

**Managing neighborhood change around new transit stops:
community planning over four decades in Somerville, MA**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the way in which local government and community advocacy groups seek to influence the extent and nature of neighborhood change around new transit stops. My interest is in how transit investment can be used to ensure economically prosperous and environmentally sustainable communities while avoiding displacement and exclusion of less wealthy community members. I focus on three mass transit projects in Somerville, MA: the Red Line extension to Davis Square in the early 1980s, the addition of the Orange Line station at Assembly Square in 2014, and the Green Line Extension through central and eastern Somerville that is now under construction. I rely on interviews with key stakeholders involved in these planning processes, a review of planning documents, and attendance at ongoing community meetings. These cases demonstrate the critical importance of cities establishing strong, community-supported visions for neighborhood change before private developers are involved. The greatest opportunities for preserving affordability, locking-in anti-displacement measures, and ensuring development supports a high quality and healthy public realm are early in the process. The Somerville cases also highlight the potential for community planning and advocacy to drive the nature of neighborhood change, as well as the tensions that can arise when diverse local stakeholders with differing priorities and internal conceptions of planning and decision-making seek to influence lengthy and uncertain development processes. I propose a City-led, inclusive, and deliberative process for better managing these tensions in future transformative developments in Somerville.

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¹ Landau, "The Development of Assembly Square"; Savage, "Redevelopment and Smart Growth at Assembly Square"; Shelton, "Assembly Square, the Back Story."

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1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of a new transit line is an extremely rare, potentially one-off, occasion for any city, and particularly so for a neighborhood within a city. Transit projects represent extremely large, lumpy investments beyond the normal financial means of most municipalities. They require the shepherding of substantial financial and political resources from multiple levels of government and, potentially, the private sector. The battle to get any particular transit project built is normally protracted and uncertain. Despite this, more than \$25 billion was spent on new rail transit lines between 1970 and 2000 in 14 major US cities.² Following negligible investment since the 1920s, this transit boom was primarily a result of a successful campaign by transit advocates in the 1970s to dramatically increase federal funding that had previously been restricted to highway construction.³

We have many reasons to think that the expansion of transit networks is a good thing. Improved mass transit infrastructure is widely believed to produce significant benefits, especially when decision-makers integrate planning for transit provision and land use in order to maximize synergistic benefits.⁴ ‘*Transit-oriented development*’ (TOD) has emerged as a popular buzzphrase to describe this kind of holistically-planned urban development. Successfully integrated transit and land use planning, it is argued, can promote economic productivity by increasing access to jobs, create more ‘livable’, vibrant neighborhoods designed at the human scale, improve health by reducing automobile-related air pollution, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by facilitating an efficient, dense model of urban development that is less reliant on cars.^{5,6} As an example, a recent report estimates that Boston’s metropolitan transit network generates \$11.4 billion in annual benefits for the region’s economy, mostly in travel time savings.⁷ That figure is more than five times the \$2 billion that the Metropolitan Boston Transit Authority (MBTA) spends each year to operate the system.

Advocates have also used equity arguments to support their case for expanded transit services. Without public transit, many “captive” low income and minority populations would be unable to access job opportunities that allow them to support themselves and work to improve their

² Kahn, “Gentrification Trends in New Transit-Oriented Communities.”

³ Altshuler and Luberoff, *Mega-Projects: The Changing Politics of Urban Public Investment*.

⁴ Suzuki, Cervero, and Iuchi, *Transforming Cities with Transit*.

⁵ Suzuki, Cervero, and Iuchi; Nasri and Zhang, “The Analysis of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore Metropolitan Areas”; Ahlfeldt and Pietrostefani, “The Effects of Compact Urban Form.”

⁶ The empirical relationship between compact urban form and key sustainability metrics such as vehicle miles travelled is mixed, likely because of the difficulty in isolating the effect of compactness from the huge number of variables involved in determining outcomes in any particular city context (Neuman, “The Compact City Fallacy”).

⁷ Dimino et al., “The Transportation Dividend: Transit Investments and the Massachusetts Economy.”

economic situations.⁸ Starting with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and strengthened by President Clinton's Executive Order 12898 signed in 1994, federal transport agencies and state and local transport agencies receiving federal funding must have policies and standards to ensure an equitable distribution of transit services⁹, although some consider very crude the means by which equity is measured under federal rules.¹⁰

The introduction of mass transit to an area is often a spur for neighborhood change, whether through large redevelopment projects or more incremental transformation. New transit projects can be a focus for competing objectives, with different actors seeking to obtain divergent outcomes from the same investment. City government may want to maximize the ability of the project to boost redevelopment and tax revenues. Private investors may spot the opportunity for lucrative development projects. Local residents may see the project as an opportunity to revitalize a community that is economically struggling, or may be concerned about its potential to change neighborhood character from that which they have grown accustomed. In contexts where high demand is increasing housing costs, residents may worry about the potential for new transit to make it more difficult to remain in the area. Agents for all of these viewpoints are likely to mobilize in various ways to seek their preferred outcomes.

Somerville, MA is a case in point. This small city neighboring Boston and Cambridge has witnessed several instances of mass transit expansion over the last four decades. In the early 1980s the Red Line of the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) subway system was extended from its previous terminus at Harvard Square in Cambridge to Alewife, including a new stop at Davis Square, just inside Somerville's western border. In 2014 a new stop was added to the Orange Line at Assembly Square, a large brownfield site on Somerville's eastern boundary with the Mystic River that was undergoing considerable redevelopment. Finally, after nearly three decades of false starts, budget runaways, and lawsuits, construction has recently begun to extend the Green Line along existing commuter rail rights of way from Lechmere to two new termini at Union Square and Medford (see Figure 1).

Each of these infrastructure projects has been accompanied by considerable advocacy and planning – both to secure the project itself and to manage the nature of neighborhood change that followed. Each has varied in important ways as a result of geography, community context, and relative timing. They provide an opportunity to assess local government and community advocacy strategies for managing change around the rare but potentially neighborhood-redefining occasion of a new mass transit station.

⁸ Welch, "Equity in Transport"; Sanchez, "The Connection Between Public Transit and Employment The Cases of Portland and Atlanta."

⁹ Welch and Mishra, "A Measure of Equity for Public Transit Connectivity."

¹⁰ Fichter, Interview with the author.



Figure 1: Transit-adjacent redevelopment case studies in Somerville

In different ways these case studies illustrate the challenges involved in defining and achieving an appropriate balance between competing or divergent objectives. As explained by the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), a local community development corporation that has been heavily involved in planning processes around the Assembly Square and Green Line projects, the core question is how to ‘manage change in a neighborhood so that conditions improve for people who live and work there, without devastating the socio-economic diversity that is so fundamental to its identity.’¹¹

This thesis proceeds with a review of previous research on the relationship between transit expansion, investment, redevelopment, and neighborhood change, and on strategies for communities and local governments to manage these processes to achieve the change they want. Chapter three describes the research question and method I adopted to answer them. In Chapter four I introduce the City of Somerville, before providing a detailed description of each of the three cases in chapters five, six, and seven based on interviews with key stakeholders, attendance at community meetings, and reviews of relevant planning documents and media. In chapters eight and nine I discuss the most important success factors and tensions, respectively, arising from these cases before concluding in chapter ten by proposing recommendations for the City of

¹¹ SCC, “The East Somerville Initiative Community Action Plan”, p.21

Somerville and the Union Square Neighborhood Council, a community group that is currently preparing to negotiate a community benefits agreement for a private development adjacent to a planned Green Line station.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter first reviews the literature on the relationship between transit expansion and investment to understand why new transit infrastructure might herald substantial change in a neighborhood. It then explores the evidence that these changes often negatively impact lower-income members of transit-adjacent neighborhoods. Finally, I review the literature on strategies for managing neighborhood change around new transit infrastructure.

2.1 Transit expansion, private investment, and neighborhood change

The relationship between transit-proximity and property prices provides a strong indicator of the benefits of transit accessibility. A review of studies from the US, Europe, and the UK found a generally positive relationship between proximity to mass transit and property prices, although the exact increase in value in any one place was highly variable, ranging from marginal to over 100 percent.¹² The San Francisco Bay Area, where homes within a half-mile of Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) stations sell for premiums of 15 to 18% above comparable properties, provides one clear demonstration of this relationship.¹³ Most researchers agree that the biggest impact on property values occurs where transit investments substantially increase accessibility (i.e. preexisting transport systems were inadequate), thereby allowing residents to spend less time and money on transportation and more on housing.¹⁴ In a meta-analysis of previous studies, Wardrip found that the impact of transit on house prices is mediated by a range of factors, including the strength of the housing market and the reliability of the transit system, and that the impact also tends to vary considerably among different stations on the same line or system.¹⁵

The expected relationship between transit accessibility and property prices appears to hold true in Somerville, MA. Using a hedonic model, Paul and Spurr found a statistically significant negative relationship between distance to mass transit and property values, including when they incorporated proposed Green Line Extension stations into their analysis.¹⁶ This last finding hints at the ability of transit investments to boost real estate values through speculative investment even in advance of project implementation.¹⁷

¹² GVA, “Crossrail Property Impact Study.”

¹³ Strategic Economics, “Property Value and Fiscal Benefits of BART.”

¹⁴ Zuk et al., “Gentrification, Displacement and the Role of Public Investment.”

¹⁵ Wardrip, “Public Transit’s Impact on Housing Costs: A Review of the Literature.”

¹⁶ Paul and Spurr, “Property Value Impacts of Rapid Transit Accessibility in Boston.”

¹⁷ Immergluck, “Large Redevelopment Initiatives, Housing Values and Gentrification.”

The growth of metropolitan areas in the US in the early-1900s was in many places a direct result of the construction of new streetcar lines. While the power of transit expansion to drive development has waned since the rise of the automobile¹⁸, the introduction of new transit infrastructure is still often associated with increased investment in urban areas. This investment is partly driven by speculative market activity, as might be anticipated based on the general relationship between transit accessibility and real estate values described above. In particular, developers have several reasons to think that investing close to fixed transit stations such as subways and light rail is a safe bet relative to other locations. First, fixed transit infrastructure provides certainty with regard to relative future value as compared to more flexible transit systems such as bus routes. Second, fixed transit concentrates value in a relatively small number of station localities as compared to buses. Finally, rail services may hold a higher social cachet than other forms of transit among potential investors that developers are likely to target.¹⁹

The market dynamic encouraging investment close to stations may be further encouraged by public policy. TOD is an increasingly popular²⁰ approach that matches transit infrastructure with development that promotes increased density of homes and/or commercial space close to transit nodes. According to Cervero et al., the two most common policy strategies for promoting TOD in the US are special zoning overlay districts that allow for an increased mix of uses, reduced parking, and higher densities, and funding for infrastructure improvements, auxiliary investments, and planning.²¹ These steps often represent the best options available to local governments to maximize the potential for transit investments to spur the revitalization of economically struggling neighborhoods.²²

A key challenge in using new infrastructure to spur economic revitalization is attracting private development of the type desired; the public sector can put transit infrastructure in place and, in cases where it owns land around the station, can embark on value capture through joint development, but it usually relies on private investors to provide the capital for new development.²³ Municipalities may need to strike a compromise in order to secure private investment, as there are often significant factors acting against a developer's decision to commit to a transit-oriented development scheme. Guthrie and Fan describe this challenge in reporting the findings from interviews with 24 residential and commercial developers in the Twin Cities region: "Transit access is broadly perceived as desirable, all else equal. [Developers interviewed], however, cited increased land costs, limited buildable land around transitways, and difficult permitting processes in central cities as factors keeping all else from being equal".²⁴ Compromises

¹⁸ Loukaitou-Sideris, "A New-Found Popularity for Transit-Oriented Developments?"

¹⁹ Rayle, "Investigating the Connection Between Transit-Oriented Development and Displacement."

²⁰ Loukaitou-Sideris, "A New-Found Popularity for Transit-Oriented Developments?"

²¹ Cervero et al., "Transit-Oriented Development in the United States."

²² Nilsson and Delmelle, "Transit Investments and Neighborhood Change."

²³ Guthrie and Fan, "Developers' Perspectives on Transit-Oriented Development."

²⁴ Guthrie and Fan, p.110.

with developers may involve concessions that make the development more profitable but do not necessarily align with the city or local community objectives such as affordable housing or open space.

Nevertheless, where market conditions are supportive, transit expansion can be the driver of redevelopment that significantly changes neighborhood character. Such redevelopment may form part of the justification for the large commitment of public funds to transit infrastructure; regions are missing important opportunities for efficiency gains and value creation if land use does not adapt to the introduction of new transit.²⁵

What do proponents of transit-oriented development think it should look like? The TOD Standard proposed by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), which describes criteria against which to assess development around transit stations, typifies a widely-shared conception of what successful TOD means. In addition to a principle requiring transit proximity and access, the Standard includes the following seven principles:

1. **WALK:** High quality, unobstructed pedestrian footpaths provide basic mobility for all. Furniture, landscaping elements, and active building edges transform walkways into vibrant public spaces.
2. **CYCLE:** Street design ensures safety for cyclists by reducing carriageway speeds or creating separate cycle tracks. A complete network, adequate shading elements, smooth surfaces, and secure cycle parking are essential.
3. **CONNECT:** Short and direct pedestrian and cycling routes require a highly connected network of paths and streets around small, permeable blocks. This is primarily important for walking and for transit station accessibility, which can be easily discouraged by detours.
4. **MIX:** When there is a balanced mix of complementary uses and activities within a local area (e.g., a mix of residences, workplaces and local retail commerce), many daily trips can remain short and walkable. Diverse uses peaking at different times keep local streets animated and safe, encouraging walking and cycling activity, and fostering a vibrant human environment where people want to live.
5. **DENSIFY:** To absorb urban growth in compact and dense forms, urban areas must grow vertically (densification) instead of horizontally (sprawl). In turn, high urban densities oriented towards transit support a transit service of high-quality, frequency and connectivity, and help generate resources for investment in system improvements and expansions.
6. **COMPACT:** The basic organizational principle of dense urban development is compact development. In a compact city, or a compact district, the various activities and uses are

²⁵ Fichter, Interview with the author.

conveniently located close together, minimizing the time and energy required to reach them and maximizing the potential for interaction.

7. SHIFT: Walking, cycling and the use of high-capacity transit are easy and convenient, and can be supplemented by a variety of intermediary transit modes and rented vehicles that are much less space-intensive [than personal motor vehicles]. Scarce and valuable urban space resources can be reclaimed from unnecessary roads and parking, and can be reallocated to more socially and economically productive uses.²⁶

While several cases, such as in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Washington, DC, have been held up by analysts as examples of best practice, TOD is not easy to achieve. According to the World Bank, successful cases rely on effective multi-sectoral and multi-jurisdictional coordination, prioritization of appropriate areas for development, a prioritization of transit over cars, solid legal and financial support, and proactive action in what is a very time-sensitive process.²⁷ There is no shortage of cases where a failure to get this process right has resulted in development that misses opportunities for generating public goods or even worsens problems such as traffic congestion.

2.2 TOD, gentrification, and displacement

The generally positive relationship between transit proximity and house prices is a driver of the most negative impact that can accompany improved mass transit accessibility - the possibility of reducing the affordability of living in the area for current or potential residents with lower incomes, and even displacing residents to less expensive areas.

While the rhetoric of TOD revolves around supposedly universal notions of livability, sustainability, and economic prosperity, critics argue that this vision is in fact intended, explicitly or not, to cater to a certain demographic and exclude others. Where TOD is adopted as a strategy for neighborhood ‘revitalization’, it might arguably be held up as an example of the tendency for ‘civic boosterism and public-private partnership in housing regeneration and urban policy ... to embrace middle-class futures for the city instead of encompassing a wider social base.’²⁸

The potentially selective target market for TOD means that some have come to associate it with gentrification.²⁹ Advocacy by community groups against TOD schemes are commonly justified

²⁶ ITDP, “The TOD Standard Scorecard.”

²⁷ Huang and Mehndiratta, “Transit-Oriented Development — What Does It Take to Get It Right?”

²⁸ Atkinson, “The Evidence on the Impact of Gentrification”, p.108.

²⁹ Peter Marcuse defines gentrification as the process by which ‘new residents – who disproportionately are young, white, professional, technical, and managerial workers with higher education and income levels – replace older residents – who disproportionately are low-income, working-class and poor, minority and ethnic group members, and elderly – from previously deteriorated inner-city housing in a spatially concentrated manner, that is, to a degree

on these grounds, and particularly in light of the potential for TOD-induced gentrification to cause displacement.³⁰

Yet, while applied social scientists and community activities have amassed a rich qualitative literature cataloguing the effects of gentrification, there is sparse empirical evidence to show that gentrification causes displacement, or even that it reduces the well-being of disadvantaged households. This is probably because of the challenges involved in measuring displacement. Vigdor, Massey, and Rivlin describe the task of determining whether gentrification reduces the well-being of disadvantaged households as ‘extraordinarily difficult’,³¹ mainly because of the difficulty of knowing what would have happened in the same area without gentrification, in identifying involuntary displacement, and in isolating the impacts of gentrification from other factors. These challenges led Atkinson to describe the task of measuring displacement as ‘measuring the invisible’.³² Arguably, ‘in the neoliberal context of public policy being constructed on a ‘reliable’ (i.e. quantitative) evidence base’³³ the lack of data on displacement has contributed to the lack of policies for addressing it.

Despite the lack of empirical evidence, ‘the theme of displacement has taken on a weight of its own in the wider gentrification literature.’³⁴ Marcuse distinguishes between direct displacement and indirect, or exclusionary, displacement, with the former being displacement that results from economic or physical forces while the latter is caused by less obvious or measurable processes, such as rising rents forcing a low-income family who would otherwise have moved into a neighborhood to move elsewhere.³⁵ Wyly et al. contend that the latter, intangible form of displacement has become far more pervasive.³⁶ Families who remain in a gentrifying neighborhood may have to absorb the impact of rising rents, which in turn may require strategies such as doubling up with other families to reduce unit cost per household.

A focus on physical displacement may miss the wider impact of gentrification on communities.³⁷ According to Atkinson and Bridge, ‘[a]t the neighborhood level itself poor and vulnerable residents often experience gentrification as a process of colonization by the more privileged classes. Stories of personal housing dislocation and loss, distended social networks, “improved”

differing substantially from the general level of change in the community or region as a whole’ (Marcuse 1985, p.198).

³⁰ Rayle, “Investigating the Connection Between Transit-Oriented Development and Displacement.”

³¹ Vigdor, Massey, and Rivlin, “Does Gentrification Harm the Poor?”, p.134.

³² Atkinson, “Measuring Gentrification and Displacement in Greater London”, p.163.

³³ Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification*, p.218.

³⁴ Atkinson, “The Evidence on the Impact of Gentrification”, p.113.

³⁵ Marcuse, “Gentrification, Abandonment, and Displacement.”

³⁶ Wyly et al., “Displacing New York.”

³⁷ Rayle, “Investigating the Connection Between Transit-Oriented Development and Displacement.”

local services out of sync with local needs and displacement have always been the underbelly of a process, which, for city boosters, has represented something of a savior for postindustrial cities.³⁸

While critical authors writing about gentrification argue that policy makers have paid too little attention to the negative impacts of gentrification and displacement³⁹, the issue has become a prominent policy topic in Somerville over the past decade. This has been especially the case with regard to the impact of the Green Line Extension project, as will be discussed in a later chapter. In 2014, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) conducted a study to estimate the potential for the Green Line Extension to cause displacement of low income residents in Somerville. It concluded that there was potential for displacement in the Green Line Extension corridor primarily through three mechanisms: i) rent inflation increasing the number of families cost-burdened by housing; ii) transit-proximity increasing the incentive for multi-unit property owners to convert these into condominiums, and iii) the expiration of affordable housing rent restrictions in properties close to planned Green Line stops.⁴⁰

2.3 Community planning: tools and challenges for managing neighborhood change

The potential for new transit infrastructure and accompanying redevelopment to cause significant neighborhood transformation with both positive and negative effects means that there is often a strong community interest in managing whatever changes occur. I take community planning to mean the process by which this is accomplished. Community planning is led by local government, often with a strong emphasis on public participation and engagement of organized community groups.

2.3.1 Community planning tools

Managing neighborhood change to achieve public objectives is the core mission of local planning departments. Municipal governments have an array of tools and policy options at their disposal, ranging from traditional land use zoning to more innovative measures like dedicating publicly-owned land to land trusts.

A number of organizations have produced toolkits for avoiding displacement around new transit nodes or following development in general. The UC Berkeley/UCLA Urban Displacement Project is attempting to measure the relationship between transit system extensions and neighborhood change in the San Francisco Bay Area, and has created a toolkit of strategies related to affordable housing production and preservation, tenant protections, asset building and

³⁸ Atkinson and Bridge, *Gentrification in a Global Context: The New Urban Colonialism*, p.2.

³⁹ Lees, Slater, and Wyly, *Gentrification*.

⁴⁰ MAPC, "The Dimensions of Displacement: Baseline Data for Managing Neighborhood Change in Somerville's Green Line Corridor."

local economic development.⁴¹ The Brookings Institute recommends relying on community organization, creating a cohesive plan, implementing policy and regulatory solutions, and establishing control of public or private assets to remove them from the market in order to provide continuing public services such as affordable housing or neighborhood amenities.⁴² The Urban Land Institute proposes separate measures for ensuring affordable housing production, affordable housing retention, and asset building.⁴³ The MAPC compiled an anti-displacement toolkit for the cities of Somerville and Medford in 2011 that includes case studies of a number of alternative strategies for managing neighborhood change, including so-called ‘development without displacement policies’, community benefits agreements, condominium conversion ordinances, one-for-one affordable housing replacement ordinances, and workforce development strategies.⁴⁴ A 2010 report by the Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy titled ‘*Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods*’ proposed the following policy toolkit for encouraging equitable neighborhood change:

Table 1: Toolkit for equitable neighborhood change proposed in Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham⁴⁵

Tool type	Policy
Planning tools	Comprehensive transit-oriented development strategy Community benefits agreements Broad-based community engagements Coordinated planning by local governments and transit agencies Transit corridor planning
Housing market tools	Transit-oriented development acquisition funds Housing trust funds and other acquisition funds Low-Income Housing Tax Credits Corridor-based tax increment financing districts Inclusionary zoning Incentive programs for housing production Incorporating affordable housing in joint development
Transportation management tools	Transit incentives for housing developments Reduced parking requirements for residential development Unbundling the price of parking Car sharing

⁴¹ Urban Displacement Project, “Urban Displacement Project: Executive Summary.”

⁴² Kennedy and Leonard, *Dealing with Neighborhood Change*.

⁴³ Levy, Comey, and Padilla, “In the Face of Gentrification: Case Studies of Local Efforts to Mitigate Displacement.”

⁴⁴ MAPC, “Managing Neighborhood Change: Selected Anti-Displacement Strategies in Practice.”

⁴⁵ Pollack, Bluestone, and Billingham, “Maintaining Diversity in America’s Transit-Rich Neighborhoods.”

Many of these strategies revolve around land value capture. That is, they take different approaches to reclaiming for public use some of the increased land value created by and for private developers through the introduction of publicly-funded transit infrastructure.⁴⁶

The potential strategies listed above depend on action by many parties. Some must be implemented by city government, some rely on policies or support at the regional, state, or federal level, while still others center on the actions of the local community itself. For instance, community benefits agreements (CBAs) are enforceable contracts negotiated between community groups and developers. De Barbieri argues that CBAs have a number of advantages, including lowering transaction costs by avoiding local governments' roles as middle-men between communities and developers; fostering civic participation in planning processes; and protecting taxpayers by allowing them to hold developers directly accountable for their commitments.⁴⁷ However, critics argue that the unregulated nature of CBAs introduces too much risk and question whether the ad hoc groups that normally emerge to participate in the CBA negotiation can truly claim to represent their communities.⁴⁸ Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn, NYC, is frequently held up as an example of a CBA process gone wrong. The developer of this enormous project paid a particularly amenable community group to act as the key community representative in negotiating a CBA that was extremely beneficial to the developer. That group, however, excluded the interests of the majority of the community.⁴⁹

This brief analysis of CBAs is indicative of the trade-offs and disagreements involved in choosing any approach for managing neighborhood change. A person's opinion on the appropriate strategy is likely to differ according to their views on, amongst other things, the proper roles of government and residents in decision-making, the overall objective of the process, and their perception of their own power in the process. There is bound to be contention and debate no matter which path is chosen. A local government's ability to pursue any given strategy will be partially determined by these local politics, while for authorization from higher levels government may also be needed to implement certain policies or programs.

2.3.2 Community planning challenges

Kelly describes the central challenge of community planning as problem solving.⁵⁰ Recurring questions include how to decide upon a plan of action that balances multiple objectives and is

⁴⁶ Hagman and Misczynski, *Windfalls for Wipeouts: Land Value Capture and Compensation*.

