

Madalyn Letellier

From: Paula Garbarino [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, June 22, 2025 12:14 PM
To: Mayor; All City Council; Public Comments
Subject: Feedback on CBA vote of 6/4/25

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June 17, 2025

Dear Elected Officials,

We are Somerville voters and taxpayers writing to protest the June 4th election held at St. Anthony's School. The balloting on the Somernova CBA was run in a misleading manner, with highly irregular rules. We ask that you disregard its outcome and not allow it to influence your deliberations about changes to Somerville's Zoning Ordinance.

We do not cast blame for this badly flawed voting process on members of the Union Square Neighborhood Council, USNC. We respect USNC's hard work to achieve good outcomes for their neighborhood. On the contrary, we feel that USNC was put in a tough spot.

Who – and why - USNC asked to negotiate with Rafi Investments-Somerville, LLC?

Residents around Central Somerville Avenue did not request or elect USNC to negotiate with Rafi on our behalf. Did Rafi make that request, or was it the City of Somerville? It seems very odd that Somerville would delegate the negotiation of a deal with a real estate firm and holding of an election to USNC, without giving its guidance and support.

The City of Somerville did not inform neighbors about the CBA process.

Until recently, few of us had heard of USNC or Rafi. Only those of us who attended earlier meetings knew about the city's "Central Somerville Avenue" planning process or the "Somernova CBA." The city did not explain the CBA's connection to Rafi's development plans and to its proposed changes to Somerville's Zoning Ordinance.

Unconventional eligibility rules distorted voter turnout and the election's outcome.

In regular Somerville elections, residents register beforehand to get on the city's voter list. Polling places are organized by ward and precinct. The Somerville Elections Department oversees the balloting process, and voters know what to expect.

Voting rights in the June 4th election were confined to an area mapped around Union Square. A small "expanded catchment area" was later added, but residents in this new area received little notice about voting. Other registered Somerville voters believed they were eligible to vote but were denied ballots when they went to the polls.

Meanwhile, Rafi’s social media urged “youth and community workers (ages 16+)” to vote. One of Rafi’s flyers said: “*Anyone* who lives, works, volunteers or owns property in the USNC catchment area” could vote: another Rafi flyer said eligibility extended to “Somerville’s Union Square, Inman Square, and Spring Hill.”

The loose end of these rules enfranchised non-resident workers and “volunteers” from Union Square, Boynton Yards, and Grand Junction. On the restrictive side, people living near the Somernova site *but outside the map* could not. We believe that these rules functioned as a kind of gerrymandering.

Rafi’s outreach to voters misrepresented the election’s consequences.

Details of the CBA were announced on May 21st. Days before the June 4th election, Rafi Investments distributed flyers equating a YES vote with good outcomes and a No vote with bad outcomes. Voters were not informed about the proposed zoning package; non-insiders were baffled about what the voting was for, and why it was needed.

The June 4th balloting had the markings of a City of Somerville election.

At the polling place, approved voters were given ballots to mark in privacy booths and directed to put them in a ballot box labeled CITY OF SOMERVILLE. Poll workers offered “I Voted” stickers with American flags on them. These features confirmed the belief of many people that they were voting in a Somerville referendum or special election.

The City of Somerville has exerted improper influence on the June 4th voting.

On June 3d, the Somerville Arts Council sent an email saying: “YOUR VOTE MATTERS! A YES vote = more arts space in Somerville.” It displays Somerville’s city seal, and the logos of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency, and the Somerville Arts Council, a municipal agency of the City of Somerville. Finally, it bears the name of mayor Katjana Ballantyne. Was it proper for the City of Somerville to endorse a YES vote in this election?

The Somerville City Council should disregard the improper June 4th CBA vote.

The Somernova CBA is conditioned on approval of zonings changes that benefit Rafi. While the CBA does not *bind* the council, it raises certain expectations. Please resist untoward pressures and base your Somernova zoning votes solely on good land use principles.

Respectfully yours,

Jane Bestor, [REDACTED]

Kirk Etherton, [REDACTED]

Paula Garbarino, [REDACTED]

David Guss, [REDACTED]

Lucile Holstedt, [REDACTED]

David Myers, [REDACTED]

Michael Raskin, [REDACTED]

Kate Lila Weaver, [REDACTED]

Patricia Wild, [REDACTED]

Victoria Wolfson, [REDACTED]

Stuart Dash

Robin Dash

Cc:

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Members of the Somerville City Council