

Somerville Redevelopment Authority

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) was founded in 1956, pursuant to the authority granted by the Massachusetts General Law Chapter 121B, § 3.

SRA Board

Nancy Busnach, Chair
Iwona Bonney, Secretary
William Gage
Phil Ercolini
Anne Tate

Mayor

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development staff to the SRA

Michael Glavin, Executive Director
Eileen McGettigan, Special Counsel, Law Department
Thomas Galligani, Director of Economic Development
Emily Hedeman, Urban Revitalization Specialist

www.somervillema.gov/departments/somerville-redevelopment-authority

SRA@somervillema.gov

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Introduction

Since it was created in 1956, the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) has played an active role in the redevelopment and revitalization of Somerville. Over the past 61 years, the SRA has made significant contributions to the revitalization of the City's neighborhoods, commercial squares, and industrial centers.

The SRA Annual Report for 2017 provides an overview of the projects that the SRA reviewed during the year, those in construction, and those that were completed. Annual reports are a requirement of the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). This report will be sent to DHCD for review and recordation.

The SRA would also like to take this opportunity to present additional information about its operations, history, how stakeholders can become more involved, and how to find out more information about the SRA.

Letter from the Chairwoman



As a long-time resident of the City of Somerville, I'm in awe of the transformation that has occurred in our small community over the past several years. We're seeing continual change in our City as a result of economic development initiatives, physical improvements in our neighborhoods and squares, the preservation of open space, and an ongoing commitment by the City to respond to the demand for market-rate and affordable housing.

With continued progress in Assembly Square, we saw the completion of Phase One of construction and significant work done towards Phase Two. What was once home to an abandoned automotive plant is now 145 acres of prime waterfront real estate. Through an ongoing partnership with our Assembly Square Master Developer Federal Realty Investment Trust, we've created a new neighborhood and a regional destination in the revitalized Assembly Square, now home to Partners Healthcare, the largest private employer in the Commonwealth. I'm delighted to welcome these new residents, new jobs, and new economic activity to the City.

It's been a big year of accomplishments in Union Square. Coming off of the creation of a detailed Neighborhood Plan in 2016, we saw a robust community process in the review, revision, and Board of Aldermen acceptance of the Master Land Disposition Agreement. With the Board of Aldermen's approval, Union Square zoning, which allows for the implementation of the Neighborhood Plan, was passed and we've moved closer to realizing the full potential of Union Square.

As we move into a new year, we look forward to the continued implementation of the Redevelopment Authority's existing urban renewal plans in Assembly Square and Union Square. Future revitalization and redevelopment of commercial districts and neighborhood centers will be fueled by SomerVision goals established by the community and put into motion by intensive neighborhood planning processes and implementation plans. Our goal has always been to transform Somerville while preserving what makes it unique.

As a final note, Iwona, William, Phil, and I encourage your participation, your input, and your thoughts. As we move forward with existing urban renewal plans in Union Square and Assembly Row and look towards the future of Somerville, we invite the public's involvement to support and grow the City we all call home. We've managed to welcome more residents, more businesses, and provide more opportunity within the City because of our strong community, our quest for transparency, and our desire to do the right thing.

Nancy Busnach
Chairwoman, Somerville Redevelopment Authority

Members of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority



Nancy Busnach *Mayoral Appointee, Chairperson, 9/14/1999-present*

Nancy is a real estate professional with more than 40 years' experience. President of Busnach Associates, she has a proven track record as a creative negotiator and effective manager. She is actively involved in the Somerville community including serving as a Member on the Board of Directors of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce. She has served as a past Chair of the Board of Directors of Groundworks Somerville, and former member of the Board of Somerville Boys & Girls Club. Nancy is a graduate of Suffolk University.



Dr. Iwona Bonney *Gubernatorial Appointee, Secretary, 12/4/2002-present*

Dr. Iwona Bonney is a Research Assistant Professor and Administrative Director of Tufts Anesthesia Research Center at Department of Anesthesiology and Perioperative Medicine at Tufts Medical Center. Iwona is a graduate of the Medical University of Warsaw and completed her Ph.D. at the Medical Research Centre, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, specializing in the study of pain, analgesics, and novel chimeric peptides. Iwona lives in Somerville with her husband and two sons.



William Gage *Mayoral Appointee, 9/14/1999-present*

William was an Environmental Analyst with the MEPA Office at the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs. He was the SRA's designee to participate in the LOCUS process and a member of the Union Square Neighborhood Council Working Group and several of its subcommittees. William received an award for historic preservation work completed at his home in Union Square within the Columbus Avenue/Warren Avenue Local Historic District.



Phil Ercolini *Mayoral Appointee, 12/8/16-present*

Phil has served the City in several capacities including an 18-year position on the Zoning Board of Appeals prior to joining the Curtatone administration as Housing Director from 2004-2011. In 2006 – 2007, he also served as Acting Director of OSPCD. Phil held several positions within the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, including Senior Housing Program Coordinator and Director of the Housing Stabilization Fund. Phil is a graduate of UMass Boston with his B.A. in Psychology and History.



Anne Tate *Mayoral Appointee, 2/15/2017-10/19/17*

Anne is interested in the intersection of design and policy. She served as special advisor on sustainable development in the Office for Commonwealth Development (OCD) in Massachusetts. At OCD she led two signature efforts: Sustainable Development Principles and Transit Oriented Development Initiative. Anne played a major role in negotiating the settlement that unlocked development for 145 acres in Assembly Square. She co-chairs the Union Square Citizen Advisory Committee. Anne teaches at RISD, and has lectured at Yale, Harvard and Princeton.