⁴⁷ De Barbieri, "Do Community Benefits Agreements Benefit Communities?"

⁴⁸ Economos, "Rethinking Community Benefits Agreements."

⁴⁹ Markey, "Atlantic Yards Community Benefit Agreement."

⁵⁰ Kelly, *Community Planning: How to Solve Urban and Environmental Problems*.

acceptable to affected stakeholders and how to most effectively collect community input on potential directions of travel.

Community input into public decision-making is customarily sought through processes such as public hearings, referenda, lobbying and so forth. However, Susskind and Ozawa argue that these traditional forms of community involvement rarely give stakeholders the control they want over decision-making and do not allow for groups with divergent interests to address their differences and come to informed consensus.⁵¹ Their proposal is for planners to build off of their existing process-management skills to adopt more explicit mediation roles, convening representatives of key stakeholder groups and encouraging them to explore their differing interests and identify areas where these overlap or where one could be traded for another.

The model of deliberative and participatory local decision-making proposed by Susskind and Ozawa as well as by academic-practitioners including Judith Innes and David Booher,⁵² John Forester,⁵³ and John Bryson and Kathryn Quick⁵⁴ places great emphasis on process design in enabling the goal of what Susskind describes as fair, efficient, stable and wise outcomes.⁵⁵ In a review of research on participatory decision-making processes, Bryson and Quick outline twelve iterative and interrelated tasks that process-designers need to undertake:

‘Assess and design for context and purpose

1. Assess and fit the design to the context and the problem
2. Identify purposes and design to achieve them

Enlist resources and manage the participation

3. Analyze and appropriately involve stakeholders
4. Work with stakeholders to establish the legitimacy of the process
5. Foster effective leadership
6. Seek resources for and through participation
7. Create appropriate rules and structures to guide the process
8. Use inclusive processes to engage diversity productively
9. Manage power dynamics
10. Use technologies of various kinds to achieve participation purposes

Evaluate and redesign continuously

11. Develop and use evaluation measures
12. Design and redesign.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Susskind and Ozawa, “Mediated Negotiation in the Public Sector.”

⁵² Innes and Booher, “Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century.”

⁵³ Forester, *Dealing with Differences: Dramas of Mediating Public Disputes*.

⁵⁴ Bryson et al., “Designing Public Participation Processes.”

⁵⁵ Susskind, “Keynote Address: Consensus Building, Public Dispute Resolution, and Social Justice.”

⁵⁶ Bryson et al., “Designing Public Participation Processes,” p.24.

The list above demonstrates how designing and facilitating an efficient and productive participatory decision-making process is easier said than done for a local government official or community organization. Each of the tasks above requires skill and discretion. No process can be replicated in cookie-cutter fashion across contexts. Even when every effort has been made to produce an ideal environment for participation there is no guarantee of success and indeed success is likely to be defined differently by the various stakeholders involved.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research questions

Neighborhood change around transit stops has been an enduringly relevant issue over recent decades and, with the continuing push towards smart growth and transit-oriented development, it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. An extensive literature has emerged detailing potential toolkits of policies and strategies that might help communities to guide this change and manage its impacts; local communities have no shortage of advice. However, it remains unclear how any particular community should go about deciding what to do. What are their priorities and which strategy, or combination of strategies, would best help them to achieve them? Which institution(s) do they need to engage? What are the key leverage points in the development process on which they should focus their efforts? How can they determine what constitute realistic objectives? Should they focus on immediate needs or long-term goals? What if segments of the community have different priorities? Once a community has settled on a strategy, what barriers does it face to implementing it in practice? Even where a particular approach appears well-suited on paper, how do context-specific historical factors influence its effectiveness?

This thesis attempts to explore these issues by studying processes of community planning around three new transit stops in Somerville, MA.

In particular, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How have communities in Somerville attempted to manage the nature of neighborhood change following the introduction of new transit stations at Davis Square, Assembly Square, and Union Square?
2. What were the key factors, relating both to the context and to the strategies chosen in each case, that influenced the effectiveness of these planning processes?
3. What lessons do these experiences provide for communities in Somerville seeking to influence the outcome of transit-related development in the future?

3.2 Case selection

I chose to study three case studies within Somerville rather than similar transit extension projects elsewhere in the Greater Boston region or further afield for two primary reasons. First, many of the same government institutions and community groups have been active across several or all of the selected case studies, allowing me to question to what extent and why their priorities and

strategies have changed over time. Second, it gives me a base line to compare recent transit improvement efforts; while the conditions of the neighborhoods into which the three transit projects were/are being introduced vary considerably, they are part of the same city with its shared history, institutions, culture, and evolving regional economy.

3.3 Methodology

The research design relied primarily on semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the three case study planning processes. For each case, I attempted to interview individuals involved from the perspectives of the City of Somerville and community organizations. I followed a snowball methodology, whereby initially-identified interviewees recommended additional individuals whom it would be relevant to talk to. I repeated this process until it stopped producing additional names. I was most able to identify interviewees knowledgeable of the planning processes surrounding the Assembly Square and Green Line Extension projects, which are far more recent than the Davis Square case. Table 2 lists the interviewees and the cases to which they could comment based on involvement or expertise.

I designed my interview questions to find out as much as possible about the history, sequence, and nature of these planning processes and to draw out lessons about what worked, what didn't, and why. Interviewees had the option of remaining anonymous and could selectively omit particular quotes from the record.

In addition to interviews, I attended community meetings and tracked public email exchanges to better understand the nature of discussions around the ongoing Green Line project, especially as it concerns redevelopment in Union Square. This has given me further insight into the ways in which organized community groups are attempting to strategize and the challenges they face in this regard.

Official plans and reports were a further critical source of data regarding the documented outcomes of different planning processes.

Table 2: Interviewees and their ability to comment on each case study

Name	Position	Davis Square	Assembly Square	Union Square
Lee Auspitz	Former member, Davis Square Task Force	√		
Bill Cavellini	Chairman, Union Square Neighborhood Council			√
Jack Connolly	Former Ward 6 Alderman	√		
Ben Echevarría	Executive Director, The Welcome Project		√	√

Katherine Fichter	Assistant Secretary for Policy Coordination, MassDOT		√	√
Laurie Goldman	Professor in Urban and Environmental Policy, Tufts University		√	√
Meredith Levy	Deputy Director, Somerville Community Corporation		√	√
Erik Neu	Board Member, Union Square Neighborhood Council		√	√
Tom Pelham	Transportation Coordinator under Mayor Ralph, Director of Community Development under Mayor Brune	√		
George Proakis	Director of Planning, City of Somerville OSPCD	√	√	√
William Shelton	Former President, Mystic View Task Force	√	√	√
Karl Seidman	Professor of Economic Development, MIT. Author of nexus study for Somerville linkage fee		√	√
Anne Tate	Professor of Architecture, RISD. Member of Mystic View Task Force, Union Sq. Civic Advisory Council		√	√
Wig Zamore	Member of Mystic View Task Force. Union Sq. Civic Advisory Council	√	√	√

I synthesized data from interviews, public documents, and media to piece together a detailed history of each transit project and the community planning processes that surrounded it. I then compared across the cases to identify critical differences and similarities and to extrapolate lessons that could be relevant to similar processes elsewhere.

3.4 Positionality

In pursuing this research I think it important to acknowledge my position as a newcomer to Somerville, having only moved to the city in August 2016. I am white, male, highly-educated, and am not personally at risk of displacement or burdened by housing costs in a serious way. Therefore, I cannot claim to speak on behalf of those who are directly feeling the pressure of gentrification in Somerville or those who have been engaged for many years in advocacy and community planning processes. I have done my best to approach my analysis with an open mind and to give an honest interpretation of past processes and those currently underway. I do not believe that my position as an MIT graduate student substantively influenced the responses that interviewees gave me; I felt that all interviews were generally candid and open.

4. SOMERVILLE: AN INTRODUCTION

Occupying a four square-mile sliver of land between Cambridge, Arlington, Medford, Boston, and the Mystic River, Somerville's predominantly residential land use and distinct lack of open space combine to make it the densest city in Massachusetts. It was home to an estimated 81,000 people in 2016.

Somerville's original growth was facilitated by the expansion of railroad and streetcar lines throughout the 1800s. Indeed, it is an example of transit-oriented development before the term existed - many older houses in Somerville were built without driveways because of their proximity to streetcar lines, railroads, and jobs. Industrial booms - first in brickmaking, then meatpacking, and finally automobile assembly - fueled the city's expansion. By 1930 its population had peaked at 104,000 people.

Somerville subsequently experienced the industrial decline common to American urban cores in the post-war period. The rise of the automobile and increasing suburbanization of industry precipitated a dramatic loss of manufacturing jobs, a dwindling population, and a shrinking tax base, while the systematic removal of streetcar lines and ceasing of railroad passenger services reduced access to jobs and neighborhood vibrancy. Somerville's economy has improved in recent years, though, benefiting from the regional boom in high-tech industry that began in the 1990s. However it remains primarily a "bedroom city", housing an increasingly well-educated workforce that commutes to jobs in Cambridge and Boston.⁵⁷ According to the 2010 census, Somerville is home to the second highest proportion of residents aged 25 to 34 in the country.

Somerville has traditionally been a working class city, dominated first by Irish and Italian families. It has remained a draw immigrants, with relatively high populations now originating from Brazil, El Salvador, and Haiti. Only 85% of Somerville residents were U.S. citizens in 2015 and nearly 30% were born outside the country.⁵⁸ Somerville's median household income has roughly tracked the average for Massachusetts as a whole, which is considerably lower than that of neighboring Cambridge. Only 34% of Somerville housing units were owner-occupied in 2015, far below national and regional averages of over 60%.⁵⁹

The City of Somerville is attempting to manage its growth in a strategic way. SomerVision, the city's most recent comprehensive plan passed in 2012, proposed restricting major development to 'transformative' areas on post-industrial land on Somerville's eastern border and to 'enhancement' zones around existing and planned mass transit stops (see Figure 2). The Board of Aldermen is currently scrutinizing an overhaul of the Somerville's zoning code that, as proposed,

⁵⁷ The percentage of Somerville residents with a college education rose from less than 5% in 1950 to nearly 55% in 2010. Source: OSPCD, "Somerville: City of Somerville, Massachusetts Comprehensive Plan, 2010-2030."

⁵⁸ ACS 5-year estimate, 2015. Source: Census Bureau.

⁵⁹ ACS 5-year estimate, 2015.

would further restrict new development to these target areas and limit further densification of the residential neighborhoods that cover the majority of the city.

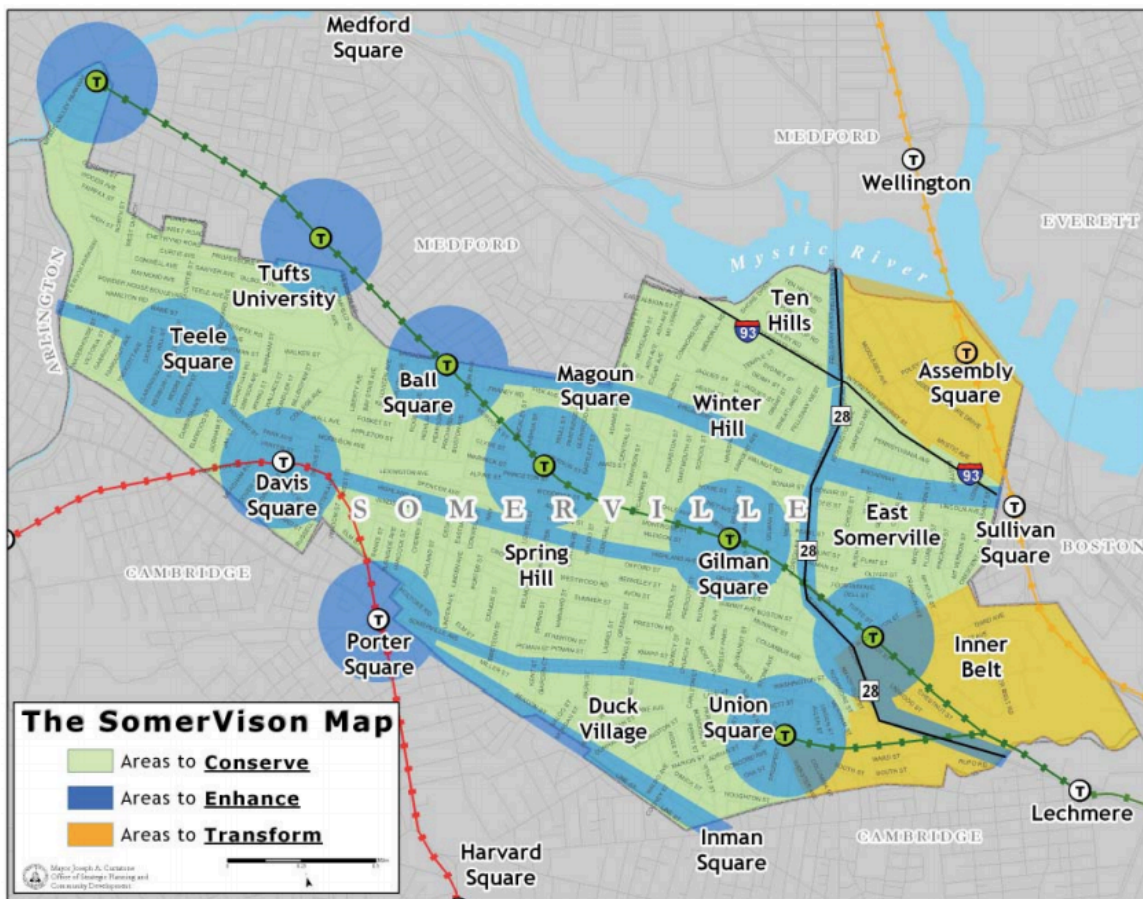


Figure 2: The SomerVision Map – Areas to Conserve, Enhance & Transform.⁶⁰

Somerville has a strong mayoral system of government, with a mayor elected directly by residents for two-year terms. The mayor is responsible for all executive decisions and appoints all members of City boards and commissions, including the Planning Board. The Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) reports directly to the mayor. The Board of Alderman is Somerville’s legislative branch, consisting of seven ward aldermen and four aldermen at-large, also elected on two-year terms.

The following three chapters outline the history of the Davis Square, Assembly Square, and Union Square case studies, respectively. Table 3 provides a top-level summary of each.

⁶⁰ OSPCD, “Somerville Vision: City of Somerville, Massachusetts Comprehensive Plan, 2010-2030”, p.140.

Table 3: Summary of cases

	Davis Square	Assembly Square	Union Square
<i>Time period</i>	1970 – 1984 (and beyond)	1998 – 2014	2000 - ongoing
<i>Preexisting condition</i>	Infill development	Tabula rasa redevelopment	Redevelopment in existing urban fabric
<i>Community strategy</i>	Open community task force	Legal challenge, negotiated agreement	Multiple participatory planning processes, anti-displacement activism, community benefits agreement
<i>Community priorities</i>	Preserve residential character, economic revitalization	Mixed-use development, commercial tax revenues, density, TOD	Development without displacement, open space, public amenities
<i>Outcomes</i>	Goals largely achieved, subsequent gentrification	Big box development avoided, new retail and residential development with signs of office interest, little neighborhood character	To be determined

5. CASE 1: DAVIS SQUARE

5.1 Existing conditions

Davis Square sits at Somerville’s western border with Cambridge. Originally built up around a streetcar line (see Figure 3), by the early 1970s the neighborhood, and the City of Somerville in general, was suffering an economic malaise. Footfall to local businesses had been falling since the removal of the streetcar line and the situation had worsened following the opening of the shopping center in nearby Porter Square in 1956 and the subsequent advent of automobile-oriented suburban malls.⁶¹ Davis Square was a place to be avoided; local Tufts students would not walk through the area alone at night. Many stores were empty and the area was home to the organized crime for which Somerville was notorious at the time. As long-time Ward 6 Alderman Jack Connolly describes, Davis Square in the 1970s was dominated by ‘wise guys and winos.’⁶²

⁶¹ Connolly, Interview with the author.

⁶² Connolly.



Figure 3: Streetcar in Davis Square in the 1900s. Source: Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership

Physically, the Davis Square area was characterized by a compact, low-rise commercial core centered around the intersection of Elm Street, Holland Street, College Avenue and Highland Avenue. This commercial area was surrounded on all sides by a residential neighborhood made up of two- to three-story single- and multi-family wooden houses. Up until 1980 the Lexington branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad ran through Davis Square at grade. Earlier a busy passenger line, by this time the railroad was used only for freight. A hundred-car freight train running through the middle of Davis Square was not an unusual sight in the mid-1970s.⁶³

Somerville politics in this era were very different from today. Corruption and patronage were rife and it was not uncommon for elections to be won on recounts in which boxes of paper ballots appeared mysteriously out of nowhere.⁶⁴ Many in the community harbored an appetite for change, however, and in 1969 Lester Ralph won election as Mayor on a reform ticket.

5.2 The Red Line Extension project

The Red Line extension project emerged as a result of successful attempts by a large coalition of community advocates to block plans to create an inner circumferential highway through Somerville, Cambridge, and Boston. The 'Inner Belt' would have required demolishing thousands of homes primarily in low-income areas and cutting long-established neighborhoods in two, primarily for the benefit of wealthy suburbanites who would be able to more speedily drive to downtown Boston. Frank Sargent, who took over from John Volpe as Governor of Massachusetts in 1969, was sympathetic to the anti-highway cause and in 1970 announced a moratorium on the expressway planning process. Sargent commissioned the Boston

⁶³ Connolly.

⁶⁴ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

Transportation Planning Review, a three-year process to restudy all available options, including mass transit expansion. This process produced the first Environmental Impact Study under the recently passed National Environmental Policy Act. Governor Sargent eliminated proposed plans for segments of new highways through Cambridge and Somerville from further consideration in 1971 and plans for the entire Inner Belt system in 1972.⁶⁵

The auto-related pollution that had become frequent in Boston and the early 1970s oil crisis combined to make mass transit expansion the favored option in place of highway construction, and the Red Line was the prime candidate. The original plan was to extend the line from Harvard Square to Route 128 at Lexington, via Arlington. However the project provoked vehement opposition from Arlington residents who held a racially-tinged belief not uncommon at the time that transit would boost crime by making it easier for people from the deprived inner city to travel out to the wealthy suburbs.

The City of Somerville recognized an opportunity in the midst of this disagreement and lobbied for an alternative route passing through Davis Square. Their argument rested on the regressive nature of the existing transit system. At the time, Somerville had the third largest population in Boston metropolitan area with 89,000 residents living in only four square miles. These residents were highly dependent on transit but had no subway service. Somerville commuters travelling to Boston had to get a bus to one of the Cambridge T stations and then pay a second fare to ride the train into town, whereas residents from surrounding towns served by the T could commute for a single fare. Meanwhile, Somerville residents paid for a disproportionate portion of the MBTA's operating deficit; at the time about two thirds of MBTA revenues came from property taxes apportioned according to city populations, not assessed values, so Somerville's density resulted in a high tax burden.⁶⁶

There was not unanimous local support for the Davis Square Red Line station. A small number of people held the same concerns as Arlington residents about crime, but the main opposition came from local businesses. According to Tom Pelham - then Transportation Coordinator for Mayor Ralph - '[t]hey were afraid that they were so far down on the commercial pecking order that people would get on the subway and go shop somewhere else.'⁶⁷ The City hired a consulting firm to study local business dynamics. They found that people living within ten minutes' walk of Davis Square were spending only five percent of their retail dollars in the neighborhood. The City raised this finding with the Chamber of Commerce, arguing that local businesses seemed averse to improving their own situation. The City encouraged them to seize the opportunity of the new station to change the course of Davis Square rather than resigning themselves to a slow decline.⁶⁸ Eventually they were at least partially successful in winning over local business support.

⁶⁵ Cambridge Historical Society, "The Inner Belt: Chronology."

⁶⁶ Pelham, Interview with the author.

⁶⁷ Pelham.

⁶⁸ Pelham.

Somerville's lobbying efforts were successful. In 1973, Governor Sargent approved plans for a Red Line route with new stations at Porter Square, Davis Square, and a terminus at Alewife. When construction began in 1978, the Red Line Extension was the largest construction project in the Northeast. Its progress was aided by Massachusetts 8th District Congressman Thomas "Tip" O'Neil, who was Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987 and provided "a lot of political help to grease the tracks." For instance, \$40 million of federal funds for environmental remediation immediately materialized when it was discovered during construction that Grace Chemicals had been dumping chemicals in the future Red Line right of way to Alewife and that, without clean-up, these chemicals would eat through the structure of the new Red Line tunnel.

5.3 Planning processes and community organization in Davis Square

Construction would be incredibly disruptive because it required entirely excavating the heart of Davis Square. Unsurprisingly, concerns about construction were an important impetus for community members to self-organize, but residents were also keenly interested in influencing broader planning decisions that would direct the nature of neighborhood change following the station's opening.⁶⁹

The Ward Six Civic Association was a pre-existing community group for local residents. In the fall of 1974 it began a campaign for two new zoning overlay districts for Davis Square that would, respectively, establish a height limit of 50 feet and require design review (with opportunity for public comment) for every new development.⁷⁰ The local business community wasn't in favor but it didn't have a strong voice at the time.⁷¹ The new overlays were passed by the Board of Aldermen.

A new organization, the Davis Square Task Force (DSTF), emerged in 1977. The Task Force evolved from the Ward 6 Civic Association, but also included the Chamber of Commerce and the Davis Square Businessman's Association. The Task Force had an open membership with a small organizing board, consisting primarily of local residents. Its goal was to act as a single venue for collecting community ideas and concerns and interfacing with the City, the State, Red Line construction contractors and private developers. The DSTF met once every two weeks during busy periods in the basement of the Somerville Library. The organizing board met a few days in advance to arrange the agenda, for which anyone could suggest additions. The group had no officers and did not vote on issues. The City provided budgetary support for printing and

⁶⁹ Connolly, Interview with the author; Auspitz, Interview with the author; Pelham, Interview with the author.

⁷⁰ OSPCD, "Davis Square Action Plan."

⁷¹ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

distributing meeting minutes, initially as a result of a Department of Transportation requirement at the time that one percent of federal grants be designated for promoting ‘maximum feasible citizen engagement.’⁷²

The DSTF played an active role during the Red Line construction period and forged strong ties with City. The Task Force helped to pool insurance claims from residents who had suffered property damage caused by tunnel blasting and worked with City on issues such as temporary property tax abatements, construction mitigation, pollution issues, noise and vibration standards, and land takings. Over time the DSTF developed a strong convening power, frequently requesting and attaining attendance from outside parties. The city planning director and local alderman were regular and engaged participants.⁷³

The Task Force had a good relationship with Mayor Ralph and his administration but this changed for the worse after the 1978 election, won by Tom August. August represented a return to the patronage-based local politics of the past and was vindictive toward Davis Square residents after losing Ward 6 in the election. August’s plan for the neighborhood differed greatly from that of local residents. He envisioned increasing density around the new station, creating a pedestrianized core, and pushing traffic out to residential streets, which would have expanded the size of the commercial area. Mayor August’s vision was in line with standard thinking in the late Seventies. The idea of maintaining Davis Square as a primarily residential neighborhood was ‘[u]nthinkable at the time. The idea of having public transit was that you could build high rises around it. The banks wanted that.’⁷⁴

Mayor August hired a consultant to develop a plan aligned with his vision, but members of the DSTF drafted a challenge when it became apparent that the contract had been let out on a sole-source basis without justification. They discovered that the City had topped off the consultant’s contract with \$30,000 previously designated for a Davis Square pediatric clinic run by a group of women active in the DSTF. The City argued that this was because Davis Square didn’t qualify as low- to moderate-income, which was patently not the case. When the Ward 6 Alderman complained to the Mayor he replied ‘those women aren’t getting anything from me because they’re always kicking me in the balls.’ At this point, Mayor August forbade his planning staff from attending DSTF meetings. The DSTF were successful in overturning the consultant’s contract and stymying the Mayor’s development plan, but ‘there was warfare for two years’ between the Task Force and the City.

⁷² The City also used this budget allocation to hire its own engineer to provide a critical eye on contractor progress and decisions during the construction period.

⁷³ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

⁷⁴ Auspitz.

