



May 8, 2026

Somerville Redevelopment Authority and
Somerville City Council

Re: Development of 90 Washington Street

Dear Authority and Council members:

The Somerville Urban Forestry Committee would like to provide some comments on the two proposals received on the recent RFP to redevelop the site. We are particularly concerned with the potential removal of mature pine trees along the existing berm that runs north to south through the site. We ask that, in evaluating the two proposals and working with the chosen developer, you give special consideration to the preservation of these pine trees due to their large size, age, species, and their location in East Somerville.

Urban Forestry Benefits: at large and in East Somerville

Urban trees provide profound benefits to their communities. Trees reduce temperatures and moderate the urban microclimate through shade and evaporative cooling. Trees improve air quality by intercepting and absorbing pollution, and reduce combined sewer overflows by reducing stormwater runoff. In addition to environmental benefits, urban trees have been found to reduce noise, reduce crime, reduce rates of childhood asthma, and generally improve the mental and physical health of people in their community (Urban Forest Management Plan).

East Somerville has the lowest canopy cover of any ward in Somerville, approximately 8%. The current Urban Forestry Master plan prioritizes planting in East Somerville to improve tree canopy equity (Section 1, Urban Forest Management Plan). East Somerville also has the worst air quality in the city ([Patton et al. 2014](#)). Local studies have shown air quality is worst during the winter months ([Padró-Martínez et al. 2012](#)). The pine trees at 90 Washington are particularly valuable for their ability to intercept and absorb air pollution year-round. Pine trees are generally poorly tolerant of salt, making them difficult to grow under many urban conditions.

The pine trees at 90 Washington are extremely valuable for their public health benefits and would be difficult to replace in our urban landscape. The resident group at Cobble Hill apartments has also repeatedly reached out to us to state the value of these trees in their own lives, as a part of their community, and a place to be outdoors and walk with family.

The landscaped berm includes 22 mature pine trees ranging in size from 10-20 inches in trunk diameter. These trees are likely at least 50-75 years old and are larger than the median city-owned tree diameter. Somerville's Tree Preservation Ordinance provides a mechanism for mitigating the harm caused by removing trees, but the reality is that tree canopy is not fungible, and it will take many years for newly planted trees to approach the magnitude of environmental and social benefits provided by the mature trees on the berm.

Recommendations to the Review Committee

We understand the value of a dense, multi-use development at 90 Washington St, and that the landscaped berm in the middle of the proposed site is a challenge for densely developing the site. However, preserving the mature pine trees should be a priority in the redevelopment plans not only for the future residents and businesses onsite, but for their neighbors and community as a whole. This site is an opportunity for the city to demonstrate that creative, transit-oriented infill development in Somerville can also maximize preservation of our limited urban canopy.

We ask that as a part of the RFP review, the Somerville Redevelopment Authority and the City Council:

- Consider prioritizing the preservation of the landscaped berm in choosing a redevelopment partner for 90 Washington St.
- Encourage both applicants to provide a conceptual plan during the Best and Final Offer (BAFO) period that
 - preserves the existing landscaped berm to the maximum extent possible
 - provides total counts of trees to be preserved and trees to be removed as part of development
 - minimizes parking onsite

Specific feedback on Wood Partners Proposal

- Consider increasing building height to reduce the footprint of the buildings, enabling you to preserve more existing green space – particularly the landscaped pine tree berm.
- We support returning the southeast corner of the site to the city for use as green space.
- Consider significantly reducing parking spaces, in keeping with the principles of transit-oriented development; if you keep a parking garage, consider adding a publicly accessible green roof.

Specific feedback on North River Leerink LLC Proposal

- In line with your stated objectives, redesign the buildings to preserve the full landscaped berm and the mature trees, and not just the back part.
- We support the creation of a central green space that would create a green connection via the landscaped berm to the Cobble Hill Apartments Open Space
- We support minimizing parking spaces on site and the proposed use of underground parking

Recommendations following redevelopment partner selection:

We would encourage the city to work with the chosen developer to refine a site design that includes the following:

- Detailed plans for tree protection and preservation during construction along the landscaped berm
- Additional native tree and other plantings to the maximum extent possible
- A building shade study to determine impacts to existing tree survival

Thank you for your service on the Civic Advisory Committee and the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. We recognize and appreciate that the CAC and the City are committed to redeveloping 90 Washington St to maximize community benefits by providing needed housing and business opportunities for the neighborhood. We hope that tree canopy and green space continue to be championed as key community benefits for future residents and current neighbors of the site. We would welcome you at future meetings of the UFC as the selection process continues and the plans evolve.

Sincerely,

The Urban Forestry Committee of Somerville

Leah Grossman and Michael Hendrix, Co-chairs



cc: Somerville Public Comments, Malik Drayton, Benjamin Demers, Steven Nutter, Vanessa Boukili