2017 Project Highlights

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority is helping to facilitate two of the most transformative redevelopment projects in the history of Somerville. Under the auspices of the SRA, dramatic redevelopment progress is underway as a new neighborhood is taking shape on banks of the Mystic River in East Somerville. Just two miles away, the SRA has sown the seeds for enhancement of Somerville's historic business district as the expansion of the Green Line promises to return Union Square to its former role as an important regional job center.

Assembly Square

Assembly Square is Somerville's newest neighborhood and one of Greater Boston's most noteworthy redevelopment projects. The area was the subject of an Urban Renewal Plan in 1980 and a major plan revision in 2012. These plans have helped to guide the transformation of this formerly languishing industrial area into a thriving mixed-use neighborhood. Full buildout of Assembly Square will include over 6.1 Million square feet of new development, including 5.2 Million square feet of commercial space and over 1,000 units of housing.

The highlight of 2017 was Partners Healthcare's move to Assembly. The state's largest private employer fully moved their headquarters into the signature, 800,000 square foot building at the end of summer 2017. Over 4,500 Partners employees now call Assembly Square their home.

A wealth of new retail tenants opened their doors in Assembly Square in 2017. The first round of Phase Two tenants and some fresh faces for Phase One added employment, entertainment, and economic opportunities for the City and its residents. Assembly Square saw its largest Riverfest ever with approximately 12,000 people in attendance for the weekend.

The SRA had a consistent focus on employment in Assembly Square. The spring job fair was held on April 26, 2017 and featured 17 Assembly Square retailers and restaurants in search of applicants for available and upcoming employment opportunities. As part of an ongoing agreement to track employment in the Square, FRIT conducts periodic employment surveys sent out to retailers. Per the July 2017 FRIT hiring survey, the most recent report shows a local hiring rate of 25% as of July 2017, an



Top Row: Partners Healthcare Building | 2nd Row: Sabrosa, Caffè Nero, Zo Greek | Bottom Row: Somerville High School touring Assembly with FRIT, Riverfest

increase of 3% from the last survey period. While marketing of available rental space is on-going, FRIT is using the open retail spaces as temporary leasing offices and open house locations for affordable housing application workshops. With an overall low unemployment rate in the City, hiring is very competitive, but FRIT promised to continue to strive for more local hiring. FRIT has connected local hiring managers with the Somerville Community Corporation First Source program and has connected the Somerville High School culinary program with Assembly Square restaurants.



Top Row: Rendering of Block 6, Montaje apartment building | Bottom Row: Rendering of Block 5B Hotel, The Row, Autograph Collection, opening April 2018

Two major buildings were under construction during 2017 on Block 6 and Block 5B. On block 5B, a 160-room hotel and 122 condominium units were under construction. The condominium units at Alloy above the hotel on Block 5B began pre-selling in April with the first residents moving in August 1st. These units were completely sold-out by September and the City saw robust interest in the 15 available affordable housing units. Across the street on Block 6, rental units in the 447-unit Montaje apartment community began pre-leasing in May with the first tenants moving in by September. This building has units that range from studios to three-bedrooms, with 56 affordable units. FRIT donated space to the City's SomerViva program to hold three application workshops with non-English speaking applicants. Both projects are expected to be completed in 2018.

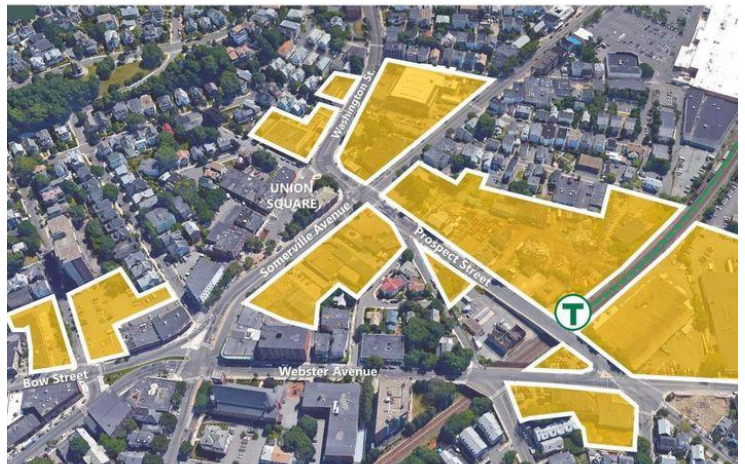
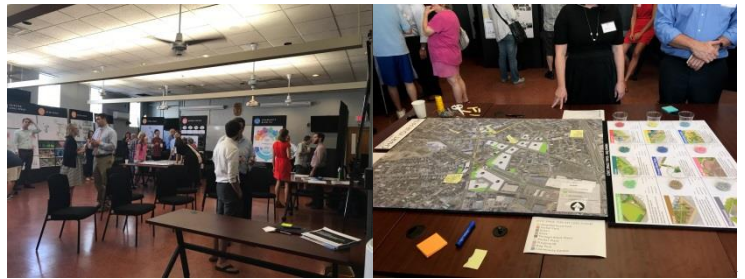
Seeing a continued increase in usage of the Assembly Orange Line T stop FRIT implemented a paid-parking system in late 2017 to increase customer turnover and discourage long-term parking for commuters or other unauthorized users. Parking and other modes of transportation will be incorporated into a Transportation Management Association, which will take existing transportation patterns and usage into consideration. The newest parking garage at Block 6 opened in early fall and serves both residents and visitors.

