



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

November 18, 2020

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Kristen Strezo	Chair	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Vice Chair	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Ward Four City Councilor	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Absent	
Lance L. Davis	Ward Six City Councilor	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Ward Two City Councilor	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	

Others present: Tom Galligani - OSPCD, Khushbu Webber - Director of Governmental Affairs, Rositha Durham - Clerk of Committees, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 7:46 PM on a roll call vote of 9 in favor (Councilors Clingan, White, Ballantyne, Davis, Scott, Rossetti, Mbah, Ewen-Campen and Strezo), none against and 2 absent (Councilors Niedergang and McLaughlin). Councilor Niedergang was absent due to his attendance at a Zoning Board meeting.

Public Hearing re: Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan

210787: Requesting approval of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan.

Councilor Clingan thanked Laura Drago for her work on the plan and wished her well on her new job. Mr. Galligani gave a brief presentation of the plan which, he said, grew out of the Winter Hill Neighborhood Plan. It identified 5 different areas, (Temple Square, Whitcomb Place, Brewery Block, Mystic Avenue and Foss Park), where investment could take place. Residents were asked for input and the consensus was to concentrate on Temple Square, comprised of the following properties:

- 15 Temple Street (Walgreens),
- between 22 and 36 Sewall Street (Sewall Commons),
- Sewall Court

- between 12 and 18 Sewall Street (Sewall Street lot),
- 299 Broadway (Star Market),
- 313 Broadway (Winter Hill Liquors, Brazilian Times) and
- 7 - 9 Temple Street (Elegancia Salon; 2 residential units)

Residents also urged the city to use its eminent domain powers, if necessary, to obtain the properties.

The development being proposed would make 3 parcels from the 7 listed above, as follows:

- D1: Green open space
- D2: Affordable housing
- D3: Commercial, residential, and green open space

The objectives of the plan are:

- Neighborhood - oriented main street commercial district
- Green and open gathering spaces
- Safe for bikes and pedestrians
- Minimize displacement by building more housing
- Equitable outcomes
- Redevelop vacant land

After the plan is approved by the Planning Board, City Council and the mayor, it will be sent to the state for approval, which is anticipated to be in January or February.

The Public Hearing opened at 6:20 PM

Eight people spoke on this item and expressed the following concerns:

- Provide community garden space,
- Include affordable housing and a safe place for people to gather,
- Create a community growing space on a rooftop and market it as a tourist attraction,
- Create a dog park, which might have the side benefit of boosting the area retail stores,
- That the owners of 313 Broadway won't be properly compensated and that the building might be replaced with a building that doesn't fit into neighborhood,
- Apply an affordable housing overlay,
- The city should help to relocate those who are displaced by this development,
- Include a supermarket, as long advocated for by the neighborhood and
- Will the businesses located at 313 Broadway and 7 - 9 Temple Street be allowed to return, and will they receive compensation?

Students from the Winter Hill School were asked what they would like to see included in the development and they suggested a skateboard park, small stores, places for teenagers, trees, crafts,

spaces for murals and youth employment opportunities. They also asked if rents in the area would increase.

The Public Hearing was closed at 6:42 PM. The record will remain open to receive written comments until 5:00 PM on December 4, 2020.

Councilor White asked if the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) could acquire the property via eminent domain and Mr. Galligani replied that it could once all of the approvals have been secured. Councilor White commented that the plan lacks specific details of what will be going into the development and Mr. Galligani explained that all parties will be involved to clarify the plan as it progresses. The city would take the smaller sites while the developer would obtain the larger site. The city would be able to be more aggressive regarding what the development would look like.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked why an urban renewal strategy is being used rather than a demonstration project, noting that the Law Department said that an urban renewal strategy was the better choice, from a legal standpoint, for this plan. He also said that the City Council would still have input on planning and zoning in the area. Councilor White asked if another HCD Committee meeting would be scheduled, since he feels that it would be inappropriate to vote on the plan now. Councilor Mbah supports the plan but also believes that there needs to be more structure to it. Councilor McLaughlin stated that he favors taking the properties by eminent domain and he, too, would like a second HCD Committee meeting. Councilor Davis asked if the City Council could have some comments from the Law Department before a second meeting takes place. Councilor Ballantyne asked for clarification regarding the approval process, i.e., can the process be re-arranged? Mr. Galligani explained that the first step (SRA) is complete. That is followed by two parallel tracks (approval by the Planning Board and the City Council), followed by the mayor's approval and finally, approval by the state. The Planning Board and City Council votes are separate and distinct and are not dependent on each other.

Councilor Ballantyne commented that we don't know who will be here in five years, and asked if a Memorandum of Understanding could be put in place to ensure that the development moves forward as approved. Mr. Galligani replied that could be accomplished and explained that if there is a deviation to the plan, it would have to go through the same public process as the original plan. He said that there are numerous steps that would need City Council approval, e.g., financing. Councilor Ballantyne is concerned that developers might not build what the community wants and she would like assurances that this doesn't happen. Mr. Galligani agreed and said that a cautious approach was taken in developing this community driven plan.

Councilor Scott asked where the decision for affordable housing would be made and Mr. Galligani said that the process in the plan is forming a citizen advisory board to evaluate some tradeoffs. Each tradeoff has an associated cost which might require additional funding support. Basically, everything will be looked at and discussed transparently to reach the best result, prior to the SRA issuing any Request for Proposals (RFP). Mr. Galligani noted that the consultant hired to evaluate the public benefits of the development is HR&A. Councilor Scott said he hasn't had confidence in leaving all final decisions in the hands of the SRA and he asked what can be done to avoid that from happening. Finally, he asked how the interface between the RFP and the final approvals would be structured and Mr. Galligani said that all expectations would be included in the RFP.

Councilor White thanked Councilor Ewen-Campen for his work on the SRA and Councilor Clingan for his work on this plan. He clarified that the Union Square covenant was between the developer and the mayor, not the City Council. He would like Ms. McGettigan of the Law Department to look

at the redevelopment plan for Assembly Square with regard to parties negotiating prior to any eminent domain taking and he would like that to be a topic of discussion at the next committee meeting.

Councilor Clingan said that this matter has been the number one issue in the area for some time. He believes in using eminent domain for the Star Market parcel, noting that the property owner has not been cooperative. He agrees that affordable housing is a city-wide issue and he understands the concerns about being cautious, but he believes that this is a great opportunity to get something meaningful developed for the area. The community wants action. He is amenable to having another meeting, but he wants to move the process along.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Handouts:

- Comment - A Weber (with 210787)
- WH URP - City Council (with 210787)