**90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan**
**Somerville Redevelopment Authority | City of Somerville**
**Amendment – November 2025**

## Overview

This document serves as an amendment to the 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan ("2019 DPP"), which was approved by the Somerville Redevelopment Authority ("SRA") and Somerville City Council ("Council") in February 2019.

The 2019 DPP laid out a process for eliminating blight and developing both a new public safety building ("PSB") and transformative mixed-use development at 90 Washington Street (the "Property"). Under the 2019 DPP, the SRA acquired the property by eminent domain, with the intention of maintaining one portion of the site for the PSB and selecting a private development partner to develop the remainder.

For this taking, the SRA awarded $8,778,000 in damages to the previous owner, Cobble Hill Center LLC ("CHC"). However, CHC contested the amount of the damages and successfully sued the Somerville Redevelopment Authority, resulting in an award of damages to CHC of $35,306,000.[1] After subtraction of the original damages paid, this resulted in new money owed to CHC in the amount of $26,528,000, plus accrued interest through February 2025 when the judgment was paid in full.

This judgment represents a significant unanticipated cost to the SRA and the City of Somerville ("City") and impacts the City's ability to both provide key services and pursue vital capital projects. Consequently, the SRA has adjusted its redevelopment plan to remove the PSB to focus purely on eliminating blight and spurring transformative development. The SRA aims to recoup a significant portion of the funds spent to satisfy the judgment of the litigation through the sale of the property for redevelopment.

This Amendment updates two sections from the 2019 DPP: Section III: Objectives and Section IV: Demonstration Project Plan. As noted in Section IV.F., amendments to the Demonstration Project Plan may occasionally be made and should "take into account any legal agreements by and between the City and the SRA, actual operations, changing demand or market forces, updates in technology or other innovations, and other outside forces."[2] The 2019 DPP notes that a "major plan change is a significant change in any of the basic elements of the Plan and shall be reviewed and approved through majority vote by the SRA and the City Council."[3] Staff believe that the removal of the public safety component of the redevelopment constitutes a major plan change.

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[1] See *Cobble Hill Center LLC v. Somerville Redevelopment Authority* (1981-CV-02669, May 17, 2023, motion for new trial denied August 21, 2023, judgment affirmed, Mass. App. Court, Summary Decision 23-P-1353 October 16, 2024.

[2] See page 37 of the original 2019 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan.

[3] See page 37 of the original 2019 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan.

**Objectives**

**A. Eliminate Blight.**

As stated in the 2019 DPP, the primary objective for the Project is to eliminate blight and to prevent the recurrence of blight by pursuing the kind of transformative, mixed-use, transit-oriented development the community calls for in SomerVision and in neighborhood plans for this area. The objectives related to the elimination of blight are listed below, all of which were articulated in the 2019 DPP:

(a) To secure the elimination and prevent the recurrence of blighted, deteriorated, deteriorating, or decadent conditions in the project area;
(b) To ensure the replacement of such conditions by well-planned, well-designed improvements which for the most appropriate reuse of the land in conjunction with the City's comprehensive Plan, SomerVision;
(c) The improvement of land use and traffic circulation;
(d) To provide a decent, pleasant, and humane environment involving a mixture of those land uses needed to produce balanced development;
(e) To maximize the full socio-economic potential of the project area with the most appropriate land uses and densities, and consistent with the other objectives stated herein;
(f) To promote economic development which strengthens the City's tax base without unacceptably impacting the physical, social, and cultural environment;
(g) To establish the minimum necessary land use controls which promote development, yet protect the public interest;
(h) To establish a set of controls which are adaptable to both current and future market conditions;
(i) To secure development in the shortest possible time period;
(j) To establish a sense of identity and place for Inner Belt;
(k) To capitalize on the location next to the East Somerville Green Line Station;

This list removes one goal from the original plan: "The improvement of public facilities." This is due to the removal of the Public Safety Building from the redevelopment plan.

**B. Public Safety Complex.**

This objective is no longer being pursued as part of this Amended Demonstration Project Plan.

