

May 18, 2013

Mr John Long
City Clerk
City of Somerville
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02145

Dear Mr. Long,

Re: Proposed Zoning Map Amendments for Prospect Hill – AGAINST

Since 1976, I have lived in and owned 41A Boston Street, a property that directly abuts the Sunoco Station, and agree with many in the May 16th public meeting that the proposals for Prospect Hill and Somerville Avenue Amendments should be considered **separately** since they have radically different implications for development. Since I am an abutter **but not** anti-development, my remarks will only concern the proposed Amendment that would change the strip of land along the McGrath Highway from BB to CCD-55.

My vision for the Prospect Hill strip of land: Multi-story housing that would comply with the density requirements of BB and tie this parcel back into the Residential neighborhood of Prospect Hill with the multi-story housing providing an appropriate transition from McGrath Highway to the 2 Family Neighborhood immediately adjacent. This is a highly visible site entering from the North along Route 28 and represents the geographic entrance to Highland Avenue, the principal civic avenue of the City itself and therefore should be developed with appropriate care. A park on the Sunoco property would also be a highly appropriate amenity!

My reasons for being against the Proposed Amendment:

- 1. Residential housing is already allowed by current zoning.** Mr. Proakis the Planning Director presented a false dichotomy when he stated that unless the zoning were changed the City would be faced with accepting one story retail development surrounded by parking on the Sunoco site. As I pointed out in the public meeting, the current BB zoning allows both commercial and residential uses to a height of 50' and any change to the current site would, I suspect, fall under the authority of the Planning Board as to its suitability.
- 2. Rescinding Changes in Zoning after allowing higher density is politically impossible.** Changes in zoning to allow higher density should be very carefully considered since it is almost impossible to reduce density after the fact and therefore irretrievable were it to be changed.
- 3. Civic character of Union Square is weakened.** Extending the CCD-55 along the McGrath as a one sided strip mall weakens the civic and commercial life that is envisioned for Union Square. Union Square is a major focus by virtue of its architecture, its character and its circulation. It is one of the many important Squares in our City and should be strengthened - made both more dense and more lively through the enhancement of its civic and commercial functions. It has a heart and is an unified entity because it is bounded by interesting and active buildings. What does the proposal have as one of its boundary? - the elevated state owned McGrath Highway that the City has no developmental control over. The retail proposed in this parcel more properly belongs in Union Square where it will increase the density of activity and the "drawing power" of the Square.
- 4. Community developmental goals of the CCD-55 zoning would not be realized in this location.** The topography of this strip, its commuter traffic and immediate adjacency to the McGrath Highway work against what I understand the goals of the CCD-55 for promoting

neighborhood development. This parcel is at the edge of the Prospect Hill neighborhood, hemmed in by the McGrath and jammed with commuter traffic in the mornings. The current Sunoco parcel is on the only really developable parcel of land since the remaining eastern section is compromised by the McGrath splitting into an elevated section and a relatively steep down ramp. The current businesses that occupy this portion of the site are marginal at best and don't rely on extensive parking to operate. The steep rise of Prospect Hill to the south further compromises the development of the site making it hard to visualize any viable retail except on the Sunoco site. Most pedestrian traffic is along Washington Street and not parallel to the McGrath since the elevated highway blocks other crossings. I suspect that most of the residents of my neighborhood, like me, prefer to walk to Union Square along streets like Boston Street, Prospect Hill Avenue, or Walnut Street that are enlivened by the variety of residential housing and views of Cambridge and the Square below and, moreover lead more directly to the heart of Union Square.

5. Traffic would be greatly increased along the off ramp as well as through the Prospect Hill neighborhood with the increased density allowed by the CCD-55. The CCD-55 allows smaller residential units along with a decrease in on-site parking. This, coupled with the proposed commercial development would increase traffic on the McGrath down ramp that is already congested during commuting hours. Even though only-neighborhood traffic is allowed up Greenville, this and other streets are used by commuters to circumvent the congestion of the McGrath and its down ramp.

6. Any zoning changes should be the result of a unified vision for the development of our city and should be made in a considered, pro-active way rather than be instigated by developers' proposals. The presentation by the representative for Sunoco was entirely self-serving when he talked about the "gate-way" importance for his site and how the new zoning changes were necessary for its appropriate development. His parcel is by far the most developable through its size, topography and access to the McGrath. This change benefits him the most. Sunoco is a rich company - they should donate the parcel to the City for park usage!

These then are my primary reasons for opposing the zoning change for this Prospect Hill strip parcel. Aldermen Taylor and White and the other residents who also spoke against this proposed zoning change made many additional and equally salient points that I will not enumerate since I am sure their submitted letters will include them.

Many thanks for your consideration,



Ray K. Warburton, Architect
Property owner of:
41A Boston Street
Somerville, MA 02143

Cc: George Proakis, Planning Director, City of Somerville; Tom Taylor, Alderman Ward 3; and William White, Alderman at Large; Mimi Graney, Executive Director, Union Square Main Streets