

MINUTES

Somerville Redevelopment Authority

Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.

(Virtual Meeting)

Software: GotoWebinar

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone's Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority was conducted via remote participation.

Present from the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA): Phil Ercolini (Chair), William Gage, Iwona Bonney, Ben Ewen-Campen, Patrick McCormick, and Emily Hedeman. Also present were Eileen McGettigan as Special Counsel, Tom Galligani as Director of Economic Development, and Sunayana Thomas as Senior Economic Development Planner and staff to the SRA.

Phil Ercolini, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:32 PM. Open session commenced. A quorum was present. This meeting was audio recorded.

Documents and Other Exhibits Used at the Meeting

- i. Draft November 18, 2020 Minutes
- ii. Draft December 16, 2020 Minutes
- iii. MBTA-SRA Air Rights Letter Agreement

Discussion and Actions Taken

1. Approval of November 18, 2020 Minutes:

- No Comments
- Motion to Approve by William Gage, seconded by Iwona Bonney.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen-Campen, Yes

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes

2. Approval of December 16, 2020 Minutes:

- No Comments
- Motion to Approve by Emily Hedeman, seconded by Iwona Bonney.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen-Campen, Yes

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes

3. Union Square Update

Ms. McGettigan provided the Union Square update.

The closing on D2 between the City and US2 is complete and US2 is now the owner of the site as of January 1, 2021. One remaining item is a request from the MBTA. Part of the original Memorandum of Agreement between the City and MBTA provided that the City or the SRA would retain the air rights over the railroad right-of-way to bridge over the tracks in the future. The air rights were conveyed to the SRA in the deed but the MBTA wants a letter to confirm that the MBTA will review any future development plans, minimize disruption in the railroad right-of-way and require the SRA to confirm that the MBTA satisfied its obligations under the deed.

Vote: Authorize execution of MBTA air rights letter agreement

Motion to Approve by Ben Ewen-Campen, seconded by Patrick McCormick.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen-Campen, Yes

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes

4. Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan

Update provided by Tom Galligani and George Proakis.

The Housing and Community Development Committee of the City Council continues to deliberate on the approval of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan (“Plan”). The Housing and Community Development Committee is requesting an MOU with the SRA regarding the implementation of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan before the Committee will vote to approve the Plan. The Council would like to review and approve any developer RFP before it is released and be part of the selection of the developer. The 90 Washington project is the only project that the SRA has done an MOU with the City Council due to the nature of the project as a Demonstration Plan Project with both a public and private purpose. The current members of the Council have concerns regarding the SRA and its past selection processes like Union Square and have requested the SRA to include the Council in its implementation decisions. The Council await an MOU proposal from that SRA.

Since the Union Square process, there have been significant changes to improve the SRA and City processes. The SRA is an independent board that is required by statute to oversee and implement urban renewal plans. In an effort to create a better line of communication, the Council, by Home Rule petition, created a position on the board for a member of the City Council to represent the Council and its interests.

The Winter Hill Urban Renewal plan is well supported by the community. The plan outlines a process that includes members of the neighborhood and other stakeholders to implement the plan and assist with the developer selections through an advisory committee process.

Mr. Ewen-Campen explained that the Council’s request is directly resulting from the Union Square process. The Council feels powerless in redevelopment processes that the SRA leads until there is an appropriations request. In urban renewal projects, there will be tension because they are visibly complicated projects and should include the Council and SRA. If the Council is going to face the accountability of it, they want a say in it. The process is complicated, and the general public does not understand it.

Mr. McCormick expressed that while Mr. Ewen-Campen is a member of the Council, the intent of his role on the SRA is to be a representative for the Council. He stressed that this role needs to be clarified to the Council. While the position is not intended to represent every Council member, but the entity in general, it was created to build trust between the organizations, relay concerns, information and as a conduit. If the Council wants more, it means that this position is not working.

Mr. Ewen-Campen explained that representing all of the Council members is difficult because there are items they do not agree on. He is trying to represent the honest will of the board and didn't see this request coming; however, it's clear that the City Council wants a level of agreement similar to 90 Washington.

Mr. Gage requested a clarification to Mr. Ewen-Campen and counsel McGettigan on the Council's request; an MOU and/or veto power on the developer selection?

Mr. Ewen-Campen encouraged the SRA to review the recording of the last City Council meeting and explained that the Council would like to have an equal vote on the selection of a developer and the negotiation for a Master Land Disposition Agreement (MLDA).

Ms. McGettigan explained that the Council is requesting veto power over the selection of a developer and the terms of an MLDA. Counsel wrote an MOU for 90 Washington Street because it was a partnership between the SRA and the Council because part of the property was for a public safety building and part for private redevelopment. It was also a demonstration project which is a completely outside the regulatory framework of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). Normally, under an urban renewal plan, the SRA is under the oversight of DHCD. Under an urban renewal plan, if SRA takes an acquisition parcel, disposes of a parcel, or executes a land disposition agreement, it is reviewed and approved by DHCD. The Winter Hill Plan is a urban renewal project so it is under the regulatory framework of DHCD.

Ms. McGettigan noted that the SRA is an independent board, created by the Council in 1956. However, once having delegated its powers to the SRA, the Council is not able to dissolve the SRA as has been raised recently by Council members. The SRA would have to vote to dissolve itself. Any powers that the SRA delegated to the City Council, through an MOU, for implementation of an urban renewal plan would diminish the SRA's authority. The question of the powers the SRA chooses to delegate to the Council in an MOU should be considered very carefully because the intent of the existence of the SRA is in question. There could be an MOU with some mandatory Council participation or sharing but which gives no veto power abilities to the Council. Ben Ewen-Campen was intended to be the conduit to share those powers. The Winter Hill Plan process has been completely different than the Union Square process with overwhelming neighborhood support for urban renewal.

