

APPROVED 10/17

August 15, 2022

Union Square Neighborhood Council Meeting

ATTENDANCE

BOARD

Bill Shelton
Ann Camara
Bill Cavellini
David Scott
Michele Hansen
Mary Napolitano
Matthias Rudolf
Andy Greenspon

PUBLIC

Kat Powers
Joe Lynch
Wig Zamore
Cosmo Di Schino
Jesse Buckley
Kristin Phelan

1. Introductions and reading of mission statement

2. Public comment

ZAMORE I wonder whether US2 really made their land purchases. How much land have us2 acquired? US2 has designated parcels, but they have not actually purchased some of the parcels. Who owns the designated parcels for us2 in the area, and what is their status?

The prices, e.g. for the Nissenbaum property, are very high. If US2 doesn't build on the D blocks, it may very difficult to sell them later.

SHELTON: US2 has purchased the Glass Stop, and that's not in the D block — they must be hoping to build in the same way as before.

Wig: when is the SRA deadline?

Tori: We will check in.

3. Discussion with Somerville Media Center

Bill Shelton welcomes and introduces the SMC, who have been invited to share their POV after the Planning Board's meeting with the USNC. At that time, the Planning Staff made the following two claims:

1. They cannot do any work with tenants in the building

2. Challenged on their 10 million estimate vs the 1 million estimate of SMC, they said they needed the tenants out to find out why.

Bill Shelton asks Joe Lynch, the former president of the SMC Board, if these claims are correct.

Joe Lynch:

I have to report that

1. The SMC has been asked to vacate the premises inside of 6 months
2. The two claims made by the SMC above are both false.

Joe gives a time line of the events leading to the present situation:

Joe has been on board 6 yrs; when he took over as treasurer, he put the SMC back into the black numbers. The SMC has been in conversation about the building use since 2017. MAPS has been in building for 25 yrs. SMC has a contract with the city to provide public TV, podcasts, and summer camps, and other media products.

2019: SMC complains about building to Curtatone. Horrible condition. Discussion begins in March. Lynch speculates that Curtatone speculates that the developers could be gotten to pay for the renovation. The building is not historically designated, largely because Curtatone squashed it.

Dec 2019: Curtatone tells SMC and PB that if they want to put money into it, they'd have to make it ADA compliant.

In February 2020, the city asks the SMC to vacate the property. In March, Covid hits. The city gives the SMC extensions through June 2021. In June 2021, SMC makes another formal request not to be evicted and to keep the building. The SMC looked for alternative locations. All of them are too expensive.

In 2021, there was an attempt to dispose of the building on the sly. The City council refused to agree without a public process.

In Jan 22, Lynch meets with Ballantyne and discovers for her the scheme Curtatone set up with US2, which largely corresponds with the present offer: US2 takes over the building and rents it out. The SMC is told that the city is concerned about the safety of the building. However, the city did not reveal the reports until recently. According to the reports, the building is pristine shape with the exception of the roof.

The SMC read the report and reviewed it; they got a second opinion, too: Both evaluation agree that the cost estimate the city made is false.

Joe has stepped down for SMC. The new board has asked for help from Ballantyne. Nothing has happened since.

The SMC wants the USNC to have a word in the future of the building. The city has been lying, even now under Ballantyne, given what Galligani, the intern head of OSPC, told the USNC.

Joe believes that the city wants a developer to pay for updating a property, retain ownership and allow the developer to charge rent.

Tori: Thank you Joe for the details. This is terribly disheartening to hear. The city thinks this is a win, and that's bad.

Andy Greenspan: Asks clarifying questions.

1. The city charges nominal rent?
- No it does not. MAPS pays a nominal fee.
2. You mentioned contracts. If you can't find a goal, the city is making you be in violation of a contract.

- good questions. There was point of contention in the contract renegotiations. The city does not agree that it has to "provide facilities"; it only has to provide a contract. The city is forcing SMC to fail by making them default on their contract.

2. By loss of argument, do you mean that the city won the contractual dispute?

- No, there was no resolution. The legal fight is for another day.

Ann Camara:

Somerville is a slumlord and has always been. Asbestos in schools. Question: Has SMC fixed things in a building it has lived in rent-free?

- Yes, we are required to keep the building in good order. We are also required to work with DPW for maintenance issues. The building has been left in disrepair — systematically.

Would you be willing to pay rent?

- yes, but we can't afford market rate rent.

We knew Galligani was lying to us. We knew the real costs were around \$1 million. Is that right, Kat?

Kat:

We asked experts and they said repairing the building would cost less than a million.

We'd love to do it, chip in, do a fundraiser. But even if I wanted to fix the leak over my window, I have to go through the city. If we can do it ourselves, we'd love to.

We're stuck because all the the Mayor has said that she wants a public process.

We're asking you — the USNC - to start the public process.

Michelle:

My understanding is the RFP specifies that US2 would redo the building, that the Fablab would move in for ten years but not pay any rent.

Bill Shelton:

Where did you hear that?