Union Square

In 2012, the Union Square Revitalization Plan was approved at both the city- and state-level. The Revitalization Plan identifies 7 disposition parcels, collectively known as the “D-Blocks”, slated for redevelopment in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121B or other conventional market transactions. In accordance with the plan, the City, through the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA), assembled land on the “D-2 Block” in Union Square to allow for the construction of a new Union Square MBTA Station. In 2014, after a due diligence process that included the participation of a 20-member Civic Advisory Committee (CAC), the SRA selected Union Square Station Associates (US2) as its Master Development partner.

Subsequently after the selection process, the City launched a neighborhood planning process in Union Square. Developed through extensive community input, the neighborhood plan provides the framework for achieving Union Square area’s share of the job, open space, housing and transportation goals as outlined in SomerVision.

Progress continued in 2017 as the SRA, the City, and US2 took definitive steps to prepare the project for an imminent groundbreaking. The two-year LOCUS process produced a place based Strategic and Community Benefit Plan in 2017 that included a prioritization of community benefits and place based strategies to ensure social equity is integrated into Union Square’s future. The City approved a \$50M commitment to the Green Line Extension project and SRA completed negotiations with US2 by signing a Master Land Disposition Agreement in April 2017. In June of 2017, the City approved the Union Square zoning amendment, which serves as the first step towards implementing the Union Square Neighborhood Plan. The City and US2 signed a development covenant specifying a series of contributions that US2 will make to defray the City’s costs related to infrastructure, including the Green Line Extension, as well as funding for a community benefits fund. The covenant also included a requirement that US2 negotiate a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with a neighborhood based organization. In December 2017, the Somerville Planning Board granted US2 a Coordinated Development Special Permit (CDSP),



Top Row: Rendering of Union Square | 2nd Row: Images from the US2 CDSP Open House | Bottom Row: Development Parcels within Union Square

which entitles US2 to build the 2.3 million square feet of development on the seven blocks first identified in the 2012 Union Square Urban Revitalization Plan. US2's entitled project anticipates 1.4M square feet of commercial space, 989 housing units (including 198 affordable units) and 174,000 square feet of new open space.

The City prepared a multi-phase infrastructure plan to address a variety of long-term Somerville storm water, wastewater, streetscape and roadway needs. The Plan includes major investments that are designed to unlock the development potential of Union Square by improving sewer and storm water capacity and reconstructing elements of the Union Square streetscape. The first phase will cost \$61 million and utilizes a combination of funding sources, including the MassWorks Program grants, developer contributions and District Improvement Financing (DIF). The Somerville Board of Aldermen approved the approach in December.

2017 Meetings

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority held 11 meetings during 2017.

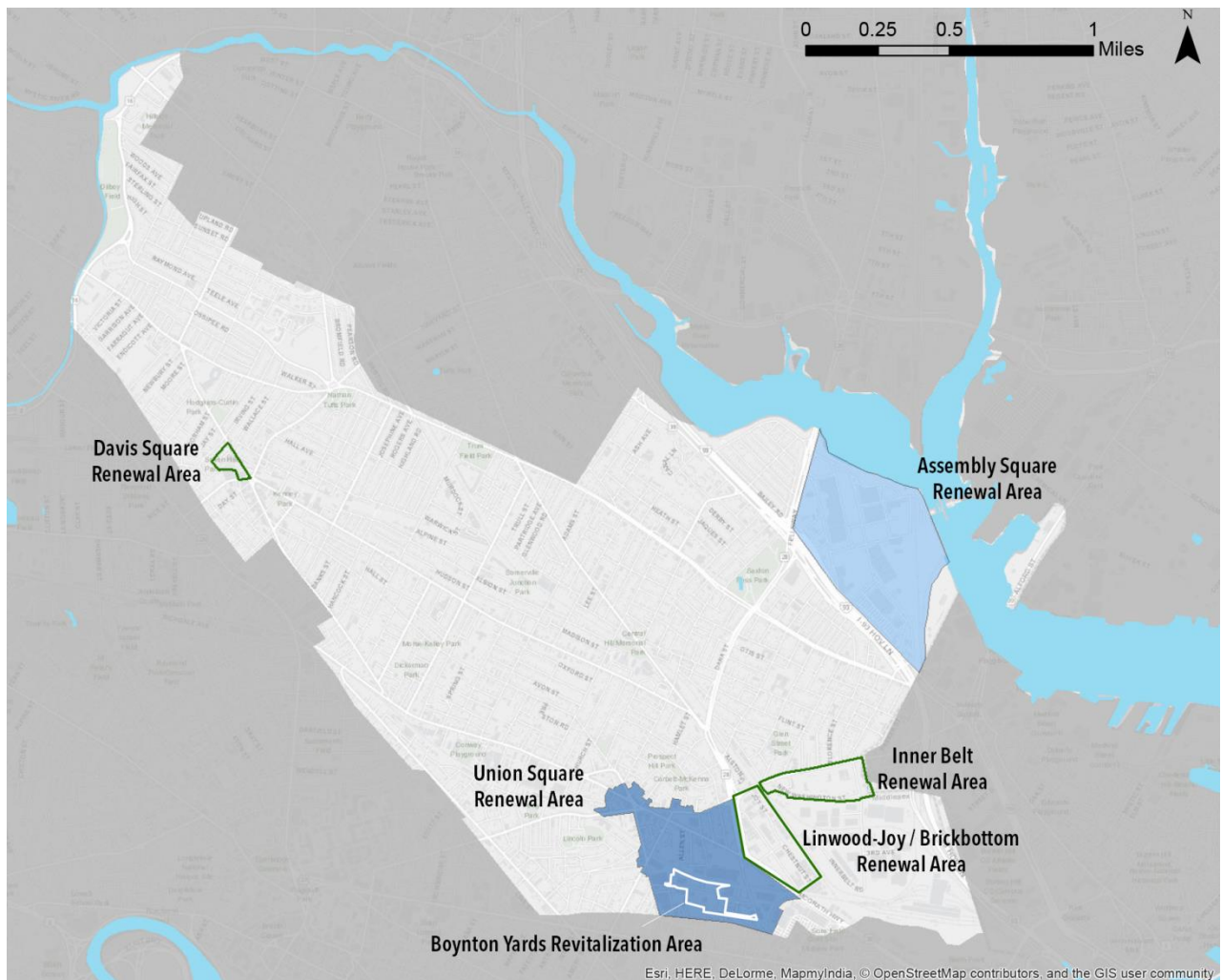
| Month | Meeting Date(s) | Votes |
|-----------|--|--------------------|
| January | R: January 19 | 2 |
| February | R: February 16 S: February 23 | 2 1 |
| March | S: March 8 R: March 16- cancelled | 2 (2 not taken) |
| April | R: April 13 - cancelled R: April 27 | 6 |
| May | No meeting | - |
| June | R: June 8 | 2 |
| July | R: July 20 | 3 |
| August | No meeting | - |
| September | R: September 14 | 3 |
| October | R: October 3 | 4 |
| November | R: November 14 | 5 |
| December | R: December 14 | 2 |