Ms. Hedeman echoed the comments of Mr. McCormick and added that the fate of Winter Hill should be with a theoretical community group to vet the process and the developer which may not be possible but whoever the community chooses should be who the SRA chooses.

Mr. Gage asked counsel if there is a way to include the Council in the vetting process for a developer selection and can provide a recommendation but it is up to the SRA to make the decision.

Mr. McCormick asked whether there are other communities that have made a move to dissolve their redevelopment authorities or are sharing their powers equally with the legislative body.

Mr. Ercolini echoed similar comments to his colleagues and questioned the issues that are being raised by the Council. He explained that this board has only shown exemplary efforts for transparency and inclusion for redevelopment efforts since the Union Square process. The board thought Mr. Ewen-Campen would represent both his Ward 3 constituents and convey the general consensus of the Council. The Council position on the SRA bears more discussion and clarification.

Mr. McCormick explained that he was a vocal Union Square Civic Advisory Committee member, helped set up the Union Square Neighborhood Council, LOCUS process and a critic of the SRA during the Union Square process. He joined the SRA because of his interest in reforming the board. He expressed that the board has made significant strides towards inclusion, transparency, accessibility, and opportunities for more public comment. He emphasized that the current board has put significant time and effort to change things and rather than speaking of mistrust, would encourage conversations around focusing on the community and identifying additional steps that can be taken through implementing best practices. Including the Council in the SRA process politicizes the process which he suggested should be avoided because there was also distrust of the Council during the Union Square process. The SRA's goal is to deliver what the community wants.

Mr. Ewen-Campen clarified that there are questions regarding what the plan is for Winter Hill. The Council wants to know what they are approving within the urban renewal plan which hasn't been clear to date. Mr. Ewen-Campen also joined the board because of SRA reform. The goal is to find some creative solution that allows the Council to be involved if they are going to be held responsible for a decision they do not agree with.

Mr. Proakis reminded the board of the Winter Hill challenges and why an urban renewal plan was considered necessary and supported by the community. The development plans for Winter Hill shouldn't deviate from the Neighborhood Plan unless heavily supported by the community. The key issue is to go back to the Council and relay what the SRA is comfortable with on how to proceed with the Winter Hill process.

Mr. McCormick helped to clarify that the board needs to discuss whether the SRA moves forward with no changes, robust advisory role or shared authority. He supports a middle advisory role with the community, an avenue for consolidated input from the Council on

points of the process with a level of commitment from the SRA to discuss any concerns that are raised.

Mr. Gage turned to legal counsel on how to proceed that will achieve a resolution to include the Council while keeping the SRA's role and authority intact.

Ms. McGettigan suggested a possible Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that could address the comments raised by the SRA, a couple of positions for the Council on the community task force or advisory committee, and clarification of the role of the Council representative seat on the SRA.

Mr. Ewen-Campen suggested a sub-quorum of people of the SRA to meet between now and the next SRA meeting with City Council members that are concerned and city staff to come to an agreement.

Mr. Ercolini is interested to know what the Council would like to see in an MOA but would like Ms. McGettigan to translate the discussion to a document like an MOA that can continue the conversations with the Council.

Mr. Proakis emphasized the importance of coming to a resolution with the Council so that it does not delay the approval of the urban renewal plan.

Mr. Ercolini appointed Patrick McCormick and Emily Hedeman as the SRA-Council MOA Subcommittee who will work with SRA Council on a draft MOA proposal.

Ms. McGettigan will work with the subcommittee members to draft a document for the full board to review and approve before the document is transmitted to the Council for discussion.

5. 90 Washington Update

Ms. McGettigan provided the project update.

The court will send out a login a week prior to the SJC oral arguments for 90 Washington and Ms. McGettigan will share it with the board so that members may watch the proceedings.

6. Assembly Square

Ms. Thomas and Mr. Proakis provided the update.

Puma is scheduled to occupy the 455 Grand Union office building in July 2021. CVS is scheduled to open in March/April 2021. A 500 unit apartment building in Block 8 will open in the Fall of 2021. New tenants to open this year in Assembly include Sephora, Sweetgreen, Shake Shack, and Warby Parker.

The commercial portion of the XMBLY project at 5 Middlesex Avenue has been sold to BioMed Realty, one of the largest biotech real estate firms in the country that invests in the life science market.

The Assembly Square Neighborhood Plan update is underway and the design team did a presentation at the end of November that can be viewed on SomerVoice.

7. Public Comment Period – None

8. Other Business Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair

- Ms. Hedeman questioned whether it was a necessary requirement for public commenters to include their address and raised the concern that some may not be inclined to do so due to privacy concerns.
- Ms. Hedeman reminded the board and the public of the SRA annual reports that provides a transparent framework and timeline of the work conducted by the SRA to date.
- The vacant SRA position is still under review by the Appointments Advisory Committee.

9. Adjournment

Next Meeting Date – February 17, 2021 – 5:30pm - Virtual Meeting

Motion to adjourn by Bill Gage, seconded by Patrick McCormick at 6:53 p.m.

Roll Call Vote:

Iwona Bonney, Yes

Ben Ewen-Campen, Yes

Bill Gage, Yes

Emily Hedeman, Yes

Patrick McCormick, Yes

Phil Ercolini, Yes