



SOMERVILLE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MEETING MINUTES

Location: Virtual meeting via Zoom Webinar

Date: March 12th, 2024

Time: The Chair convened the meeting at 5:31pm.

Meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/EyU39KFljVM>

ATTENDANCE:

SRA Members Present: Philip Ercolini (Chair), Iwona Bonney (Secretary), Ben Ewen-Campen (Councilor), Christine Stone, Patrick McCormick, William Gage.

(Iwona Bonney joined at 5:40 due to technical difficulties, and thus missed the roll call vote and first vote on Item 1.)

SRA Members Absent: None.

Staff Present: Rachel Nadkarni (Director of Economic Development), Catherine Lester Salchert (Special Counsel), Ted Fields (Senior Economic Development Planner), Ben Demers (Economic Development Planner).

AGENDA ITEMS:

Staff presented virtual meeting house rules to the Board.

1: Approval of minutes for the February 21st general meeting.

No edits were suggested.

W. Gage moved to approve the minutes as amended. Seconded by P. McCormick. Approved 5-0-0 (Yes-No-Abstain) by roll call vote.

2: Public Comment:

No public comment was made.

3. Union Square Revitalization Plan (USRP) – Presentation from Union Square Station Associates (US2) on implementation of the USRP.

Greg Karczewski, President of Union Square Station Associates (US2), joined the SRA to present on the implementation of the Union Square Revitalization Plan (USRP). This is one of the active urban renewal plans that the SRA oversees. US2 serves as the Master Developer of the USRP, and was selected in this role by the SRA in 2014 through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process.

G. Karczewski began with an update on overall progress across the master project, which covers 15 acres and 2.4M square feet (sf) of development. US2 is currently focused on several key disposition parcels (or “D” parcels), which are the parcels included in the USRP to be redeveloped. The current



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parcels of focus are:

- D2 (nearly complete),
- D3.1 (working towards building permit), and
- D4.3 (moving forward after amending the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) with the Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC)).

G. Karczewski then walked through progress on the D2 parcel specifically. This parcel is made up of a life sciences building at 10 Prospect (formerly D2.1 in the USRP), and then a 450-unit apartment building at 20-50 Prospect (formerly D2.2/D2.3 in the USRP). This project was part of the first phase intentionally since it offers an opportunity to connect the new Green Line station with the rest of Union Square. G. Karczewski expressed that D2 also helps the City meet the goals of SomerVision, including new infrastructure, new housing units, and new jobs.

10 Prospect received its first Certificate of Occupancy (CO) in late summer 2023, and US2 is working towards a final CO shortly by completing final conditions. Once these conditions are complete and a final CO is received, US2 will return to the SRA to request a Certificate of Compliance (COC), which is referenced in the main agreement between US2 and the SRA, called the Master Land Disposition Agreement (MLDA). US2 is also working to lease the building, though the life sciences market is currently slow. He also reiterated that one of the broader goals of the USRP is to create an urban employment center, and US2 wants to ensure that there is space to start, grow, and stay in the neighborhood. To support this, US2 is providing amenities on the ground floor, convening space on the top floor, two floors of 10-15k sf lab suites for early-stage companies, and three floors of flexible entrepreneur spaces. US2 has also moved their offices into 10 Prospect from their old location at 31 Union Square.

20-50 Prospect has received COs for the majority of floors except for the top few floors of 50 Prospect, which is the residential tower building directly north of the Union Square Green Line Station. 20-50 Prospect contains 450 units, 20% of which are deed-restricted affordable; 250 of those units were occupied as of the presentation, with 81 out of the 90 affordable units being occupied. The common space of the building also features art by a local artist, Susan Berstler. Lastly, Life Alive Café is working towards opening a location in one of the ground floor retail spaces of the building.

G. Karczewski also reviewed the spaces around the D2 buildings. US2 created a plaza to the west of 20-50 Prospect called Union Square Station Plaza, which had been approved for ~16,000 sf but was ultimately built closer to 19,000 sf. The space was designed by Ground Inc. a Union Square female-owned business. The plaza creates a connection between the center of Union Square and the Union Square Green Line Station, 600 linear feet of seating, and brackets for public art to be installed. The plaza is also made up of 70% permeable surfaces to help with drainage.