R: Regular Meeting S: Special Meeting

History of SRA Urban Renewal & Revitalization Strategies

Established in the 1960's, the state's urban renewal law was adopted to develop areas that needed extra assistance to address substandard conditions. While early plans under the state law were often used to demolish and clear large blighted areas, more recent applications of the law have been focused on targeted development of particularly challenging or blighted lots.

Since the mid 1950's, the City has implemented seven major urban renewal projects: Linwood-Joy, Inner Belt, Union Square, Assembly Square, Davis Square, Boynton Yards Phase 1, and the recent Union Square. Ongoing research is being conducted to identify opportunities for the SRA to provide effective and ongoing support in the furtherance of the city's revitalization goals .



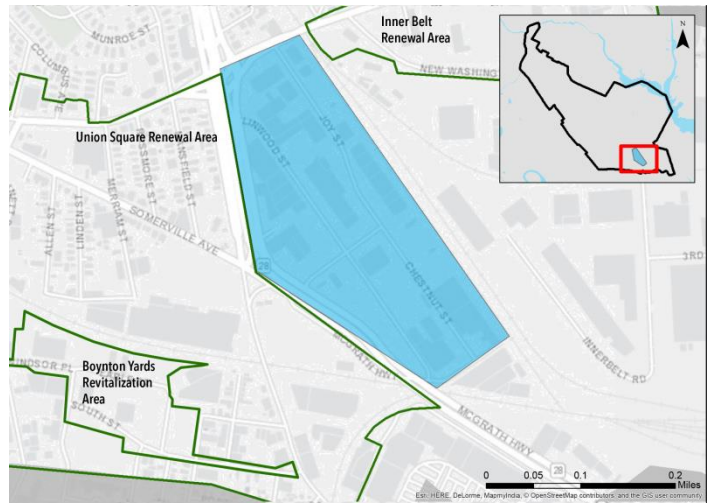
Linwood-Joy Urban Renewal Project 1953-1966

The Linwood-Joy Urban Renewal Project was Somerville's first urban renewal effort. Also known as the Brickbottom Project, this was the first urban redevelopment project in Massachusetts. An area of mixed residential, industrial, and commercial properties was replanned to be what would be then a modern, urban industrial area.

A few industrial plants in good condition were retained, but substandard plants and all residential buildings were demolished. In the 1950's, the Linwood-Joy area was generally a low rental area; contract rents (without utilities) ranged from \$17-24 a month (approximately \$350-600 in today's value), the lowest in Somerville at a time when the average contract rent was \$36 per month (\$900 in today's value). The average value of a single-family home in the area was also low: \$2,700 compared with a city average of about \$7,800.

The project involved the relocation of 328 families (81 owners and 248 renters) over a four-year period, 1953-1957. In general, the renters moved to other parts of Somerville, Charlestown, and Cambridge; many of the owners bought other property in Somerville. About 50 families moved to public housing, including some senior citizens who later moved to housing for the elderly when it became available.

The Somerville Housing Authority, which acted as Somerville's redevelopment authority before the Somerville Redevelopment Authority was established in 1956, carried out the relocation and first phase of the urban renewal project. The SRA completed the execution of the Linwood-Joy Project in 1966.



Top: Outline of the Linwood-Joy Urban Renewal Area

Bottom: Advertisement from the 1970's showcasing real estate in Brickbottom

Inner Belt Urban Renewal Project 1968-1970

In 1948, the Massachusetts Department of Public Works unveiled the Master Highway Plan for the Boston Metropolitan Area, which identified a system of Boston-area expressways. The plan identified the path of a number of major new arterial roadways, including what would eventually become I-90, the Mass Pike, and I-93 which cuts through Somerville.

The highway master plan also laid out a foundation for the creation of an “Inner Belt Expressway”, which would connect the major arterial roadways heading north and west. This highway was proposed to encircle Boston and quickly connect Boston's inner boroughs without requiring a trip through busy downtown thoroughfares. This construction required a plan for the acquisition and demolition of numerous homes and businesses in Somerville, Boston, Cambridge, and Newton.



