

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Steering [REDACTED]  
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**Subject:** 90 Washington St: Choose North River Leelink

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To City Councilors and Somerville Redevelopment Authority members:

At 90 Washington Street, the City of Somerville has acquired a rare opportunity: four under-built acres a short walk from a Green Line station. The city has received two proposals to make the site better for the city. One, from Wood Partners, proposes 300 new homes and 600 aboveground parking spots. The other, from North River Leelink, offers over 450 new homes and up to 200 underground parking spots.

Our small city has a lot of needs, but parking for hundreds of new cars is not one of them, especially for a site served by the Green Line, multiple bus routes, and two major protected bike lanes. Wood Partners' proposal to have a "Texas Donut" style building of housing wrapped around 600 parking spots would be an awful use of space. It creates worse homes and it encourages more car usage. North River Leelink is proposing a better land use model that tucks parking underground and uses the central area for a park, not parking. East Somerville has a historical lack of green space, so being able to create more is a huge boon for the city.

Both projects promise to match our Inclusionary Zoning's rules, with 20% of the homes permanently affordable. But the size of North River Leelink's proposal allows it to provide more homes in total and therefore more affordable homes as well. And they do that while still being respectful in scope adjacent to the Cobble Hill apartments.

Based on the initial proposals, it is clear that one development team is more clearly aligned with the goals of the city in terms of land use and housing construction. **Therefore, Somerville YIMBY encourages the Somerville Redevelopment Authority to choose North River Leelink as the development partner for the 90 Washington Site.**

Before that decision comes, there is a window for adjustments to the current proposal. We hope that the city doubles down on its climate, street safety, and affordable housing goals through tactical changes.

Since this site is so close to so much transit, we think that a car free site might be possible here. That would greatly reduce the amount of new car usage and aligns with the city's transit and street safety goals. The money saved from not building parking can be used for transportation programs for the residents such as free T or Blue Bike passes. The cost savings can also be passed onto the tenants via lower required rents or to the city as part of the cost of acquisition.

We also see a great opportunity for more height at the corner of Washington and New Washington Streets. The current North River proposal imagines it as a 14-story building. That site is already quite far from the main neighbors and closest to the T stop, so the project could make best use of the High Rise zoning with a 24-story point tower. Buildings in this range typically get cheaper per square foot as they get taller, which opens another opportunity for the city to be compensated better. Based on the floorplans in the proposal, this change could provide about 90 more homes, which means 18 more permanently affordable ones.

Somerville faces many challenges, including a need for more green space, safer streets, and more housing. 90 Washington presents an opportunity to continue on the right track in solving all three of those issues. We hope the city chooses wisely and remains a leader in creating a better city for its residents.

Thank you,  
Somerville YIMBY