



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

GEORGE J. PROAKIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To: Somerville City Council
From: George J. Proakis
Date: November 12, 2020
RE: Item 205709: That the Administration immediately pursue creation of a public fields and recreation area in the Inner Belt District pursuant to the Fields Master Plan.

I am writing regarding the recent council order (#205709) about the creation of public fields and recreation areas in the Innerbelt District, pursuant to the Fields Master Plan.

The Innerbelt area is one of the “transform” areas identified in the original SomerVision Comprehensive Plan. As with the other areas to transform (Assembly Square, Boynton Yards, Brickbottom, etc.), OSPCD staff is expected to lead neighborhood planning efforts that yield large scale developments that include commercial office and lab space, walkable neighborhood retail, residential space and significant public open spaces.

Implementation of these plans is typically accomplished in cooperation with developers who will seek a “Master Plan Special Permit.” This type of permit opens up significant development opportunity on parcels to be developed while requiring applicants to provide significant public benefits including open space. Master Plan special permits in the new zoning code are established through overlay districts. The overlay districts are put in place after the completion of a neighborhood plan. At this time, the Innerbelt does not yet have an overlay district, because more planning is required in this district to complete a neighborhood plan.

Two strategies can be used to provide additional open space in Somerville:

1. Purchase land and develop it into open space. Cost for doing so can exceed \$4 million per acre, and in transform districts, the cost per acre will likely be far greater. In the Innerbelt, it is also worth noting that the neighborhood currently is occupied by large parcels that provide significant annual property taxes to the City. The property at 70 Innerbelt Road, for example is one of the city's top 10 taxpayers. We cannot afford to remove these properties from the tax rolls at this time.
2. Work with private developers to have them build open space to our specifications, based on our neighborhood plans, in exchange for permitting greater density of development within their master plans.

The best strategy for developing open space in the Innerbelt is to use the second option as it allows for the open space to be developed concurrently with new commercial property that can meet fiscal needs and it allows the open space to be consistent with a thoughtful neighborhood plan.