The August mayoralty ended after one term when Eugene Brune, another reform candidate, won the 1979 election. At this point, according to Lee Auspitz, ‘we [the DSTF] were suddenly in power.’⁷⁵ The City and the DSTF worked together to create a vision for the neighborhood’s development following the Red Line opening. The Davis Square Action Plan was released in 1982. The Plan was ‘resident-driven,’⁷⁶ with priorities placed on protecting residential character, commercial revitalization, streetscape improvements, storefront renovations (see Figure 4), open space, and improved traffic management and parking.⁷⁷ The Task Force also prioritized the removal of billboards from atop Davis Square buildings, a step which received national attention at the time, and worked with the City to convert the old railroad right-of-way into a “Community Path” for cyclists and pedestrians. Figure 5, a map from the Action Plan, highlights some of the key planned interventions in the Square.



Figure 4: Illustration of renovated storefront facades in the Davis Square Action Plan (OSPCD 1982, p.13)

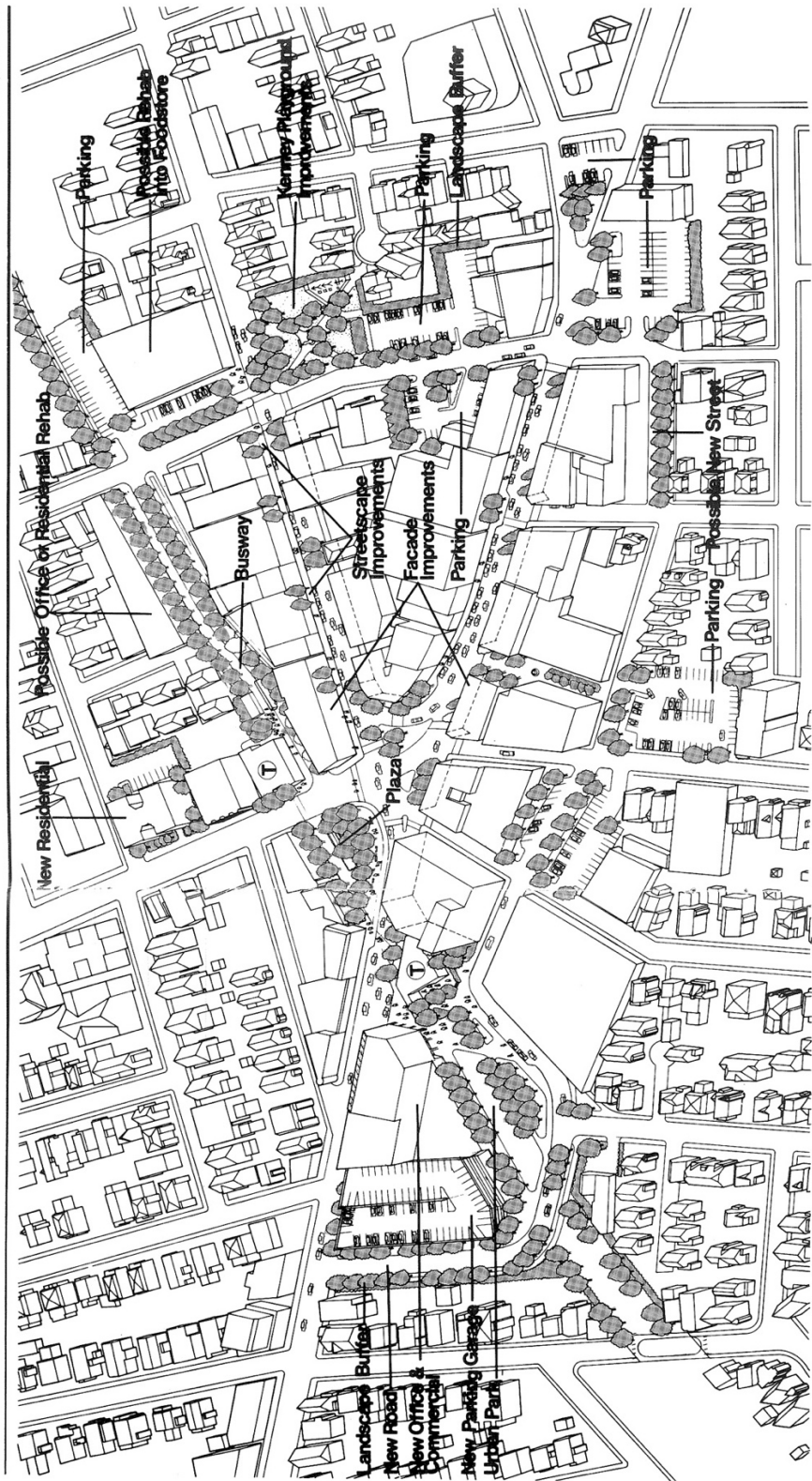
There was little controversy within the Task Force over the vision for Davis Square. According to Lee Auspitz this was partly because of the demographic makeup of the area at the time. Somerville had a far lower average level of education than today and most of the largely blue collar population did not have time to commit to ongoing public deliberations about neighborhood character.⁷⁸ While the driving, grassroots force of the group came from its non-college-educated members, they were self-selected to share a common vision: that the neighborhood was blighted and that, with the new station, progress was going to come.

⁷⁵ Auspitz.

⁷⁶ Auspitz.

⁷⁷ OSPCD, “Davis Square Action Plan.”

⁷⁸ Auspitz, Interview with the author.



DAVIS SQUARE
CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS



Office of Planning and Community Development

Figure 5: Summary map of Davis Square Action Plan recommendations (OSPCD 1982, p.22)

The Brune administration held a genuine commitment to work with the Davis residents and give them input down to some very specific details, such as the public art that would be installed in the station. As Tom Pelham, then Director of Community Development, describes, it represented a ‘total 180 degree turn of the planning process’ compared to the preceding era of highway planning.⁷⁹ Mayor Brune was a local resident and beloved by the local community. Again from Tom Pelham: ‘What I think held it together was that Gene Brune the Mayor was from that neighborhood and everybody knew him and trusted him. He was not out to find developer friends and get some campaign contributions. The guys who were there before [in the City] would probably have taken bribes.’⁸⁰

Interviewees I spoke with gave conflicting opinions on whether gentrification was a topic of discussion for the City and Task Force as they were planning for the introduction of the station. Lee Auspitz claimed it was definitely a concern: ‘We were very aware of the gentrification issue and the idea was to slow it. You can’t fight the market on something like that, but you can put up barriers’⁸¹ by limiting heights. On the other hand, Jack Connolly claimed that ‘gentrification was not in anybody’s minds. We were focused on how we can reenergize the Square.’⁸² The Davis Square Action Plan itself makes only passing reference to affordability as an issue.⁸³

5.4 After the station

After a decade of planning and construction, Governor Michael Dukakis cut the ribbon for the Davis Red Line station on December 8, 1984.

The station’s opening had a considerable effect on the local real estate market. According to Lee Auspitz, ‘Mistrust in government was such that people didn’t believe the T was coming even when there was a hole in the ground. When it finally opened prices shot up 15% overnight.’ I did not hear corroboration of such an immediate impact from other interviewees, but all sources agree that after several years the area was starting to experience noticeable change. For example, an incontrovertible indicator of the changing market came about five years after the Davis station opened when upmarket Cambridge realtor Hunneman started issuing joint Somerville-Cambridge property maps and marketing Somerville properties based on their relative prices compared to similar properties in Cambridge.⁸⁴

The collaborative spirit between the City and the DSTF continued on planning issues after the station was finished. While the general intention was to limit new development and control heights, the City intervened to make sure a few anchor buildings got built. The Harvard

⁷⁹ Pelham, Interview with the author.

⁸⁰ Pelham.

⁸¹ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

⁸² Connolly, Interview with the author.

⁸³ OSPCD, “Davis Square Action Plan.”

⁸⁴ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

Vanguard building on Holland Street was the first major construction, while the Ciampa Manor elderly persons home was intended to mark the edge of the commercial core on College Avenue, as well as act to slow gentrification. For each proposed development the Davis Square Task Force established a sub-committee made largely of abutting residents and the City was hospitable to working with these groups to work out issues and develop solutions.

Overall, the Davis Square model was collaborative rather than adversarial and since all development involved urban infill there was no mega-developer with whom to negotiate (as in the Assembly Square and Union Square cases described in subsequent chapters).⁸⁵ Moreover, the zoning code was ‘written as if it were for a suburban town,’⁸⁶ so everything in Somerville was non-conforming. This meant that every development that was proposed required community support if it was going to get through permitting.

The Davis Square Task Force remained active for a total of 35 years and became an accepted part of the planning process. The City of Somerville Zoning, Planning, and Liquor Boards started advising applicants to submit plans to the Task Force for pre-vetting ‘to get a sounding of neighborhood opinion before submitting formal requests.’⁸⁷ According to Jack Connolly this opportunity to audition plans was beneficial for developers since it allowed them ‘a dry run before the clock officially started ticking with permits and so forth. This meant that projects could be done much more quickly than they usually are now.’⁸⁸

The passing of the Massachusetts Rent Control Prohibition Initiative on the November 8, 1994 state ballot precipitated a major change in the local real estate market. After Cambridge subsequently abolished rent control in January 1995, a large flow of people began moving from previously rent-controlled properties in Cambridge to cheaper homes across the border in west Somerville.⁸⁹ While today the difference between Cambridge and Somerville, especially along their border, is almost unnoticeable, in the Eighties the idea of Cambridge residents considering Somerville in large numbers had been unimaginable. ‘Cambridge was another world to Somerville at that point.’⁹⁰ The increase in demand contributed to steadily rising property prices in the Davis Square area and Somerville more generally.

⁸⁵ Auspitz; Pelham, Interview with the author; Connolly, Interview with the author.

⁸⁶ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

⁸⁷ Auspitz.

⁸⁸ Connolly, Interview with the author.

⁸⁹ Autor, Palmer, and Pathak, “Housing Market Spillovers: Evidence from the End of Rent Control in Cambridge, Massachusetts.”

⁹⁰ Auspitz, Interview with the author.

Davis Square is today widely considered a great success case for community planning and is often held up as an example for the economic revitalization potential of mass transit.⁹¹ The Square is known for its funky, vibrant character and draws people from across the region to its restaurants, bars, and cultural amenities (see Figure 6). Not unrelatedly, it is also the most expensive and wealthy part of Somerville. The median estimated household incomes in 2016 for the census tracts immediately adjacent to the T station ranged from \$80,000 to \$131,000, compared to the city-wide statistic of \$78,673.⁹² Figure 7 illustrates the form of the neighborhood in 2018.



Figure 6: Davis Square in February 2018 (Left: a view across the square with One Davis Square on the right and Elm Street opposite. Right: the Harvard Vanguard building on the right and Red Line station on the left with the bikeway behind it. Source: the author.

Current Somerville Director of Planning George Proakis agrees that the planning processes around the Davis station in the eighties were very successful. He claims the biggest lesson is that they never formalized their vision in the zoning code and have therefore had to make decisions since on a case-by-case basis with no guiding vision embedded in the regulations. The City is trying to amend this now in an updated plan for Davis Square. They want to build consensus behind the plan so they don't have to fight over every building.⁹³

⁹¹ Massachusetts Smart Growth / Smart Energy Toolkit, "Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Urban Case Study"; Susskind, "Citizen Participation and Consensus Building in Land Use Planning: A Case Study."

⁹² ACS 2012-2016 5-year estimate.

⁹³ Proakis, Interview with the author.



Figure 7: Davis Square today (Map: author, Data: Cities of Cambridge and Somerville, MBTA)

6. CASE 2: ASSEMBLY SQUARE

The Assembly Square story does not concern development triggered by the introduction of a new transit stop. Instead, it describes how the introduction of a new T station was able to profoundly change the nature of development possible on a site that had been subject to a long-term battle between developers, the City, and community activists.

6.1 An industrial legacy

Assembly Square could hardly be more different from Davis Square. The 145-acre site, roughly equivalent in size to the Boston financial district, is named after its former use as home for the Ford Motor Company Edsel Assembly Plant, designed by iconic industrial architect Albert Kahn (see Figure 8). The plant was one of the region's largest employers from its opening in 1926 until over 1,100 people lost their jobs when its doors closed in 1958. First National Stores was another major employer on the site during this period. Following the Ford plant's closure the site lay largely unused for decades.



Figure 8: The Somerville Ford Assembly Plant in February 1958, the year it closed. Source: Boston.com.⁹⁴

In 1979 the City of Somerville declared the site blighted and adopted a 20-year “Assembly Square Revitalization Plan” that envisioned Assembly Square taking advantage of its location adjacent to the recently constructed Interstate 93 to become a retail center. The plan was developed based on a proposal by East Bay Development Corporation rather than the City’s vision. The City claimed that retail would promote high-value development across the rest of Assembly Square. East Bay Development reopened the old Ford plant building the following year, reimagined as “Assembly Square Mall.”

However, the mall was hit hard by the recession of the late eighties and a loss of customers to regional competitors. In 1996 the mall’s then owner Shearson Shopco, who had bought the mall for \$4.4 million in 1988, defaulted on its mortgage and Aetna Insurance foreclosed on the loan.⁹⁵ A Home Depot had opened on an adjacent parcel in the site in 1992; the first big box-type development for the area. In contrast to the mall, this store was incredibly successful, eventually becoming the second highest grossing Home Depot in the country.⁹⁶

The failing Assembly Square Mall was bought in 1997 for \$18.8 million by Assembly Square Limited Partnership (ASLP), a consortium of local developers Taurus New England and National Development. Their intention was to quickly refurbish and resell a mall of roughly the same character as the previous project, but they struggled to attract new tenants.

⁹⁴ <https://www.boston.com/news/business/2012/07/19/assembly-squares-ford-factory>

⁹⁵ Savage, “Redevelopment and Smart Growth at Assembly Square.”

⁹⁶ Zamore, Interview with the author.

6.2 A new vision for Assembly Square

The seeds for an alternative vision for Assembly Square were planted in the minds of Somerville residents in 1998. Anne Tate, an architecture professor at the Rhode Island School of Design, had been travelling around the state giving a talk named “Guiding Growth”, which promoted the benefits of mixed-use, dense, well-designed, and transit-oriented development strategies - then couched under the banners of “Smart Growth” and “New Urbanism.” After hearing Anne speak at the State House, Representative Patricia Jehlen invited her to give her talk in Somerville.⁹⁷ The attendees were inspired and, in a spontaneous discussion following the talk, they decided to form a group to promote the pursuit of New Urbanism in Somerville, focusing on the Assembly Square site. They named their new group the Mystic View Task Force.⁹⁸

Mystic View were motivated by the potential to create a dense, office-driven, mixed-use district that would help to address Somerville’s structural fiscal challenges. As former Mystic View member Wig Zamore described, Somerville is ‘351st out of 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts’ in terms of its jobs-residents imbalance, sitting ‘5,000 jobs short of breakeven per square mile.’⁹⁹ In contrast, neighboring Cambridge has the biggest jobs to residents surplus. William Shelton, former Mystic View President, reaffirmed this mindset: ‘You know, people have different hierarchies of issues that they’re looking for in development but, for me, the one that dominated everything else was that we need commercial development, that we need essentially office and R&D development here. And the reason why is because the city is on welfare, and only 14% of our assessed value is commercial. Residential pays 60% the [property tax] rate that commercial does but creates twice the fiscal cost, so we have a structural fiscal deficit. And it’s necessary to solve that because that’s how we pay for everything else.’¹⁰⁰

A fairly small group of core Mystic View members did a lot of research and analysis to determine what might be possible at Assembly Square and to build the case for an alternative to the mall and big box store model that had dominated until then. They saw Assembly Square as the best development site left in Greater Boston for high-density development, with excellent infrastructure connections and proximity to downtown and MIT/Harvard. From their analysis it was clear that office development was the only way to generate a fiscal surplus, and would also generate far less traffic than alternative land uses while increasing the potential for open space. Crucially, their research of precedents elsewhere demonstrated to them that developers require a master plan in order to commit to the kind of transformative investment that Mystic View envisioned because they need assurance that surrounding properties will align with their vision.

⁹⁷ Shelton, “Assembly Square, the Back Story.”

⁹⁸ Several former members expressed to me their subsequent regret of choosing a name that had little obvious connection to the group’s cause.

⁹⁹ Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹⁰⁰ Shelton, Interview with the author.

Strong leadership from the City would be needed to establish a vision in advance of development.¹⁰¹

The Mystic Viewers also identified the potential for a new Orange Line station at Assembly Square as vital for realizing the kind of development they envisioned. The MBTA Orange Line runs at grade along the Eastern boundary of the site. Given the average spacing of stations along the rest of the line it appeared reasonable to imagine a new station at Assembly Square, which would transform the ability of workers to reach future offices at the site from downtown Boston without relying on cars.

In May 1999 Mystic View organized a charrette to elicit feedback and ideas from the public on a potential physical design vision for the site. In advance, they convened a group of designers to help produce alternative sketches of what Assembly Square might look like, ranging from the extremes of a full build-out to turning the entire site into a park, and a handful of intermediate strategies in-between, as well as alternatives such as purely residential or box store development models. Over 150 people attended the charrette, which resulted in wide consensus on a balanced vision that revolved around a new ‘30-30-30’ mantra, presented by Mystic View members based on their prior analysis, for what Assembly Square could and should contribute to the City: 30 acres of open space, 30,000 jobs, and \$30 million of tax revenue.¹⁰² This mantra provided a useful headline vision with which to quantify Mystic View’s asks.

The Mystic View charrette was held only four days after Dorothy Kelly Gay’s election as Somerville Mayor. Gay attended the event and endorsed the group’s vision. This was a time of great excitement. As Wig Zamore puts it, ‘the City signed on, the community signed on, the Chamber of Commerce signed on, everybody signed on.’¹⁰³ The job of refining the vision endorsed in the charrette had been done in private by a very reduced group of Mystic View members. According to Anne Tate, this hard work in analyzing the potential of the site and precedents set elsewhere ‘enabled them to go back and say “yes you can” when people said “no you can’t.”’¹⁰⁴

By 1999 ASLP was still struggling to re-tenant the Assembly Square Mall in its current form. They weren’t interested in the type of untested, mixed-use development proposed by Mystic View. Seeing the success of the adjacent Home Depot and wanting to ensure a quick profit, the developers proposed building a new strip mall of ten big box stores, a project that would be in violation of the zoning code. When ASLP reluctantly held a public meeting on the mall site in

¹⁰¹ Shelton, “Assembly Square, the Back Story.”

¹⁰² Tate, Interview with the author.

¹⁰³ Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹⁰⁴ Tate, Interview with the author.

August 1999, 300 people, including then Alderman Joe Curtatone, attended and spoke unanimously against the plan. Mayor Gay eventually blocked the proposal. It was after this meeting that National Development New England got cold feet and backed out from the ASLP partnership. Taurus replaced them with Gravestar, a local firm with strong political connections whose main role would be to help in arranging permits.¹⁰⁵

Mayor Gay launched a competition for a consultant to work with the City on their vision. She wanted to develop a strategy for Assembly Square and get development underway as soon as possible to help alleviate the City's severe fiscal stress. The consultant who won, Steve Cecil, was under heavy pressure from the ASLP to include big boxes as part of his suggestions. His final proposal adopted a three phase strategy with the intention of mitigating the difference between the competing visions. The first phase allowed big box stores like those proposed by ASLP. Five to ten years later, the strategy assumes that the landowners would want to fill in the big box parking lots with mixed use development to capture increased land values generated by the first phase. Finally, the proposal imagined that land values would eventually be high enough that the mall owners would choose to demolish their own buildings for higher value redevelopment. Mystic Viewers were highly skeptical of this vision. As described by Wig Zamore, 'that's not going to happen. What's the mechanism for doing that? Home Depot isn't going to fill in the parking lot at its most valuable store.'¹⁰⁶ William Shelton called the proposed phased transition 'an economic impossibility.'¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the proposal at least acknowledged the potential long-term value of mixed-use, dense development at Assembly Square. The Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) and the City would adopt a 20-year urban renewal plan for Assembly Square in 2002 based on its findings.

6.2 Legal fights

The City and Mystic View initially had a quite constructive and collaborative relationship. After the Board of Aldermen unanimously passed a resolution stating it supported the Mystic View's vision, Wig Zamore, Anne Tate, and Kit Perkins (another Mystic View member) worked confidentially with the City to draft new zoning rules for Assembly Square. They raced to get the zoning ready before a Board of Alderman meeting where ASLP intended to apply for permits for the new Home Depot store that it now wanted to develop. However, the City failed to submit the new zoning when the meeting arrived. Mystic View decided to submit zoning unilaterally, after informing the City. However, the mayor claimed to the press that this had come as a surprise. In response, Mystic View decided to break confidentiality and announce that they had been working with the City to develop new zoning. According to William Shelton, this was 'a breaking point for the administration', who 'would never again communicate with Mystic View except through public channels.'¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Shelton, "Assembly Square, the Back Story."

¹⁰⁶ Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹⁰⁷ Shelton, "Assembly Square, the Back Story."

¹⁰⁸ Shelton.

Under extreme pressure to get development underway, the administration grew increasingly convinced by ASLP's argument that retail was the best bet for immediately realizing new tax revenues and that there was no regional market for office space. Without informing the Board of Aldermen, Mayor Gay signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the developers saying that the City would support ASLP's plan to build a new, larger Home Depot in return for some concessions such as \$350,000 for waterfront improvements. Wig Zamore describes the City's move as 'a complete fall of the cliff - forget the process.'¹⁰⁹

In 2000, the Somerville Planning Board approved a new application from ASLP to build a large Home Depot. The proposal clearly conflicted with the zoning code, but was waived through on a nonconforming use and structure. Mystic View saw this as a clear Achilles heel. In January 2001 Lanny Evarts, an abutter to Assembly Square, agreed to appeal the Planning Board's decision in Superior Court. Ms. Evarts was a Mystic View member and committed to their vision of open space and mixed use development. She turned down ASLP's offer of \$2 million in cash in return for a settlement.

At this point ASLP began an aggressive campaign against Ms. Evarts and Mystic View. With the cooperation of the city, they launched a public relations drive casting Mystic View as self-interested elitists. On multiple occasions they persuaded influential contacts to recommend the Attorney General investigate the group on baseless claims that it was set up to enrich Ms. Evarts and tried unsuccessfully to get Mystic View funder the Barr Foundation to cut off its support.¹¹⁰

In 2001 the mayor-appointed SRA issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for developments on Yard 21, a 9-acre former MBTA switching yard in Assembly Square. In closed session, the SRA chose ASLP, despite receiving a competing offer which would have paid twice as much for the site and generated more than twice the amount of tax revenues and jobs. The competing proposal from Mystic Port included accommodation for 1,500 graduate students, more than a million square feet of office space, 70,000 square feet of retail, a performing arts center, and funding for an Orange Line stop.¹¹¹ ASLP wasn't required to buy the site immediately, instead depositing a small down payment and signing a Land Disposition Agreement that committed it to completing the purchase by 2009. In the eyes of Mystic Viewers, ASLP did not plan to build on Yard 21. They simply intended to hold the site in order to increase the value of their adjacent properties.

Meanwhile, Swedish furniture giant IKEA were also facing difficulties in Assembly Square. The company had purchased a 17 acre waterfront parcel in Assembly Square in 1999 and had since

¹⁰⁹ Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹¹⁰ Shelton, "Assembly Square, the Back Story."

¹¹¹ Shelton.

been locked in negotiations with the City over its proposal for a new store on the site. Mystic View was entirely opposed to the idea of a traditional IKEA store because of the extraordinary car traffic they almost always generate and, more importantly, because they saw it as an enormous waste of potential in comparison to the jobs and tax revenues that could be generated through office and R&D space. Despite some attempts to work together to develop a new vision for how the store might work, including repeated proposals by Mystic View to initiate a mediation process, Mystic View members eventually submitted an appeal to IKEA's Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) certificate (based on its apparently flawed calculation of traffic forecasts), Chapter 91 license (which requires that developers commit one square foot of land to public open space for every square foot built upon on formerly submerged land in Massachusetts), and zoning (subsequently dropped).

By 2003 Mayor Gay was growing increasingly frustrated with Mystic View's delaying tactics. She felt that IKEA had gone through a lot of hoops for them over three years of effort. However, in January of that year Lanny Evarts won her appeal against ASLP's zoning. After collaborating in the PR campaign to denigrate Ms. Evarts and Mystic View, this verdict undercut Mayor Gay's position. Arguably, Mayor Gay lost re-election in 2003 because of her inability to resolve the Assembly Square stand-off.¹¹²

Joe Curtatone won the 2003 mayoral election having publicly supported a "smart growth" approach to development – 'Over my dead body, if I'm mayor, will there be a strip mall at Assembly Square' he said at one point during the campaign.¹¹³ But following election Curtatone appeared to change his stance. Curtatone had received the largest campaign contributions of any mayoral candidate in the state, despite only announcing he would run on the last possible day. It appeared that ASLP had been active in arranging donations from a wide variety of local and far-flung contacts, sometimes in return for corresponding donations to political campaigns in districts elsewhere.¹¹⁴ ASLP now wanted to build a strip mall rather than a Home Depot and realized that they would need an agreeable city administration to change the zoning to make this possible.