G. Karczewski then reviewed the three thoroughfares on the lot: Milk Alley, Charlestown Place, and Bennett Court. Construction of these spaces is all complete.

US2 has also completed their work to support the MBTA station. This includes the MBTA operators break room (since this is an end-of-the-line station), a Ride drop off area, a green space, and a Blue Bike station directly next to the station to make it more multi-modal.

Lastly, G. Karczewski updated the SRA about work towards the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)



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between US2 and USMC. US2 hosted the third annual holiday give to gather resources for the Somerville Homeless Coalition. They are also working with the SAC on a public art exhibit and are moving forward with an affordable housing project on D4.3. US2 made a 155k payment to USNC this past year, which brought the total payment amount across the life of the CBA to \$777,000. US2 have also participated in Union Square Main Street's Keeping Small Strong campaign to support local small businesses.

G. Karczewski took questions from SRA members.

W. Gage thanked US2 for the presentation.

B. Ewen-Campen asked what the next step is for the D4.3 affordable housing project now that the zoning issue is behind everyone. G. Karczewski answered that the next step is to acquire the properties that make up D4.3, which have two owners. US2 has also been talking to staff about streetscape work as well as MassDOT work on the Webster Street Bridge, which both influence the makeup of the D4.3 parcel. US2 is also going to be working closely with Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH) and Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) to deliver the project, so have started to meet more regularly with those organizations.

4. Eversource easement request for Parcel 96-A-43.

B. Demers gave a presentation to give context to the item. He explained that Eversource is requesting an access easement from the SRA through a portion of Parcel 96-A-43 (and subparcel 96-A-44), which the SRA owns. This is a thin parcel in Boynton Yards that runs along 600 Windsor and Windsor Place, and then wraps around to Windsor Street in two sublots. The requested easement will allow Eversource to install underground transmission lines across the parcel, which will allow these lines to be brought from north of the MBTA Green Line track further into Boynton Yards. A memo explaining this context was shared with SRA members ahead of time, along with a draft easement.

The specific easement language was still being finalized by Eversource and City staff, but a vote was requested at this meeting on whether to grant the general easement being defined by staff, which would allow the work to move forward once language was finalized. The next step would be for staff to finish documentation, and then the Chair of the SRA would need to sign a copy of the easement on behalf of the SRA and the secretary would need to sign a certified copy of the vote that would be attached to the easement.

B. Demers also noted that at the last meeting of the SRA, staff had identified this parcel as one that they may request the SRA to transfer to City ownership to help facilitate these kinds of infrastructure requests in Boynton Yards as the neighborhood further develops. Staff were not ready to move forward with that request for a transfer at this meeting, but if in the future the SRA does transfer this land to the City, City staff do not foresee an issue with the easement being in place.

Keenan Brinn from Eversource joined the meeting to provide additional context. Eversource is attempting to construct a transmission line from the substation on Prospect Street to Kendall Square in Cambridge. The route for this substation involves crossing US2 property (the D2 parcel, previously discussed), Charlestown Street, the MBTA tracks, 600 Windsor Place, and then the SRA-owned parcels. It would then continue across Windsor Street towards Cambridge.



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W. Gage asked if the City or SRA is being reimbursed for the easement. K. Brinn noted that they have not discussed any monies at this point. W. Gage noted that his issue with the project is not about this easement but is instead about the substation in Union Square that will not be enclosed to mitigate the effects of electromagnetic fields with so much housing being built nearby. He noted that Eversource is spending hundreds of millions of dollars to put the substation in Kendall Square underground, and that this consideration is not being matched in Union Square. K. Brinn answered that this is beyond his area of expertise, and he is here purely to secure the easement in Boynton Yards. W. Gage noted he would vote against any easement until the substation issue was addressed.

