

December 14, 2006

Mr. Kevin Prior, Chairman, Somerville Planning Board
c/o Ms. Martha Tai
OSPCD
City Hall
93 Highland Ave
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Union Square Zoning Amendment

Dear Chairman Prior and Members of the Somerville Planning Board,

We are a group of concerned Union Square citizens who recently organized to address the proposed Zoning Amendment as presented at the Planning Board Hearing December 7, 2006. While we agree with members of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development that Union Square is in need of a revitalization effort, we take issue with the appropriateness of the scale and character that this zoning amendment would allow.

We would like to call to your attention the following items, which we feel are critical pieces of the zoning amendment and directly impact the future of Union Square. We have also identified action items that the City take up to effectively address our concerns.

- Scale and Character of New Development
 - Appropriateness of 12-storey/140' height, particularly the PUD-C1 proximity to historic residential neighborhood of one, two and three family homes.
 - Effect of the loss of sunlight and increased shadows to the proximate environs.
 - Effect of the loss of views from all surrounding areas, especially the historic Prospect Hill neighborhood and Park.
 - *Requested Action: Reduce height limits to 45'-65', which would reduce impact and still achieve the housing, economic, cultural, and social goals of the zoning.*
- Transportation
 - Impact of added trips-per-day resulting from 1.5 million sf of new development on failing intersections.
 - Impact of added trips-per-day resulting from 1.5 million sf of new development on air quality in the Square.
 - Additional parking pressure, particularly during the snowy winter months when current city lots (at the Prospect St/Somerville Ave lot and the Washington St./Union Square lot) are used for snow emergency parking.
 - *Requested Action: Prior to passage of the zoning, evaluate the impact of added trips-per-day resulting from the potential program at full build-out.*
- Open Space
 - Impact of the possible loss of the Union Square plaza/open space, depending on alternative traffic solution chosen. Information about traffic routing not clear.
 - Given the existing lack of open space in the area, and the expected increase in population (hopefully some family population), plans for additional open space should be part of the zoning amendment.
 - *Requested Action: Identify potential sites for usable neighborhood open space and incorporate into the zoning amendment.*

- Housing
 - Proposed housing type (high-rise condos) is not commonly identified as the most suitable for family housing, elderly or special needs housing (all of which are affordable housing beneficiaries).
 - *Requested Action: Identify the projected demographic mix in the proposed housing, and then align the housing style, size and types proposed with that mix.*
- Extent of Zoning
 - Questionable boundaries of artist overlay and PUD/PUD-C1.
 - There is no clear need or benefit identified that warrants the extent of the PUD-C overlay, which extends well into the existing residential neighborhood with significantly increased density.
 - *Requested Action: Evaluate the City's and neighborhood's housing and commercial needs; identify and respect the boundaries of the existing residential neighborhood with regard to the area of the PUD-C overlay.*

We feel strongly that this rezoning process needs additional time for careful public discussion of these issues. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to discussing these issues with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Stuart & Robin Dash - 41 Stone Avenue
 Eric Fellingner – 12 Prospect Hill Avenue
 Gregory & Sonia Janks - 9 Homer Square
 Pat Larkin - 2 Emerson Street
 Tina Miller & Tim Pulling - 42 Columbus Avenue
 Molly O'Neill - 2 Emerson Street
 Philip Parsons - 20 Bonner Avenue
 David Shaw - 44 Columbus Avenue
 Peter Sisk - 27 Columbus Avenue

Cc: Mayor Joe Curtatone
 Alderman Maryann H. Heuston, Ward 2
 Alderman Thomas F. Taylor, Ward 3
 Alderman William White, Land Use Committee Chairman
 Alderman Sean O'Donovan, Ward 5
 Alderman Bruce Desmond
 Alderman Dennis M. Sullivan
 Jim Kostaras, Executive Director, OSPCD