ASLP needed to find a way to get out of a sticky contract with Home Depot, who had bought the majority of the large loan that ASLP had used to purchase the Assembly Square Mall in 1997 in return for a guarantee that they could build a second store on the site. Mayor Curtatone hired a law firm to write new zoning for Assembly Square that would give as-of-right development permissions for a strip mall but not big box stores – a strategy to get ASLP out of its obligations to Home Depot. The Board of Aldermen approved the zoning amendment in April 2004.

¹¹² Savage, "Redevelopment and Smart Growth at Assembly Square."

¹¹³ Shelton, "Assembly Square, the Back Story."

¹¹⁴ Shelton.

Mystic View activists pointed out that the new zoning amendment would violate Massachusetts' uniformity rule for state and local zoning codes, which requires that every landowner within a district be treated similarly. Lanny Evarts submitted an appeal on these grounds in July 2004.

In December 2004 ASLP filed for an as-of-right permit for a strip mall. Having lined up land ownership, zoning, and a building permit, they now looked to fulfill their initial ambitions of selling on the site for significant profit. In 2005 ASLP sold the site to Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRIT) for \$64 million, netting a \$30 million profit.

6.3 A mediated solution

Based in Maryland, FRIT is a national-scale developer with a track record of developing so-called "urban villages," such as Bethesda Row outside Washington, DC. Their commitment to Assembly Square was predicated partly on the potential for a new Orange Line station on the site.¹¹⁵

Despite the zoning appeal still being unresolved when they bought the site, FRIT plowed ahead, re-tenanting the Assembly Square Mall and putting in \$60 million of improvements. However, Mystic View won the cases against FRIT's zoning and IKEA's Chapter 91 license in 2006. This put FRIT in a difficult situation because it meant they had no legal right to carry out the improvements or put tenants in the building. Mayor Curtatone was also under considerable pressure having lost both lawsuits.

After five years of legal battles and stalemate, Mystic View proposed a mediation approach to devising a mutually acceptable outcome for the rest of the Assembly Square site. The City had initiated an earlier attempt at mediation in 2003 when they commissioned the Cambridge-based Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to conduct an assessment of the conflict, the views of different stakeholders, and the potential for a mediated outcome.¹¹⁶ CBI completed the assessment but withdrew when it became clear that ASLP was not interested in participating. FRIT, IKEA, and Mystic View agreed to a second attempt in 2006. Wig Zamore asked Massachusetts Secretary of Commonwealth Development Doug Foy to act as mediator, who agreed on the condition that he could have Anne Tate as part of his team. Thereafter the three parties began six months of negotiation, meeting at Assembly Square once a week. FRIT and IKEA were initially wary of having Foy mediate the process given his apparent alignment with the Mystic View point of view (Foy had helped to develop a Smart Growth Plan for the state several years earlier), but he was successful in winning their trust.¹¹⁷ Mystic View participants

¹¹⁵ Boston Globe, "\$25M for Assembly Square Stop."

¹¹⁶ CBI, "Draft Conflict Assessment Findings: The Future of Assembly Square."

¹¹⁷ Nolon, "Second Best Practices? Addressing Mediation's Definitional Problems in Environmental Siting Disputes."

described that Foy had a very powerful personality and helped to push the sides to a solution. According to Wig Zamore, 'all we [Mystic View] were really interested in was the legal obligations for the land use mix, some legal obligation to open space, and the legal obligation to the Orange Line T stop,' in addition to some public river access and pedestrian and bike connections into and out of the district.¹¹⁸

The parties hammered out a settlement, which was announced in December 2006. The agreement centered around a “Long Term Vision” with three primary goals:

1. 'Prioritizing commercial office and R&D development to optimize the tax base and job opportunities in Somerville.
2. Creating a transit-oriented, mixed-use development.
3. A pedestrian-oriented urban design with improved connections to the surrounding districts and incorporating significant open space amenities.'¹¹⁹

The subsequent Planned Unit Development (PUD) masterplan approved by the city included about 5 million square feet of total development, including 1.75 million square feet of office and R&D space, 512,000 square feet of retail and cinema, a 340,000 square foot IKEA store, 2,100 residential units, a 200-room hotel, the existing Assembly Square Marketplace mall, and about 10,000 parking spaces.¹²⁰

Earlier in 2006, FRIT and IKEA had agreed in principle to a land swap that would move IKEA inland and give FRIT control of the parcel adjacent to the Mystic River and the proposed Orange Line stop (see Figure 9). This would allow FRIT to pursue its intended mixed-use development, and would release IKEA from its Ch.91 restrictions. According to Mayor Curtatone when he announced the deal, the land swap would allow FRIT to include 1,300 more housing units and 15,000 more square feet of office space than it would have otherwise.¹²¹ IKEA would eventually pull out of Assembly Square in 2012, selling its 12 acres of land to FRIT, who subsequently controlled almost the entire Assembly Square site.

Since agreement was reached in 2006, FRIT has commenced with constructing the first phase of their mixed use development, branded as Assembly Row.¹²² This is primarily retail and residential, as well as including a large cinema and indoor Legoland attraction. FRIT's rendering of the completed Assembly Row development is displayed in Figure 10.

¹¹⁸ Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹¹⁹ IKEA, FRIT, and Mystic View Task Force, “Settlement Agreement.”

¹²⁰ City of Somerville, “Planning Staff Report, Case Number PB # 2006-59.”

¹²¹ Hassett, “Magistrate Rules against IKEA, City Still Hopeful.”

¹²² Construction did not begin until 2012.



Figure 9: Proposed layout for Assembly Square following FRIT-IKEA land swap. Source: FRIT, 2006.

FRIT contributed \$15 million to the \$29 million Assembly Orange Line station, which opened in 2014 and was the first new transit station in the state for almost three decades. The project was approved by the city in May 2011, after the MBTA signed a memorandum of understanding with FRIT over financing in February of that year.¹²³ The balance of the financing came from the state Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development and the Federal Transit Authority, meaning it did not require any MBTA or city funds. FRIT had repeatedly made it clear that the T stop is absolutely critical to their mixed-use plans for Assembly Row.

¹²³ Taylor, "MBTA Approves Assembly Sq. T-Stop Agreement."



Figure 10: FRIT rendering of the completed Assembly Row development. Source: Blumgart, 2014

A critical challenge to realizing transformative mixed-use development is attracting tenants to a new location that is unestablished as an office market. Partners HealthCare announced in December 2013 that it would build a new 700,000 square foot headquarters on the former IKEA site for 4,500 administrative employees, directly adjacent to the new T stop. The office opened in 2016. This building is the first real office development at Assembly Square and, while Partner's non-profit status means it will not contribute substantial tax revenues to the city, it may signal to other potential commercial tenants that Assembly Square can be a viable office location.

As part of the agreed development, FRIT has expanded the waterfront green space along the Mystic River by 50%, renovated a park, and built a wooden pedestrian underpass under I-28 that links the site to the neighboring Ten Hills neighborhood.

6.4 Intermediate reflections

I have mixed feelings walking through Assembly Row in early 2018. On the face of it, the district appears distinctly character-less, dominated by chain retail outlets and restaurants (see Figure 11). However, one has to remember what was there before, and what might have been had the earlier plans for big box stores and parking lots been implemented. The FRIT-owned Assembly Square Marketplace mall directly adjacent to Assembly Row provides an immediate reminder of the waste of land this kind of development represents.



Figure 11: Walking through Assembly Square in February 2018 (Top left: the new Partners Healthcare Headquarters behind the Assembly Orange Line station. Top right: The waterfront park. An Orange Line train approaches Assembly Square from across the Mystic River in the background. Bottom left: the Assembly Orange Line station on the right with a bridge to the Assembly Row site. Bottom right: the Assembly Square Mall, also owned by FRIT, immediately to the West of the Assembly Row site.) Source: the author.

Mystic View members I interviewed have similarly mixed feelings. They know that the development is far better-aligned with their vision than it would have been had they not intervened, but see the completed and planned development as contributing substantially less to the city than it could have. The development is unlikely to contribute the 30,000 new jobs, 30 acres of new open space, and \$30 million per year in net new taxes that they were convinced was possible if it had been developed as primarily office space with supporting retail and amenities,

rather than the retail- and residential-dominated project that emerged.¹²⁴ But they are happy that the site will have more open space and incorporate better urban design principles than it would have otherwise.¹²⁵ Figure 12 depicts the current layout of the site.

Participants in the Assembly Square saga argue that the process has transformed how large-scale development is done in Somerville. Having experienced the difficulty of the development process at Assembly Square, the City is attempting to develop a more structured process for planning, community engagement, and approval that can be replicated across Somerville's other strategic development areas.¹²⁶ The City is also considering approaches to developing a masterplan for the additional 75 acres of Assembly Square not included in FRIT's plans.

The Assembly Square case also set a precedent for a strategy that would later be an important factor in the redevelopment of Union Square, my third case study. In 2006 the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) and East Somerville Neighbors for Change led a community planning process in the low-income and high minority population neighborhood of East Somerville. The East Somerville Initiative (ESI) produced a Community Action Plan prioritizing residents' objectives, after 15 months of focus group meetings and community summits involving over 1,000 residents in total.¹²⁷ As might be expected the residents placed considerable importance on objectives relating to protecting and enhancing housing affordability. However, and to the surprise of SCC Director Meredith Levy, the residents' top priority was to campaign for commitments to local hiring from the Assembly Square development.¹²⁸ This demand was successful, as IKEA agreed with the City to prioritize East Somerville residents in hiring for the 500 new jobs it would create and contributed \$100,000 to an employment training program for local residents, to be managed by SCC.¹²⁹ While IKEA, would later pull out of Assembly Square, they had already committed the job training funds, which would prove essential to supporting SCC's ongoing First Source Jobs Program. The notion of a legally binding local benefits package determined through community planning efforts set the stage for the CBA process now underway in Union Square.

¹²⁴ Tellingly, 30,000 new jobs by 2030 was included as a *city-wide* objective in Somerville's 2012 comprehensive plan. Current park space at Assembly Square totals 17.5 acres, if including the 12-acre Draw 7 Park directly across the Orange Line right-of-way.

¹²⁵ Shelton, Interview with the author; Tate, Interview with the author; Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹²⁶ Proakis, Interview with the author.

¹²⁷ SCC, "The East Somerville Initiative Community Action Plan."

¹²⁸ Levy, Interview with the author.

¹²⁹ Hassett, "IKEA to Consider E. Somerville Residents First."



Figure 12: Assembly Square in 2018 (Map: Author, Data: Cities of Boston and Somerville, MBTA)

7. CASE 3: UNION SQUARE

7.1 The Green Line Extension project

The Green Line Extension project and particularly the associated redevelopment at Union Square demonstrate the challenges that cities and communities face when attempting to balance multiple priorities while dealing with the great uncertainty inherent in market-led development.

For many decades, Somerville has lobbied for an extension of the Green Line light rail line from its current terminus in Lechmere to parts of Eastern and Northern Somerville reliant solely on buses for public transit (see Figure 13). The Green Line Extension project was initially approved in 1990 as a pollution-mitigation requirement for Boston's Big Dig project. However, it remained stalled because of cost-overruns and did not receive State funding until 2006 following a legal challenge by the City of Somerville and the Conservation Law Foundation (CLF). After further delays due to cost issues -- since its initial approval, the project's costs ballooned from \$438 million to \$2.3 billion, before being cut back to about \$1 billion -- the project is now underway. On November 20, 2017, the MBTA accepted a construction bid from a consortium of contractors. The project is currently scheduled to complete by December 2021.

While receiving a large amount of public advocacy and entailing copious subsequent community engagement, the decision to approve the Green Line Extension project was not the result of a public planning process -- the judgement from the CLF case meant that it was 'decreed in law, with very specific details about wheres, hows and whats.'¹³⁰ Some interviewees conceded that the project would probably not have been chosen if it had not been legally mandated -- there are other transit project ideas that make far more sense from a regional perspective. According to some interviewees the State would never willingly spend so much money on a project that would benefit such a small and defined group of people.

Many of the same people who were heavily involved in the Mystic View Task Force during earlier battles over development at Assembly Square were also active in advocating for the Green Line Extension. They established a new organization, the Somerville Transit Equity Partnership (STEP), in order to escape the pall of elitism that ASLP had been successful in casting over them during the Assembly Square law suits. STEP's arguments revolved around the unfairness of the current transportation system, in which Somerville shoulders a disproportionately high burden in terms of land use and air pollution while benefiting little in terms of service. As the group's website states, 'Eight passenger trains pass through Somerville. Only one of them stops.'¹³¹

¹³⁰ Fichter, Interview with the author.

¹³¹ Somerville Transit Equity Partnership, "Background."

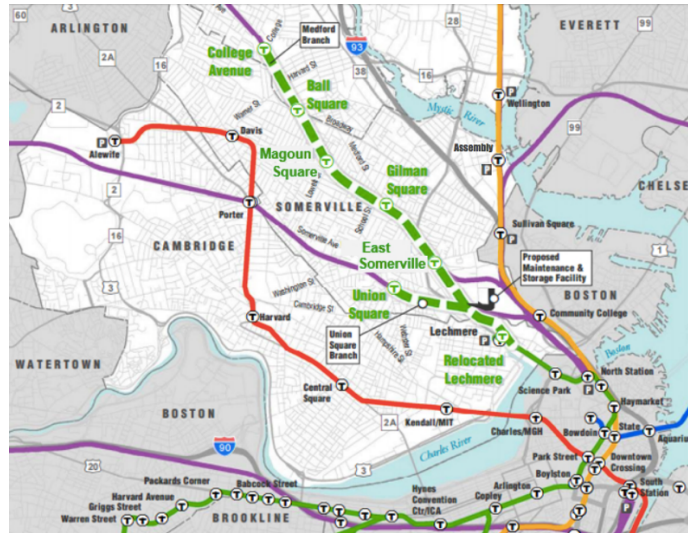


Figure 13: Current and planned mass transit routes in Somerville. Source: MassDOT.

The Green Line Extension is predicted to bring major benefits for Somerville. According to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), the project will increase the percentage of Somerville residents living within walking distance of rail transit from 20 percent to 80 percent; reduce air pollution; support economic growth and improve the commercial tax base.¹³²

However, the Green Line Extension has also raised concerns among some constituents regarding its potential impact on neighborhood change. The Greater Boston region is now one of the country's hottest property markets and Somerville has witnessed some of its steepest price increases. The median sales price for homes in Somerville grew by nine percent in 2016.¹³³ Despite this trend, and perhaps in part because of its poor transit accessibility, Somerville has retained some pockets of more affordable housing, at least by comparison to its expensive (and transit-connected) neighbor, Cambridge. The introduction of the GLX is likely to impact this housing market dynamic.

I have frequently heard that the Green Line Extension project enjoyed unanimous support from across the Somerville community. This narrative seems true for a large portion of the population. For instance, several interviewees told me the story of a famous public meeting in October 2004. Despite it being the night that the Boston Red Sox were playing to win the World Series for the first time since 1918, three hundred people packed out the high school auditorium to demand that state officials commit to the Green Line Extension. Jennifer Lawrence, director of local

¹³² MassDOT, "Green Line Extension Project: March 23, 2016 Public Meeting."

¹³³ Trulia.com (Accessed 11/24/2017)

nonprofit Groundwork Somerville, gave the following quote in 2011: ‘We [Somerville] have so many activists and community groups, elected officials and city officials. We may not always get along, but one thing we all agree on is that the Green Line needs to come in.’¹³⁴

However, a section of the community has always harbored doubts about whether the project would be in their interests. The CLF’s law suit was predicated on the notion that the Green Line Extension would primarily benefit the lower-income and ethnically diverse communities that live in East Somerville along the I-93 corridor, who stood to suffer from increased air pollution after the Big Dig. This may have been more true when the CLF lawsuit was initiated, but because the project has been so delayed and the regional market has heated up so much in the meantime, it is probably of less benefit now to the people it was supposed to help, who are the most vulnerable to potential gentrification.¹³⁵ As Ben Echevarría, who directs the Welcome Project, a nonprofit that works to support immigrant communities in Somerville, posed to me, ‘Public transit is good, but for who?’¹³⁶

7.2 Introducing Union Square

While the Green Line Extension involves six (potentially seven) new stations in Somerville and Medford, I focus my analysis in this thesis on redevelopment around the new station at Union Square. Union Square represents by far the greatest expected change in terms of surrounding redevelopment and has been the focus of a long series of city and community planning processes. The development is very much ongoing – construction has only recently begun on the Green Line Extension itself, while shovels are yet to hit the ground in the planned mixed use redevelopment led by master developer US2.

Union Square is Somerville’s biggest and oldest commercial district and was named after its role as a recruiting center for soldiers during the Civil War. The streetcar that used to run between Union and Harvard squares was the first in Boston and allowed Cambridge and Somerville residents to commute to Boston (see Figure 14). Union Square grew as an industrial hub. At the turn of the 20th Century it housed grist mills and factories for ink, glass, and copper tubing. After the streetcars were removed the local economy collapsed. Many property owners removed upper stories from their buildings to reduce tax bills, resulting in an increasingly fragmented urban fabric. After the Ford Assembly Plant closed in 1958, some former employees moved to Union Square to set up auto salvage and repair shops.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ragovin, “Getting Around Gets Easier.”

¹³⁵ Fichter, Interview with the author.

¹³⁶ Echevarría, Interview with the author.

¹³⁷ OSPCD, “Union Square Revitalization Plan.”



Figure 14: The intersection of Bow St and Somerville Ave in Union Square in the 1920s. Source: OSPCD.¹³⁸

Today Union Square is an interesting mix of tired, low-density (post-)industrial sites, diverse locally-owned stores and restaurants, and a thriving cluster of high-tech startup businesses and artist communities making use of the historic industrial buildings to the west of the Square. The area is valued for its sense of community and quirky character. The central plaza provides a space for public amenities like a weekly farmers market, while it is not uncommon for the whole square to be closed off to traffic for events such as the annual Fluff Festival. While the Lowell and Fitchburg commuter rail lines run just south of the Square, these do not stop in Somerville, so buses are the only available form of public transport. Figure 15 illustrates the layout of the neighborhood and the extent of planned redevelopment, which I describe in the subsequent section.

¹³⁸ OSPCD.

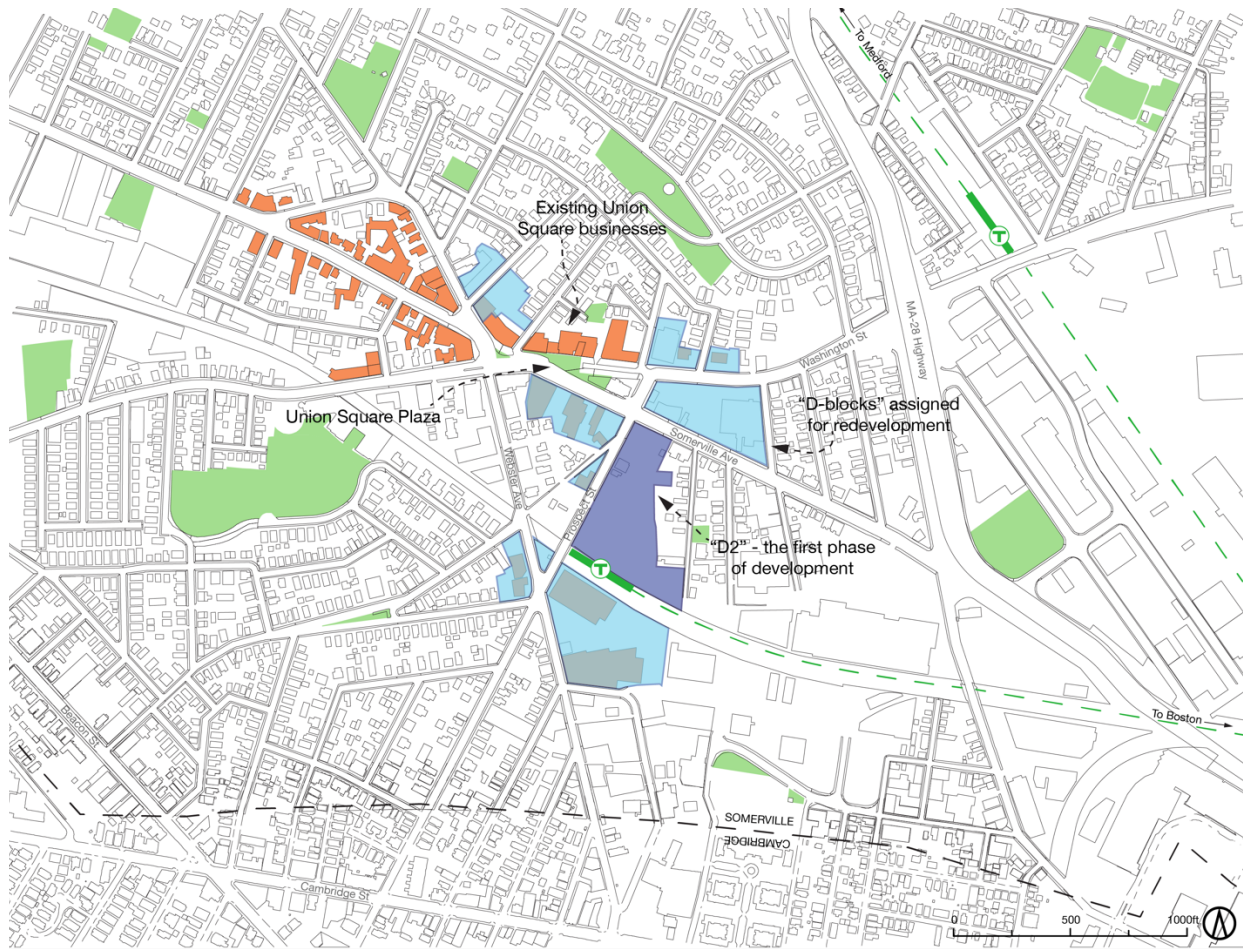


Figure 15: Union Square, current conditions (Map: Author, Data: Cities of Cambridge and Somerville, MBTA)

7.3 Planning processes and milestones in the Union Square redevelopment process

The City of Somerville recognizes Union Square and Boynton Yards, an adjacent industrial area, as two of only a few strategic sites in Somerville where significant development might be possible without requiring the destruction of characterful and historic residential neighborhoods. The Green Line Extension project is seen as a crucial factor for unlocking this development. Since the project was confirmed, the City administration has embarked on extensive planning processes to make development possible and ensure that it meets Somerville's needs. Perhaps learning from their experience at Assembly Square, the City has focused on developing a strategic masterplan, using eminent domain powers to gain control of key parcels, and enlisting a master developer to spearhead development for the whole district. They have endeavored to ensure considerable community input throughout. However, this has been a grueling process for all involved. After nearly ten years of almost continuous and often overlapping planning processes in Union Square, construction is yet to begin. In this section I outline the major processes, decisions, and milestones that have defined the Union Square redevelopment story so far. This timeline is summarized in Figure 16.

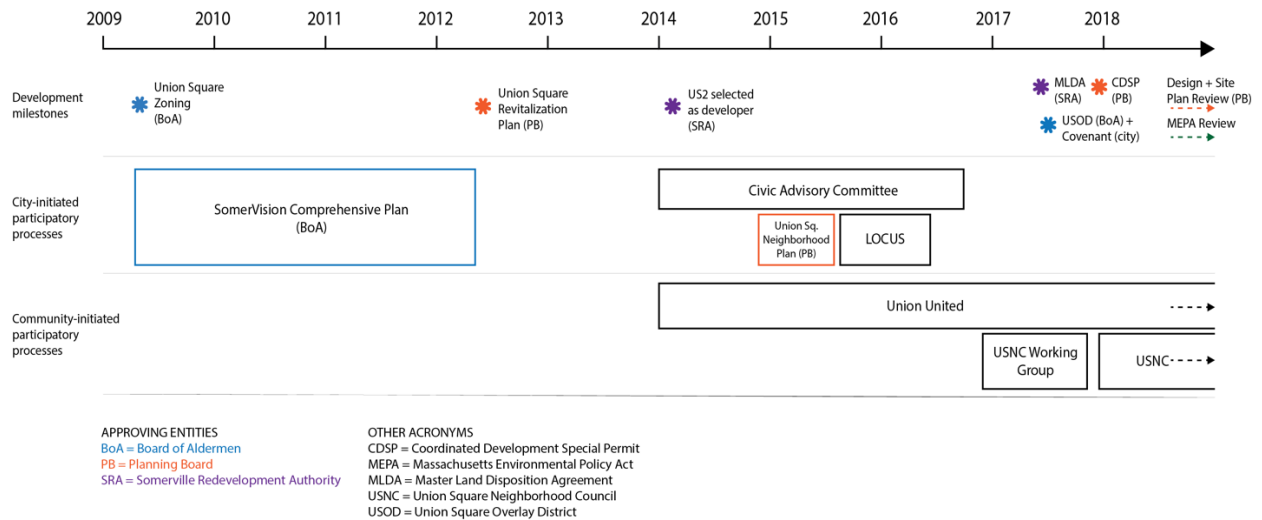


Figure 16: Timeline of milestones and participatory processes in the Union Square development.

