



SOMERVILLE REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

MEETING MINUTES

Location: Virtual meeting via Zoom Webinar

Date: Tuesday, November 12th, 2024

Time: The Chair convened the meeting at 5:33pm.

Meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/pH0H7wdIEqs>

ATTENDANCE:

SRA Members Present: Philip Ercolini (Chair), Iwona Bonney (Secretary), Patrick McCormick, Courtney Brunson, William Gage.

SRA Members Absent: Ben Ewen-Campen (City Councilor), Christine Stone.

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

AGENDA ITEMS:

Staff presented virtual meeting house rules to the Board.

1. Approval of the October 7th general meeting and October 23rd and November 1st special meeting minutes.

P. McCormick asked that the start time of the meeting in the November 1st meeting minutes be changed from AM to PM.

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

2. Public comment period.

No public comment was made.

3. Considerations of urban renewal in Gilman Square.

a. Staff introduction.

Ahead of the meeting, staff shared a letter with SRA members that was addressed to them from the Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels Civic Advisory Committee (CAC). This group exists to provide feedback to the SRA on the potential use of urban renewal at 360 Medford Street in Gilman Square, and to the City on the related development of adjacent City-owned land at 350 Medford Street and the triangular green space at the intersection of Medford and Pearl Streets. B. Demers serves as staff support to the CAC in addition to being staff support to the SRA. The letter can be found here:



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<https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/2024-11/Gilman-Square-CAC-LetterToSRA-2024.11.06-Final.pdf>

Staff gave a presentation summarizing the content of the letter. This included the history of planning work in Gilman Square and the history of the specific work of the CAC. The letter also includes two options for potentially acquiring 360 Medford Street through either (1) urban renewal or (2) incentives to purchase the parcel that could be included in a Request for Proposals (RFP) when the City is ready to redevelop 350 Medford Street. CAC members were seeking SRA consideration of moving forward in the process of urban renewal rather than waiting to consider this question until the City is ready to move forward with development of its land.

b. Letter from the Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels Civic Advisory Committee.

The Chair opened the item to discussion from SRA members.

P. McCormick asked if staff had engaged with the owner of 360 Medford Street. Staff responded that they have had some conversations with the owner and he had expressed interest in selling, but he has been waiting to see next steps from the City that are still being determined. The owner has expressed that potential developers have expressed more interest in purchasing the site in conjunction with the City-owned site. Staff reaffirmed that the current owner is able to put forward a development proposal for his own land at any time.

P. McCormick asked if there was a sense of the cost for environmental cleanup of 360 Medford Street, since it is a Mobil gas station. C. Stone had expressed concerns about the SRA taking the site due to potential environmental contamination at a past meeting. Staff confirmed that they do not have a specific cost, but they would determine this cost and any required cleanup work if they were at the point of looking to acquire site control.

W. Gage noted that it would be unlikely that the SRA would take the site since it is a functioning business, and thus it will be difficult to get a determination of the site as blighted, substandard, or decadent. Staff noted that this is something they would look to get more input about in the process of exploring urban renewal. The CAC has functioned on an assumption that the site could potentially qualify for urban renewal since it is not meeting its full economic potential as a gas station next to a transit station. C. Salchert affirmed that it may be difficult to prove eligibility for urban renewal at the site. C. Brunson expressed comfort with this potentially be a substandard lot given the economic goals of the neighborhood but would want to see more investigation.

C. Brunson asked the advantages of using an urban renewal plan that would not be achieved from a City-led RFP. Staff answered that urban renewal provides certainty to the process of an acquisition of 360 Medford Street, since incentives within an RFP process do not provide certainty that a respondent would ultimately purchase the adjacent parcel. Staff added that the heightened interest in joint redevelopment is tied to the extensive infrastructure desires for this area (e.g. accessibility to the MBTA station entrance), which can likely be better achieved through a joint development of the parcels.

C. Brunson asked if there is time sensitivity to move forward now, or if the SRA and staff could wait to revisit these planning questions. Staff noted that there is time pressure from the neighborhood



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and from the owner of 360 Medford Street. However, there are also potential reasons to wait, including the real estate market being more favorable to development and the MBTA potentially being in a better position to collaborate.

P. Ercolini noted that he is sensitive to urban renewal at the moment and suggested that staff pursue alternative planning strategies to achieve neighborhood goals at this site. Several other SRA members agreed that pursuing urban renewal at this time may be aggressive. They expressed that they appreciate and understand the desire to move forward from CAC members and the neighborhood, and that the CAC likely wants a straight answer on urban renewal.

A member of the public, Eilish Brown (71 Bow Street), made comment. E. Brown asked if the City could purchase this parcel to transform it into a park to mitigate flooding and sound concerns. Staff responded that the City could take the parcel through eminent domain to turn the site into a park without the use of urban renewal, but previous engagement found that many members of the neighborhood preferred having a civic space further away from the intersection of School and Medford Streets. Staff also affirmed that neighborhood members have expressed other desires for this site beyond flooding mitigation, including an accessible entrance to the MBTA station and more affordable housing and community space.

SRA members affirmed that they are not ready to move forward with urban renewal on this site at this time and encouraged staff to pursue alternative planning strategies. They did not preclude considering urban renewal in Gilman Square in the future.

4. 90 Washington Street Demonstration Project Plan – Executive session to discuss *Cobble Hill Center LLC. v. Somerville Redevelopment Authority*.

P. McCormick moved to enter executive session. Seconded by C. Brunson. Approved 5-0-0 by roll call vote.

SRA members returned to the main session at 7:06pm.

2. Adjournment:

P. McCormick moved to adjourn at 7:07pm. Seconded by C. Brunson. Approved 5-0-0 by roll call vote.