



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
SOMERVILLE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR**

*PHIL ERCOLINI  
CHAIR*

**MINUTES**

Somerville Redevelopment Authority  
Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.  
(Virtual Meeting)  
Software: GotoWebinar

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone's Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority was conducted via remote participation.

Present from the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA): Phil Ercolini (Chair), William Gage, Iwona Bonney, Patrick McCormick, Ben Ewen-Campen and Emily Hedeman. Also present were Eileen McGettigan as Special Counsel, Tom Galligani as Director of Economic Development, and Sunayana Thomas, Senior Economic Development Planner.

Phil Ercolini, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30PM. Open session commenced. A quorum was present. This meeting was audio recorded.

**Documents and Other Exhibits Used at the Meeting**

- i. Draft December 12, 2019 Meeting Minutes
- ii. Winter Hill Neighborhood Plan Implementation Presentation

**Discussion and Actions Taken**

**1. Approval of January 16, 2020 Minutes:**

- Comments: None
- Motion to approve by Iwona Bonney.
- Roll Call Vote:  
Iwona Bonney, Yes  
Ben Ewen-Campen, Yes  
William Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes  
Patrick McCormick, Yes  
Phil Ercolini, Yes.

## **2. Winter Hill Neighborhood Plan Implementation Update – Potential Urban Renewal Plan – Presentation by Lauren Drago, Urban Revitalization Specialist, OSPCD**

Lauren Drago provided a presentation to the Board to share the feedback results for the Winter Hill Implementation process and the possibility of an Urban Renewal Plan. Ms. Drago went into site history, neighborhood plan process, private developer interests and challenges and highlighted the community's cautious support for an urban renewal plan. Since June 2019, Economic Development conducted multiple public meetings, office hours, bilingual meetings, business outreach and made available an online engagement platform to gather as much feedback as possible to move forward with an urban renewal plan. Eighty-five percent of the feedback received supported an urban renewal plan.

The feedback sessions included conversations to determine which sites in Winter Hill should be included in the Urban Renewal Plan; 90% of the respondents included the Star Market site as their priority. The 10% of people who did not support having the Star Market site included were also against an urban renewal plan. Other sites that the community contemplated including included Whitcomb Place, Foss Pavement and the Brewery Block. There was split consensus on the Brewery Block so OSPCD plans to have additional meetings to address comments and concerns in the coming weeks.

Ms. Drago emphasized the importance of a good process that builds on trust for an urban renewal plan. She also mentioned that there are community members who are worried that creating this plan will give the City the ability to do whatever it wants in their neighborhood. Most want the assurance that there will be ongoing processes that keep the community involved. There are also differing perspectives on the scale of what the urban renewal area should include.

Ms. Drago explained the requirements of an urban renewal plan and the process to approve a plan. The information required in an urban renewal plan is determined by the State; the local authority may add any additional items to it once the state requirements are met. The State focuses on eligibility, site preparation, maps, relocation plans, financial planning, etc. Most of the information for the urban renewal plan will be guided by the Winter Hill Neighborhood Plan, which was a two year effort to capture the broader long term goals for the neighborhood, and will include additional feedback received in recent outreach. A relocation consultant will be hired to assist local businesses and residences in determining the benefits they would receive as a result of a relocation.

In addition to the State requirements, Ms. Drago plans to conduct a workshop with the relocation consultant for businesses and other individuals that might be displaced as a result of the plan so that they have a better understanding of what to expect out of the process early on. She also suggested that an equity analysis be included in the plan via SomerVision 2040 discussions to analyze development proposals and critical thinking about how benefits and burdens are distributed or might be distributed. In addition to the workshop and equity analysis, she also suggested working with the SRA to prescribe a community process that articulates where the decision making points are and how people can be involved.

Ms. Drago anticipates providing a draft urban renewal plan in July for the SRA to approve in August and then to the City Council for a public hearing and vote before sending to DHCD for final approval. Once an urban renewal is approved by the SRA, City Council and DHCD, OSPCD would generate an RFP (Request for Proposals) in collaboration with the community for a specific site within the urban renewal plan with the goal of selecting a developer in early 2022. Whether the RFP is for one site or multiple sites has yet to be determined and will be determined with the community at a later date.