**C. Transformative Development Opportunity.**

As stated in the 2019 DPP, 90 Washington Street could support a transformative, mixed-use development program anchored by the nearby East Somerville Green Line Station. Transit-

oriented development could meet several important community needs and desires, including housing (both market-rate and affordable), tax and job generating commercial development, affordable neighborhood-serving retail uses, community civic space, and other community-oriented uses.

**D. Recouping funds used to satisfy the judgment for the taking of 90 Washington Street.**

Beyond the objectives listed above related to eliminating blight and realizing a transformative development opportunity, this Amendment also adds recouping funds used to satisfy the judgment for the taking of 90 Washington Street as an explicit objective. These funds will help preserve the City's overall financial health to ensure it can continue to provide key services and pursue vital capital projects.

**Demonstration Project Plan**

**A. 90 Washington as a Demonstration Project Plan.**

This section in the 2019 DPP provides justification for the redevelopment of 90 Washinton Street as a demonstration project. This continues to be an appropriate demonstration project, given that it is not located within any existing urban renewal plan and targeted, public intervention is still necessary and appropriate to eliminate blight generated by the long-vacant site.

**B. Demonstration Project Phases.**

The 2019 DPP laid out five phases of the demonstration project. Those phases are listed below, with notes describing progress to date and any adjustments.

*Phase 1: Demonstration Project Plan Approval.*

Complete.

*Phase 2: Acquisition of 90 Washington Street.*

Complete.

*Phase 3: Project Delineation and Design.*

Phase 3 is intended to determine the use of the property and design of various project elements. As laid out in the 2019 DPP, the City convened a Public Safety Complex Building Committee and led "listening and visioning sessions" and "design workshops" between 2022 and 2023 to

determine the nature of any future Public Safety Building or Complex as well as community desires for private redevelopment on the site.[4] While the public safety component of the redevelopment is no longer being considered, staff have extrapolated desires for private redevelopment to apply to the entire site.

Phase 3 of the 2019 DPP also specifies that "A final concept and list of various uses will be developed to be presented to the City Council, who will have the responsibility of articulating the community's goals and program of uses to determine alternative uses and refine its development objectives for the Request for Qualifications/Proposals."[5] Staff will continue with this process to obtain Council approval of final uses and development goals.

*Phase 4: Developer Selection.*

The 2019 DPP notes that if redevelopment of the site by a private developer is determined by the Council to be the appropriate future use of the property, then the SRA shall undertake a process to select a developer that may include issuing a Request for Proposals ("RFP") or similar process. Any final uses approved by the Council in Phase 3 would be reflected in the RFP. The SRA previously released a Request for Qualifications ("RFQ") to gauge interest from development partners for the site and learn how public safety components could be combined with other development. However, given the significant shift in redevelopment plans, a new Request for Proposals ("RFP") process will be used to solicit new responses.

The 2019 DPP also notes that responses to this RFP would be reviewed by a Technical Advisory Committee. However, staff will instead work with members of the 90 Washington Street Civic Advisory Committee ("CAC") to review proposals. The CAC is made up of various stakeholders interested in the project (including two Somerville City Councilors) and meets regularly to discuss project implementation. The CAC format is now standard across SRA projects and provides a consistent avenue for feedback. As outlined in the 2019 DPP, the CAC will recommend two developers to the Council, who will then vote to either approve the selected developers or change one or both. The SRA will then select a final developer from the Council's two choices.

The 2019 DPP also outlines a process by which the selected developer will enter into an Exclusive Negotiating Agreement (ENA) to negotiate a Land Development Agreement (LDA) with the SRA, which will need to be approved by the Council. The developer will also need to work with City staff to develop a site design plan, a phasing plan and schedule, and detailed financial plan. The SRA and City still intend to follow these steps.

[4] See pages 31-32 of the original 2019 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan.
[5] See page 32 of the original 2019 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan.

*Phase 5: Project Implementation.*

The 2019 DPP notes that, during Phase 5, if the project does not break ground within three years from the date of transfer, the SRA will retain the right to take back title to the land at no cost. This deadline will be shifted to require a developer to apply for permits from the appropriate Somerville permitting body (e.g. Somerville Planning Board) within three years, to allow greater flexibility in implementation.