



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
MAYOR KATJANA BALLANTYNE

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Memo

To: Somerville City Council
From: Tom Galligani, Executive Director
CC: Somerville Redevelopment Authority
Date: Thursday, October 23, 2025
RE: 90 Washington Street Redevelopment – Process Review and Development Objectives

Overview

This memo accompanies three items being introduced at the October 23rd, 2025 City Council meeting (items 25-1594, 25-1596, and 25-1597) and their corresponding attachments. The first two items seek to update the two documents that lay out the 90 Washington Street redevelopment process: the 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan (“DPP”) and an accompanying Memorandum of Agreement (“MOA”) executed in February 2019 by the City Council (“Council”) and the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (“SRA”) that set the process expectations of each group. The third item advances the redevelopment process laid out in those documents by introducing development objectives and a program of uses that the SRA will include in a Request for Proposals (“RFP”) to select a development partner. Staff will present on the three items at the October 23rd meeting.

Background

The SRA took 90 Washington Street by eminent domain in 2019 to be the site of a new Public Safety Building (“PSB”) and transformative private development in place of what had been a vacant shopping center. At the time, the SRA paid \$8.78 million. The former owner then sued the SRA over this value, and a jury determined in October 2024 that the site was worth \$35.3 million. Through the SRA, the City was required to pay the difference in these values along with interest, which brought the total paid to approximately \$39 million. Although the City paid the judgment in full, this strain on the City’s budget impacts its ability to offer key services and pursue vital capital projects. The SRA is now obligated to help the City recuperate the funds spent on the judgment. To this end, the City and SRA issued a public

statement in January 2025 that they would remove the PSB from the redevelopment project in favor of full private redevelopment to help recoup funds and preserve the City's overall financial health.¹

Redevelopment process and amendments to the 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan and Memorandum of Agreement that lay out the 90 Washington Street redevelopment process

Two documents lay out process for the redevelopment of the 90 Washington Street: the 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan ("DPP")² and an accompanying Memorandum of Agreement ("MOA") executed in February 2019 by the Council and SRA that sets the process expectations of each group. The DPP splits this process into five phases: (1) Demonstration Project Plan Approval, (2) Acquisition of 90 Washington Street, (3) Project Delineation and Design, (4) Developer Selection, and (5) Project Implementation. While this process is primarily managed by the SRA, Council approval is required at several points:

- Finalizing the development objectives and program of uses that will be included in an RFP;
- Recommendation of two RFP finalists to the SRA, from which they'll select a development partner; and
- Finalizing the land development agreement between the SRA and development partner.

Two City Councilors also sit on the 90 Washington Street Civic Advisory Committee ("CAC") that provides feedback to the SRA about project implementation.

Staff are recommending amendments to the DPP and MOA to explicitly remove the public safety component of the project, acknowledge the role of the 90 Washington Street CAC, and allow for greater flexibility in development timing. The original DPP notes that a "major plan change is a significant change in any of the basic elements of the Plan and shall be reviewed and approved through majority vote by the SRA and the City Council." Staff believe that the removal of the public safety component of the project constitutes a major plan change. The majority of the process, including the remaining points where Council approval is required, would not be changed by the amendment. Prior to requesting a vote to approve these changes, staff are requesting a joint session between the Council's Land Use Committee and the SRA at which a public hearing will be held to hear feedback on the changes to the DPP.

Redevelopment objectives and program of uses

The DPP describes that, during Phase 3 – Project Delineation and Design:

"A final concept and list of various uses will be developed to be presented to the City Council, who will have the responsibility of articulating the community's goals and programs of uses to determine alternative uses and refine its development objectives for the Request for

¹ The full language of that public statement can be found on the City's website here:

<https://www.somervillema.gov/news/somerville-adjusts-redevelopment-plans-90-washington-st>

² The original Demonstration Project Plan approved in February 2019 can be found with appendices here:

<https://voice.somervillema.gov/13595/widgets/107074/documents/73984>

Qualifications / Proposals ('RFQ/RFP'). The SRA will ratify the future use determined by the City Council, provided that is consistent with this Plan.”

Staff have drafted a set of development objectives and a program of uses (see Exhibit A) based on public engagement conducted since 2022 that included public meetings and design workshops, listening sessions with residents of Cobble Hill Apartments, and regular meetings of the 90 Washington Street Civic Advisory Committee. While this engagement generally asked what the community would want to see from private redevelopment adjacent to the PSB, staff have extrapolated feedback to apply to the full site. The objectives also include the City and SRA’s financial goal to recoup funds spent on the taking of the site. Staff reviewed the document with CAC members at their October 6th meeting and with SRA members at their October 14th meeting.

Staff will present the development objectives and program of uses at the October 23rd City Council meeting. Staff will then request a vote to approve the objectives and program of uses after the public hearing on November 6th, likely at the November 13th meeting of the full City Council. The objectives and program of uses will then be added to the RFP, which the SRA will release in early 2026.

Exhibit A: Development objectives and program of uses for 90 Washington Street redevelopment

**90 Washington Street – Development objectives and program of uses
Fall 2025**

Prepared by:

Economic Development Division, City of Somerville
Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA)
90 Washington Street Civic Advisory Committee (CAC)

1. Recoup a significant portion of funds paid for the taking of 90 Washington Street.
2. Achieve a combination of some or all of the following land uses:
 - a. **New housing**—Including owner-occupied and rental residences affordable to a range of incomes and available in a range of sizes.
 - b. **New commercial space**—Particularly for retail shopping, food & beverage and personal service businesses in ground-floor storefronts, with outdoor dining/seating if possible. Grocery stores, markets, retail food businesses, restaurants and pharmacies are especially desired by local residents.
 - c. **New civic space**—Particularly for non-profit organizations, community groups, social service enterprises.
 - d. **Green space**—Active and passive recreation and gathering areas.
3. Meet the following development principles:
 - a. **Mixed-use building formats**—The parcel should be primarily used for housing, but with a variety of ground-floor uses that address the commercial needs of residents and workers in the neighborhood.
 - b. **Dense development**—Target building density that is consistent with the City’s Mid-Rise or High-Rise zoning districts and that introduces significant new housing units to the area, while concentrating density on the western portion of the site closest to the East Somerville MBTA Station.
 - c. **Flexibility in form or massing**—Encourage architectural approaches that deliver High-Rise levels of density while allowing alternative typologies or configurations that advance community goals and enhance the public realm.
 - d. **Sustainable design**—Compliant with Somerville’s new Stretch Building Code and demonstrate leadership in resilient design.
 - e. **No surface parking**—Comply with Somerville’s Zoning Ordinance, which prohibits surface parking so near to transit stations (e.g. the new East Somerville GLX Station).
 - f. **Robust urban canopy and natural landscape**—Incorporate landscaping that strengthens the urban canopy, enhances the public realm, and creates an appropriate buffer to Cobble Hill Apartments. Preserve viable existing trees where possible.
 - g. **Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the development process**—M/WBE participation in the areas of development, financing, design, construction and ownerships; in workforce development programs; in contractor and supplies diversity programs; and in community outreach to underrepresented communities.