Outline of the Inner Belt Urban Renewal Area

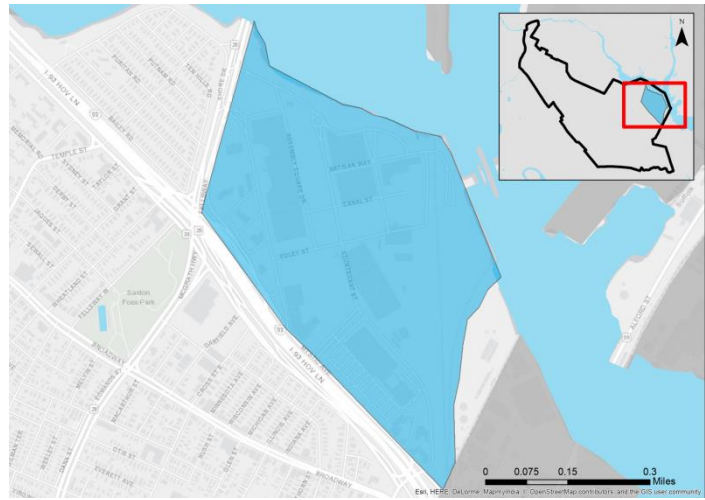
Within Somerville, the Inner Belt Project Area, located between Washington Street in East Somerville and the route of the proposed Inner Belt, was set for clearance and redevelopment for industry and business. The project received approval from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and began the execution phase.

There was significant opposition by residents of the neighborhoods across the area which would have been impacted by the Inner Belt's construction. The project was eventually stalled and abandoned in 1970, but not before much of the existing neighborhood had been razed in Somerville. A total of seven families and 20 businesses were relocated as part of the Inner Belt urban renewal project.

The planned results of this urban renewal project would capitalize on the anticipated construction of the Inner Belt Expressway (I-695). With the anticipation of the Inner Belt, the Inner Belt District was advertised in a real estate booklet as a “unique parcel [which] combines the advantages of a suburban type development and a downtown location.” The assets of the area that were marketed to potential investors remain the area's strong points: accessibility, proximity to Boston and the region, auto-designed roads, and a large neighboring work force. The SRA completed the execution of the Inner Belt Project in 1970.

Assembly Square Urban Renewal Plan 1980-present

In 1980, the SRA, acting as the city's urban renewal agency and redevelopment authority pursuant to G. L. c. 121B, § 9, and its Board of Aldermen, found that the Assembly Square area was a "substandard, decadent, or blighted open area" and qualified as an eligible project area under G. L. c. 121B, § 48. The SRA prepared and submitted to the department the 1980 plan to carry out urban renewal activities within the Assembly Square area. The department, determining that the "area [was] both substandard and decadent and . . . detrimental to the health, safety, and welfare of the community," approved the plan as being in accordance with G. L. c. 121B, § 48.



Outline of the Assembly Square Renewal Area

The cornerstone of the urban renewal plan was the rehabilitation of the former auto assembly plant into a retail mall known as the "Assembly Square Mall". Other development included a new Home Depot. In 1999, the internationally known Swedish home furnishings store, IKEA, purchased two former industrial sites on the Mystic River waterfront. IKEA obtained permits for its proposed retail store; however, the permits were challenged in court by community members opposed to a "big box" use on the waterfront, with the result that redevelopment of the site was stalled for a number of years.

Among the major goals and objectives of the 1980 plan were to increase the real estate investment and tax base; provide additional jobs; develop and plan a new revitalized industrial-commercial area; improve accessibility to the area by providing new streets; encourage new commercial, light industrial, hotel, and office uses; explore at a future date the possible location of a rapid transit station in the area; and investigate the feasibility of creating a combination of recreational open space and waterfront housing.

On June 20, 2002, by a unanimous vote, the planning board found that the major plan change was in conformity with the general plan for the community as a whole. On September 26, 2002, the SRA and the Board of Aldermen, both by unanimous votes, approved the major plan change with a few minor revisions. The Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development approved the major plan change by a letter dated October 28, 2002. The 2002 major plan change extends the term of the 1980 plan to August 1, 2022.

Davis Square Urban Renewal Project 1983

In 1976, the MBTA decided to extend the Red Line from Harvard Square to Fresh Pond via Davis Square. The City and a group of residents named the Davis Square Task Force worked to prepare the Square for this new exposure. The culmination of these efforts was the Davis Square Action Plan, released in 1984. The action plan sought to improve the image of Davis' streetscape, open space, storefronts, traffic and parking, and development. The T opened in 1984 and many of the plan's goals were implemented over the next decade. However, many of the goals focused on parking instead of trying to incentivize use of the new transit stop.



Outline of the Davis Square Renewal Area

The goals of the Davis Square Urban Renewal Project were to increase the supply of public off-street parking, to improve existing sidewalks and streets, encourage commercial activities, maintain property values and encourage investment, and improve visual appearance of the Square. The Davis Square Urban Renewal Project Area contained approximately 3.7 acres of land. There were 14 building in the project area, some of which were vacant at the time of acquisition.

The Harvard Vanguard building (18-40 Holland Street), Holland Street MBTA head house, and Community Path were all constructed during the Urban Renewal Plan execution. Buena Vista Road was relocated.

Boynton Yards Phase 1 1989-2006

In the early 1980's the SRA approved an urban renewal plan for Boynton Yards. At that time, Boynton Yards was an 80-acre site consisting of industrial, commercial, and residential uses. The urban renewal plan aimed to redevelop the area, which suffered from blight, decadent, and substandard conditions. New jobs and new housing were planned for the Boynton Yards area. The principal accomplishments were the demolition of run-down buildings, remediation of industrial wastes, construction of "light industry" buildings, and construction of South Street to support truck traffic. The plan had two phases, the second of which was abandoned when the City decided to expand its plans for redevelopment into Union Square. The first phase was completed on June 22, 2006.



