

Ten Questions for US2 leading up to next Tuesday's Q&A session on Sept 5, 4-8 pm at the Somerville Police Station

This meeting is the first step in US2's permitting process. As such, it is one of a limited number of places where we can legally impact US2's decision-making process. These questions reflect concerns coming out of the Union Square zoning process, which you can read about [here](#) and [here](#). They are required to address community feedback. Let's make this meeting count!

1. Commercial tenant in D2. The Board of Aldermen passed Union Square zoning in a midnight vote over the objections of almost every constituency active in Union Square, save the Chamber of Commerce. Mark Niedergang referred to it as "minimally acceptable zoning," and almost every alderman, in prefacing their vote, stated that they were unhappy with the result. Many people felt it was a rushed process.

One of the expressed reasons that zoning passed was that US2 claimed to have a commercial tenant lined up for the D2 block, and stated that Somerville was at risk of losing that tenant without the surety of zoning.

- **Who is the tenant?**
- **What is the status of that agreement?**
- **What is the timeline for them moving into the D2 block post-construction?**

2. Making good on climate change recommendations. Two years ago, the City convened LOCUS to identify community benefits priorities. A panel of thirty community leaders submitted detailed recommendations on environmental health and climate change, among others. Those priorities included net zero building design, prefab roof structures that are compliant with green roofs and solar panels, establishing a transportation management association, and requiring new buildings to include a coordinated plan for stormwater management in the case of extreme flooding.

None of these priorities made it into zoning. As it stands right now, Union Square zoning relies on the "good faith" efforts of individual tenants and property owners to do the due diligence on climate change mitigation and stormwater management.

- **What procedures are you putting in place to require future tenants, contractors, and design partners to comply with net zero building design?**
- **How will you ensure that LOCUS climate change priorities -- including district-wide stormwater management - are acted upon?**
- **Beyond US2's contribution to infrastructure bonding, how do you plan to work with the city to minimize the risk of catastrophic flooding in USQ?**

3. Protecting small businesses in Union Square. The [Union Square Neighborhood Plan](#) includes extensive details for how mid- and large-scale tech companies will be served by commercial development in Union Square. It says little to nothing about small businesses -- in particular, businesses capitalized at under \$1 million and family-owned businesses - which currently represent the bulk of commercial tenants currently in Union Square, and who are under tremendous rent pressure.

- **How do you plan to address the displacement of small business in USQ?**
- **In the case where a business is not able to afford a micro retail unit, what is your plan for helping that business relocate elsewhere in Somerville?**
- **What funding have you allocated to make this possible?**

4. The purpose of a Coordinated Development Special Permit. At the May 2 BOA meeting, US2 presented a [complete design plan](#) for Union Square. Many people, including members of the Board of Alderman, complained that this is not how zoning is supposed to work. You don't zone around one plan; you establish zoning, and then developers begin their visioning process from there.

Three years ago, when we had the initial Somerville by Design meetings at the Post Office, city planners presented a variety of options and plans with the aim of soliciting community feedback. These meetings -- the one we're at right now -- are part of a design review process that is intended to give residents meaningful input in what their neighborhoods look like. The premise of Somerville by Design was to engage stakeholders in the decision-making process. That should still be the ultimate goal.

- **What changes have you made to your development plan since submitting the initial version to the Board of Alderman on May 2?**
- **Are there alternate versions of a plan we can look at?**
- **When will the public be asked to weigh in on multiple plans?**

- **Does the city plan to reopen the Somerville by Design process?**
- **If they did, would you be amenable to holding your permitting process until that process is complete?**
- **If not, why?**

5. Increasing the amount of green and open space. One of the major concerns during zoning was the lack of publicly accessible green space. Throughout zoning, constituents asked to see multiple options for park space in Union Square. We were told that adding more green space would minimize development capacity and reduce the value of the development as a whole. To date, the largest proposed green space is on D4, which many believe is not a suitable space for a park.