Michelle:

At a meeting. We need to verify that.

Does Somerville consider you a public good?

- based on the contracts, we are a public good. We are the public side of the government channel. We show School Committees, council meetings, etc. The caveat is that if SMC fails to provide the goods for any reason, the contract becomes void. The city might be trying to undo the contract

KAT:

We are a public company that takes the Cable Companies "public access funds" and provides access.

MH: Doesn't that mean that the city is breaking its own contract. They're obligated to provide public access.

Joe:

Other municipalities have seen it necessary to fold their public access into the municipality. SMC is the only one that hasn't gone under — because it's so well run and frugal. If we don't deliver, the city can come in and swoop up everything.

Michelle:

We have to go into the the Fablab meetings to understand what is going on. We have to

support public access. We — the board — should support you.

Bill S:

Four of us were involved in a meeting with the Planning staff. We were concerned about the amount

of housing they want to build. Still less than 20% of our property is commercial, so Somerville remains a poor city. The rich ones like Cambridge would have the discussion — they have the money. I raise all this because we need leaders who can think systemically. Too much housing will make it impossible for the city to pay for essential services like the SMC.

My Question: I asked Greg Jenkins about the SMC. He mentioned it may be possible for the SMC to move into a spot at Brickbottom

POWERS Some places we have looked at are \$100K per year, which we can't afford

CAVELLINI FAB Foundation/FAB Lab. My position is I'm opposed to meeting with the FAB Foundation. The danger I see is that the city will call a meeting with them as "public process". City planning staff is rogue, they are outlaws. Galligani seems to see this as a personal goal for him (to bring in FAB). He will try to nail this down in his temporary role in the next two months. If the D2 Arts and Creative Enterprise mandated for US2 goes in the Firehouse, that means less space for ACE.

CAMARA I support SMC staying in the Firehouse.

HANSEN The rent money from the Firehouse will go to US2 then?

LYNCH That's correct. US2 fixes up the building and they get the rent.

POWER I spoke to the mayor. She said she would listen to our proposal for municipal broadband for example. She committed to a public process.

LYNCH Federal money is coming in but it feels to me like SMC and MAPS are getting kicked to the curb.

Report on Community Center Committee /Culture House visit

HANSEN We would apply for a grant with Culture House to host a popup community center, e.g. a movie night

CAMARA They also could help us look for money for a feasibility study

ANTONINO I think it is a good partnership. I don't want to pay Culture House for meeting hosting.

CAMARA We can use my yard

HANSEN We will be sending a letter to the mayor, stating that we are intending to push for the community center

CAVELLINI If we can figure out what kind of uses the community center will need, the designer will be able to design a better building.

599 Somerville Ave tree removal and compensation

ANTONINO It's a Lab/Commercial site. Trees were accidentally removed. One pin oak was damaged, and all four trees were taken down. SomerNova was fined for this. They are also looking to make reparations to the community. I suggest a Miawaki forest.

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PHELAN Ownership of SomerNova is very distressed by this. We have paid the fines the city imposed. Wednesday we will have open hours to discuss it with anyone who wants. Thursday we are meeting with the urban forestry committee. We want to make amends.

HANSEN Regardless of fault, it is SomerNova's responsibility. It is hard to understand how this can happen. There should be signs on the trees saying "don't cut". I agree that Miawaki forest should be planted by SomerNova.

CAMARA I agree with Michelle. Many people hold trees as their higher powers. The trees around me have gotten me through hard times in my life.

CAVELLINI Paying fines and planting new trees don't make up for killing mature trees. The reparation should recognize that this sets back the progress of the trees 15 years. The building that is going up should set aside space that was supposed to be built and use it for planting an urban forest.

PHELAN The caliper of the four trees combined is 14 inches in diameter

Developer updates/upcoming meetings.

CAVELLINI The lawyers for US2 are meeting with the land use committee in September 14 regarding D4.3

GREENSPON Glass Stop site hearing US2 is September 24, 6:30pm.

CAMARA Elan Sassoon wants to develop the Stanhope Framers building, rezone to MR5.

GREENSPON Let's shoot for August 29 at 7pm for meeting with Sassoon.

Public Call to join the Boynton Yards committee

GREENSPON I need a committee so we can get money from CV properties. At least four people.

HANSEN I will help, and try to get Roger from 80 Webster.

CAMARA I will help

ANTONINO I will get in touch with DLJ regarding their contribution as well

GREENSPON Should we have a fundraiser?

ANTONINO Get SomerNova involved, pollinator party, native plant sale. Mayor suggested this type of events.

CAVELLINI I like the idea.

ANTONINO I move to accept the minutes of June 20, July 18 and August 1

Motion passes unanimously

Public comment

ZAMORE Grand View Avenue lost a huge tree recently. Green Line corridors will take a lot of work to get them re-greened. Thousands of trees.

Next public Monday September 19, 7:00 pm. 53 Hanson Street. Rain date is on zoom.

GREENSPON Moved that we move to executive session. Unanimously approved.

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