7.3.1 Union Square Zoning (2009)

The City took its first steps in the current attempt to enable significant redevelopment in Union Square in 2009 when the BoA approved new zoning for the district. This followed 20 meetings in which community members gave input on the design and type of development that they would hope to see alongside the arrival of the Green Line station. The zoning established several TOD districts of varying densities as well as a Commercial Corridor District (CCD), all of which allowed for mixed-use development and more density than the preexisting zoning. The CCD focused on appropriate in-fill development in Union Square's core, while the TOD districts allowed for more transformative, dense development on vacant or underutilized land close to the future T station (see Figure 17). In anticipation of the area's future proximity to transit and with the intention of promoting non-car trips, the zoning included reduced parking requirements and the ability for developers to waive these further with appropriate transportation demand management measures.

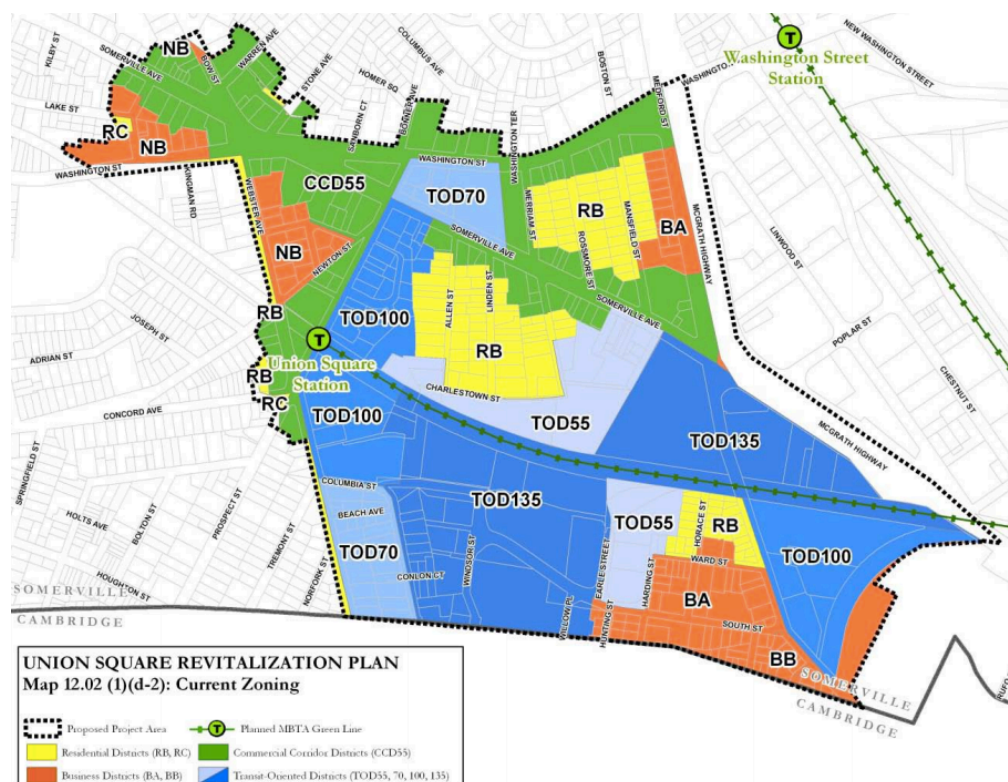


Figure 17: Union Square zoning approved in 2009. Source: OSPCD (2012)¹³⁹

7.3.2 SomerVision (2009-2012)

SomerVision, the City's most recent comprehensive plan, was approved in April 2012 following a lengthy participatory process that had started in 2009. The plan centered on achieving the following high-level goals across the city by 2030: 30,000 new jobs, 125 new acres of open space, 6,000 new housing units (including 1,200 permanently affordable units), and 50% of new trips being taken via transit, bike or walking. Additionally it proposed focusing 85% of new development in several newly-classified "Transformative Areas," namely the southern portion of Union Square, Boynton Yards, Inner Belt, Brickbottom, and Assembly Square (see Figure 2).¹⁴⁰

7.3.3 Union Square Revitalization Plan (2012)

To initiate the development process at Union Square, the city proposed a Union Square Revitalization Plan, which was approved by the Planning Board and the state in 2012. The Revitalization Plan formally defined the "Union Square Revitalization District" as "decadent," a status required to justify public purchase of development sites. The plan identified seven disposition parcels (the "D-Blocks") totaling 15.69 acres that would be purchasable by the SRA, including through eminent domain if necessary (see Figure 18).

¹³⁹ OSPCD, p.50.

¹⁴⁰ OSPCD, "SomerVision: City of Somerville, Massachusetts Comprehensive Plan, 2010-2030."



Figure 18: The seven Union Square disposition blocks (“D-blocks”) identified in the Union Square Revitalization Plan. Source: Union Square Neighborhood Plan¹⁴¹

7.3.4 Civic Advisory Committee (2014 - 2017)

In December 2013 the SRA issued a request for qualifications (RFQ) from developers interested in pursuing a mixed-use, long term project across the D-blocks. Several interviewees I spoke with praised the quality of the RFQ in setting out what the city was looking for in an experienced and well-financed developer with the ability to preserve and enhance ‘the sense of place and unique qualities that define Union Square, while still providing for an expanded economic base for the City through the use of Transit Oriented Development.’¹⁴²

Wanting to have community input in to the developer’s selection, Mayor Curtatone appointed a group of local business owners, development experts, architects, and community advocates to a new Union Square Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) in January 2014, whose job it would be to shortlist and recommend developers to the SRA. The CAC started with 20 members, and

¹⁴¹ OSPCD, “Union Square Neighborhood Plan,” p.179.

¹⁴² Somerville Redevelopment Authority, “Request for Qualifications for Selection of a Master Developer Partner for Certain Union Square Disposition Parcels,” p.32.

eventually grew to about 30. It was co-chaired by Anne Tate and Wig Zamore. The CAC met monthly and all meetings were open to the public.

The SRA received responses to its RFQ from ten developers. The CAC whittled this list down to a shortlist of four after hearing presentations from the developers. City staff and members of the CAC and SRA travelled around the country visiting some of these developers' previous projects to assess whether they had experience of delivering the kind of development envisioned for Union Square. Of the four shortlisted firms, the CAC strongly favored Seattle-based Girding-Edlen and made this recommendation to the SRA. However, at a meeting on June 26, 2014, the SRA unanimously selected Union Square Station Associates (US2), a joint-venture between two Chicago-based firms. After only just making it past the initial selection round as the fourth of four shortlisted teams, US2 had hired a local consultant to run an intensive public relations campaign on their behalf. While US2 are well-qualified for the project, the CAC was of the opinion that Girding-Edlen's past projects were extremely strong and far better aligned to their vision for the district. The SRA's rebuttal of the CAC's considered and enthusiastic recommendation soured subsequent relations with the City. The CAC remained active for several years as a sounding board for the planning department and the developer and its members were active in many of the subsequent planning processes detailed below.

7.3.5 Union United (2014 – ongoing)

While gentrification had not been a widely voiced concern before, at least beyond the low income and minority populations living primarily in East Somerville, by 2014 the increasingly concrete proposition of the Green Line coming to Somerville meant that the issue was gaining prominence. About the same time as Mayor Curtatone created the CAC, local organizers decided it would be critical to establish a group to advocate for community concerns in the Union Square area. Union United was formed as a coalition of community advocates, business owners, and concerned citizens focused on organizing for “development without displacement.” The group benefited from staffing and coordination support from the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), a local community development corporation that had been active in organizing earlier community planning initiatives around the proposed Green Line Extension corridor and is otherwise focused on providing affordable housing and job training to low-income residents.¹⁴³

The Union United group started meeting once a month to discuss and learn about strategies taken by communities elsewhere in the country to avoid displacement impacts where cities and towns had decided to publicly fund or assist major projects like public transit or sports arenas, or where large companies had moved into town and created new pressures for surrounding neighborhoods.¹⁴⁴ They sought legal advice from groups in Detroit, California, and locally who had experience negotiating agreements with private developers and connected with groups that

¹⁴³ Levy, Interview with the author.

¹⁴⁴ Cavellini, Interview with the author.

had experience working inside government to pass policies designed to soften the blow of the gentrification that accompanies large-scale real estate development. It was through this process that Union United members gravitated towards the importance of demanding that the community be able to negotiate a CBA with the Union Square master developer, a more formal extension of the approach taken by the ESI with IKEA at Assembly Square.

Union United were eager to engage in formal community planning processes such as the CAC (which eventually expanded to accommodate several Union United members), but they were also determined to organize more directly with pickets and other visible demonstrations where necessary. As described by Union United member and longtime community organizer Bill Cavellini, ‘the cry of our group, and the asks and demands, is about equity, and who benefits from economic development.’¹⁴⁵

7.3.6 Union Square Neighborhood Plan (2014-2015)

Meanwhile, the city administration were progressing planning efforts for Union Square’s redevelopment. After the approval of SomerVision in 2012, the OSPCD had moved to initiate separate physical planning processes for different neighborhoods in the city. These neighborhood plans are intended to act as district-level implementation guides for the city-wide comprehensive plan. The city created a new brand for the process - “Somerville*byDesign*” - and started by eliciting community input for neighborhood plans for the neighborhoods around the proposed Lowell Street and Gilman Square Green Line stations.

In late 2014 the planning division turned its attention to Union Square. According to one interviewee, decision-makers in the city administration were expecting US2 to propose their own plan for the district and how they intended to develop the D-blocks. A number of members of the CAC were horrified and exclaimed to the city that ‘this is nuts, you have to tell them what the plan is.’ The city had little money to pay for the plan so requested funding from US2, who eventually contributed \$340,000. Because the funding was privately-sourced, the city did not need to use an RFQ to procure a planning firm to lead the plan and so used the same consultants -- Principle Group -- as had worked on the Lowell and Gilman plans, a further cause for concern for some community members. The city held several workshops on specific issues, culminating in a three-day design charrette in Union Square in March 2015. The intention was to obtain maximum public input, with hundreds of people participating in the design charrette.

According to Director of Planning George Proakis, the community members involved in Somerville*byDesign* at Gilman Square had been happy to talk about design principles, but this was not the case at Union Square.¹⁴⁶ The community was determined to talk about CBAs, largely because Union United had organized members to attend and demand this, including through a

¹⁴⁵ Cavellini.

¹⁴⁶ Proakis, Interview with the author.

picket outside the meeting. While empathizing with Union United's demands, Mr Proakis was concerned that it was difficult to talk about community benefits before the rough physical form of the development was known, which had been the intention of the neighborhood plan. The wording of the final Union Square neighborhood plan reflects this unexpected focus on economic development and anti-displacement planning in addition to design. The plan described its goal as 'to balance city-wide planning objectives with a community driven process that identifies neighborhood priorities and issues and reconciles differences between the two – where they exist.'¹⁴⁷

Mr Proakis was surprised by some of the results of the process, claiming that it generated dynamics that he had never seen before in conversations with elected officials and community members. For instance, there was a big advocacy push during the public meetings for an increased open space percentage in the neighborhood plan. In response, Mr Proakis gave a presentation on the trade-offs involved; because the City had already negotiated certain developer contributions towards off-site infrastructure and the Green Line station with US2, increasing required open space would require raising the allowable density of development on other parts of the D-blocks. When he proposed that he would be able to increase the percentage of open space by adding extra permitted floors to proposed buildings, there was unanimous consent that this was OK, and the same was true when he proposed similar solutions for enabling more family-sized units or affordable housing. While many of the participants had started out the process with an apparent anti-development mindset, when they got into the details of the various possible trade-offs many people thought they sounded like acceptable deals.¹⁴⁸

In contrast, some community advocates criticized the process and claimed not to recognize the plan that was eventually adopted. For instance, Bill Shelton argued that the attempt to focus first on design was backwards from the necessary planning process. According to Mr. Shelton, 'Step one should have been to decide ... the uses that we want in Union Square. Therefore, what is the development program? How many square feet of commercial and what kind of commercial? How many square feet of retail? How many of housing? How many square feet of open space? Then, the massing. How much do we put here and how much do we put here? And simultaneously with the massing, what's the transportation plan? How do we get people to and from this place? Where does the parking go? And then, talk about "OK, we know how much we want to build of what kind of use and generally we know where in the square it would fit, so what's the design?" Well these guys did the opposite. They got everybody in, they showed them a bunch of photos of developments around the world and said, "pick what you like." And they had a series of exercises like that in which a lot of people participated. And then at the end they came out with a plan and no one recognized it.'¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ OSPCD, "Union Square Neighborhood Plan," p.36.

¹⁴⁸ Proakis, Interview with the author.

¹⁴⁹ Shelton, Interview with the author.

A further frustration was that the plan had not been developed before the master developer was chosen. Some felt that US2 had been working behind the scenes to get the plan to align with their expectations and had a major influence on the outcome. For instance, the community had spoken strongly against having a tall residential tower directly adjacent to the Green Line station, which is exactly what the plan proposed.

7.3.7 LOCUS planning process (2015-2016)

Following the public process contributing to the Union Square Neighborhood Plan, Mayor Curtatone in July 2015 enlisted another outside group to help develop ‘an innovative new model’¹⁵⁰ for identifying and prioritizing public benefits to be sought from the developer. With funding from the Barr Foundation, the City partnered with ‘LOCUS: Responsible Real Estate Developers and Investors,’ a program run by a coalition of real estate developers and investors under the banner of national non-profit Smart Growth America. Its leaders claim to support ‘sustainable, equitable, walkable development in America’s metropolitan areas.’¹⁵¹

The City appointed 30 “strategy leaders” to participate in the process, largely drawn from the membership of the CAC as well as Union United. The group embarked on a series of facilitated brainstorming sessions and exercises to consider different public benefits that they considered important to obtain in the future Union Square. They broke into working groups to consider particular aspects of the development and its anticipated impacts. The process was intended ‘to create a set of policy expectations and public benefits standards for both the community and potential Union Square developers.’¹⁵² After months of dedicated effort, the group published a report detailing their conclusions in April 2016.¹⁵³

Proponents of transit-oriented and walkable development have held up the Union Square LOCUS process as a successful case of community deliberation to manage the impacts of new development. For instance, in his book ‘*Within Walking Distance*’, Philip Langdon describes how ‘The overall objectives of the [LOCUS] collaboration are to ensure that rail service will arrive, that the community will get development that it is comfortable with, and that social equity goals will be met. In strong real estate markets, a process like this one may help local communities get the right balance of transit, amenities, residential and commercial development, and affordability.’¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ City of Somerville, “Innovative Public Benefits Model to Be Created Through City Partnership with Locus.”

¹⁵¹ Smart Growth America, “LOCUS.”

¹⁵² City of Somerville, “Innovative Public Benefits Model to Be Created Through City Partnership with Locus.”

¹⁵³ LOCUS, “Somerville Union Square Strategic and Community Benefits Plan Final Report.”

¹⁵⁴ Langdon, *Within Walking Distance: Creating Livable Communities for All*.

However, many LOCUS participants were dissatisfied with the process, which took up a year of time. A key failure is that the facilitators ‘never imposed finite limits’¹⁵⁵ on what the community could ask for from the developers. They failed to associate anticipated costs or efforts associated with different strategies, prioritize between them, or determine ways to maximize what could be achieved.¹⁵⁶ Bill Shelton offers a particularly critical illustration of the same shortcomings I heard described by other participants: ‘the LOCUS process encouraged everybody to dream for whatever they wanted: “Yeah, let's have as much affordable housing as possible! Yeah, let's have as many jobs as possible! Yeah, let's have as much affordable housing as possible! Yeah, let's have human scale!’ And the problem is they're trade-offs. And no one, to this day, has forced people to think through the trade-offs.’¹⁵⁷

The final LOCUS report lists priorities established by each working group, but does not consider trade-offs between objectives within or across working areas. Moreover, the priorities are a mix of general goals and action steps with varying specificities to the Union Square development itself. Priorities variously require action by actors including the developer, community organizations, the City, and the State, but there are no identified mechanisms for choosing between them. Some of the priorities have general action steps, while others have no identified path forward. Almost no priorities are accompanied by an estimate of likely cost.¹⁵⁸ These shortcomings are illustrated in Table 4, replicated from the LOCUS report, which lists the priorities identified by the LOCUS working group on housing.

Table 4: Priorities identified by the LOCUS Housing Working Group. Source: LOCUS (2016).¹⁵⁹

Top Priorities	Lead	Plan of Action	Partners	Duration	Cost
1 Ensure the greatest level of housing preservation and production for extremely low income up to 170% of AMI.	PMO/City	- Build staff capacity and financial resources of existing housing trust fund. - Create local policies to maintain affordability for current residents. - Conduct a vulnerable populations audit to measure impacts of Union Square redevelopment. - Obtain subsidy and loans from Union Square DIF.	Somerville Housing Authority, Existing Housing Trust Fund; Private and non profit developers	5-6 months	TBD
2 Provide a good mix of housing that is attainable	Community Organization/ City	- Obtain from US2 survey results of amenities needed for family housing	City; PMO; Trust Fund (SHT); State	TBD	TBD

¹⁵⁵ Shelton, Interview with the author.

¹⁵⁶ USNC, “Community Benefits Agreement Summit.”

¹⁵⁷ Shelton, Interview with the author.

¹⁵⁸ LOCUS, “Somerville Union Square Strategic and Community Benefits Plan Final Report.”

¹⁵⁹ LOCUS, pp. 18-19.

	and will accommodate families' and senior needs.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine the feasibility of a real estate transfer tax and Community Land Trust to use those proceeds to harness gentrification, reducing both commercial and residential displacement - Develop housing resources and assistance from local universities and colleges - Focus efforts and resources on acquiring and rehabilitating existing housing stock. - Provide up-zoning and density bonuses to developers in exchange for affordable housing. - Leverage State's 40R program 			
3	Promote home ownership and rental housing opportunities.	Community Organization	- Establish a Housing loan incentive program financed with public and private support based on the transfer fee	City; PMO; Housing Trust Fund	TBD	TBD
4	Ensure property management functions are kept in the hands of local stakeholders.	Community Organization	TBD	PMO	TBD	TBD
5	Streamline and ensure accountability of tenant and homebuyer marketing and selection policies and procedures for attainable housing options	Community Organization	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
6	Gain long-term community control of a percentage of land to be redeveloped for family friendly housing development.	City/Land Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establish a Land Trust and other leveraged resources - Identify other tools and incentives to promote family friendly housing development 	TBD	TBD	TBD
TOTAL						TBD

According to Wig Zamore the goals of the LOCUS facilitators were misaligned with those of at least a portion of the community: "Their whole promise was walkable, transit-served housing and we wanted live-work balance. They were completely focused on bringing housing back to the

city, but we've already got housing in the city. We're great with mixed-income housing being part of the mix, but at least people who come from a Mystic View background and have done all of the research across the landscape really want a more balanced land use mix. We're concerned about all the small artists, makers, retailers, and musicians who have helped define the character of Somerville. The most unique stuff in Somerville.¹⁶⁰

During the LOCUS process Union United campaigned to convince the mayor and the LOCUS strategy leaders of the importance of establishing of a democratically elected entity that could negotiate a CBA with US2 on behalf of the community. The LOCUS participants created a working group to deliberate on this and eventually endorsed the demand in their final report.

Soon after the LOCUS process ended, Somerville's Board of Aldermen passed an important new law affecting development in the city as a whole. At a May 9, 2016 meeting the Board voted unanimously to increase the level of affordable housing that developers would have to include in their projects from 12.5% to 20% for projects with 18 or more residential units and 17.5% for projects with between 8 and 17 residential units.¹⁶¹ This step had been supported by a widely-signed community petition.

7.3.8 Master Land Disposition Agreement for D2 parcel (approved May 2017)

The development process took an important step forward on May 2, 2017, when the SRA and US2 signed a Master Land Disposition Agreement confirming and setting the terms of sale for the "D2" block to US2 for \$9.3 million.¹⁶² The largest of the D-blocks, D2 is situated directly adjacent to the future Green Line right of way and includes the location of the future Union Square station. This block is expected to include the highest density of new development in Union Square, including a 23-story residential tower in the corner closest to the station (see Figure 19).

¹⁶⁰ Zamore, Interview with the author.

¹⁶¹ Jimenez, "Aldermen Approve New Requirements for Building Affordable Units in Somerville."

¹⁶² Somerville Redevelopment Authority and US2, "Master Land Disposition Agreement."

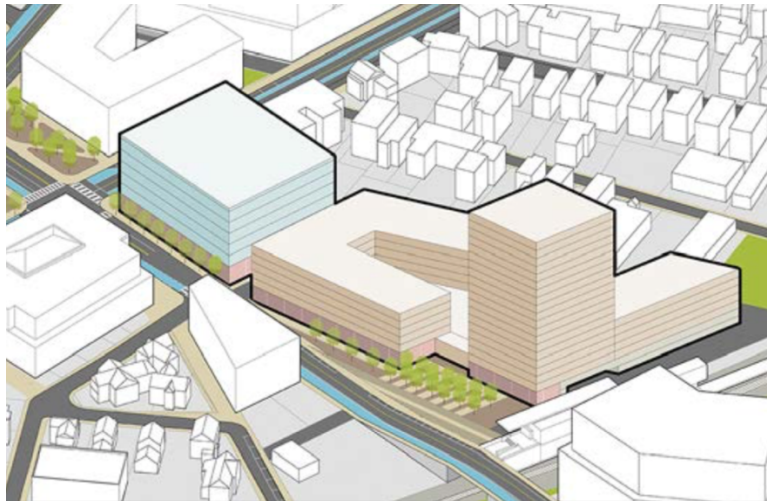


Figure 19: Rendering of potential development on the D2 block in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan. The Green Line station is in the foreground. Source: OSPCD.¹⁶³

7.3.9 Union Square Overlay District – approved June 2017

The following month, the BOA passed 9-to-1 a new zoning overlay for the Union Square redevelopment district.¹⁶⁴ This overlay district set the rules for the design and programming of development that would be permitted on the D-block parcels. Community advocates had spent many hours in the previous months studying the proposed zoning line-by-line and giving written feedback and testimony to the city, and the aldermen used some of their arguments to suggest changes. Union United’s submission to the BOA raised concerns that the zoning would be passed before the community had had an opportunity to negotiate a legally enforceable CBA with US2 and before a job’s linkage fee system was in place.¹⁶⁵

The zoning locked in some key components relevant to city and community objectives. On housing, for instance, it required that 20% of all residential units in the Union Square development be affordable, and that at least 50% of these be built on-site. It also took fairly aggressive steps to encourage “family-sized” affordable homes, allowing a developer to add an additional “bonus” floor to a mid-rise tower for each additional 5% of three-bedroom affordable units that they include across the development above the minimum level of 15%.

At a holistic level, the zoning overlay required that at least 60% of the total built out floor area be dedicated to commercial uses, in line with the city-wide goal established in SomerVision. Some aldermen and community advocates were unhappy with the amount of civic and green space mandated in the zoning. Many had hoped for a 30% minimum level, but the city settled on 25% after negotiations with US2. The goal of 125 acres of new open space included in SomerVision is

¹⁶³ OSPCD, “Union Square Neighborhood Plan.”

¹⁶⁴ City of Somerville, “Union Square Zoning.”

¹⁶⁵ SCC, “SCC Comments: Zoning for Union Square.”

intended to be met primarily through development in the transformative districts, like Union Square, so some were unhappy that the city had not been more aggressive in demanding a higher open space contribution in the zoning.

The zoning overlay also required the developer to pay an affordable housing linkage fee of \$5.15 per square foot of non-residential development over 30,000 square feet, to be paid into Somerville's Affordable Housing Trust Fund. The city had set this fee in 2013 after commissioning MIT professor Karl Seidman to conduct a legally mandated "nexus study" to estimate the subsidy required to mitigate additional housing pressures that new development in Somerville was likely to cause.¹⁶⁶

The BOA had been due to vote on the zoning overlay the previous week but had been delayed, in part by a protest from Union United who demanded that the zoning not be passed until it included a requirement for a negotiated CBA (see Figure 20). According to Union United activists, the BOA was under considerable pressure from Mayor Curtatone and his staff to vote on the zoning and get development moving.¹⁶⁷



Figure 20: Members of Union United protest at Somerville City Hall on May 31, 2017 to urge the BOA not to pass Union Square zoning until a CBA was included in the amendment. Source: Bowler (2017).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Karl F. Seidman Consulting Services, "Somerville Linkage Fee Nexus Study."

