman At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	Alderman at Large	Present	

Alderman Heuston stated that she filed a disclosure form with the City Clerk and was told by the Ethics Commission that she does not need to be recused from discussions/actions regarding this matter.

Mayor Curtatone made some brief remarks and spoke about the deployment of Fire Department resources. The city has invested millions of dollars in fire equipment, however, the stations are not in the best condition. The city will be issuing an RFP for an update of the matrix study. The mayor said that the site being considered here is a prime spot due to its location. He said that the Lowell Street station is obsolete and he stressed that the city is not getting rid of Union Square service, but he is not yet sure where another station may be located. The city needs a place to train fire fighters and does not have the luxury of taking its time to purchase parcels. In December of 2013, the owners of the parcel were notified that the city was contemplating purchasing the site for a fire station. The mayor also commented on what he said were untruths being circulated around the city regarding the value of properties next to fire stations decreasing and he gave assurances that the community would be engaged in the development of the new station.

1. Public Hearing: #197852 - Order of Taking - 515 Somerville Ave.

The Public Hearing was opened and several members of the public spoke on the item. Among the concerns raised were; the absence of public discourse on the matter; the lack of transparency, alternative ways to house larger fire apparatus; the possibility of having

shared services with other communities; the need to maximize the city's avenues as connectors to its squares; the need for a fire station in Union Square; traffic congestion on Somerville Avenue, caused in part by the narrowing of the vehicular roadway to make room for bike lanes and by traffic calming measures, Park Street traffic congestion; the city would be giving up a gateway to and from Cambridge and maybe \$200-300K in tax revenue; the site is in a residential neighborhood, therefore, this proposal would not be financially beneficial to the city; the eminent domain process; site cleanup costs; traffic light timing to ease congestion; the need for stations in Union Square, at Lowell Street and at Assembly Square; the need for local fire houses; the Lowell Street Station occupies less than 1/3 of its present site; the city's increase in density requires additional services; no other sites are being considered; whether this would open opportunities for those waiting to become fire fighters by expanding the department. (Chairman Lafuente replied that he believes that transfers would be made to reassign personnel.)

Tom Ross, President of Fire Fighters Local 76, said that this proposal is a great opportunity to enhance the Fire Department since fire service is changing and requires continuous training, which could be accommodated at the proposed site. He supports this plan - but not at the expense of Union Square not having a permanent station and he pointed out that in fire fighting, a timely response is critical.

Jay Colbert, Secretary-Treasurer of the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts, said that Somerville is unique in that it has the most housing units and vehicles per square mile and is the most densely populated city in New England. He noted that it's difficult to get down Somerville Avenue during the morning hours. He also said that the city needs 6 engine companies, adding that the city is in dire need of infrastructure improvement and this location would help in that area.

Claudia Morrow spoke about the city's desire to build thousands of housing units. She queried where the master plan for public safety is. Ms. Morrow said the city wants to sell the Union Square fire station property to developers and said that if the city can spend the amount of money being spent on other things, it should take care of its fire fighters. She is against this proposal.

The Public Hearing was closed.

197852: Requesting an Order of Taking of real estate property at 515 Somerville Avenue to provide for the relocation of the Fire Department from its current facility in Union Square.

Chief Fire Engineer Patrick Sullivan spoke on the item and said that fire service in the city is geographically based and moving to the proposed location would provide better access to Assembly and Union Squares. He believes that locking a station in Union Square would be a disruption to the residents there. The OptiCom system will be installed to control traffic during service calls. The proposed location would house a small training tower, a trench area and spare apparatus. No fire or smoke would be used during training.

Alderman White raised some questions regarding the actual wording of the request regarding the relocation of the Union Square station and asked why the city isn't using the funds from the sale of the Union Square station property to fund a new station in Union Square. Mayor Curtatone responded by saying that the relocated station would not necessarily be out of the square and he reiterated that there will be fire service to Union Square.

Alderman Niedergang spoke about the need to look at this proposal in the larger context of where stations need to be located and he wants the whole picture before proceeding to take any property. Alderman Rossetti referenced a document from OSPCD that spoke about relocating the public safety building and asked if that information could be posted to the city's website. Alderman Connolly requested that the RFP to update the matrix report be provided at tomorrow's Finance Committee meeting (on July 7th).

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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