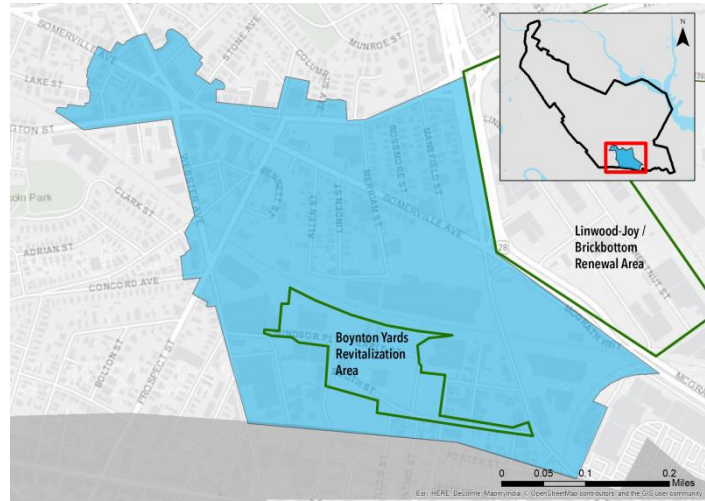
Outline of the Boynton Yards Phase 1 Renewal Area

Union Square 2012-present

The Union Square Revitalization Plan is a 20-year plan that was adopted by the SRA, the City of Somerville Board of Aldermen and the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Urban Development in the fall of 2012. The Plan identified a 117-acre urban renewal area in the city's oldest commercial district, Union Square. The Plan focused on redeveloping seven blocks surrounding the new MBTA Green Line station to create a transit oriented regional employment center.

Over the past five years, the City and the SRA have made substantial progress laying the groundwork for Union Square's transformation. In 2013, the City issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) seeking a Master Development partner for Union Square and in 2014, the SRA selected Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2) as the City's master development partner to redevelop all seven D-Blocks as outlined in the Revitalization Plan. The City authorized \$8M to support acquisition and clearance of disposition parcel D-2 by the SRA in 2013. In November 2015, the City was awarded a \$3.34 million construction grant for Union Square utility upgrades from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, through its MassWorks Program. A second award of MassWorks Program funding of \$10 million was announced for Somerville in November of 2016, the largest award in the program's history.

The City completed and adopted the Union Square Neighborhood Plan in the spring of 2016, which outlined the community's values and vision for Union Square's future. The Neighborhood Plan encompasses the seven redevelopment parcels and articulates a development program that would support the creation of 1,000 new units of housing and a total of 2.3 million square feet of mixed-use development centered on the new transit station. Following the neighborhood planning process, 34 community leaders including SRA member William Gage, worked with the LOCUS organization to create a public benefits framework for Union Square.



Outline of the Union Square Renewal Area

SRA Real Property

The acquisition of land by the SRA is typically focused on properties with near-term redevelopment potential and on large scale development projects that align with highly visible and long-term economic and housing development goals. The SRA also can act as agent for the City in assembling properties for City-sponsored projects.

All of the SRA's current property holdings are within Union Square or Boynton Yards, both recent urban revitalization areas.



| Address | 2017 Assessment <i>Land + Improvements</i> | Description | Acct# | Mblu | PID |
|--------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| 0 Windsor Pl | \$334,700 | Vacant sliver of land | 98000730 | 96 A 43 | 102826 |
| 100 South St | \$294,100 | Groundwork Somerville Garden | 99000380 | 97 A 8 | 15483 |
| 138 South St | \$561,500 | Groundwork Somerville Garden | 18570155 | 97 A 7 | 15105 |
| 19 Bennett Ct | \$167,800 | Union Square Development Parcel | 20131540 | 82 I 3 | 110387 |
| 24 Medford St | \$192,800 | Corner Park in Boynton Yards | 6235130 | 97 D 9 | 15114 |
| 258 Somerville Ave | \$29,300 | Union Square Development Parcel | 11352097 | 82 D 6 | 12769 |
| 26 Bennett St | \$502,400 | Union Square Development Parcel | 20131570 | 82 D 31 | 110390 |
| 26 Prospect St | \$368,500 | Union Square Development Parcel | 11353150 | 82 I 1 | 1348 |
| 266 Somerville Ave | \$1,398,300 | Union Square Development Parcel | 11353120 | 82 D 37 | 1339 |
| 27 Bennett St | \$553,000 | Union Square Development Parcel | 19607050 | 82 I 6 | 1350 |
| 30 Prospect St | \$394,700 | Union Square Development Parcel | 6229200 | 82 I 2 | 12815 |
| 32 Prospect St | \$170,100 | Union Square Development Parcel | 20131550 | 82 I 4 | 110388 |
| 34 Prospect St | \$269,400 | Union Square Development Parcel | 20131560 | 82 I 5 | 110389 |
| 4 Milk Pl | \$306,000 | Union Square Development Parcel | 23716087 | 82 D 5 | 12768 |
| 40 Bennett St | \$666,600 | Union Square Development Parcel | 16555140 | 82 D 23 | 1333 |
| 50 Prospect St | \$957,700 | Union Square Development Parcel | 7280101 | 82 D 26 | 1334 |
| 51 Allen St | \$788,500 | Union Square Development Parcel | 89000209 | 82 D 20 | 1332 |

Property Profile: South Street Farm

The South Street Farm is Somerville’s first urban farm. Since 2011, Groundwork Somerville’s Green Team, a non-profit environmental youth employment program that teaches job training and skill building, and community volunteers have transformed two, barren, paved parking lots on South Street owned by the SRA into an abundant food forest.