¹⁶⁷ Bowler, "Union United Hosts Rally as Aldermen Continue Discussing Union Square Zoning."

¹⁶⁸ Bowler.

7.3.10 Covenant agreement – approved June 2017.

On the same day as the zoning overlay was passed, the City and US2 signed a development covenant agreeing a series of “public benefits” payments, listed in Table 5, that would be provided by the developer in addition to the linkage payments legally mandated under the zoning.¹⁶⁹ US2 also agreed in the covenant to give priority to qualified Somerville residents and veterans for construction jobs and to not begin construction on a residential project beyond the D2 block until it had begun construction on a second commercial project – a concession to the City’s prioritization of commercial over residential development.¹⁷⁰

Table 5: Public Benefits payments agreed to by US2 in the Development Covenant

Public benefits name	Use	Amount per square foot	Estimated total¹⁷¹
GLX contribution	Defraying the City’s \$50 million contribution to the Green Line Extension project	\$2.40	\$5.5 million
Off-site infrastructure contribution	Infrastructure improvements undertaken by the City because of the Union Square development	\$2.00	\$4.6 million
Community benefits fund contribution	To be determined by the Union Square Neighborhood Council (defined subsequently) and approved by the BOA	\$1.60	\$3.7 million
Future phase contribution	Use to be determined by the City. Only applicable to phases of development subsequent to the initial D2 block phase	\$2.00	\$3.4 million

Source: City of Somerville (2017)¹⁷²

Significantly, the development covenant also included an agreement ‘to negotiate in good faith’¹⁷³ a CBA with a Union Square neighborhood council, once this council had been formed and recognized by the City. This CBA would encompass commitments additional to those already included in the zoning overlay and development covenant. The CBA commitment was

¹⁶⁹ City of Somerville, “Development Covenant.”

¹⁷⁰ Residential projects are generally less risky to developers because the lease-up risk is spread over many small units rather than a small number of large commercial tenants. In new markets developers will rarely begin commercial projects without securing tenants in advance.

¹⁷¹ US2, “Coordinated Development Special Permit Application.”

¹⁷² City of Somerville, “Development Covenant.”

¹⁷³ City of Somerville, p.7.

included in the covenant rather than the zoning ordinance because the City is not legally permitted to delegate permit-granting authority to a private party, which is what it would be doing by making permitting dependent on reaching agreement with a community group.

7.3.11 Linkage fee increase vote

On December 12, 2017 the BOA voted 9-0 to increase the city-wide housing linkage fee to \$10 per square foot for developments larger than 30,000 square feet and introduce a jobs linkage fee of \$2.46 for developments larger than 15,000 square feet.¹⁷⁴

The city had commissioned Karl Seidman to conduct a new nexus study in 2017, which found that housing pressures had intensified over the previous four years.¹⁷⁵ The study concluded that projected large-scale commercial and retail developments across the city would create demand for 591 new housing units over the next ten years, including 133 units for households with very low incomes, 182 low-income units, and 276 moderate-income units.¹⁷⁶ Seidman estimated that the total subsidy required to mitigate this housing pressure was \$86.43 per square foot, but advised that this would make Somerville uncompetitive with its neighbors. He recommended a housing fee of between \$8 to \$10 dollars.

The nexus study also assessed the potential for a jobs linkage fee to be paid into a new Municipal Job Creation and Retention Trust Fund, which had been given the green light in 2016 after the State approved a Home Rule Petition from the City. The study recommended the job linkage fee be established at a level of \$2.00 to \$2.50 per square foot.

The vote to increase linkage fees followed the November 7, 2017 aldermanic election in which seven “Our Revolution Somerville”-endorsed candidates were elected onto the Board on a ticket of promoting progressive change. It also followed a concerted organizing effort by SCC to gather signatures and turn out people to testify at public meetings in support of ambitious linkage fees.

US2 estimates total payments of \$6.6 million in housing linkage fees and at least \$1.9 million in jobs linkage fees if the Union Square development is realized to its proposed extent.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Bowler, “Somerville Aldermen Approve Higher Housing and New Jobs Linkage Fees.”

¹⁷⁵ Karl F. Seidman Consulting Services, “Linkage Nexus Study Final Report.”

¹⁷⁶ The nexus study can only be used to estimate direct impacts of new commercial development on housing demand, i.e. demand from employees of new tenant businesses, so it provides a minimum estimate of likely development impact.

¹⁷⁷ US2, “Coordinated Development Special Permit Application.”

7.3.11 Coordinated Development Special Permit (approved December 2017)

Two days after the linkage fee vote on December 14, the Planning Board granted a Coordinated Development Special Permit (CDSP) to US2 and the SRA, approving a Coordinated Development Plan (CDP) that US2 had submitted in November envisioning 2.4 million square feet of new development.¹⁷⁸ The CDP was a requirement of the Union Square zoning overlay and set out in further detail the overall vision, programming, and phasing of the proposed development.

The CDP included more developed analyses by US2 of how the required civic space could be included across the D-blocks, the impact of new building shadows, and an analysis of transportation flows after the development is complete. It also illustrates US2's current plan for building massing, which included an increase in the height of the D2 block residential tower to 25 stories (see Figure 21). US2 committed in the CDP to building all of the 20% required affordable units on site, equating to 180-200 units, and to developing 15% of these units as 3-bedroom, family-sized dwellings (the minimum level required in the zoning). Figure 22 is US2's own illustration in the CDP of the many public, community, and economic development benefits they consider themselves to be committed to or otherwise providing in the development as a whole.

In their decision to approve the CDSP, the Planning Board also approved a number of US2 requests for special permits to develop contrary to the recently-approved zoning overlay. First, they approved Residential being incorporated as a principal use in the D2, D3, D4, D5, and D7 blocks on the basis that it would support the mixed-use vision for the development and as a catalyst for other important uses. Second, the Board approved US2's request to be able to provide up to 5% of the required civic space via payment in lieu in order to give the developer more design flexibility. Finally, they approved US2's proposal to consolidate mandated Arts and Creative Enterprise space in one site, rather than including a small amount in every parcel they develop, as is required in the zoning.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ US2, "Coordinated Development Special Permit Application."

¹⁷⁹ City of Somerville, "Planning Board Decision: Union Square Coordinated Development Special Permit."

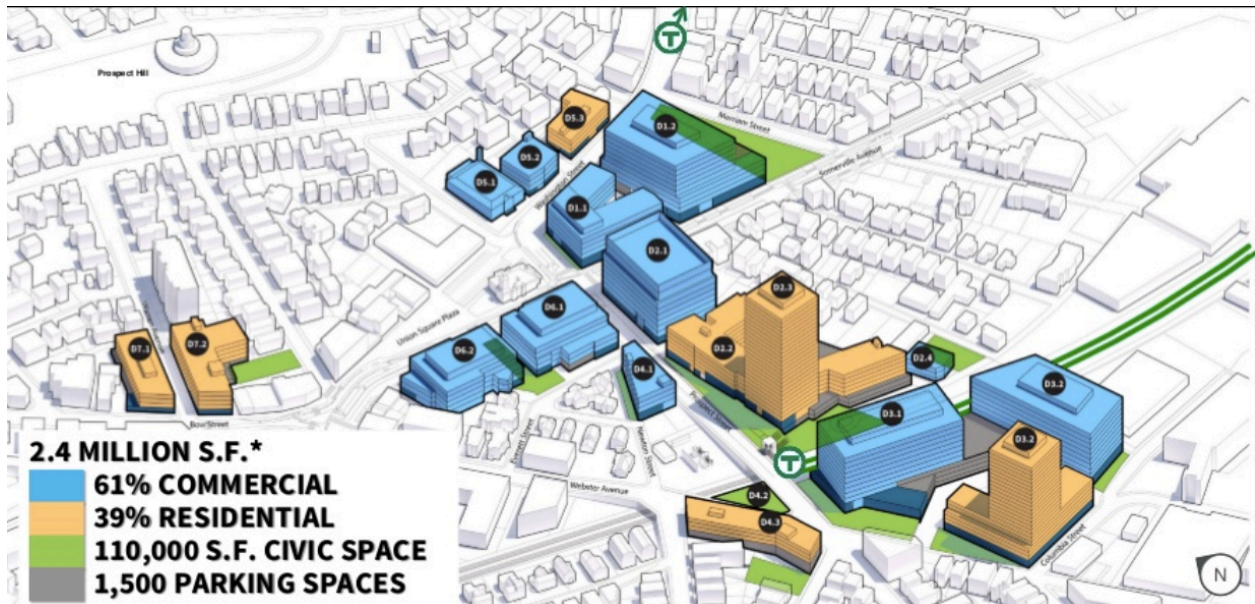


Figure 21: US2’s proposed Union Square development as presented in the Coordinated Development Special Permit approved in December 2017.

The CDP was criticized by some community members for appearing to renege on important aspects of the vision established in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan, which was supposed to provide the basis for its development. Representatives of Union Square Neighbors and Green and Open Somerville, two groups for whom public realm and walkability are priorities, were concerned that the CDP appeared to remove the broad sidewalks and building setbacks of the Neighborhood Plan, was not developed in coordination with the City’s public-realm and streetscape planners, and did not include provisions for an indoor civic space – a key demand of community advocates for several years.¹⁸⁰ These groups also criticized the Planning Board for rushing to vote on an important decision that, they argue, merited more discussion.

¹⁸⁰ Shelton et al., “Why We Need a Community-Focused Planning Board.”

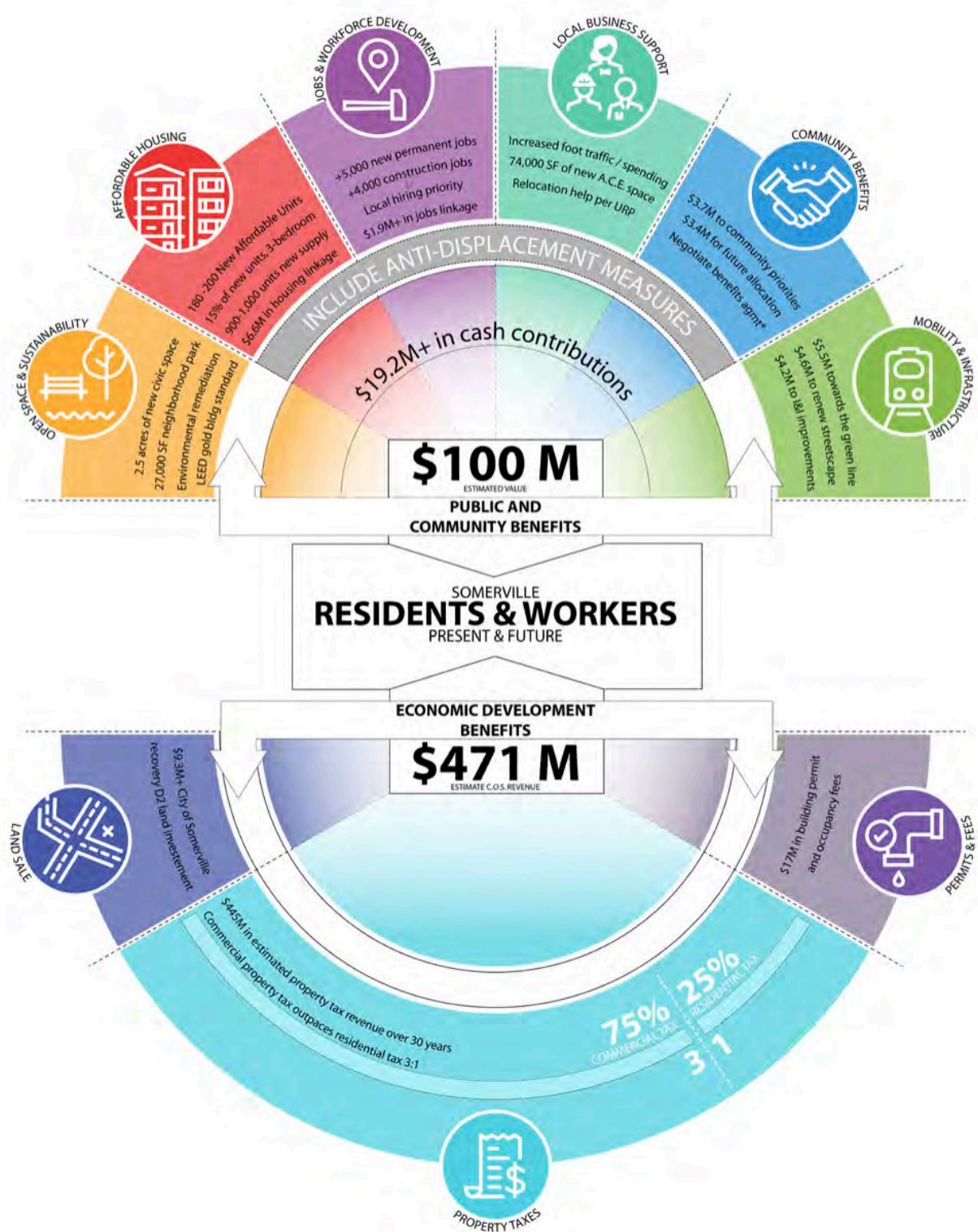


Figure 22: Project benefits as presented in US2's Coordinated Development Special Permit Application. Source: US2 (2017, p. 205).

7.3.12 Union Square Neighborhood Council (2017 – ongoing)

Following Union United’s continued advocacy on behalf of a CBA and the endorsement of this approach by the LOCUS strategy leaders in 2016, a group of community members began steps to develop a Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) that would be able to negotiate with US2. Beginning in December 2016, a self-appointed group of community advocates originating from a LOCUS sub-committee formed an open Neighborhood Council Working Group that would meet for several hours on a bi-weekly basis. The group spent a year and a half deliberating how the USNC should be constituted, what its bylaws should be, and how it should be elected. The working group had no formal structure, so made decisions based on two-thirds majority votes. The group passed revised bylaws in October 2017 after an initial proposal was narrowly defeated in a public vote in June 2017. Around 200 people participated in each of the votes. Participants described to me this process of “meta-deliberation” over an as-yet non-existent group as well-mannered but very draining.

The group held elections for the USNC’s founding board in December 2017, in which 42 candidates ran for 15 positions. The election was structured with the intention of securing representation from a diversity of Union Square viewpoints, with a requirement that the elected board include at least two members of each of the following groups: Union Square homeowners; renters; business owners or workers; charitable/religious/educational/advocacy groups; and immigrants. Voting was restricted to people who lived, worked, and/or owned property in the Union Square neighborhood, as defined in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan. 712 people voted, equivalent to 27 percent of the turnout for the November municipal election in the three voting precincts that make up the majority of the Union Square neighborhood.¹⁸¹

The election did not play out without a degree of controversy. In advance of the vote, two Union United members had organized a slate of 15 candidates and were very successful in reaching like-minded residents. 13 out of 15 of the candidates endorsed by this group won election to the board. This domination of the vote caused some consternation among others in the community who largely shared the same objectives as Union United but didn’t necessarily agree on the best way for achieving them. Some candidates who had been working for a long time on planning issues and community engagement in the area and, in their view, had demonstrated their efficacy, were not elected, while other candidates with little experience made it onto the Council. In addition, despite the elections being set up in a way to get representation from a diversity of viewpoints, no brick and mortar business owners were elected to the Council.

The USNC board has been meeting bi-weekly since December. It’s challenge is to decide how to prioritize the various objectives that it might seek in negotiation with US2. To help in this regard, the USNC held two Community Benefits Summits in February 2018 to generate ideas and elicit

¹⁸¹ Ward 2 - Precincts 1 and 2, and Ward 3 – Precinct 1. The Union Square Neighborhood also includes parts of other voting precincts, so actual turnout was lower than 27%.

community input. I attended one of these events, in which participants broke out into groups on different topics (e.g. housing, built environment, green and open space, local business, transportation, sustainability), generated ideas for potential asks to be negotiated with US2, and voted with sticky labels for their top five asks across all the categories (see Figure 23). Goals for housing, jobs, green and open space, and community space received some of the largest numbers of votes.

From a personal perspective it was impressive to see the level of organization among the USNC board running the event. However the event also highlighted to me the fundamental challenges of processes like this. Community members have no way of knowing what is a reasonable demand of the developer, or where the developer's limit lies in terms of what it can concede to in negotiations. Unless they are one of the relatively small group of people who have been following the planning process for years and read every line of each planning document and legal agreement participants do not have a clear picture of what community benefits have already been locked in by the zoning overlay, development covenant and land disposition agreement. Few members have the expertise required to know the legal restrictions on what can be demanded, for instance, on local hiring rules.

As an illustration, at the summit I attended there was considerable support for the idea of pursuing a 40% inclusionary zoning requirement for the Union Square development – an idea that was suggested by a member of Union United in an opening presentation. In principle this idea sounds good to community members worried about displacement and affordability, but there was no discussion of how this level of inclusionary zoning would compare to precedents set elsewhere or the cost it would place on US2 in comparison to other potential community asks. Indeed, there was no discussion of the magnitude of concessions that the USNC might reasonably aim to achieve from US2 overall. As illustrated in Figure 22, the negotiated CBA represents a small portion of what US2 considers it is providing to Somerville in public and community benefits.

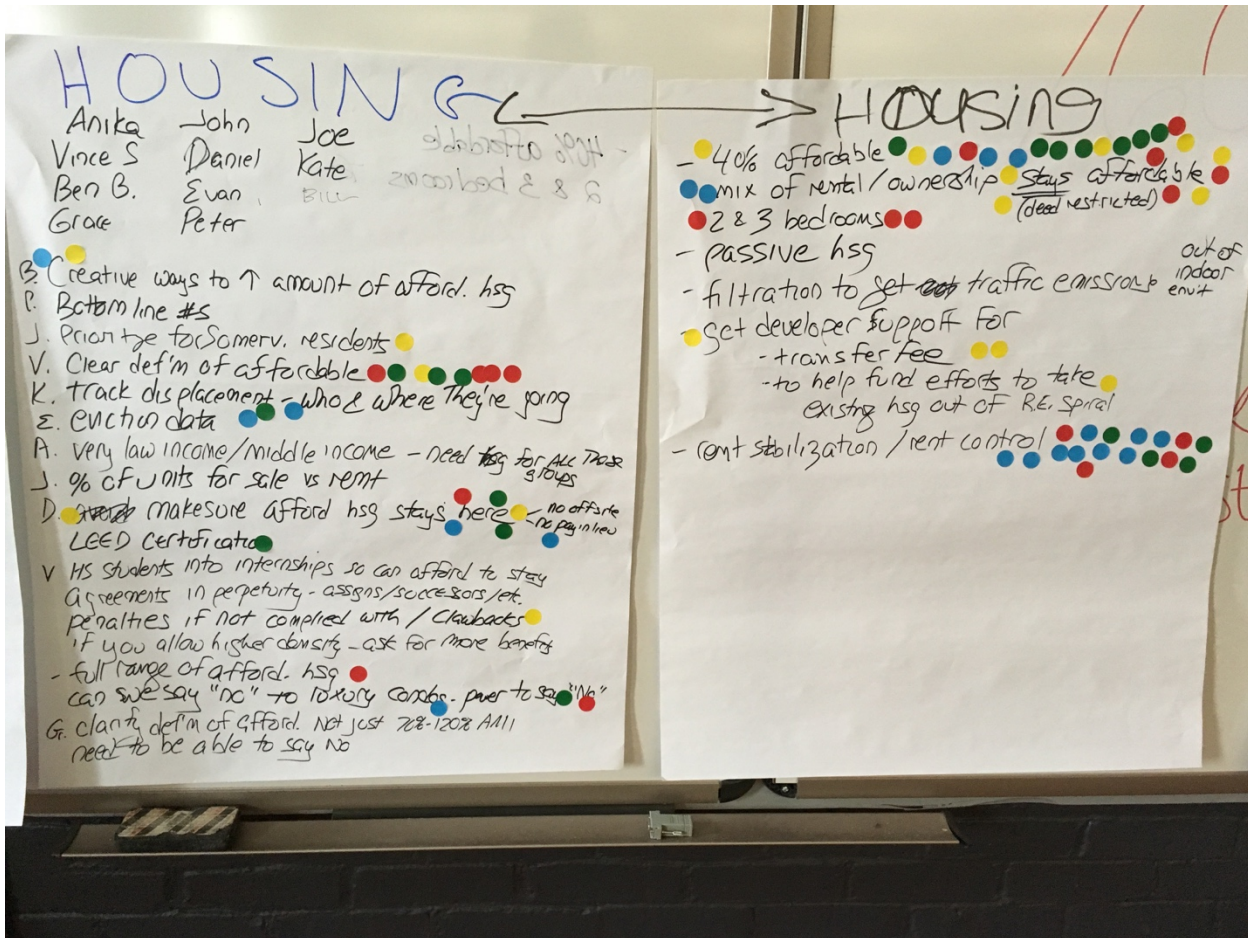
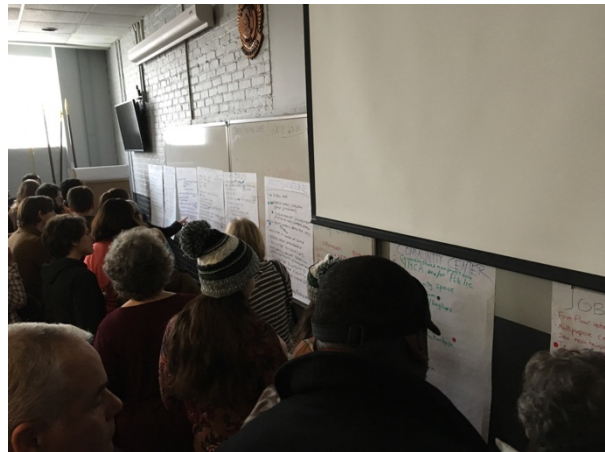


Figure 23: Scenes from the Union Square Neighborhood Council Community Benefits Summit at the Somerville Public Safety Building on February 10, 2018 (Top left: a break-out group on open space brainstorms potential asks for the CBA negotiation. Top right: participants vote on their most important developer asks. Bottom: housing was an important issue for participants.) Source: the author.

Everyone active in the USNC is participating in good faith and attempting to get the best possible outcomes for Union Square residents and Somerville as a whole. It remains to be seen exactly what can be achieved. However, it is apparent in my view that, despite the enormous focus by many members of the community on negotiating a CBA, this will only influence the final outcome to a minor degree in terms of preventing displacement. The majority of relevant issues, such as inclusionary zoning, have already been confirmed in the zoning ordinance, and US2 only has so much wiggle room to include additional concessions on top of this. As one participant I spoke with described the CBA process, ‘you can only get so much blood out of a turnip.’ I expect the CBA negotiation may be most successful in achieving important but less expensive community goals like a multi-modal indoor community space, job hiring preferences, or input over the location of a required neighborhood park.

While the USNC’s primary focus is on negotiating the CBA, it is active on other fronts, including through the creation of a Built Environment Committee (BEC) to organize input to the City, US2, and other developers on design and public realm considerations that will arguably have the biggest long-term impact on the future success of Union Square.

7.4 Next steps for Union Square

The Union Square redevelopment story is clearly only just beginning. It is too early to make conclusions about the ultimate success of planning and community engagement processes. In the immediate term, US2 must complete a MEPA review before proceeding with design and site review plan approval for each phase of its development.¹⁸² At each of these stages there will be opportunity for public comment and input. At some point in 2018, hopefully before construction begins, US2 and the USNC will commence negotiations over a CBA. Any proposal for a CBA would need to be approved by two thirds of the USNC’s membership. If it progresses to the full build-out proposed in the CDP, construction may last for 30 years.

8. DISCUSSION: SUCCESS FACTORS

The stories of Davis Square, Assembly Square, and Union Square illustrate clearly the challenges of attempting to manage neighborhood change around new transit stops and large urban development projects in general. Each of the cases involved planning processes that lasted a decade or more, with city staff and community members leading and engaging in processes with uncertain and changing deadlines, false starts, and long-term consequences.

Residents organized to pursue different objectives and adopted divergent tactics in each case. At Davis Square the goal was to revitalize the area’s commercial core while avoiding dense development and protecting the residential character of the neighborhood. The community coalesced into an informal task force that worked closely with the City and evolved into a *de*

¹⁸² A separate design and site plan review is required for every building, civic space, and thoroughfare proposed in the development. This means there will be 7 to 8 review processes for the D2 block alone.

facto municipal entity from which prospective developers required approval. The limited development that did occur in Davis Square was on an infill basis in an already established neighborhood.

