



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 10, 2020

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Stephanie Hirsch	Chair	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Vice Chair	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Absent	

The meeting was held in the Committee Room and was called to order at Chair Hirsch at 6:04pm and adjourned at 7:26pm.

Others present: Tom Galligani - OSPCD; Melissa Woods - OSPCD; Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Kimberly Wells - Assistant Clerk of Committees

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about tracking the new jobs that are created, and Ms. Woods is working to develop a narrative for all of the tracking mechanisms. This will use economic census data, and the implementation phase includes transparency around tracking and reporting. The OSPCD team is exploring the measurement of income inequality on a local level. Councilor Ewen-Campen also asked about the number of worker owned co-ops, and Ms. Woods asked for clarification to do more research on this. Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that these include businesses owned by their workers, which tend to be more equitable in pay, benefits, skills development, and long-term planning, which the city should encourage.

Approval of the February 5, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

209626: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development provide feedback on SomerVision 2040's chapter on Commercial Development, Business and Arts with respect to metrics and key tasks.

Chair Hirsch shared that the goal of this discussion is to discuss how to increase the commercial tax base. A dedicated committee of seven members of the SomerVision working group worked on this chapter and Mr. Galligani served as the staff for that working group. The group weighed the need for both economic development and housing, and included a cross-section of individuals such as small business owners. Chair Hirsch pointed to Kendall Square as an example of what might be created. Mr. Galligani noted that creating something like that is probably unrealistic. The focus should be on creating something authentic and unique to Somerville.

The key priorities included: building more commercial development to support the tax base and provide more jobs; preserving and supporting local, independent, and minority-owned businesses; preserving and supporting the arts and creative economy; and promoting quality jobs, enjoyable main streets, and strategic workforce development. The goal of a 1:1 jobs to worker ratio is the ideal. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked what this number would be, and Ms. Woods shared that currently, there is approximately one job to every two workers. Chair Hirsch wondered whether there are businesses that generate commercial revenue but don't have many employees. Mr. Galligani noted that there are some telecom companies or warehouses that might fit this description, as they are primarily capital intensive. Mr. Galligani elaborated that the strategic workforce development includes training to enable residents to qualify for the jobs that are created in the city. Chair Hirsch wondered whether there was a plan for matching up the jobs created with the skills already available, and that is a challenge. A large component involves finding both short and long-term options for new immigrants and those with developing English abilities.

Mr. Galligani continued to note that to achieve this, the city needs to create a conducive and predictable regulatory environment. The new zoning code was an important step toward this. There is also a Minimum Mixed Use Ratio (MMUR) committee currently working with a consultant, though the market has changed even since it began its work a couple of years ago and will ebb and flow over time. Setting a MMUR will help manage the pace of development and the vitality of an area. Another important step is to create development opportunities through Neighborhood Plans, financial support (including leveraging federal and state funds) for Brownfields and other cleanup, and infrastructure improvements.

Ms. Woods added that the market has completely changed since the SomerVision 2030 plan was created, and the 2040 plan is more focused both on commercial development and housing as a ratio, rather than one or the other. Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that anti-displacement work is critical as this development is occurring, to ensure that the new jobs and housing are not all for high-income residents.

Mr. Galligani emphasized that this is a multi-decade process that requires patience. As an example for comparison, the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Plan was finalized in 1965. It is important to support Neighborhood Plans and planning efforts, continue to update zoning, and invest in infrastructure to attract potential commercial development.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about the arts and what will likely happen to studio buildings and how to help them survive. Mr. Galligani noted that it is an uphill battle, and a working group is being created to develop strategies. These may include zoning, funding mechanisms for ownership, and finding new facilities, among other ideas. Councilor Ewen-Campen requested that more information about protecting and supporting artists be included. He also asked about what tools are available to attract a mixture of jobs, and Mr. Galligani noted that it is difficult to be as nimble as the economy. Chair Hirsch added that the discipline to use new revenue to support vulnerable populations is an important path to consider. This is why linkage fees are useful. Councilor Ewen-Campen also asked whether the administration had considered whether the impact of remote work due to the coronavirus will have an impact on new construction and Mr. Galligani noted that this was a fear after 9/11 and it never came to fruition, though there is always a chance things may change as technology continues to improve.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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196368: That the Director of SPCD submit a plan on the use of city owned properties as it

relates to projected growth identified in the SomerVision Plan.

Mr. Galligani noted that the City does not own much land. It is currently evaluating a case of subterranean rights to encourage commercial development. The City is open to using its assets to facilitate the SomerVision goals.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

208817: That the Director of SPCD provide any take-aways on the process of achieving permitting for a large commercial development in Union Square, including zoning, master planning, neighborhood council formation, SRA involvement, use of DIFs, and bonding for infrastructure investments.

Chair Hirsch summarized the item as a question of what went wrong and what went right with the Union Square development, and Mr. Galligani noted that it may be too soon to tell. There were lawsuits and delays, as well as community concerns, and the City seems to be putting the right pieces together in a thoughtful way. When the area comes together, there will be more perspective, but there is constant learning from prior experiences. For example, the City is working closely with neighborhood groups in Winter Hill and Gilman Square to hopefully lead to quicker implementation.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

206746: That the Director of SPCD, with the Finance and SomerStat Departments, construct modeling that demonstrates the likely economic impacts of various commercial types on commercial development, jobs, housing, and other factors, and advise if there should there be caps on any business type when in conflict with SomerVision's goals.

This is difficult and expensive work, that is not always useful and actionable, but there is consideration of these factors in decisions. Ms. Woods noted that there is a 2017 study of land uses that informs some of the decision making and notes that multi-family and mixed use developments are generally tax positive, where single and two-family residences are generally a tax loss. Councilor Ewen-Campen emphasized that creation of housing is a value.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209205: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council the ten largest lots outside of the proposed "Transform" districts and outside of any "Neighborhood Plans" that are likely to come up for redevelopment in the next several years, so that special attention may be given to their redevelopment.

Ms. Woods is working with Councilor Ewen-Campen to narrow the scope of the analysis and will provide details soon. Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that these will be larger than small apartment buildings.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

203563: That the Director of SPCD provide bi-annual progress reports on Assembly Square, Gilman Square, Lowell Street, Winter Hill, and future planned neighborhoods as they are completed.

See attached memo, 204322. Councilor Hirsch wondered whether more planners on staff would enable the work to be completed more quickly. There is a "chicken and egg" concern and funding paths for implementing the plans is more of a concern than the planning work. Ms. Woods noted that the focus is on transformational area planning, to add jobs in the 100s at a time.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

204322: That the Director of Finance and the Director of SPCD report on the financial and planning progress in the planned neighborhoods referenced in #203563.

Se 203563.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Handouts:

- Presentation (with 209626)