Each year, the Green Team grows about 2000 lbs of food in the raised beds at South Street Farm. This food is sold at the Somerville Mobile Farmers Market, which is run in partnership with Shape Up Somerville. Vegetables are sold at a reduced cost and brought to more accessible locations around the city for some of our community members who are most in need of access to fresh food. Sites include local schools, housing developments, and the Council on Aging. The Green Team youth program also operates a "pop-up" bike market which functions as a satellite of the Somerville Mobile Market. The bike site travels to additional locations, bringing food and educational materials about healthy eating and other relevant topics

The South Street Farm is an important part of the movement towards sustainability and revitalization in Somerville. Green Team members are the stewards of this project and consequently placed at the forefront of the wider national urban agriculture movement.

Groundwork and the SRA have transformed a vacant lot into greener, healthier, productive and aesthetically pleasing urbanscape for the community. Features include a solar-powered rain-harvesting system, re-purposed curbstones as growing fields, cider press, composting, honey bees and pollinator hotels, and a passive-heated greenhouse in the works.

2017 saw the SRA and Groundwork Somerville working together to lay the foundation for further development on the South Street Farm. While the site is understood to be temporary urban agriculture, the SRA is supportive and excited about Groundwork Somerville's continued efforts to support the growth of their programs. Groundwork Somerville is working with Fennick McCredie Architects to design a multi-functional shade canopy for 25-30 people. The structure will serve as a teaching space for community workshops and presentations, a break area for those working at the farm, and a gathering space for community events. The canopy’s roof is also a rainwater catchment system for crop irrigation, visibly demonstrating the organization’s commitment to sustainable environments¹.



Top Row: Operating the Cider Press at South Street Farm | 2nd Row: Callaloo Harvest, Cider Day | Bottom Row: Green Team at work and pollinator habitat poles.

Photos courtesy of Groundwork Somerville

¹ <http://www.fmachitecture.com/2017/12/22/groundwork-somerville-fennick-mccredie-team/>

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is a redevelopment authority?

A Redevelopment Authority is an independent body politic and corporate, and not an agency of a municipality. Therefore, it does not answer directly to the chief executive. This affords the Redevelopment Authority more autonomy in planning and implementing revitalization and redevelopment projects.

Redevelopment Authorities have broad powers to plan and implement activities needed to redevelop underutilized, deteriorated or blighted open areas, to encourage new development and to promote sound growth. Redevelopment Authorities have the power to:

- Establish rehabilitation and design standards;
- Assemble and dispose of land, including the taking of real estate through eminent domain;
- Relocate businesses and residents occupying property in urban renewal areas in accordance with state and federal relocation requirements;
- Demolish and/or rehabilitate substandard structures;
- Participate in real estate development and commercial revitalization;
- Issue bonds, borrow money, invest funds, and receive grants; and
- Accept gifts or requests.

Redevelopment Authorities are exempt from M.G.L. c.30B, the Uniform Procurement Act, when engaged in the development and disposition of real property in accordance with an approved Urban Renewal Plan. This exemption, coupled with the ability to use eminent domain powers makes Redevelopment Authorities powerful tools for commercial revitalization, industrial park development, infrastructure improvements, facilities renovation and brownfield site remediation. Redevelopment Authorities are particularly effectively in large-scale and complex redevelopment projects and land assembly.

A Redevelopment Authority is governed by an appointed five-member board. The process for appointing the board of a Redevelopment Authority is controlled by the public sector. In a city the city council must confirm members appointed by the mayor or city manager. The Commonwealth, through DHCD, appoints one member to the Redevelopment Authority board. Staffing levels vary depending on the size of the municipality and the type of activity undertaken according to an Urban Renewal Plan or other activities. At minimum, most Redevelopment Authorities consist of an executive director and an administrative assistant.

The development and approval of an Urban Renewal Plan is necessary before a Redevelopment Authority can undertake certain projects.

When was the Somerville Redevelopment Authority created?

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority was founded in 1956.

What are the duties of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority?

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) is the City of Somerville's duly constituted redevelopment authority under Massachusetts General Laws c. 121B. The City's urban renewal plans have traditionally been implemented through the SRA. M.G.L. c. 121B gives redevelopment authorities the power to declare that an area is a substandard, decadent, and/or blighted open area, to prepare an urban renewal plan for its redevelopment and to do eminent domain takings to further the purposes of the plan.

What is urban renewal under M.G.L. Chapter 121b?

Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 121B (M.G.L. c. 121B) municipalities acting through their redevelopment authorities, are authorized to redevelop substandard, decadent or blighted open areas for industrial, commercial, business, residential, recreational, education, hospital, or other purposes. Future development within these designated urban renewal areas must be undertaken in accordance with use limitations specified in approved urban renewal plans.

Chapter 121B places great importance on the achievement of socio-economic development such as the provision of jobs for the unemployed, the addition of tax revenue to overburdened communities and/or the assemblage of parcels of sufficient size for the expansion or siting of industry, business or housing. Urban renewal projects help municipalities revitalize deteriorated and underutilized areas by providing the economic climate environment needed to attract and support private investment. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is charged with the responsibility for the operation and administration of the Urban Renewal Program as defined under c.121B.

What is an urban renewal plan?

The Urban Renewal Plan is an application submitted by a municipality through its Redevelopment Authority to DHCD requesting approval of an urban renewal/redevelopment project. The Urban Renewal Plan must include all the following information as specified by Massachusetts Regulations 760 CMR 12.00:

- Maps of the project area;
- Data demonstrating that the area meets the eligibility criteria as a substandard, decadent or blighted open area;
- Project objectives, including specifications of all proposed redevelopment and detailed job creation and retention estimates;
- A financial plan, including cost estimates and a project budget;
- Local approvals;
- Site preparations, including land protections and measures to address environmental or flood problems;
- Public improvements, including how the improvements will help achieve the objectives of the plan;
- A relocation plan;
- Redeveloper's obligations (i.e., restrictions that are or will be placed on a developer of individual parcels purchased from Redevelopment Authority);
- Disposition for each parcel (i.e., how will the parcels be redeveloped and by whom, if information is known at time of urban renewal plan preparation);

- A report on citizen participation describing meaningful citizen participation in the planning process and expected citizen participation during project execution.

