

## **Gilman Square Neighborhood Council General Meeting**

Monday July 7, 2025

### **Attendees**

GSNC Board 2

Community Members 10

### **Meeting Notes**

Tori A. from Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) offered that the USNC allows 10 minutes at the beginning of their meetings for public comment.

### **Comments by mayoral candidate for re-election Katjana Ballantyne in response to questions by attendees (This is not a transcript.)**

Self-Introduction

- Come from an immigrant family, 1st to go to college, I've worked in nonprofit, been a Somerville City Councilor
- Value difference and inclusive leadership, community buy-in, I want an inclusive and equitable city
- Priorities include housing, jobs, infrastructure, greenery, and fiscal responsibility
- Because of good fiscal management Somerville now has perfect credit enabling us to tackle long overdue infrastructure projects. We have pay equity in city jobs, new major union contracts, an increased school budget, and a city budget not wholly dependent on federal funding. We are suing the Trump administration to receive congressionally approved funding.

What would be your actionable next steps for the Homans site in the next term?

- I want what's good for Somerville and to work alongside the GSNC to create a transit-oriented, mixed-use square. Not looking to put in a tank.
- Economic Development is working on other properties, but there has been activity in Gilman Square: new bakery coming, food tenant in Piano Building up-zoning approved for 297 Medford St. We activated the square in 2024 with Culture House. *[Pop-up events were programmed by Culture House and High Energy Vintage using the city's ARPA funds.]*
- I want to see some movement on the Homans site but our staff is working on other things.

What actionable steps would you take to move the disposition study forward in Gilman Square? Would you hire more staff?

- We are waiting in part for the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) study that needs review by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of

Environmental Protection (DEP). In 2026 the study is coming back for community input, so it won't be done until 2027. We aren't in a place to say when there will be shovels in the ground.

- We are seeing positive movement through the bakery, Piano Building food tenant and up-zoning. The Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) determined that the Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) is not pursuing urban renewal for the Mobil site. Pearl St., and Medford St. are also being worked on.

You mentioned the SRA choosing not to pursue urban renewal. I attended all of those meetings, which were months and months of the same conversation. The level of energy was very out of step with the community's wishes for development. Can you commit to more resources?

- I want to see a vibrant Gilman Square

What active, tangible measures would you take?

- I'm going to push on the disposition study to make sure it advances, but other properties must be completed before we can address Homan's site. The CSO study could be slowed by the EPA.

The CSO study has to do with the tank, but Rich Raiche (Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management) has said the tank is not going to hold up development. Those statements are contradicting.

- The water level will change in Gilman Square, there will be tanks, we don't know where.
- 90 Washington, 299 Broadway, and the Armory are taking staff time.

The group (GSNC) had a plan in place including a Request for Proposals (RFP), it seems like we've gone backwards in the past 4 years. What is the apprehension? Why are we so low on the priority list? We were told 2 years ago that the water study wouldn't get in the way.

- Gilman Square is still on the list, we have other projects. It depends how quickly we can move on the other 3 projects. We wanted to get the disposition study last year. The goal is to get the disposition study, then a couple of years later be able to act on it.

Would you entertain a lease to keep it (Homans site) in better order now?

- A lease? Talk to my staff.

Would you be able to staff up?

- We have a conservative fiscal budget and have not added any staff. We are working within what we have now, or with modest consultants.

Are we 4<sup>th</sup> on the list of projects?

- Yes, I would say Gilman Square would come after the 3 projects mentioned.

When you think of the potential of Gilman Square, what comes to mind?

- Transit oriented, mixed-use, active square. We try to plan for an 18 hour day of activity in larger squares (like Davis Square). In the smaller squares (like Gilman Square) we plan for activity in the morning and after work. I expect it to be a safe place to walk and bike through.

*At this point Mayor left and the community continued the conversation filling in the history of the CSO study.*

Christine C. and Matt C.

The Combined Sewer Outflow study is required by the EPA. Somerville has avoided it in the past because we were too poor, that is no longer the case. Somerville is pushing gray water solutions that include tanks. The CSO is unrelated to the disposition study. The city put 2 options in the CSO plan proposal that show a large tank on the Homan's Site.

Various

What about the lease option? Is the site contaminated?

There has not been an environmental assessment. It's been Green Line Extension (GLX) storage. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) refused to test the soil. There is a good chance it has some contamination.

Jim K. (The owner of the Piano Building who corrected earlier statements that he had found a food tenant; he has not.)

I would take on a 2-3 year lease, if the city could add electricity and water.

Ben W. (Candidate for Councilor-at-Large)

I have heard similar stories of delay from other communities in Somerville. What other kinds of meetings have there been?

There have been meetings of different groupings of the same people.

The Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) had meetings with other residents and at the end of that process the SRA said they had no appetite for using eminent domain with the

Mobil station due to the legal decision that significantly raised the price at 90 Washington St. However, Gilman Square is a very different situation, the Mobile station is a critical path issue.

Other neighborhoods in Somerville are opposing development, we're asking for it. It seems like an open door for them to walk through.

*The community then moved to the other items on the agenda.*

### **Homans Site**

- The GSNC Board recently contacted Ben Demers, Senior Planner and Real Estate Specialist, Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD), asking for an update on the Homans site. He confirmed the Mayor's message that 90 Washington Street, the 299 Broadway redevelopment, and the implementation of the Armory Master Plan are taking all of their time.
- Since our community meeting on July 7, 2025 the GSNC Board has contacted the Mayor and OSCPD about the possibility of Jim K., owner of the Piano Building, leasing the Homans site.

### **Gilman Square Arts & Music Festival 2025**

- Much thanks to the Somerville Arts Council who continue to be a fabulous and supportive partner!
- We have a full roster of vendors, artists, and musicians including 3 current and 2 former Nibble Kitchen vendors
- We are awaiting the final poster design
- It would be nice if we could refresh the video
- A volunteer sign up with specific tasks and times is now on the website and [here!](#)

### **125 Highland Avenue**

A developer and former tenant at Greentown Labs has contacted the GSNC with a very provisional interest in the former church building at 125 Highland Ave. The property is currently zoned as urban residential and would require a use change.

### **Neighborhood Get Together**

Save the date for Wednesday July 23rd! We will meet after work at 6:00pm at the Homans site (Medford St. below the Gilman T station), unless the weather determines that we should go to Winter Hill Brewing instead.

**Next general meeting Monday August 4, 2025, 6:30pm-8pm (or less).** There will be no September meeting due to the festival on September 13th.