By contrast, the Mystic View activists at Assembly Square were pushing to maximize the density and commercial value of new development and to block proposals that replicated big box developments that had come before. As Anne Tate describes, 'I think we were really a national exception in that the community stopped development because it wasn't enough. They wanted more development and wouldn't let anybody do less.'¹⁸³ Mystic View began trying to filter community input into a creative visioning process, working closely with the City, but as relationships and trust deteriorated they switched to an oppositional, legal challenge-based strategy, which was eventually resolved through mediation. The Assembly Square site was essentially a *tabula rasa*, with no residents at risk of direct displacement or neighborhood character requiring protection.

Meanwhile, the Union Square community is treading a difficult line between promoting commercial development, improving the public realm, and protecting lower-income residents from displacement. They have participated in a convoluted series of City-appointed, self-appointed, and open planning processes, built pressure through community organizing, and are now preparing to negotiate a CBA with the Union Square master developer. The planned development is an example of master-planned urban renewal on empty or underutilized parcels in the midst of an existing neighborhood fabric.

A further important difference between the cases is in the changing regional economic context in which they each occurred. The Greater Boston economy has followed a meandering but persistently upward path since the early 1990s, a trend which has been accompanied by increasing pressure on the local housing market (see Figure 24). It's no surprise that gentrification and displacement were relatively minor concerns in the early 1980s in Davis Square, when the prospect of house prices soaring appeared extremely far-fetched. The legal battles over Assembly Square happened at a time when the regional economy was picking up but the City was still uncertain about the capacity of the local market to support the kind of commercial development that the community was advocating for. Now, in Union Square, the super-heated regional market has made affordability a prime community concern.

To some extent these differences limit the lessons that can be drawn from comparative analysis but equally they help to illustrate different aspects of the challenges of managing transit-induced development, or the ways in which common challenges play out differently in varying contexts.

¹⁸³ Tate, Interview with the author.

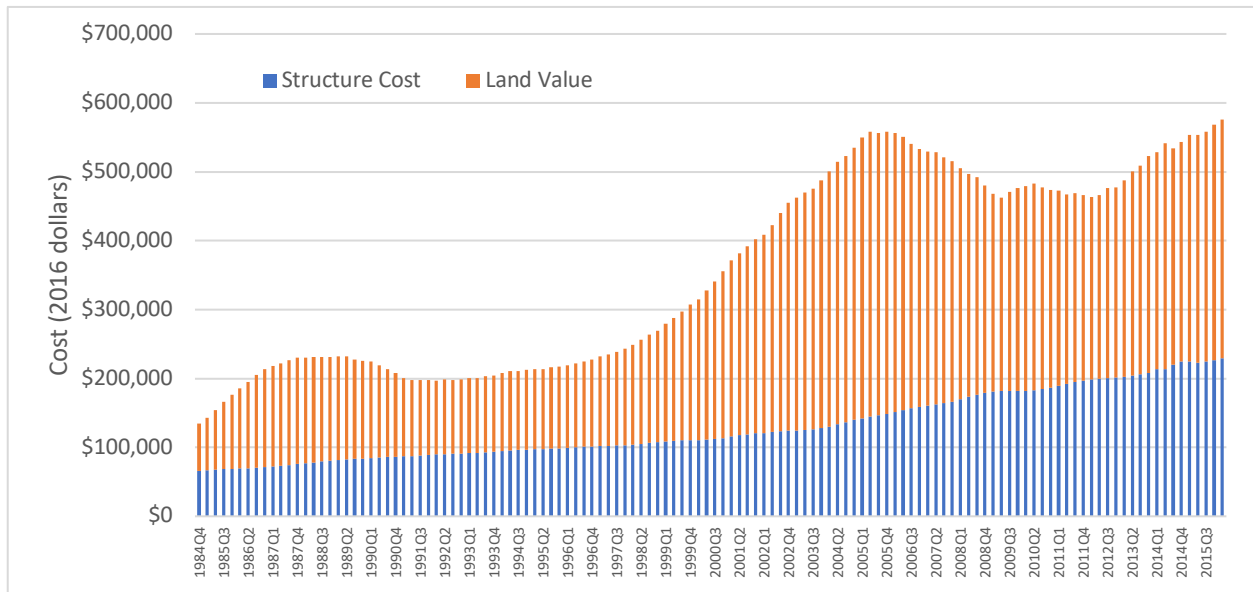


Figure 24: Estimated average home prices in the Boston Metropolitan Statistical Area, 1984 – 2016. Source: Lincoln Land Institute (2016).¹⁸⁴

In this section I discuss the factors in the cases that I considered most important to promoting productive and trusting planning processes and allowing communities to achieve their goals. Three factors jump out to me from the Somerville cases as fairly unequivocally increasing the likelihood of a stakeholder group achieving its goals. These are clear and focused demands, access to political power, and a commitment to process.

8.1 Clear demands

Advocating for and achieving community goals is far easier when you can clearly agree on and define what these are. The Davis Square Task Force had a quite clear and unified objective for the neighborhood following the introduction of the Red Line station. They provided a united front to the City and developers on the need to protect the low-rise residential neighborhood character and focus revitalization efforts on a concentrated and clearly defined commercial core. At Assembly Square, Mystic View were successful in diverting the course of development in part because they were a small group who, through their extensive analysis and design work, knew exactly what they wanted on the site and could be belligerent in pursuit of this clearly defined vision. In contrast, achieving a community consensus view at Union Square has been a more complicated effort. Most interested parties share a similar overall vision for what the redevelopment should contribute to the community, but they may prioritize specific objectives differently or hold divergent opinions on how the same high-level objectives can best be achieved. These differing opinions are partly a product of the more diverse community involved in the planning process at Union Square in comparison to Davis and Assembly Squares.

¹⁸⁴ Morris and Palumbo, “Land and Property Values in the U.S.: Metro Area Land Prices.”

The USNC is now facing the considerable challenge of crystallizing its negotiating position in the limited time remaining before negotiations are likely to begin. The negotiating team will need a clear prioritization of its general objectives, but its negotiation position will also be much stronger if it can back up demands with specific details. For instance, if the USNC decides to focus on getting US2 to commit to including a multi-purpose indoor civic space, it should have a clear picture of how many square feet it thinks is necessary, which exact programming needs it wants to be included, and what additional funding sources might be available to assist US2 in making it work (e.g. one suggestion is that the Somerville YMCA could relocate to this space and/or that a branch of the Somerville public library might open there. If so, both of these entities might be able to unlock or contribute funding towards the space.). Developing this detail from scratch will be a tall order in the time available.

8.2 Political power

The cases demonstrate the benefits of community advocates having a political economy favorable to their interests. The success of the Davis Square Task Force was possible in large part because of the group's close affiliation with Mayor Brune, who was a local resident and former ward alderman. This relationship and alignment of vision invested power in the Task Force and helped it to establish itself as an entity with significant weight in determining what could or could not happen in Davis Square. Even during the two years of the Tom August mayoralty, the strong connections of some centrally-involved Task Force members to politically powerful figures allowed them to stymie the August's plans to densify the area. For instance, prominent Task Force member Lee Auspitz was connected, through his Presidency of the Cambridge Ripon Society, to Senator Edward Brooke, who had been heavily involved in the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) until his election defeat to Paul Tsongas in 1978. Through the influence of Brooke, federal officials began descending on Somerville to question the legality of August's strategy of using HUD Community Development Block Grant funds to support private developers' plans to substantially demolish and rebuild the neighborhood.¹⁸⁵

Advocates at Assembly Square and Union Square have had less direct access to and alignment with political power than was the case at Davis Square. At Assembly Square, Mystic View initially had a collaborative relationship with Mayor Gay, but this became increasingly strained over time as the growing pressure on Gay to generate immediate tax revenues for the city through retail development clashed with the advocates' longer term and higher risk vision for a mixed-use and commercially-driven district. The relationship between the group and the City became increasingly distrustful and was not improved through the election of Mayor Curtatone, who some Mystic View members considered to have too close a relationship with ASLP.

¹⁸⁵ Pelham, Interview with the author.

At Union Square, the City has worked hard to ensure public participation and the Mayor has appointed multiple citizen advisory and planning groups to develop priorities and to advise the City. Community groups and the City have generally had a productive working relationship. However, the Union Square community does not enjoy the same kind of close relationship with the Mayor as was the case in Davis Square. There is a perception in some groups that Curtatone leans towards the interests of developers - he has certainly defined his standpoint in public as being in favor of development so long as it meets the community's needs.

In general, the larger, more concentrated development involved at Assembly and Union Squares mean that the developers there wield far more power in comparison to any individual developer proposing an in-fill project at Davis Square. The scale of development involved in these projects mean that the City must establish a working relationship with the developers, who may have considerable leverage over them given the City's strong incentives to realize planned development. This dynamic may inherently make community advocates feel somewhat distanced and reduced in influence.

8.3 Commitment to process

The three cases clearly demonstrate the grueling nature of attempts to plan and get community involvement in long-term development processes. Participants involved over many years often feel frustration about the speed of change or about being asked to reinvent the wheel on processes they think have already been completed. This highlights the fact that participatory processes have costs, both to those running the process and those participating.¹⁸⁶ One of the reasons that Davis Square appears to be a success in terms of community engagement is the clear commitment to the Davis Square Task Force as the primary platform for aggregating community views and providing feedback to the City. This commitment allowed the Task Force to sustain decades beyond the initial station planning phase and establish itself as a valued and respected entity, demonstrating the potential for participatory processes to create valuable and enduring social infrastructure.¹⁸⁷ The longevity of the Task Force was made possible by its friendliness with (and funding from) the City administration as well as the incremental nature of change that it was attempting to manage – a community task force can more easily grapple with development proposals for individual infill projects with timescales of one to two years than it can with a district-level redevelopment project likely to take 30 years or more.

At Assembly Square and Union Square, planning and community engagement has involved a succession of different and often overlapping processes, which have consumed substantial time and resources. Sometimes new processes built on the progress made in preceding efforts but in

¹⁸⁶ Cooper, "The Hidden Price Tag: Participation Costs and Health Planning."

¹⁸⁷ Feldman and Quick, "Generating Resources and Energizing Frameworks through Inclusive Public Management."

other cases it was not clear why a new process was initiated when it seemed to replicate what had come before.¹⁸⁸ The Union Square story most clearly illustrates this, with the initial creation of a CAC then being superseded by Union United, the Neighborhood Plan process, the LOCUS process and now the Neighborhood Council. Some of these steps were City-initiated and some were driven by community dissatisfaction with the existing process. Somerville Planning Director George Proakis admits that he would never have planned a process like this in advance; this is a big driver for identifying a clear and replicable review process that can be used for future redevelopment across the rest of Somerville's Transformative Areas.¹⁸⁹ The Assembly Square case also exhibited a lack of clarity over process. Most notably, stakeholders criticized the time and money spent by the City on developing multiple plans for the site, including the Cecil Study in 2000, the 2002 Assembly Square Revitalization Plan, and the Assembly Square Transportation Plan, without making clear the links between them or laying out a well-defined strategy for their implementation.¹⁹⁰

Clearly the City needs some ability to adapt a development review process in response to changes but all involved benefit if a clear process is laid out from the beginning and there is trust that it will be rigorously followed through on. If it appears that the process is being made up or reimagined as it goes along then the community is likely to lose trust in the City and be less willing to participate in the ongoing process, while developers will likely view investment in the neighborhood as a more risky proposition. If investors perceive the approval process as risky, then the developer's financing will be more expensive and they will have less money available for community benefits.

9. DISCUSSION: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

The three case studies highlight a number of major challenges for cities and communities attempting to manage the nature of neighborhood change around new transit stops. First, they highlight how differing models of planning and decision-making can cause friction between stakeholders even when they are pursuing the same overall goals. Second, they show how difficult it can be to prioritize community objectives and to know how aggressively to push developers in pursuit of these given the opacity of a developer's financial situation. Third, the cases raise questions about the appropriate respective roles of the City and local residents in relating to developers and the potential advantages and disadvantages of community groups attempting to bypass the City's formal authority. Fourth, they illustrate the very considerable challenge that City staff face in attempting to successfully manage and direct a transformational redevelopment process reliant on private investment. Finally, the cases raise important questions about representation and legitimacy when different groups and individuals attempt to speak on behalf of "the community."

¹⁸⁸ Neu, Interview with the author.

¹⁸⁹ Proakis, Interview with the author.

¹⁹⁰ CBI, "Draft Conflict Assessment Findings: The Future of Assembly Square."

9.1 Alternative models of planning: analysis, activism, and collaboration

The influencing strategies adopted by community members in Somerville illustrate some of the challenges of different approaches to planning and the tensions they can create. Broadly, I would categorize community viewpoints on appropriate influencing strategies in Somerville into two groups: those focused primarily around carrying out detailed analysis, generating “optimal” proposals, and achieving influence through formal engagement processes, and those focused primarily on building support around an organizing cause and achieving influence through activism. In reality, these groupings are far too simplistic; individuals and groups in Somerville who I would describe as primarily advocacy-focused have done a lot of technical analysis to support their positions, while those I would describe as primarily focused on analysis and formal engagement have also been involved in advocacy and community organizing. However, I think that this grouping does capture differing high-level notions among members of the community about what should be the primary strategy for influencing public decisions.

Planning theorists have much to say on the relative advantages and limitations of different theories of decision-making and the tensions that can arise when those with differing theories are required to interact. Judith Innes and David Booher argue that public officials, professionals, and members of the public often have different tacit models of how the planning and policy making system should work. These models, summarized in Figure 25, vary both in the extent to which they see good decision-making as reliant upon the inclusion of a diversity of stakeholders and interests and in the degree to which the interests of those involved are interdependent on one another. Innes and Booher describe how ‘those who believe in and practice each model act within the logic of the particular model and tend to feel strongly that their approach is the right, if not the only, way to do planning.’¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Innes and Booher, “Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century,” p.12.

		Diversity	
		Low	High
Interdependence of interests	Low	Technical Bureaucratic <i>Convincing</i>	Political Influence <i>Co-opting</i>
	High	Social Movement <i>Converting</i>	Collaborative <i>Co-evolving</i>

Figure 25: Four models of planning and policy making. Source: Innes and Booher (2000).¹⁹²

Adopting Innes and Booher’s framework, I would argue that the dominant models of planning exhibited by Somerville community members fall in the “Technical Bureaucratic” and “Social Movement” boxes. Those ascribing to the former model believe that there is a “best” course of action that can be identified through rigorous analysis and, often, that they are the ones best qualified to do that analysis. They typically think that general citizen involvement should be limited to assisting in setting goals at the beginning and perhaps commenting on alternatives generated through the analytical process. According to Innes and Booher, the technical model does not work well when interests are diverse and/or highly interdependent, which has the result of making many complex scenarios imaginable. In addition, a focus on technical determinations underplays the fact that, while land use decisions should be informed by analysis, they are inherently political in nature.¹⁹³ I would argue that prominent Mystic View members aligned most closely with this model given their focus on extensive and detailed analysis by a small group to develop a concrete vision of the optimal development strategy for Assembly Square. They attempted to influence the planning process through formal engagement, only switching to a legal challenge approach when it appeared their only option.

In contrast, the Social Movement model posits that the only way for people not in power to influence decision making is to join together behind a unified vision and loudly advocate for

¹⁹² Innes and Booher.

¹⁹³ Susskind, “Citizen Participation and Consensus Building in Land Use Planning: A Case Study.”

decisions in support of that idea. While those involved might claim to *be* the community, by definition the movement cannot include a full range of community interests because this would mean diluting the movement with those whose interests are not aligned with its goals. This fact arguably limits the extent to which social movements can facilitate collaborative decision-making because those involved cannot collaborate with groups they consider the “enemy” without threatening the movement’s internal cohesion. Union United is the clearest example of a group in Somerville aligned with the Social Movement of planning and policy making, rallying as many people as it can behind the banner of “development without displacement.”

I found that each of these approaches has its own strengths and challenges. There was agreement across my interviews on the difficulty of keeping members of social movements engaged over the long time scales, uncertainties, and false starts of major development processes. Organizers need to know when to push, which steps in the development process are key leverage points for achieving movement objectives, and how to set realistic goals in order to achieve the short-term “wins” required to build momentum.¹⁹⁴ As one interviewee described, ‘One thing that continues to bubble to the top every single time there is a new infusion of people or a new process is the length of time that these types of developments take - a long series of plans, work, announcements, etc. etc., with unexpected changes, developers walking away, other people coming in... Meanwhile, everybody who's new to the process wants to treat everything as a last stand. The community seems to be slowly learning that process, realizing that it may be important to work together to be on the same page rather than treat everything as a last stand. We don't want to be counter-productive.’

The activist approach of Union United has caused tension with some community members who ascribe more to the analysis and formal engagement model of decision-making. One such interviewee complained that many of those involved in advocacy in Somerville often ‘substitute ideology for evidence.’ These critics would argue that this has been the case, for instance, in respect to Union United’s primary push for affordable housing; some, based on their analysis, are convinced that the best way for Somerville to achieve progressive goals are to encourage commercial development to boost tax revenues and reduce the city’s fiscal imbalance, rather than focusing on building more housing in what is already an overwhelmingly residential city whose construction trends will have negligible influence on regional housing market dynamics.

However, despite the frustrations of some parts of the community, it is clear that advocacy groups have a critical role in maintaining pressure on decision-makers. As one interviewee described, ‘Some people can't stand activist groups' tactics. But that's what their job is - to keep the fire going underneath people who either need to be pushed or want to do these things but

¹⁹⁴ Connolly, Interview with the author; Echevarría, Interview with the author; Goldman, Interview with the author; Levy, Interview with the author.

don't feel they have the wiggle room with their constituents. Decision-makers need something they can point to, to say they were forced to do it.'

Activism and organizing are critical means for engaging and representing the historically marginalized communities who are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of development. For instance, Ben Echevarría described how formal planning processes in Somerville offer little confidence to people of color that their voices will be given weight in decision-making: 'Not once in this process have People of Color been able to say anything. We've had a white elected Board of Aldermen making decisions, an appointed all-white Zoning Board making decisions, an all-white Planning Board saying what they want, an all-white planning department saying what they want, and an all-white developer making decisions on what they want.'¹⁹⁵ In this situation, organizing, movement building, and advocacy appear the only viable strategy for vocalizing and achieving community goals.

Given the respective limitations of technical bureaucratic and social movement approaches to planning, Innes and Booher make the case for an alternative model predicated on collaboration. Their proposed collaborative model sees successful planning as involving direct dialogue between representatives of all parties interested in the outcome of a decision. It posits that true collaborative dialogue can only take place if all parties are equally informed, their interests are interdependent, all issues are on the table, the participants are legitimate representatives of their respective groups, and agreement is only reached through the consensus of a vast majority of participants.¹⁹⁶

Arguably, some of the participatory planning processes pursued at Union Square over the past several years can be seen as attempts to implement a planning model more in line with this collaborative ideal. The Neighborhood Plan, LOCUS process, and USNC have all attempted to include representatives from across the community and, to differing degrees, have encouraged mutual learning and direct dialogue among those with differing views and interests. A clear limitation of these processes is that they have not included one critical stakeholder, the master developer US2. Participants from a range of community groups have been heavily engaged in deliberations over how to achieve the best future for the neighborhood but they have not been able to hear the viewpoints of the party with the most direct role in implementing this change. This makes it difficult to avoid an adversarial image of the developer emerging, in which the community must fight to extract concessions from a greedy and faceless opponent.

The USNC, for instance, includes a range of people who I would describe as holding differing visions of how best to influence planning and has created space for internal deliberation through its weekly meetings and community summits. However, by establishing a group theoretically

¹⁹⁵ Echevarría, Interview with the author.

¹⁹⁶ Innes and Booher, "Public Participation in Planning: New Strategies for the 21st Century."

representing the entire community in order to negotiate a CBA the USNC is inherently oppositional - it sets up the community against the developer and, to some extent, against the City, who, as addressed in Section 9.3 below, is also trying to represent the community's interests. Some members of the USNC have highlighted the need to avoid such an adversarial relationship and instead seek to work with US2 to identify common interests, but the two-party negotiation structure may make this difficult to achieve.

Furthermore, because of the dominance of the initial founding board election by a single slate of candidates, questions have been raised about whether, despite the best efforts of those involved in establishing the USNC's bylaws, the board includes representation from a full range of community interests. A number of preexisting neighborhood groups felt unhappy about the dynamics of the election process. The group's legitimacy will likely be tested as it moves closer to negotiations with US2.

9.2 Prioritizing demands and knowing how far to push private investors

One of the most fundamental challenges I identified through my conversations with those involved in the various transit-instigated development cases in Somerville is that of prioritizing community benefits that might be sought from private developers and then knowing how far to push given the opacity of the developers' financial situations. The community needs to decide exactly what it wants in the context of an uncertain notion of how much flexibility the developer has to provide additional benefits without making the project financially infeasible.

A central cause of this challenge appears to be a misalignment between how most members of the community and a developer perceive risk. When community members without experience in the real estate industry are presented with renderings of the potential full build-out of a multi-decade, billion dollar development project, they can be inclined to see these as images of what *will* get built rather than an illustration of what the development *might* look like if all goes to plan. Given their expectation that the developer *will* build this enormous project and realize a large return, community members understandably consider it entirely reasonable to demand substantial upfront contributions for community benefits. The following description by one community advocate I spoke with in regard to the Union Square project of their position regarding community benefits typifies this view [emphasis added]: 'Over the life of the project we *know* you [US2] are going to make billions of dollars, and that's not an issue. But when you're fighting over spending millions now and you're not looking at the 30, 40, or 50-year pro forma where you're making billions, it's just not acceptable to me. You should make sure that the community is taken care of.'

On the other hand, developers and real estate investors have a very different perspective on the likelihood of real estate projects and associated returns being realized, especially when the project is attempting to establish a market for a type of development that has not already been proven in that location. Union Square will be competing for commercial tenants with new developments in more established markets like Kendall Square, Downtown Boston, the Seaport, North Point, and,

potentially, Assembly Square. Significant amounts of new office and lab buildings will come online in these locations before the first commercial building at Union Square is completed, meaning that US2 is gambling on the Boston commercial market continuing to grow for many years at a healthy rate.¹⁹⁷ The first company deciding to locate a major office in Union Square will be making a considerable leap of faith in the neighborhood's potential to become a new commercial hub. This situation illustrates the risk that US2 is adopting in pursuing development on the scale planned. The developer will raise the majority of its financing from private investors on the capital market, who will demand a certain return, but US2's own equity is invested at a much higher level of risk, for which it justifies a higher level of return.

This common misalignment in conceptions of risk and developer profit among members of the community complicates the process of prioritizing potential community demands and objectives. Many in the community want to extract large concessions from the developer but the developer only has a certain amount of financial flexibility, and the community cannot know exactly how large that flexibility is.¹⁹⁸ This uncertainty is just as much an issue for the City, which is trying to get as close as possible to the line of the developer's viability without crossing it. The City is facing its own risks – it needs revenues from commercial development at Union Square to pay back bonds that financed its contribution to the GLX project, a new high school, and other infrastructure improvements and would also suffer considerable political damage if it is seen to have been too lenient with developers.¹⁹⁹ US2 did allow an independent expert to review their books on behalf of the City, and George Proakis was encouraged by the expert's conclusion that the City had obtained more community benefits from US2 than was normal for a developer in their financial position. Because the City has already locked in sizable developer contributions through inclusionary zoning and linkage fees, US2 likely has relatively small amount of further benefits that it can commit to.

To negotiate effectively with US2, the USNC will need to have a clear prioritization of its various objectives and, ideally, a rough idea of how costly these would be to US2 to provide. According to a board member I interviewed in February, the USNC does not yet know how it is going to approach this task. The CBA Summits in March were designed in part to get a better idea of community priorities, but these effectively just added to the list of wants, rather than giving a clear picture of which goals are most important, which goals might be in opposition to each other, or what community members might be willing to trade-off for particular objectives in negotiation with the developer. From my experience, there has been little discussion of which

¹⁹⁷ Seidman, Interview with the author.

¹⁹⁸ Proakis, Interview with the author.

¹⁹⁹ It is possible that the MBTA will refund the City of Somerville its \$50 million contribution if the project comes in under budget. In this event, US2 would not expect reimbursement of its contribution to the City's Green Line expenses.

community benefits might be achieved at little or no cost to US2 and which would be more financially burdensome (and would therefore exclude the potential for many other negotiated benefits if pursued by the USNC). The USNC board produced a summary report in March 2018 attempting to distill the input it had received at these summits as well as from extensive written submissions from other neighborhood groups and recommendations from earlier processes such as LOCUS.²⁰⁰ This report highlighted the major areas of concern²⁰¹ but cannot comment on the relative importance of specific suggestions. The USNC is in the process of forming a negotiating team through a call for nominations. The USNC board will need to approve negotiation goals before the negotiations themselves begin.