In order to approve a proposed Urban Renewal Plan, DHCD must make the following six findings:

- (1) The project area would not, by private enterprise alone and without either government subsidy or the exercise of governmental powers, be made available for urban renewal -- i.e., without public involvement, the project/site would not be developed.
- (2) The proposed land uses and building requirements in the project area will afford maximum opportunity for privately financed urban renewal consistent with the needs of the locality as a whole -- i.e., the project will enhance/promote desired private investment.
- (3) The plan for financing the project is sound.
- (4) The project area is a decadent, substandard or blighted open area.
- (5) The urban renewal plan is complete as required under 760 CMR 12.00 (see #1 above).
- (6) The Relocation Plan is approved under M.G.L. c.79A, the relocation statute.

When these findings have been made, DHCD will issue a letter of approval for project implementation. If the Urban Renewal Plan is not approved, it may be resubmitted with such modifications, supporting data, or agreements as are necessary to meet DHCD's written objections.

No urban renewal project may be undertaken until a public hearing relating to the urban renewal plan for the project has been held before the city council and approval is obtained by municipal officers and DHCD.

How are decisions made?

For a decision to be made, the members of the SRA must vote. A simple majority is needed for a vote to pass or fail.

Can I attend meetings?

The SRA meetings are open and public meetings. Scheduled meetings are posted on the City of Somerville calendar with official meeting notices and agendas posted in adherence with the Open Meeting Law. The SRA meets approximately once per month. It does not have a standing meeting time, but meeting notices and agendas are posted at least 48 hours in advance of a meeting in accordance with the Open Meeting Law.

How do I request to have an agenda item heard at the next SRA meeting?

Email OSPCD's Special Counsel, Eileen McGettigan, at emcgettigan@somervillema.gov.

What are the meeting rules?

The SRA has no formal written rules, but SRA meetings follow Parliamentary Procedure.

How does the City staff support the SRA?

The City provides administrative and legal assistance to the SRA, primarily through the Office of Community Planning and Strategic Development (OSPCD). Staff from the OSPCD answer daily inquiries about the business of the SRA, prepares the SRA meeting minutes, prepares the annual report of the SRA, manage projects and consultant contracts and carries out all SRA activities. In the case of the 2012 Union

Square Urban Revitalization Plan, staff from the OSPCD prepared and authored the plan. Special Counsel provides legal opinions, conducts or oversees all legal work associated with the SRA's activities and prepares the meeting agendas for the SRA.

Does the SRA have its own budget and financial resources?

The SRA maintains an account with the Somerville Municipal Credit Union. However, the account has a balance of \$0.00 throughout 2017. There was no activity in the SRA bank account during 2017.

If the SRA doesn't have any funds in its account, how does the SRA fund redevelopment activities like site acquisition, land assembly, clearance the relocation?

The SRA relies on City funds to accomplish virtually all its activities. If the SRA wants to spend money on projects, it can only do so after seeking and gaining approval from the Somerville Board of Aldermen. In fact, virtually all its activities related to the Union Square Urban Revitalization Plan, including the site preparation, demolition and relocation of tenants on the D-2 Parcel, were funded by a municipal bond authorized by the Somerville Board of Aldermen. The SRA may also use funding provided by the designated master developer for the redevelopment area.

Are SRA members paid to participate?

In 2017, SRA members were paid a monthly stipend of \$300.00 per month. These funds were paid out of the City's General Fund.

How do I join the SRA?

The SRA is a five-member board, all Somerville residents, who serve staggered terms of three years each. Four members are selected by the mayor and the fifth is appointed by the Governor. SRA vacancies are announced on the Somerville website, through the Somerville social media presence and through local publications. At the time of this annual report's publication there is one vacancy on the SRA. Applicants are asked to submit a statement of interest, a resume, and may be asked to interview with City staff.

Enabling Legislation

Massachusetts General Laws Part 1, Title XVII, Chapter 121B,

Section 4 Redevelopment authorities; creation; dissolution

There is hereby created, in each city and town in the commonwealth, a public body politic and corporate to be known as the "Redevelopment authority" of such city or town; provided, that no such authority shall transact any business or exercise any powers until the need for such an authority has been determined and a certificate of organization has been issued to it by the state secretary, both as hereinafter provided.

Whenever the municipal officers of a city, or the voters at an annual or special town meeting determine that there is a need for a redevelopment authority in such city or town for the purpose of engaging in urban renewal projects or other work under this chapter and that it is in the public interest that such an authority be organized in such city or town, a redevelopment authority shall be organized in such city or town.

Whenever a redevelopment authority determines that there is no further need for its existence, and that all outstanding obligations of the authority have been satisfied, it may by a majority vote of the five members submit the question of its dissolution, in a town, to the voters at an annual town meeting or, in a city, to the municipal officers. If a city or town votes for such dissolution in accordance herewith and the department is satisfied of the existence of the facts required herein, it shall so certify to the state secretary and said redevelopment authority shall be dissolved forthwith subject to the applicable provisions of section fifty-one of chapter one hundred and fifty-five.

For more information, contact:

Thomas Galligani
Director of Economic Development

Phone: (617) 625-6600 ext. 2528
Email: tgalligani@somervillema.gov

Somerville Redevelopment Authority
c/o Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and
Community Development
93 Highland Ave.
Somerville, MA 02143