

Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels

Civic Advisory Committee

Date & Time: Thursday, September 26th, 2024, from 5:30-7pm

This public meeting of the Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels 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 as a Zoom Webinar.

Meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/gw3W9n7h668>

Meeting notes

1. Roll call and approval of previous meeting summaries.

Ben Demers, a Senior Economic Development Planner for the City of Somerville, welcomed attendees to the meeting at 5:35pm.

Roll call:

- In attendance: Diana Marsh, Jennifer Koerber, Ben Elgart, Michelle Machado Moreira, Councilor Jesse Clingan.
- Not in attendance: Ram Kelath, Jack Lister, Melinda Coneys, Jamie Cragnoline, Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen.

CAC members did not have any edits regarding the meeting summary for the previous meeting on August 29, 2024. CAC members voted to approve the meeting summary so staff could post it online.

2. First public comment period.

No public comment was made.

3. Update on temporary activation of City-owned land in Gilman Square.

Staff provided an update on Gilman Pop-Up, which is a temporary public activation of a portion of 350 Medford Street created by the City in partnership with a local placemaking and design firm, CultureHouse. CultureHouse's on-site management of the Pop-Up and support for programming ended

on September 8th, since the project's funding requires their work to be completed by the end of September and they need time for closing elements. The site, however, will remain publicly accessible until a direction for redevelopment is determined or maintenance factors cause it to close, and will still feature artwork, hammocks, furniture, and some shade coverage. Because of the funding constraints, rented infrastructure on the site (the scaffolding structure, bathrooms, and generator) needed to be removed. CultureHouse is working on a final report that summarizes their learnings from the project and recommendations for both (1) future development in Gilman Square and (2) temporary activations of City-owned sites, since this is the first temporary activation of its kind that the City has managed. Staff expressed appreciation to CultureHouse for overcoming obstacles on the project in a short time frame.

Rishika Dhawan, Senior Community Manager at CultureHouse, joined the meeting to provide a final presentation on Gilman Pop-up for CAC members. This presentation included an overview of how the space was designed, a summary of events that were hosted, challenges the CultureHouse and City teams faced, and the learnings and recommendations that will include in the final report. Recommendations for future work/development in Gilman Square included community spaces, low-cost restaurants, public restrooms, and public art, amongst others.

CAC members expressed thanks to CultureHouse's staff for creating and managing the space.

A CAC member expressed that they appreciated CultureHouse's recommendation for interesting design elements that allow for exploration, like walking paths and hammocks.

A CAC member asked if CultureHouse can provide more detail in the report about the type of retail that people enjoyed at the site, as well as about the types of space needs that users expressed.

A CAC member noted that CultureHouse's observations rang true with other observations that the CAC has collected previously through community engagement.

A CAC member concurred that development will need to work to not create a wind tunnel down at the site.

A CAC member reaffirmed that future development should have food options.

Staff noted that CAC members can reach out to them if they notice any issues with the site.

R. Dhawan left the meeting.

4. Drafting of letter to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority regarding urban renewal.

CAC members and staff continued to edit the letter that staff had drafted for CAC members to send to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) expressing interest in exploring urban renewal in Gilman

Square. Staff had made edits before the meeting based on feedback at the August meeting. CAC members affirmed these edits, and recommended several more.

Because fewer CAC members were in attendance than expected, CAC members and staff talked through how to ensure buy-in from the full CAC. Because more CAC members were present at the previous meeting and had given general approval, CAC members felt comfortable with staff sharing the letter a final time over email to solicit edits, with the intention of incorporating those edits offline and sending the letter to the SRA. If staff receive substantive edits over email, however, they will wait to send the letter until another CAC meeting can be hosted to discuss the edits.

5. Neighborhood updates from CAC members.

Staff noted that the City's Mobility Division will be hosting a community meeting on October 9th regarding streetscape improvements along Pearl Street West.

6. Second public comment period.

No public comment was made.

7. Meeting adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at 6:46pm.