

# UNION SQUARE NEIGHBORS

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George Proakis, Director of Planning  
Somerville OSPCD  
City Hall  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

January 6, 2015

Re: Feedback on December 17 Union Square Neighborhood Plan Meeting

Dear George and members of the US2 and Somerville by Design team,

Union Square Neighbors (USN) wishes to submit the following comments in response to your call for feedback at the Union Square Neighborhood Plan meeting on December 17. USN is excited to participate in the process of creating a community-based master plan for Union Square, and we hope these suggestions will help make the process as effective as possible.

## **Boundary of Study Area**

The maps provided at individual tables showed a boundary of the study area to be considered in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan. We understand that the focus of this plan is not on the McGrath corridor or Brickbottom, but **we believe the study area should be expanded to include Washington Street east of Union Square up to the new Washington Street T stop.**

While the Union Square station is central to the redevelopment parcels, it is critical that the larger Neighborhood Plan address how the heart of Union Square will be connected to the Washington Street station. For portions of Prospect Hill and Union Square East including Boston Street, Mansfield Street and Rossmore Street, this will be the closest T stop. Once the Green Line extension is complete, the Washington Street station will be where the rest of Somerville will get off the T when they want to come to Union Square. This will also be the point where all of Union Square will access the community path. A strategy for creating and enhancing these connections is essential to the Neighborhood Plan and the future of Union Square.

## **Principles of Development**

Over the past year, USN has developed a set of principles that puts into words our wishes, values and expectations for the development to come and sets out specific ideas that can be incorporated into both the Neighborhood Plan and the design of the D2 block. We have shared these documents with both the US2 team and the City of Somerville, and **we request that they be included and considered as part of the crowdsourcing and visioning components of the Neighborhood Plan.**

## Public Input Process

The timeline presented showed a substantial amount of public meetings planned for the coming months. While these meetings typically work well to generate broad ideas, distribute information, and get people talking to one another, having time to evaluate and provide thoughtful critique and response will also be important to foster true community-based planning. As the process moves forward and more detailed plans are created, we would like to request the opportunity to review and develop feedback outside of the meetings as well. This is also important because it is likely no one will be able to attend all meetings. We ask that you consider the following:

- To the extent possible, **distribute materials prior to the meetings to allow attendees to come prepared with feedback.** This will also allow those who cannot attend to provide feedback through neighbors who will be in attendance.
- **Make materials presented at meetings available on the Somerville by Design website within 24 hours.**
- **Get to specifics early, and provide a minimum period of time for comment on proposals.** Particularly for the design of the D2 block, the schedule should allow time for changes and revisions based on this feedback.
- **Engage and utilize the planning and design talent that is a part of the Union Square neighborhood.**
- **Incorporate input and ideas from independent, resident led events and planning efforts** including the three ‘Space In Between’ symposiums held by and Union Square Main Streets in July and August and the ‘After the Mobility Revolution/Audi Urban Future Initiative’ workshop held by Philip Parsons with the Congress for New Urbanism in September.

## Outreach

We appreciate all the efforts that are being made to involve the community in this process through the Somerville by Design website, as well as through the social media platforms described at the meeting. We also appreciate the availability of materials in multiple languages. It is, however, important to reach out to people who may not be as connected to the online world. It is also important to ensure that residents who can’t make particular meetings are able to stay involved and provide input.

To help ensure the outreach process is as inclusive as possible, we ask that you consider:

- **Create a (paper) mailing list for Union Square residents who may prefer to participate in this way.** While it would be impractical to distribute all materials to everyone through the mail, the survey that was filled out by attendees of the December 17 meeting is a great example of something that could be sent out by mail and then sent back in to you.

- **Provide a supervised play area for children at the most significant meetings** to encourage families to participate.
- **Engage high school students in Somerville** by holding a meeting for students to share their vision. This is important since it is their future that is being planned.
- **Reach out to underrepresented or marginalized groups that aren't likely to show up at regular planning meetings** and may not have advocates to speak on their behalf. This includes those with mobility and physical limitations, or those for whom the venue or environment isn't comfortable for people to attend and speak up. In some cases, targeted outreach would be beneficial – for example, planners could hold a listening session in the community room at Properzi Manor.

USN will do its best to spread the word among our neighbors about the ways to get involved and provide input.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tim Talun, Chair  
Union Square Neighbors

*Steering Committee:* Suzanne Bremer, Robert Buchanan, Stuart Dash, Sam Engelstad, Andy Greenspon, Jim McGinnis, Annette McGloin, Philip Parsons, JT Scott, Bonnie Tominack, Shu Talun, Tim Talun

CC:

Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor, City of Somerville  
Maryann Heuston, Ward 2 Alderman  
Bob McWatters, Ward 3 Alderman  
Wig Zamore, Chair, Union Square CAC  
Greg Karczewski, US2  
Drew Leff, US2

From our mission statement:

*“Union Square Neighbors (USN) is a grassroots, independent neighborhood association dedicated to helping residents and stakeholders of Union Square shape the future of their community. Our vision is for a healthier, greener, and more vibrant Union Square that includes buildings and places that reflect the inventive, unique, and historic character that people love about our neighborhood.”*

For more information please visit <http://www.unionsquareneighbors.com>