C. Stone asked how deep underground these lines would be placed. K. Brinn answered that they would likely be about four feet below the surface, in a vault. C. Stone also asked how many land owners Eversource needs to get easements from. K. Brinn answered that most of the work is being done through City streets, rather than other landowners.

P. Ercolini asked if the wall being used to shield the substation was purely aesthetic, and why they were not building a building around the station. B. Ewen-Campen noted that he was the ward councilor who oversaw the meetings about this station (which were required for Eversource to receive special permits from the City), so he provided additional context. He stressed that there was interest in not having a rusty substation so close to the heart of Union Square and most people wanted it removed altogether, but that option was not on the table. A lot of conversation was around needing to meet the growing demands of the grid, and many people were aligned in the need to expand the grid to move away from fossil fuels. There was also concern about Eversource encroaching on the MBTA right of way which would preclude a future Green Line expansion to Porter Square, but the work did not end up encroaching further on the right of way. Lastly, there were also aesthetic concerns for the structure, especially given Eversource's insufficient maintenance of the station. The City went through a year of community process and multiple design rounds, and consensus was reached that a building around the station was technically impossible because of underground infrastructure nearby. The design that ultimately succeeded was to not try to hide the substation, and to instead put up aesthetically pleasing fencing and lighting.

B. Ewen-Campen also noted that he is not aware of any mainstream scientific concerns with electromagnetic waves near a substation like this, and that he was supportive of this easement.

B. Ewen-Campen moved to make a motion and I. Bonney seconded for the following:

To approve an Easement consisting of approximately 188 square feet in favor of NSTAR Electric Company DBA Eversource on and within certain parcels of land owned by the SRA adjacent to Windsor Street and Windsor Place in order to construct conduits for electric service to be provided to an adjacent parcel known and numbered as 600 Windsor Street owned by Union Square RELP 600 Windsor Owner LLC as shown on the Plan for the same and;

To authorize Phil Ercolini, Chair, to execute said Easement on behalf of the SRA.

Approved 5-1-0 by roll call vote.

5. 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan (DPP) – Executive session to discuss the status of litigation, *Cobble Hill Center LLC v. Somerville Redevelopment Authority*.



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P. McCormick made a motion to move into executive session. Seconded by C. Stone. Approved 6-0-0 by roll call vote.

SRA board members returned from executive session to the open session at 6:35pm.

6. Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan (WHURP) – Update on 299 Broadway project proposal.

B. Demers gave an update regarding the development at 299 Broadway, which is located within the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan (WHURP) area.

For context: The WHURP is one of the active urban renewal plans that the SRA manages. Rather than the SRA using eminent domain and choosing a development partner through a Request for Proposals (RFP), as is common with urban renewal, the goals of the plan are currently being met through private development. The developer in this case is a partnership between a for-profit developer, Mark Development, and two affordable housing developers, Beacon Communities and RISE Together. This team received their approvals from the Somerville Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) in February 2023 and then purchased the site this past October. The design included 288 units spread across two buildings, 132 of which would be deed restricted affordable.

B. Demers explained that, given the high costs that many development teams are facing, the project team has needed to make some changes and are planning to return to the ZBA to request an amendment to their approvals. The changes will increase the number of overall units by 28, which the team will achieve by lessening the setbacks on the north side of the 5th and 6th stories and changing the internal unit mix. Staff do not believe that this negatively impacts how the project is helping to achieve the goals of the urban renewal plan. The next ZBA meeting on this project will be on Wednesday, March 20th. At that time, the ZBA will determine whether they believe these are substantial or insubstantial changes to the project, which will trigger whether they decide to host a public hearing on the topic in another month. Staff will keep the SRA informed as this process progresses, but as much as possible staff are encouraging members of the public to follow the ZBA process to simplify engagement. Staff were also planning to give this update at the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting on Thursday, March 14th, which the development team would attend to give a short presentation on project changes and answer any questions ahead of the ZBA process.

