

Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan Civic Advisory Committee

Date & Time: June 13th, 2024

This public meeting of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan Civic Advisory Committee was conducted via remote participation. We will post an audio recording, audio-video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of these proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting on the project website: <https://voice.somervillema.gov/gilman-square-plan-implementation>.

The meeting was held using Zoom Webinar. A recording of the meeting can be found here: <https://youtu.be/iG6ztX0drNg>

Meeting notes

1. Roll call and approval of previous meeting summary.

The meeting began at 5:39pm.

Roll call vote:

- CAC members present: Breck Bailey, Councilor Jesse Clingan
- CAC members absent: Will Colan, Edith Kwok, Councilor Jake Wilson
- Staff present: Ben Demers (Senior Planner, Economic Development)

Members approved the May 9th, 2024, meeting summary.

2. Discussion of the community room at 299 Broadway.

Staff reviewed that the development at 299 Broadway will include approximately 3,000 square feet of “community space,” as described in its decision from the Zoning Board of Appeals. The space will be located on the first floor of the northeast corner of Building A, which is the building where all units will be income-restricted.

Staff explained that “community space” is a broad category that often refers to space for general assembly, such as a community meeting. Staff have also identified a need for space for early childhood community programming in particular in this area, such as:

- Multilingual playgroups and parent support groups run by the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative and SomerPromise;
- Home visiting programs including Early Head Start, Early Intervention, ParentChild+, and SomerBaby, for families that are housing insecure;
- Parent/Infant Yoga, Family Art Classes, and Mobile Libraries run by the City’s Library and Recreation departments.

Staff expressed that they would like to work with the development team to explore a space flexible enough for both general assembly and early childhood programming needs, and asked for CAC member responses to this consideration.

A CAC member agreed that educational or wellness community uses would be a good use of the space, and stressed the need for multilingual programs. They would also like to see other community programs like career fairs.

Several CAC members noted that they want to make sure that a room is not vacant twenty-three hours of the day.

A CAC member noted that they want to make sure that the space is not fully taken up by family-oriented programs, so people do not feel excluded.

A CAC member asked who would hold the key to the room and approve programming. Staff noted that this is something they are currently discussing internally for any community space being created by private development. A CAC member noted that it would be useful to have a lockbox where someone could pick up the key.

3. Note on CAC recruitment.

Staff updated CAC members that the application period to join the CAC closed at the end of May. Staff received 11 applications and will be interviewing applicants within the next couple months to add new members.

4. Updates from CAC members regarding community perceptions of 299 Broadway.

A CAC member asked if the development is still moving forward as planned. Staff explained that the development team is putting together their final design drawings, which is why we are currently discussing community space programming so that the design is flexible enough to allow for various uses. These designs will then be used to get an updated pricing for the project. The development team has not informed staff of any setbacks in the timeline, which is to demolish the existing structures this Fall and then start development in Spring 2025.

A CAC member noted they were disappointed that the space would be used for staging for the Somerville Housing Authority project (as explained at the May 9th CAC meeting), and is worried that the development team will not be able to demolish around the staged units. Staff explained that the staged units would be removed by July, so their storage will not impact the demolition timeline. Agreements for temporary uses of the site have ensured that any use will not continue past a point that it would impact the development timeline. Staff also noted that this storage will not preclude the development team from hosting an event later in the summer to inform people about what is happening in the project.

A CAC member stressed that demolition of the existing Star Market will cause people to tune into the project, so the development team should ensure everything is in order at that point.

5. Public comment period.

Mary Mangan expressed that she supported a multifunctional community room. She also expressed that it is not clear when activity will start for the project, and that if something is stored temporarily at the site, people will have questions and will assume it is a permanent part of the project.

6. Meeting adjournment

CAC members decided to not meet in July. Staff will check in with CAC members in early August to see if they would like to meet in August. Otherwise CAC members will wait to meet until September.

The meeting adjourned at 6:15pm.