#### Comments from the Board:

The board emphasized to staff that the utmost importance is community feedback and ensuring that the urban renewal plan is reflective of the majority of the community. Board members highlighted the growing pains of the Union Square process and while it's not an apples to apples comparison, it's important to make sure that there is a clear plan for community feedback, developer selection, and a process to determine what goes on each site. Board members also commended staff for their outreach efforts to date and implementing new online feedback platforms, like SomerVoice, to capture resident comments who may not be able to attend public meetings. However, staff were urged to continue to be creative and to strive for getting more input by putting a call out to attendees to take the information and share it with their peers, post on Facebook, doors or mentioning it in gathering places like churches to help spread the information of what's happening in the neighborhood. The Board also suggested to staff to think about the urban renewal plan as a phased approach. The Board was also interested in doing an equity analysis but would like to know more during the process to understand whether it's identifying the challenges, including solutions, or supporting small businesses throughout this process that may otherwise be unaware of the process. Board commended the department for its outreach efforts to date and looks forward to hearing more from staff about future progress in this important area.

#### Public Comments:

- Resident of Winter Hill - Are there restrictions that would make an urban renewal plan not worth pursuing?
  - Ms. McGettigan explained that an urban renewal plan is the appropriate vehicle for a redevelopment like this when the area proposed to be redeveloped includes

multiple lots. An urban renewal plan approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development provides important protections to both the SRA and the owners and renters in the affected area.

- Resident of Winter Hill - Agrees with Board members that more people in Winter Hill need to hear about this and while there are online platforms like SomerVoice, the outreach focus should not be moved away from non-digital platforms.
- Resident of Union Square - Thanked the City for a successful community process to date and supports the urban renewal plan and the identified sites as long as businesses are protected and a fair payment made if their property is taken by eminent domain. Commended the SRA, while Union Square was complicated for those involved, she appreciated the board taking the necessary steps to run an efficient public process and hopes to see it executed in Winter Hill.
- Property owner/developer – Voiced concerns over repeating eminent domain failures of the West End in Boston. In the case of Winter Hill, he is a property owner on one of the lots in the Star Market block. He has made improvements to the building but is concerned for his tenants and their future. He's in support of the taking of Star Market. Willing to work with the City for his property on Temple Street to develop the building or make any other improvements; however, the added costs of linkage payments make it difficult for a local developer to compete with larger developers and develop in the City.
- Resident of Winter Hill – Having watched what happened in Union Square, believes there is an importance for a community benefits agreement. While an equity analysis is valuable, it's not the same as a community benefits agreement. If we are using our community resources to ready a site for a developer, we need to make sure our needs are met. The community wants to see changes happen on the Star Market site but want to be cautious about taking property. Also doesn't want a process to lag because of how long it takes for an urban renewal plan to go through the approval process. Questions whether it will be more complicated because there are multiple parcels on this block.
- Resident of Winter Hill – There is enthusiasm for this plan if the City will be behind the community and if it is perceived that the City is not as friendly with the developer as it has been in the past. The City operates under the notion that we have to sell Somerville to developers which is not the case anymore. There are people who want to develop and a price should be exacted to deliver and meet the needs of the community.
- Resident of Winter Hill – It's unclear about why the plan needs to have multiple sites and the type of feedback the City wants from residents. The Star Market site is the first priority in the community. The two sites on Sewall are appalling and are horrible for the abutters. Please provide us straight answers for the type of feedback you need from the community. We do not want to delay the plan or development because it now includes multiple sites.
- Member of Somerville Stands Together & Jobs Retention Trust – Advocated for a CBA early and upfront and make sure that is a part of any developer discussions to ensure there are local jobs and union labor on site which is important to move the project forward smoothly.

- Resident of Winter Hill – Advocated for multiple sites including Star Market that are dormant to be a part of the urban renewal plan versus needing to do multiple urban renewal plans. It’s an opportunity to examine the entire area and prioritize community benefits. Supports the overall approach to the urban renewal plan.
- Councilor Clingan – appreciated the work Ms. Drago and others have put into the process. It has been frustrating to see the turnout despite the door knocking, offering food, open hours, etc. However, he has heard from many constituents that they share the same sentiment on Star Market. He has communicated with property owners across the district and with neighbors and the business community. It’s too early to discuss community benefits but he certainly wants to engage in that conversation when it’s time.