P. Ercolini asked if the 288 units referenced were in addition to the 28 additional units that the development team was requesting. B. Demers confirmed that the original approvals allowed 288 units, to which 28 units were now being added. P. Ercolini asked if this is a combination of market rate and affordable units. B. Demers answered that this was his understanding, yes, but that more detail would be given at the ZBA presentation.

C. Stone asked how those additional 28 units were being achieved and how the unit mix was changing. B. Demers explained that he did not have an accurate count of the new unit mix on hand, but this level of detail would be provided at the ZBA. C. Stone's concern is about losing family units in the building to allow for more small units that can achieve higher rents per square foot.

P. Ercolini asked if there are state affordable housing funds in this project. R. Nadkarni answered that they would be returning to the State, but this should not create additional issues. There may



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also be new state funding sources becoming available. B. Demers added that the number of units they want to add would be within the bounds of their State approvals, which require the project to not change the number of units by a certain percentage of the original approvals.

7. Announcement of upcoming Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) meeting on Thursday, March 28th, 2024.

As requested at the previous SRA meeting, staff updated SRA board members that the next meeting of the Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels Civic Advisory Committee will be Thursday, March 28th, from 5:30-7pm, virtually. Staff will provide this information by email. SRA members had asked for this information in case they wanted to come to the CAC meeting to express to members that SRA members see urban renewal as a last resort option.

C. Stone asked if SRA members would attend as presenters or as members of the audience. Staff noted that either would be possible. P. Ercolini also asked if there were ex parte issues with an SRA member presenting to the CAC on behalf of the larger body, since there would not be a quorum. C. Salchert felt that one person could be designated to make a statement and answer questions, but could not go beyond that. Staff will investigate this. P. McCormick asked what consensus there is to speak on this. He would like to be on the CAC agenda but would only say that he is there to listen, and that urban renewal is a last resort tool and that the preference is generally for private development to achieve neighborhood goals. He does not want the SRA to prematurely step in.

P. Ercolini asked if anything would stop someone from the CAC from attending the SRA meeting. B. Demers noted that this communication is generally handled as a letter from the CAC to the SRA so that they can achieve consensus and note areas where consensus was not reached. The CAC has already been considering whether to summarize their thoughts in a letter. This is the main way that discourse between the bodies has been achieved in the past.

B. Ewen-Campen felt comfortable with the way that P. McCormick summarized the issue. He felt that an SRA members' presence at the CAC meeting would help to demystify who serves on the SRA. However, he does not want anyone to overly imply a consensus from the SRA on an item that has not been substantively discussed.

8. 2023 SRA Annual Report review.

a. Discussion of annual report.

B. Demers gave a presentation on the SRA's 2023 Annual Report. All redevelopment authorities in Massachusetts are required to submit these reports annually to both the Mayor's office of their City and to the State's Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (formerly the Department of Housing and Community Development). These reports review projects and any relevant administrative or financial information about the Authority. B. Demers walked through the sections of the report. Staff focused on making the report more accessible to someone with very little existing understanding of urban renewal. A published version of the report will be added to the SRA's page on the City's website.



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W. Gage commented that the report is excellent.

C. Stone provided two comments for edits. Staff will incorporate these edits prior to submitting to the State and Mayor.

b. Request for vote to approve and send the 2023 Annual Report to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

I. Bonney made a motion to approve the report and submit it to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Livable Communities and to the Mayor of Somerville. Seconded by W. Gage. Approved 6-0-0 by roll call vote.

9. Update regarding recruitment for vacant SRA position.

B. Demers provided an update to the SRA regarding recruitment for the vacant SRA position. When fully staffed, the SRA has seven board members, and one position is currently open. Staff are therefore opening a call for recruitment. The City's Communications and SOIA teams have just finished their work on the call, which will go out this week and will close on April 15th. Staff will share materials with SRA members to also share within their networks.

10. Items not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.

No items were brought forward.

11. Next meeting: Tuesday, April 9th, 2024.

No conflicts with this date were noted.

Adjournment:

I. Bonney moved to adjourn at 7:12pm. Seconded by P. McCormick. Approved 6-0-0 by roll call vote.