- **What are your plans to mitigate health and environmental hazards -- in particular, accumulations of particulate matter -- on the D4 lot?**
- **You say it's 25% green and open space, but in reality, only 17.5% is required to be developed as parks specifically. How do you plan to make up the remaining 7.5%?**
- **What is the cost of reopening Somerville by Design to consider wider options for expanding publicly accessible green space in Union Square?**

6. Inclusionary zoning and the sale of the police station. Union Square zoning includes a clause that allows the Board of Alderman to raise the amount of inclusionary zoning at some point in the future, which was a direct result of the FRIT waiver and the community's inability to include large developments in future zoning changes.

Section 29 of the covenant, which was added in response to this clause and passed with zoning on June 29, essentially says: "If you do this, we'll take the cost difference off the per-square foot contributions in this covenant or the cost of future lots purchased." ([covenant Section 29](#)). In other words, if the BOA raises inclusionary zoning -- or passes anything which increases the cost of development -- US2's infrastructure, GLX, and community benefits contributions could go down, and the value of the D1 police station that we are standing in -- when it is sold to be turned into residential -- could be significantly decreased. This would force the city to pay out of pocket for higher IZ rates while protecting the developer. It would also force us to choose between affordable housing and city services, as property is expensive and it costs to move.

- **Do you plan to exercise this clause around the sale of D1 police station?**
- **The city is already reevaluating its plans D1 and has considered moving the police station to the lot currently slated for Art Farm due to the cost of real estate. Do you anticipate working with the arts community to offset costs?**
- **How will you work with the city to guarantee that USQ is served by high-quality municipal services, in the event that Section 29 is triggered?**

7. Ricky's Flower Market. During approval of the Union Square Neighborhood Plan, the Planning Board declined to allocate space on D1 for Ricky's Flower Market, stating that this would amount to spot zoning. As a result, Ricky's was not mentioned during the discussions of green and open space in Union Square zoning. Ricky's Flower Market currently sits on D1.1, which is projected to be the future site of a hotel.

US2 has described this hotel as being critical to anchoring a sense of place in the first phase of this project, as people walk from the T station into Union Square, but currently this is exactly the role that Ricky's plays. What is your plan for guaranteeing that Ricky's will be able to remain in the square?

- **Are you currently working with Ricky's Flower Market to establish a plan?**
- **Where will they be located?**

8. Engaging with the Union Square Neighborhood Council. The covenant requires that US2 work with the Union Square Neighborhood Council in good faith. The Union Square Neighborhood Council does not yet exist, and members of the working group that are currently in discussions -- in many cases, pretty tense discussions -- about who will be able to serve on this group, what its relationship to the city will be, how it will move forward in negotiations with US2 on community benefits, and what the priorities should be for Union Square going forward.

These are public meetings and anyone is allowed to attend. At the same time, US2's presence in these meetings has been extremely divisive. US2 has continued to send representatives over the express objections of a minority of working group members to meetings that have nothing to do with design specifications or building plans.

- **What is the purpose of attending working group meetings regarding membership and elections?**

- **What is the value of attending, when the group is not yet constituted and the discussions are not addressing issues directly related to permitting?**
- **Would you consider holding off on attending until directly asked?**

There likely will come a time when US2's presence in these meetings is desired and helpful (OSPCD, for instance, was very generous with their time leading up to the Union Square zoning, and the USQNC will likely want to be involved in discussions around permitting). At the moment, US2's presence has served to fracture the group.

9. US2's contribution to community benefits. At the moment, US2 has pledged \$3.7 million over 30 years, which amounts to roughly \$123,000 / year. The CBA itself will not include any negotiations around money. Many people are dissatisfied with this.

- **The Community Benefits Committee -- once it is constituted -- will do a 5-year needs assessment. If that assessment determines that the need is greater than \$123,000/year, will you amend the CB contribution?**
- **What do you see as the major impacts of the GLX development on low-income communities in Somerville?**
- **Do you have plans to work with the Union Square Neighborhood Council to address housing and commercial displacement in Union Square?**

10. What is your timeline for beginning construction? This is the first step of a brand new permitting process! What avenues will be available in the future for people to weigh in on this development? When do you anticipate starting construction?