

TESTIMONY of ED MARAKOVITZ

ZONING AMENDMENTS

OCTOBER 2016

My name is Ed Marakovitz. I live at 6 Oak Street, Somerville, in Union Square. I have lived there with my wife for 25 years. I am a member of Union United.

I urge the Land Use Committee, Planning Board, and Board of Aldermen to formally commit to a community benefits agreement (CBA) involving the City of Somerville government; a neighborhood council to include representatives of current Union Square residents vulnerable to displacement due to Union Square development; and US 2, the master developer for Union Square BEFORE adopting the zoning amendments for Union Square.

Community development must be for the benefit of the people who live in the community, not for people who may live here in the future. Whereas there is nothing wrong with new people moving into a community – Union Square’s population can increase – there is something wrong when the new people DISPLACE the current residents as rents increase dramatically in buildings affected by development and in nearby private rental housing.

In addition to avoiding displacement, development should increase affordable housing, especially for families; provide jobs for local residents; expand and enhance parks, green space and the neighborhood environment; and bring about an array of additional community benefits. Some of these benefits can be built right into the zoning amendments. Others need to be listed and committed to in a separate CBA before the zoning amendments are adopted.

Verbal commitments and/or the inclusion of a “community benefits fund” will not suffice. Future mayors, aldermen, planning directors and developers can change those commitments. A legally enforceable CBA will assure that the promised commitments actually occur.

Perhaps the single most critical important factor in Union Square development is the extension of the Green Line into our neighborhood. Allow me to remind the Committee, Planning Board and aldermen that the GREEN LINE EXTENSION IS GOING TO OCCUR DUE TO TWO LEGALLY ENFORCEABLE AGREEMENTS, one in 1990 and one in 2006. The Conservation Law Foundation negotiated an initial legally enforceable agreement with the State and the MBTA in 1990 to mitigate air pollution resulting from the Big Dig. The state and the MBTA have been trying to wriggle out of that agreement ever since. In 2006 the Conservation Law Foundation successfully sued the State and the MBTA to force progress on the Green Line extension. Somerville’s own Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP) advocated vigorously in that effort.

Do you honestly believe the Green Line extension would be occurring without those legally enforceable agreements?

A community benefits agreement can be a win-win-win for community residents, City government, and the developer. Please commit to it, so Union Square development can proceed.

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