



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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SARAH LEWIS, *SENIOR PLANNER*

MEMBERS PRESENT

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SARAH RADDING
JORDAN SMITH
FRANK VALDES

DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE MINUTES

The City of Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Monday, August 20, 2018, at 6:30 p.m.** in the **Academy Room, Public Safety Building, 220 Washington Street, Somerville, MA**

The purpose of the meeting was to review and make recommendations on the following proposals:

1. **Union Square Parcel D2.1:** Applicant, Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2), is seeking pre-application design review for a Commercial building type.
 - a. **The Project:**
 - i. **Project Description:** Pre-application design review for a Commercial building type.
 - ii. **Applicant:** Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2)
 - iii. **Project Team:** John
 - iv. **Project Highlights by the Project Team:**
 1. Neighborhood meeting showed massing studies. Inspired by area's history of "sand pit" square for making bricks and glass.
 2. While this is a commercial building, still needs to relate well to the residential buildings.
 3. Corner steps back at ground level and is articulated to emphasize existing Union Square.
 4. Arrival court provides secondary entry.
 5. Storefront as frames to breakdown building scale and overhang intended to frame longer views.
 6. Materials that were relevant during late 1800s when Union Square was active but with modern interpretations – e.g., brick, glass, metal paneled and/or fluted. Opportunity for rich detail and depth in façade.
 7. Mechanical penthouses step back to minimize visual impact from street level especially at both Square and Plaza. More transparency at the corner with open terrace at top.

2. **Union Square Parcel D2.2:** Applicant, Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2), is seeking pre-application design review for a General building type.

a. **The Project:**

- i. **Project Description:** Pre-application design review for a General building type.
- ii. **Applicant:** Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2)
- iii. **Project Team:** Eric
- iv. **Project Highlights by the Project Team:**
 1. Important to create porosity for activity.
 2. Larger arrival court is a shared co-planar space, woonerf, and minimized private space.
 3. Step back and down at rear to be more respectful of pine grain and intimate scale of Allen St.
 4. Residential part is stacked like Somerville residential (e.g., triple deckers) and while 6 story is articulated to appear as only 4.

3. **Union Square Parcel D2.3:** Applicant, Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2), is seeking pre-application design review for a Podium Tower building type.

a. **The Project:**

- i. **Project Description:** Pre-application design review for a Podium Tower building type.
- ii. **Applicant:** Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2)
- iii. **Project Team:** Eric
- iv. **Project Highlights by the Project Team:**
 1. Larger ground floor public realm than previously shown. Building has shrunk and tower is lower.
 2. Cultural landmark as well as physical.
 3. 600' between T and the Square.
 4. Interlocking puzzle pieces to vary street front – no monotonous even “base,” also steps in and out. Varied architectural styles and colors to create a tapestry of diversity and a contemporary interpretation of base/middle/top

4. **Union Square Civic Space:** Applicant, Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2), is seeking pre-application design review for a Plaza civic space type.

a. **The Project:**

- i. **Project Description:** Pre-application design review for a Plaza civic space type.
- ii. **Applicant:** Union Square Station Associates, LLC (US2)
- iii. **Project Team:** Shauna
- iv. **Project Highlights by the Project Team:**
 1. Civic space was previously trying to maintain Prospect St. grades. Flat plaza at station grade for ADA and visual connections. Grade change between Prospect St and plaza provides opportunity for green buffer.
 2. Miller’s River as a concept of flow mixed with the history of the area and allows for edges and pockets of activity.
 3. Shared entry court between the two buildings.

b. **DRC Comments (on D2.1, D2.2, D2.3, and civic space):**

i. **Circulation:**

1. Circulation to T from the south (Boynton Yards) needs more attention. Providing an elevator near the transformer vault would improve this.
2. The back of the lot needs more development with respect to circulation and the connection to the adjacent neighborhood.
3. **Provide renderings** showing views of the development from Target, Boynton Yards, Cambridge.

ii. **Woonerf and alley:**

1. Woonerf is an improvement over the earlier alley between buildings.
2. **Woonerf must be designed** as a shared street rather than a minor service way – needs to consider bikes and pedestrians.
3. Bus access likely to be from alley which will further burden this route.
4. Relationship of bike parking/storage to alley bike route seems inconvenient.

iii. **Edges:**

1. The eastern edge of the site is viewed from peoples' backyards and rendering shows a chain-link fence – must be mitigated to not be just “a back” – consider dimensions and buffers.
2. River concept and buffer plantings are attractive. Concept gets lost at northern end – should carry through to Somerville Ave.
3. North end of plaza at D2.1 feels like a pinch point that could open up.
4. Civic space area has increased since Neighborhood Meeting but storefront zone is not truly “civic” right along the buildings.

iv. **Bike Storage:**

1. Bike storage risks being an eye sore. A similar structure in Davis Sq is rarely used. This will be the termination of the plaza and it **should be designed so it is attractive.**

v. **Buildings:**

1. Heading in a good direction with materiality and details.
2. Lab building has a 40' tall penthouse so needs more than just the setback and metal panel cladding. **Consider its articulation and the view from Prospect Hill.** Is it an art opportunity? Something that changes? Enclosing most rooftop mechanical equipment in a penthouse is preferred.
3. Consider pushing D2.1 façade away from street edge at its southern corner. Check views into US plaza from this location.
4. The low-rise residential bar improves the development's relationship to the adjacent neighborhood.

c. **Public Comments:**

i. **Green space:**

1. Strip of green on Prospect says “sit in traffic”; want more green space in back like USNC.
2. Left over dog park space
3. D2 is only block large enough for high quality park. Want space in middle of block.
4. Air pollution should move open space to rear.
5. Green walls throughout.

ii. **Civic space:**

1. This plaza is not a high quality public space. Prospect will be bumper to bumper and particulate matter is still being studied. Should be at interior of block – disappointed; this needs to be changed.
2. Don't see anything of Civic Advisory Committee's work included such as a library branch.
3. Wide sidewalk rather than a plaza
4. Effort needs to incorporate neighborhood indoor civic space possibilities – can be shared.
5. Open space is an afterthought.

iii. **Access:**

1. GLX circle should be where platform is located.
2. Handicapped access is insufficient
3. Alley will have conflicts with bike access, cars to garage and trucks to loading docks
4. Maybe the woonerf is a better open protected space.
5. Right hand turn off Prospect at arrival court will be cutting across a heavy pedestrian path.
6. Consider about slippery steps, not thought through enough.

iv. Parking garage:

1. 3 story parking garage is not appropriate backing up to Allen neighborhood
2. Allen St neighborhood needs to be redeveloped if D2 is building a garage wall to neighborhood.
3. Not enough attention to Allen St neighborhood.
4. Need more consideration of garage, should be addressed as 4th building.
5. Underground parking should be used or prove why not possible.

v. Buildings:

1. Tower has no top.
2. Tower looks good.

Other Business

There was no other business

NOTICE: While reasonable efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the data provided in these minutes, do not rely on this information as the complete and accurate portrayal of the events in the meeting without first checking with the Planning Division staff. If any discrepancies exist, the decisions filed by the Board serve as the relevant record for each case. The Planning Division also maintains audio recordings of most Board meetings that are available upon request.