

NOTES FROM STEP MEETING 18 December 2006

December 18, 2006, 7-9 PM

VNA Assisted Living Center, Lowell St. Somerville

Present: Ellin Reisner, Wig Zamore, Andrea Yakovakis, Karen Molloy, Jim McGinnis, Kristie Chase, Chungchi Che, Ken Krause, Mary Jo Connelly, Paul Morgan

Notes written by Karen Molloy

1. Transportation Transition – Patrick Administration

Ellin and Ken each went to Patrick Transition meetings, which were held in several communities in recent weeks. Ellin attended the Energy and Environment meeting in Randolph. The meeting also covered MBTA debt load, gas tax. Ken attended the Transportation-focused meeting, at which around 100 people attended. The MBTA debt load was mentioned as was the fact that the Patrick transition team was reviewing transit commitments. A strong message was given that various agencies need to communicate/work together (EOT, MBTA, Mass Highway, etc.).

2. Metro Future Visioning Follow-Up

Ellin and Wig attended the recent Boston MAPC's MetroFutures Visioning workshop held in Danvers. The workshop entailed collecting ideas and presenting scenarios. People had to work with scenarios involving land use, education, water, supply, transportation, and so on. Attendees were from a variety of areas and backgrounds. MAPC collected feedback and will make recommendations for a long-range plan in June 2007. Ellin noted that at the workshop older participants seemed more concerned with environmental issues; younger participants were more concerned about education.

3. Bus Survey Follow-Up

Our bus survey results show overwhelmingly that participants are frustrated by lack of schedule adherence and frequency of bus service in Somerville. The main description is "unreliable". To our surprise and gratification, several people who filled out the survey don't ride the buses, and gave their reasons why. Ellin is drafting an Op-Ed to go in the Somerville Journal about STEP's bus survey. Could link with the recent Globe article about recent increase in bus service in many areas around Boston (unclear however whether this article had to do with Somerville service).

Wig mentioned that the Boston MPO has the perception that

Somerville always has a long list of needs, which get fulfilled. Oddly, the members of the MPO have no way of knowing the outcome of their decisions; although Somerville issues come before the MPO frequently, we rarely ever get funding for what we need. Wig recommends that Somerville bundle its needs in packages before the MPO.

4. Medford MGNA Update

Ken Krause reported that the beyond Lechmere study was vague on the Green Line Extension to Medford. There is a West Medford backlash underway. The State Delegation will not support the extension beyond Rte. 16. THE City Council is finally committed to hold a public meeting about the Green Line in January. There will be another MGNA community outreach meeting for the Hillside area in late January. Ken has heard that VHB has "completed 30% of Green Line design" but no details. Huh? No community input? We agreed to hold a joint STEP-MGNA meeting in Jan or Feb to look at possibilities and issues centered on Ball Sq. and Rte 16 stops.

5. Assembly Square

Wig reported that the Planning Board voted the PUD forward. Mystic View and developers has not settled a couple of matters, hope to do so soon. The City and developers' agreement is available. In addition to developing strip malls, Federal Realty knows how to develop sidewalk retail. Oddly, the \$3.6 million budgeted for public art was wiped out in favor of the sentiment "artists will be in Union Square". Ellin, who is on the Board of East Broadway Main Sts., said that it is looking at the relationship between Broadway and Assembly Sq.

6. Union Square Zoning

Jim reported that the Union Square zoning additions are for certain usages (artists' studios for example) with affordable housing between 12.5 to 15%. One area is demarked for a 12-story building. Unclear how much this plan will add to the tax base, as only 50% is non-residential. There needs to be more office and retail space to attract people to the Square as a destination. The proposal in general is disappointing except for the art overlay district; it doesn't add much to Union Sq except to lure developers to city-owned parcels. Joe Merkel is the planner at OHCD in charge of the project. There will likely be another public hearing on the zoning plan before it goes to the Aldermen to vote on.

7. **Medford Petition to Extend Green Line Past Route 16**
Ken mentioned the online petition posted on the MGNA listserv about whether or not residents affected by the Green Line extension would prefer the Green Line to extend beyond Route 16. There is a question as well whether people prefer a connection to the Lowell Commuter Rail at Ball Sq rather than at West Medford.
8. **Harvard Graduate School of Design Green Line Study**
No reply from students at the HGSD on the progress of their Green Line Extension urban planning project. Their semester ends in January.
9. **Presentation at TRB Poster Session on Public Involvement**
Ellin reported that STP has been invited to participate in a poster session at the annual TRB conference held in Washington DC at the Hilton. This year the conference will run from 21–25 January and the poster session will be on 23 January. Ellin (who attends the conference each year) will staff the STEP table (all STEPpers are invited!) which will feature the timeline, the map of proposed station, brochures, Bob's video, air quality handout, bus survey, etc.
10. **Putting Photo Examples of Light Rail on the Website**
When we put on the website photos of example outdoor light rail stations from other areas (of metro Boston or other cities around the world) we should be careful about putting up examples of single track stations; it's not an ideal design idea and costly to retrofit to double-track later. Examples should include not just small neighborhood platforms (such as Green Line out at Newton & Brookline) but station in areas of land use similar to Union Square.

Next meeting: 29 January 2007