

John Long

From: bill cavellini <bcavey152@msn.com>
Sent: Friday, May 25, 2018 3:06 PM
To: City Clerk Contact
Subject: Neighborhood Council position on Union Square development
Attachments: To the Honorable Board of Aldermen and the Design Review Committee.docx

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To the Honorable Board of Aldermen and the Design Review Committee,

We are writing you regarding the proposed development of the D2 parcel by Union Square Associates ('US2') in light of its pending consideration before the Design Review Committee and its request for the transfer of additional public lands. Though certain points pertain to the purview of each respective body, we are addressing you jointly so you are all aware of our positions on the full picture.

We have considered the D2 design proposal as presented during their "Neighborhood Meeting" on April 19th, and found that it fails to meet the expectations of the community per the many discussions that the City, US2, residents, and business owners have had over the years. Though these concerns have been repeatedly communicated, US2 has failed to incorporate much, if any, feedback, choosing instead to re-present the same plan in ever finer detail.

Of primary concern is the overall massing of the proposed structures, which are bulky, alienating, and divide the neighborhood. Superblocks are relics of the early 20th century, and do not reflect contemporary best-practices. By placing a parking garage that backs onto Allen St., US2's design effectively forecloses all possibility for future public space, circulation, or commerce on that side of the superblock. It creates a development huddled around the Green Line station and US2's assets, presenting its back to important parts the neighborhood. As the designated and City-empowered master developer, **US2's development must enhance Union Square**, not just its own parcels.

Additionally, the so-called "sunken plaza" on the Webster St side of the proposal is merely a set of stairs that is necessary for commuters to access the Green Line station. This is not a 'pocket park', it is a stairwell.

The proposed private pool atop the parking garage raises additional concerns. It establishes a distressing contrast between the "haves" and "have-nots", deepening class divisions in our city. Though we are not in favor of a parking garage, we believe that **any recreational space created by this development should be fully accessible to the general public, with the programming of that space elaborated through community process**. When compared to a public playing field or pool, private amenities cannot be considered the "highest and best" use of parcels acquired through eminent domain.

Before the Board of Aldermen is a request to approve the transfer of an additional parcel (Agenda Item #204755; parcel 82-D-1) from public into private hands through the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. We insist that the Board hold **adequate public hearings** on this potential transfer of land, and that they give the community enough time to review the proposals. It is apparent that US2's architectural plans are not mature enough to move forward.

Furthermore, US2 has not secured the support of the community for their project through a Community Benefits Agreement. The Union Square Neighborhood Council has been hoping to meet with US2 in order to begin formal negotiations for a Community Benefits Agreement, as described in the covenant between US2 and the City of Somerville. A basic requirement of beginning formal negotiations, as described in this covenant, is for the Board of Aldermen to recognize the Neighborhood Council as the negotiating entity of the CBA.

US2 has not yet agreed to the simple enabling amendment that the City of Somerville has proposed, which would help start the process for formal recognition of the Neighborhood Council. We therefore ask that the Board of Aldermen decline to approve any transfers of land to the SRA unless and until US2 agrees to the City's proposed amendment to the covenant in order that formal negotiation of a CBA can begin promptly.

Otherwise, US2 is poised to reap the benefits of its public partnership and designation as Master Developer without regard to the responsibilities of that role.

Respectfully,

The Union Square Neighborhood Council Board