### **3. 90 Washington Project Plan Update**

Ms. Thomas provided the update for 90 Washington.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the demolition is on hold and considered non-essential construction at this time. Ms. Thomas is working with ISD to make sure the contractors have the necessary safety and health plans in place before moving forward. The Capital Project and Asset Management department is working towards finalizing an OPM for the Public Safety portion of the project site: Colliers. Once the contract is finalized and signed, City staff and Colliers will work together to release a Request for Qualifications.

Ms. McGettigan provided additional updates. As construction and most other activity is at a halt, the litigation continues in the appeals court. The brief of Cobble Hill is due on April 27<sup>th</sup> and the SRA will have 30 days to respond. The City’s incident response team has put together a list of available sites to use for various purposes during the pandemic and 90 Washington is one of the sites included.

### **4. Union Square Update**

Ms. Thomas provided the project update.

GLX construction has continued throughout the COVID-19 shutdown and they are targeting a Q2 2021 Union Square Station opening. Schedule, design, easement and logistics coordination between the GLX/MBTA, COS and US2 is ongoing albeit slowed due to MBTA's pandemic response efforts.

Somerville Avenue Infrastructure & Streetscape project is on hold pending resolution of COVID-19 construction moratorium.

Despite the COVID-19 impacts, US2 continues its work to advance all facets of the D2 project schedule (permitting, contracting, financing, land closing, MBTA coordination, etc.). An updated project schedule is being finalized given COVID-19 impacts, and a Q4 2020 D2 construction start is targeted.

US2 recently hosted meetings with both the City and Union Square Neighborhood Council to discuss CBA implementation. As an interim priority, the parties are focused on unlocking some of the \$214,000 of pre-paid Community Benefits Agreement monies that US2 funded in June 2017 to accelerate filling new staffing positions for Union Square Main Streets and Somerville Community Corporation – First Source Program. Both of these organizations are resource constrained and under additional service demands given the current pandemic. Lastly, a draft amendment to the Community Benefits Ordinance was introduced to the City Council last month and was referred to the Legislative Matters Committee.

#### Board Member Comments:

- Do we have a timeline on when US2 plans to purchase D2?
  - Ms. McGettigan anticipates it to be in May or June but there needs to be several Board votes and it may take multiple meetings as documents are being prepared.
- Has there been a switch in the developer partner for the lab building?
  - Mr. Galligani confirmed that US2 is still the developer of the lab building and is responsible for the entire project. They had approached the SRA about a year ago with a development partner, Skanska, but that partnership has not materialized. Skanska is an international builder and has a local development arm that was going to help US2 to build out the lab building, however US2 will be initiating and completing the lab building on their own.

#### 5. **Assembly Square Update**

Ms. Thomas provided the update.

25% of retailers are open today with more anticipated to open in the next few days. Restaurants have applied for outdoor seating and will begin service once their socially distanced layout and health and safety plans are submitted and approved. Construction is on hold across the City. Block 5B is 60% complete (office building) and Block 8 is about 50% completely (residential).

Federal Realty has been an active participant in our virtual town hall meetings and group sessions related to business support. They have donated 15 meals per day, in collaboration with Assembly Row restaurants and Crenshaw Construction, to Somerville Homeless Coalition and will continue to do so until May 1st. Every Friday, Mike's Pastry is delivering pastries to frontline workers. Federal Realty has also provided the KMart space for the Batelle operations that were brought to Somerville in partnership with Partners Healthcare and the City of Somerville. The location is used to decontaminate personal protection equipment (PPE). This is one of four locations in the U.S.

**6. Public Comment Period - None**

**7. Other Business Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair**

Next Meeting Date – May 20, 2020 – Virtual Meeting

**8. Adjournment**

- Roll Call Vote – Motion by Iwona Bonney

Ben Ewen – Campen, Yes

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes.