

Somerville Steering Committee ready to roll

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The MBTA's rendering of the new Green Line stop proposed for Ball Square.

By Travis Andersen, Town Correspondent

The Steering Committee - a group of about 60 city officials, business leaders, and community activists - is analyzing statistical trends in town to see how the data may impact its wide-ranging plan for city development.

The plan - in effect a guide for city officials due out around December 2010 - must win approval from the Planning Board before it enters the city record. It will touch on several areas, including prep work for the Green and Orange Line extensions, new commercial and housing developments, and land use proposals.

At two public meetings next month, the committee will examine recent trends in population; housing; the local economy; transportation; and land use.

Keith Craig, a project manager in the city planning department, gave the committee a sneak preview of some of the data at a public meeting on Tuesday night at the Visiting Nurses Association on Lowell Street.

He noted that about one third of the city's 78,000 residents are new arrivals. In addition, he said, roughly 20 percent of the local workforce is employed in the health and social service sectors.

"That may be a surprise to a number of people," Craig said. "It was to me."

The city will be in for an even bigger surprise when workers finish the Green and Orange Line extensions, according to Monica Lamboy, head of the planning department.

She told the committee that at present, 15 percent of the city has easy access to rapid transit. When the new MBTA stations open, that figure will jump to 85 percent. The committee must use this sort of data to determine what development proposals make sense in the future. Once a plan is in place, Lamboy said, working with developers will be far easier.

"They'll know if they come in and give us X, we're going to like it," she said.

The committee will break into five subgroups devoted mainly to commercial squares; neighborhoods; open space and cultural centers; transportation; and housing.

In addition to the meetings - which will include public comment - residents can chime in on the [committee blog](#).

Ward 5 Alderman Sean O'Donovan, a committee member, said in his opening remarks that he can't wait to start brainstorming with the diverse group.

"It's great to see so many people from across the city from different backgrounds," he said.

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