In comparison to Davis Square and Assembly Square, equity is a far more central issue in the planning process at Union Square. I believe that this focus on equity, primarily concerning the potential displacement of residents and businesses, in addition to physical design, programming, and land use planning factors significantly complicates the task of prioritizing community objectives because it adds another dimension against which results must be measured and to which resources will need to be dedicated, probably to the expense of other types of goals. For instance, a push for a higher inclusionary zoning percentage than the 20 percent currently required would reduce US2's ability to provide more green space or a community center – other key community objectives. There is also considerable disagreement on how equity goals can best be achieved, and USNC will need to decide on what it thinks is the best strategy. On the one hand are those, such as Union United, who believe that the USNC should aim for the maximum possible level of affordable and family-size units in US2's developments. On the other hand are those who think that one development, even if large, will not impact a regional housing affordability problem and that the USNC can better achieve equity goals by focusing on maximizing the quality of the public realm, which will be in place for decades to come, demanding strong sustainability measures, and perhaps exploring how the developer could contribute to city-wide housing affordability programs in addition to the linkage fees it is already committed to. This opinion appears especially merited because the development at Union Square will only directly displace a handful of residents and businesses.

9.3 Questioning the traditional roles of the City, community, and developer

The different approaches taken to community planning in each of the cases raise the important question of what is an appropriate relationship between a city government, residents, and a developer, especially in the case of transformative redevelopment projects, and what are their roles in defining and delivering beneficial outcomes. Theoretically, the City's role is to represent the interests of local residents as mandated through democratic process and to ensure that any development is in the public interest, however that is defined. In this traditional view the City is a

²⁰⁰ USNC, "Community Input for a Community Benefits Agreement in Union Square."

²⁰¹ Affordable housing; arts and creative economy; business development; community center; green and open space; jobs; parking and traffic; and sustainability and climate change.

middle man between the community and the developer (see Figure 26), and provides power to the community through its requirement for developers to follow consistent procedures in order to get approval and its ability to enter into legally binding commitments and enforce standards. The City can provide certainty through zoning ordinances of the community benefits that a developer must provide if it is to proceed with a project. Indeed, according to George Proakis, the Planning Department's core role is to make sure the community shares as far as possible in development profit.

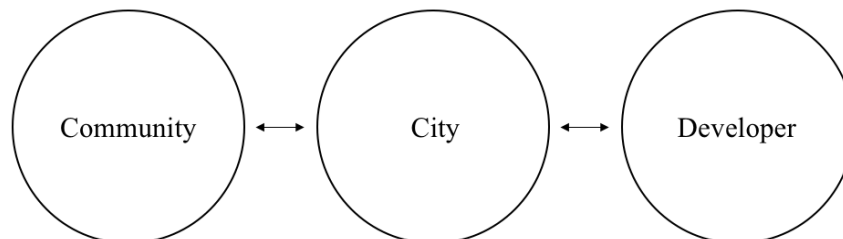


Figure 26: Traditional role of City in representing the community's interests in development processes

Trust between residents and the city administration is an essential element for making this relationship work. If community groups do not trust that their interests will be sufficiently protected by the City's actions alone then they can mobilize to pursue these interests themselves, creating the tri-partite relationship illustrated in Figure 27. This was evident to some extent at Davis Square and Assembly Square; at Davis, the DSTF became a forum where developers would come to trial their proposals with the community before seeking official approval from the City, while at Assembly Square, Mystic View lost trust in the city administration and adopted a direct legal strategy (although their appeals were against city and state decisions rather than ASLP itself). However it is especially true at Union Square, where the USNC is attempting to negotiate a CBA directly with US2.

I would argue that a disadvantage of the CBA approach now being pursued at Union Square is that it sets up the "community" (as USNC's founders claim to represent) as apart from the City in the development process. Rather than consolidating the City's power to negotiate on behalf of the community, the pursuit of a CBA sends a message that the community does not entirely trust the City (which is likely true) and needs to take matters into its own hands. Proponents of the CBA approach contend that it increases the community's power by making them directly involved in decision-making but critics might argue that it in fact undercuts the combined power of the City and the community by reducing the City's authority and attempting to shift it to an ad hoc group with no track record and untested political legitimacy.

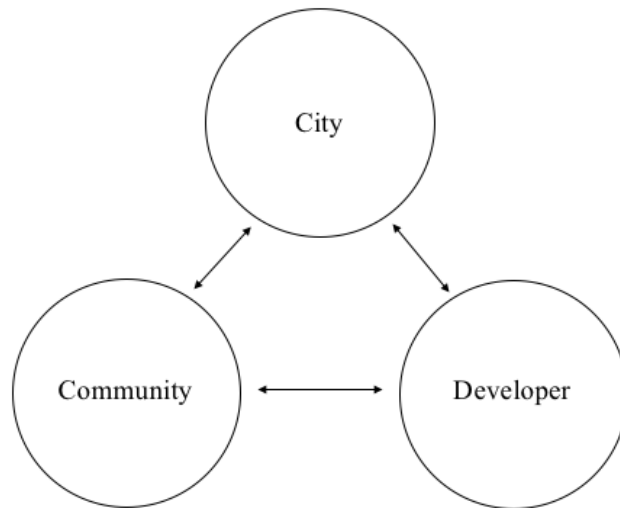


Figure 27: Alternative model in which the community seeks to negotiate directly with the developer

The desire for the community to have a more direct role in development processes is symptomatic of the well-documented shift towards public participation in decision making since the 1960s as the deficiencies of top-down planning became increasingly evident and general education levels steadily improved.²⁰² Increasing public participation is quite clearly a positive thing. If managed well, participatory processes can increase trust, build relationships, and produce decisions that better account for local interests and context.²⁰³ Some argue that public participation is a necessity because it is difficult for city planners to act alone in pursuit of equity and the “public good.” For instance, Lisa Peattie, quoting Jane Jacobs, critiques the Davidoffian²⁰⁴ notion that planners should advocate explicitly for equity goals:

I am not sure what planners ought to do about this issue. But I do have the feeling that in the old advocacy planning days we retained a bit too much of the professional's desire to move things to a higher level. Our "common good" visions tended to take the forms of a progressive transportation system, a more egalitarian social system-desirable goals in themselves, but perhaps the goal-setting did not embody the healthiest process.

As usual, Jane Jacobs has something incisive to say about this. "Self-appointed exponents of the common good have done an awful lot to ruin the notion of the common good," she says. Perhaps we, too, sometimes began to drift into the complacent way of thinking that Jacobs identifies with Robert Moses and his

²⁰² Thomas, *Public Participation in Public Decisions*.

²⁰³ Bryson et al., “Designing Public Participation Processes.”

²⁰⁴ Davidoff, “Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning.”

*favorite saying, "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." Jacobs worries about "two words as generalized and as abstract as [common good], which can be corrupted so easily, and turned against the common good. . . . But people understand when you say 'the neighborhood good.' That is not so abstract. 'The good of the city,' that gets a little more abstract, and you can 'justify' a few more eggs broken, usually wrongly. And the bigger and more abstract the subject of this 'good' gets, the more easy it is to make it a grindstone for somebody's axe."*²⁰⁵

Peattie is concerned that the consequences of planners' decisions are too wide-ranging and unpredictable for them to pursue "common good" goals in a gung-ho way. Her suggestion is to somehow strike a middle ground in which planners do not adopt explicit positions on behalf of particular groups, instead aiming to keep a focus on 'larger and longer-term issues and consequences' while also spending 'more time on streets and front steps to grasp daily life.'²⁰⁶

How should we think about approaching the difficult challenge of balancing high-level technical analysis with diverse community interests in practice? The communicative, collaborative model described in Section 8.3.1 above, which Judith Innes describes as a new 'paradigm' of planning, is illustrative of a theoretical discourse that has emerged over the past fifty years that stresses the importance of carefully designed processes that seek to include a full range of affected parties in deliberative decision making.²⁰⁷ A key conclusion in this discourse is that, while community participation and power in decision-making is essential, the community should not seek to bypass the City entirely. Rather, it is the City's responsibility to establish legitimate processes that effectively integrate community participation.

In this vein, Susskind and Ozawa suggest that planners have an important mediation role to play in convening stakeholders and helping them, through collaborative discussion and joint fact-finding, to develop agreements that account for divergent community interests.²⁰⁸ Proponents suggest consensus building approaches can assist by focusing efforts on identifying mutually acceptable packages of outcomes rather than a single ordering of collective goals.²⁰⁹ A critical assumption is that durable and legitimate decisions can only be reached through deliberative processes if all interested stakeholders participate in the process. While some would raise concerns about planners' ability to be impartial, given their positions as City employees with

²⁰⁵ Peattie, "Communities and Interests in Advocacy Planning.", p.151, quoting "Jane Jacobs's Response to Patrick Byrne's Presentation," in *Ethics in Making a Living: The Jane Jacobs Conference*, edited by Fred Lawrence (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 187.

²⁰⁶ Peattie.

²⁰⁷ Innes, "Planning Theory's Emerging Paradigm: Communicative Action and Interactive Practice."

²⁰⁸ Susskind and Ozawa, "Mediated Negotiation in the Public Sector."

²⁰⁹ Innes, "Planning Through Consensus Building: A New View of the Comprehensive Planning Ideal."

interests in development outcomes as well as their own personal viewpoints, John Forester argues that city planners should be able to play both negotiation and mediation roles concurrently with the community and developers.²¹⁰

According to the collaborative, communicative model of planning, the various parties involved in large-scale development processes would best be able to pursue their respective interests by engaging in deliberation together rather than adopting adversarial positions. The successful mediation attempt at Assembly Square demonstrates the potential of reframing contentious disputes in terms of opportunities to maximize mutual gains.

The challenge at Union Square is that the City selected a developer before embarking on participatory planning processes to understand the interests of the community. Ideally these processes would have happened before a developer was selected. The results of these processes would then have been locked into the zoning and any prospective developers would have known the full picture of what would be required of them before committing to the project. By selecting the developer first, the City created a situation where the community wanted to give its input, but they knew that the City was having its own conversations with the developer on the side and suspected that the developer's influence outweighed their own. This contributed to the situation where community members felt the need to claim a portion of decision-making power back for themselves. The City therefore has to maintain trust – its power comes from the notion that it is representing the community.

9.4 Learning to manage transformative development

The three Somerville cases illustrate the challenges that face city administrations in directing and managing transformative neighborhood change in comparison to the more normal model of incremental infill development. The City of Somerville has very little past experience of this kind of large redevelopment and acknowledges that to some extent it is learning what works and what does not as it goes along.

A clear message stressed by community advocates and acknowledged by the City is that it is the City's responsibility to set a clear vision for the overall goal of a district-scale development. Individual developers rarely have experience of developing entire new neighborhoods and need certainty that development on adjacent parcels will not detract from their projects' values if they pursue an ambitious path, while a holistic perspective is required to plan for the aggregate impacts of development, e.g. on traffic flows, and to identify opportunities and threats that would not be obvious at a more granular scale.²¹¹

²¹⁰ Forester, "Beyond Neutrality: The Possibilities of Activist Mediation in Public Sector Conflicts."

²¹¹ CBI, "Draft Conflict Assessment Findings: The Future of Assembly Square."

Many interviewees argued that this holistic, proactive vision-setting was not done clearly enough at either Assembly Square or Union Square. However, setting and sticking to a vision involves a certain degree of risk and requires confidence, especially when the City is unsure of the market's ability to deliver a form of development that is untested in a particular location. For instance, it is likely that the City's reluctance to wholeheartedly pursue the Mystic View vision at Assembly Square was partially related to its earlier experience in the 1990s during the Capuano administration, where an attempt to encourage ambitious commercial development at Boynton Yards rather than low-density industrial uses was rebuffed by the market. This demonstrated the risk of getting burned if you set your expectations too high.

The failure to establish a clear vision and lock in supporting zoning regulation before developers get involved contributed to some of the challenges discussed earlier in this chapter. For instance, the problem of not knowing developers' financial flexibility when seeking to maximize community benefits is largely an issue because the developer was selected before the City and community's vision was established and set in the regulation. In hot markets like Boston, the City can be fairly confident that developers will still be interested if they set ambitious community benefits requirements in the zoning. By setting them in advance, these requirements should become baked into the land value; the developer is likely to negotiate a lower price in recognition of the requirements they know they will have to comply with in the future. As Anne Tate put it, 'the baseline should be as high as possible. Then you're only attracting people who can make that work.'²¹² If, as in Union Square, these standards are not set in advance, the developer pays a higher price for the land and then has little flexibility to meet requirements that are imposed further down the line.

Of course, if US2 decides to back out because the community benefits demands are too high, it is possible that another developer would be interested in stepping in to take their place. This is a common view among some of the community organizers I spoke with. Ben Echevarría, for instance, argued that 'Cities, communities, developers, and corporations should be willing to walk away from a project if it's not fair. We should be able to say thank you but no thank you. There are plenty of other people who want to come in, we should be able to leverage that.'²¹³ It is possible this is true, but the prospect of development stalling would be extremely unattractive to the City, who's reputation and financial position are at risk, and would delay the realization of the many benefits that the project is likely bring. For those who question the narrative that the project will benefit the existing community, especially lower-income and marginalized groups, the idea of development being postponed may not sound like such a bad proposition.

Having requirements set in advance also lessens the risk that community members perceive the City as being in cahoots with developers, as fewer aspects of the development are negotiable

²¹² Tate, Interview with the author.

²¹³ Echevarría, Interview with the author.

going forward. Both the Assembly Square and Union Square cases demonstrate to some extent the difficulties that arise when it seems that the City is too close to developers. One interviewee described this problem at Union Square: ‘We need the City to keep developers at arms’ length. Ultimately, the planning staff are technocratic people. They get lost in that and lose the forest for the trees sometimes. They’re not natively wired to keep broader issues in mind. It’s a risk because they speak the same technical language as the architects and sub-contractors. It’s very easy for US2 to get buddy-buddy with them because they’re in there in the details speaking the same language. We need to remind them to keep it at arms’ length. A lot of people ascribe malice, which I don’t think is true.’

There is a difference between having a clear vision and objectives and being overly committed to a particular method for achieving them. The Somerville case studies demonstrate the inevitability that things will not go exactly to plan, key players will change, and unexpected developments will alter what is possible. By having clarity over their objectives, the City and community groups can increase the likelihood of preferable outcomes being achieved despite the potentially convoluted path needed to getting there. However, these groups must also have adaptability to roll with the punches and modify their strategy for achieving their vision when required, for instance by allowing for some degree of adaptability in design rather than requiring that a developer stick precisely to a predetermined blueprint.

9.5 Defining and representing “the community”

A final but critical challenge that the Somerville planning cases illustrate is that of community representation. I have used the term “community” throughout this paper to describe the interests of those living in or near to the three case study areas. But, in truth, the vast majority of the people who have lived in these areas over the forty year timeframe I am studying have never or very rarely been actively involved in planning processes or attended community meetings. Many people do not have the time or bandwidth to participate, and this is particularly true for those most at risk from displacement who may be working multiple jobs, caring for family members, or excluded by language barriers.

The active “community” I have referenced is often a rather limited and recurring group of people. The Mystic View group, for instance, was dominated by a few prominent individuals and, by luck, most of these same people are now Union Square residents and also actively involved in that planning process. Equally, while the USNC elections achieved a respectable turnout, the people actively involved since are probably less than forty. Each weekly meeting is attended by the Board and a handful of other interested members.

I think that the difficulty of any one group or initiative truly representing the community is a further justification for relying on City-convened participatory processes that, although flawed, are designed to collate input from, and ideally facilitate deliberation amongst, a diversity of community groups and individuals. A serious limitation of the CBA model being pursued by USNC is that it involves an ad-hoc, self-organized group attempting to stake a claim as the

singular representative of the community with a mandate to negotiate with the developer over community benefits. Because of the diversity of views in the Union Square community about what should be prioritized in these negotiations and Union United's dominance in the UNSC election to the detriment of other pre-existing community groups, some in the community are likely to oppose whatever strategy USNC chooses. We will only know the legitimacy that the group has established once it is forced to adopt and defend a concrete negotiation position.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

This investigation has illustrated many common and context-dependent challenges of attempts to manage neighborhood change around new transit stops. Through my analysis of three major efforts to guide and influence such change I have developed a number of recommendations for the City of Somerville and Somerville community groups as they continue to grapple with the task of seeking private development that is aligned with the City and community's interests. My intention is that these recommendations will be relevant for cities elsewhere facing similar challenges.

10.1 Recommendations for the City of Somerville

10.1.1 Proactive strategy for Boynton Yards, Brickbottom, and Inner Belt

A critical lesson from the efforts to manage transformative redevelopment at Assembly Square and Union Square has been on the need for the City to set a clear and holistic vision from the outset, ideally before developers have gotten involved, and to lock in expectations of developers in the zoning code at this early stage.

Somerville has aspirations to pursue further transformative development building on the momentum of the project at Union Square, offering the City an opportunity to implement a planning process that learns lessons from what has come before. The SomerVision comprehensive plan identifies the string of industrial land in Boynton Yards, Brickbottom, and Inner Belt as the City's long-term targets for transformative development (see Figure 28). These areas are close to the future Union Square and Washington Street Green Line stations but have a far less coherent and vibrant existing neighborhood fabric than Union Square, meaning that the City does not anticipate market interest until the project at Union Square has clearly demonstrated the viability of commercial development in Somerville. The City and community groups have conducted piecemeal planning efforts over the years in these districts but have not yet produced any definitive plans. The city-wide zoning overhaul currently under consideration by the BOA does not make detailed proposals for these areas. Instead, the City's intention is to establish new zoning overlay districts for each area once neighborhood planning efforts have been completed. The City anticipates starting the neighborhood plan process for Boynton Yards, the area closest to Union Square, in 2018.



Figure 28: Transformative areas identified in Somerville's 2012 comprehensive plan. Source: author.

The City should be very clear in advance about what the planning process will look like for these sites, how it intends to collect and integrate community input, and at what point it will set expectations in the zoning code. Where the City intends to pursue a public land acquisition and developer selection process as it did at Union Square, it should not initiate this until the neighborhood plan is complete and the zoning overlay is in place. The City must avoid the temptation to rush the process for planning development at this scale, which will fundamentally define the character of a substantial swathe of Somerville for a century or more. Given the strong long-term prospects for the regional economy, the worst cost of a thorough and ambitious planning process is a slight delay in development. Indeed, the process will likely be smoother in the long run because investors will have more confidence in the City's vision.

The City should take advantage of this planning phase to identify land that is already publicly owned or could be purchased and then preserved for affordable housing, or at least kept in public ownership. Purchasing land would have been far easier before the current economic boom, but the City may still consider it worthwhile for certain plots. There may also be an opportunity for acquiring land from state agencies; the MBTA owns several large parcels in Inner Belt for instance (although their location close to the highway may count them out for housing on air quality grounds). If the City did not want to directly develop housing on publicly-owned land it might pursue private development on based on long-term ground leases that give the City the option to reconsider the best of use of the land in the future in the likely scenario that economic, social, and environmental conditions change considerably over time. This is a strategy that

Washington, DC has taken, for instance, in current developments around the new NOMA-Gallaudet metro station.

10.1.2 Commit to an inclusive and deliberative participatory decision-making process

Building on the previous recommendation, the impending planning processes for the redevelopment of Somerville's transformation areas offers an opportunity to implement City-led participatory processes that address the deficiencies of the recent processes at Assembly Square and Union Square. There is potential for a planning process that promotes deliberation amongst diverse community stakeholders, enhances trust, and negates the desire or need for additional CBA negotiations.

I would suggest this process be run in the following way:

First, Somerville's planning department should take on the role of convener and facilitator. If the planning staff require support from an external consultant, this consultant should be selected through an open RFQ process rather than relying on the firm that has been responsible for previous neighborhood plans.

Second, every effort should be taken to ensure that all those with interests in the outcome of the development are represented in the neighborhood planning process. The City should conduct a stakeholder assessment to identify these groups and seek representatives from each to sit on a leadership group. At early sessions they should ask the question "are there any groups who should really be involved in this process but are not here?" It would likely be necessary to take active steps to enable the participation of those facing barriers to involvement, such as inability to give up time from jobs and childcare. These steps should involve basic logistical arrangements that maximize participation. The City might seek funding from Boston foundations who have demonstrated their interest in supporting visionary and inclusive planning processes. The Barr Foundation, for instance, provided funding for both the Mystic View Task Force and the Union Square LOCUS process. This funding could potentially be used to compensate those who need additional support to participate.

The planning process should proceed with discussions facilitated by the City, with the goal of first making clear the interests of all those participating and then identifying over-arching objectives for the planning process that all participants can get behind. The group would then discuss strategies for achieving these objectives, engaging in joint fact-finding and precedent sharing on issues such as zoning, urban design, public realm and green space, small business support, and anti-displacement strategies.

The key factor is that City staff participate as stakeholders in the process, honestly representing their own interests and concerns in the neighborhood development process. If the City only acts as facilitator then some participants may lose trust that their own input will be taken seriously because the City has its own, unknown objectives.

It would be made clear from the outset that it is the City's responsibility to develop and adopt the plan in the end and enact the zoning based upon it. The BOA would be very much inclined to pass something produced through a legitimate process. If successful the process might produce an ongoing task force for maintaining accountability and vetting proposals in their area, as happened in Davis Square.

10.2 Recommendations for the Union Square Neighborhood Council

10.2.1 Focus on long-term impacts and low-cost asks

The USNC faces a tough challenge in narrowing down and defining its strategy for negotiating with US2. I have several suggestions based on my research.

First, the USNC should not prioritize further affordable housing contributions at Union Square. The City has already heard that the loudest voices in the public planning process at Union Square were pushing for affordable housing and locked an ambitious inclusionary requirement into the zoning, which has since been extended to the entire city. This is an excellent achievement for community advocates campaigning for more stringent developer contributions. However, the provision of zoning-mandated affordable units will have taken up a considerable portion of the financial leeway that US2 has before the project becomes unviable. Focusing on an even higher affordable housing contribution, as has been advocated by Union United, would both undercut the City's leadership in proactively mandating the current 20% level and remove the possibility of developer contributions to other areas critical to both avoiding displacement and ensuring a successful public realm. Housing advocates should continue their support for city-wide mechanisms to increase the supply of affordable housing and increase housing stability, including the real estate transfer fee currently under consideration by the BOA and the tenant's right of first refusal, which would allow tenants in multi-unit buildings a window of time to collectively purchase the property at market value and maintain it as affordable rental units rather than condominiums when the owner wishes to sell.

Additional anti-displacement asks at Union Square should focus on support for vulnerable business tenants, who have not received much attention in the process so far. The USNC might also focus on demands that could contribute strongly to equity goals but have little financial impact on US2, such as requiring future retail tenants to implement local hiring preferences. Such a commitment would need to be coupled with upfront funds for job training so that local residents can be well-placed to take on these jobs when they become available. US2 is already required to pay a jobs linkage fee to be used for city-wide training programs, and the USNC might consider additional funding for job readiness training to be a sensible use for the financial contribution to as-yet undefined community benefits that US2 is committed to in the development covenant. While many advocates are anxious to obtain upfront monetary contributions from US2 to head off the immediate displacement pressures of the project, they should acknowledge that the developer will be able to commit far larger amounts of funding over time. Upfront contributions must be paid for largely from equity, the developer's most expensive

and limited financing source, whereas contributions paid over time on a per-square-foot-of-development basis can be financed through lower cost debt and amortized over the life of the project.

There appears to be a strong consensus from public input solicited by the City and the USNC on the desire for a high quality indoor space for use by public and non-profit tenants. In recognition of this, the City mandated provision of some as-yet-undefined “indoor civic space” in the Coordinated Development Special Permit and required that US2 work with the USNC to flesh out the idea and identify potential tenants. A priority goal for the USNC should be to ensure the indoor community space is as high quality as possible. As I described earlier in this thesis, this will require them to offer specific suggestions on size and programming and to explore potential funding arrangements with prospective tenants. A well-conceived community space could be a highly valuable resource to Union Square residents and workers for many decades to come, but will require proactive effort from the USNC to help US2 deliver it. Simply demanding a large community building with a long list of community amenities is unlikely to be a productive strategy.

Beyond the CBA negotiation itself, the USNC can play an important role in keeping the City accountable to its goals for high quality design, public realm, and open space in Union Square. It should be an active contributor to the site plan and design review process for individual project phases, ensuring that these do not lose sight of the overall vision for the district. The USNC’s continued engagement and oversight will make it clear to US2 and the City that any deviations from the plan that reduce the quality of key elements such as open space will not be tolerated.

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