



# CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

## CLERK OF COMMITTEES

September 19, 2012

### REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Tony Lafuente	Chair	Present	
Rebekah Gewirtz	Vice Chair	Absent	
Dennis M. Sullivan	Alderman At Large	Present	
William M. Roche	Ward One Alderman	Absent	
Maryann M. Heuston	Ward Two Alderman	Present	
Thomas F. Taylor	Ward Three Alderman	Present	
Sean T. O'Donovan	Ward Five Alderman	Present	
Robert C. Trane	Ward Seven Alderman	Present	
William A. White Jr.	Alderman At Large	Absent	
John M Connolly	Alderman At Large	Present	
Bruce M. Desmond	Alderman At Large	Absent	
Janice Delory	Chief of Staff	Present	
Omar Boukili	Administrative Assistant	Present	
Michael Glavin	Exec. Director, OSPCD	Present	
George Proakis	Director of Planning	Present	
Ed Bean	Finance Director	Present	
Frank Wright	City Solicitor	Present	
Hayes Morrison	Director of Transportation & Infrastructure	Present	

- Public Hearing on #193585: Union Square Revitalization Plan

Mr. Glavin spoke about the plan and why it is being proposed, who will implement it, the cost and the timeline. The proposal, encompassing a 20-Year Action Plan for public and private investment in Union Square, is a major component of the city's 2012 SomerVision Plan and will accelerate the Green Line Extension project schedule and link the Green Line station with Union Square. The plan will be implemented by the City of Somerville, the Somerville Redevelopment Authority, the MA Department of Housing & Community Development, private developers, business interests, community-based organizations, the MBTA and MassDOT. The cost for the first development phase (Block D-2) is estimated to be \$8 million and later phases are estimated to cost \$60 million. The anticipated timeline projects Green Line service beginning during the winter of 2016/2017.

Several members of the public spoke on this issue, with most of the comments being concerned with sparing a business located at 35 Prospect Street, known as Crossfit Somerville, from being taken by

eminent domain. Those individuals praised Crossfit Somerville for being a part of what makes Union Square special and for being a draw for other businesses in the city. The owner of the business and the building it's housed in, J. T. Scott, told the members that he purchased the building and brought it up to code in 2 months so that he could open his business, which has now been in operation for 10 months. Mr. Scott said that he purchased this property because he believes in the revitalization of Union Square and he envisions growing the business, noting that growth is dependant on having the freedom to do so. He asked that this property not be included in the initial plan and he asked for the city's trust.

Stephen Mackey, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce, spoke in favor of the proposal, pointing out that Union Square has been poised to become a hub of activity for many years, but the missing link was transit - and this plan includes a T stop. The plan also raises legal, financial and emotional issues associated with eminent domain takings. Mr. Mackey stated that he believes the plan fulfills the legal requirement of the state and he stressed that Block D-2 is the immediate link to making the rest of the plan possible, although the city has no schedule for the other areas, at this point. What is clear, said Mr. Mackey, is that this area will go from generating \$60K to \$2 million per year in tax revenue. The Chamber of Commerce sees the distinction between Block D-2 and the other areas and asks that the full plan be considered, with the hope that the plan prevails.

Thomas Bent stated that the Green Line Extension project is moving forward and stated that the MBTA requested that the City of Somerville acquire certain parcels in order to move the project forward. Mr. Bent asked that the plan prevail.

Toni Shelzi, owner of the property at 4 Milk Place, stated her approval of the plan saying that it was in the best interest of the city, adding that transit is a catalyst for development. Peter Z., owner of industrial property, (in Block D-3), that that houses Royal White and its 400 employees, is in favor of transit expansion but he is not sure why his property was included in the plan. Another speaker pointed out that eminent domain can be cruel, saying that although Davis Square grew from transit, it wasn't draconian. He believes that the square should be allowed to grow organically.

Wig Zamore spoke in favor of the plan saying that both sides in this discussion are correct and that diversity needs to be protected while new reviatalization is undertaken. He believes that negotiated takings will be better than eminent domain takings. Mr. Zamore also cautioned against using gross taxes as a measurement of anything, stating that the city needs to look at the net taxes gained as well as the quality of life provided to community.

Alderman Heuston submitted an email she received from Michael Yenke, into the record.

**193585 - Requesting approval of the Union Square Revitalization Plan, per MGL c121B s48 and 760 CMR 12.00 et seq.:**

**RESULT:**

**KEPT IN COMMITTEE**