

STEP June monthly meeting
June 22, 2009
Visiting Nurses Association

In attendance: Ellin Reisner, Wig Zamore, Jim McGinnis, Kristi Chase, Andrea Yakovakis, Naomi Slagowski, Karen Molloy, Alex Kaplan, Loren Barcus, Byron Clemence, Andrew Salzberg, Alex Epstien, Maaza Mekusig.

Introductions

Updates and Announcements

Orange Line Assembly Square planning meeting:

There has been approval of federal stimulus funding for the road portion of the project, but there isn't funding for the transportation portion. This meeting, which will be on June 29th at 6:30 at the Capuano Center cafeteria (150 Glen Street in East Somerville) is the first public meeting for design of the Orange Line in Assembly Square. The head house (entrance and exit) to the stop at Assembly Square is planned to be at the opposite end of the IKEA store. People should go to the public meeting and support the idea of adding a second head house at the IKEA end of the platform. The current planned configuration is not good for handicap accessibility.

Some people suggested transportation solutions used in Brooklyn - the IKEA has a dedicated ferry for the store that goes to Manhattan, a free shuttle to the train, and a lot of Zipcars. Copenhagen IKEA has bikes with trailers that you can rent to bring home your items.

Community Corridor Planning:

Meetings have been held to engage the community in Green Line Extension planning, including speakers of Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole. People have been going door-to-door telling people about the meetings. The next round of meetings will have some planning drawings to show people, and get input from the neighborhood. The Community Path will also be up for discussion, and people can get questions answered about the Green Line. The meetings will be held:

- College Ave Meeting.....June 29.....6pm (TAB Bldg)
- Route 16 Meeting.....July 8.....6pm (Clarendon Towers)
- Ball Square Meeting.....July 14.....6pm
- Lowell Street Meeting.....July 16.....6pm
- Union Square Meeting.....July 25.....10am
- Gilman Square MeetingJuly 29..... 6PM
- East Somerville/Brickbottom/
Inner Belt.....Aug 5.....6PM

Somerville is a 2009 All American City!

Representing STEP Ellin was part of the team of about 40 Somerville residents that went and presented three examples of civic engagement here. The event is sponsored by National Civic League, and they have been doing this event for 60 years.

Ellin reported that the event was a great experience and very inspirational to hear about civic engagement in the other cities. The presentation focused on the Green Line Extension, the Resistat program, and Somerville Cares About Prevention (SCAP), a group that tries to prevent teen substance abuse.

The presentation was done as people holding trolley cars and moving as a trolley with stations that were at the high school, businesses (Union Square), city hall. The skit and award ceremony are posted on youtube. On Thursday night at the board of aldermen meeting there will be a ceremony to celebrate

Community Assessment of Freeway Exposure and Health (National Institute of Health) study:

The kick-off meeting was this morning. The van that is fitted with the air pollution equipment is ready, and everyone is hired that will be surveying people – most of them are from Somerville, and the surveyors will speak Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole. They will collect blood from people that are willing to look for biomarkers that might indicate diseases related to air pollution. July 13th is the planned beginning of the surveying. Mystic Activity Center will be used as a clinic for the blood work.

The air quality research used to be focused on regional effects, but now there is much more science focused on local air effects, which this study will look at. This is an environmental justice issue, and will help make clear how living near highways affect community health.

Boston Architectural College student designs for Union Square:

Wig, Jim, and Ellin saw the designs of the Boston Architectural College students for a Union Square Green Line station that they worked on in their class, and thought they had great ideas. The professor is checking with the students to see if they would be willing to present their designs in Union Square at the Farmer's Market.

Urban Ring:

There is still not a definite plan for the stops in Somerville.

Transportation reform bill:

A board of five people will appoint the secretary of transportation. A Massachusetts capital finance solution is still not in place. The state can't include the Green Line for federal funding without coming up with a solution for state finance of capital transportation projects.

Action Items

ArtBeat planning:

This is a great opportunity to reach out to people. It will be July 18th in Davis Square (rain date July 19th). Karen will request that our booth be in the park. We passed around a sign up sheet, and we need help for booth staffing. We can use Steve's tent. We have new green buttons, and the T-shirts have been ordered. If anyone is interested in special order T-shirts, let Ellin know.

There are a lot of updates that are needed to the brochures: time line, air quality

brochure, general STEP brochure, and current news in Somerville transportation brochure. The brochures are going to be laid out in a common format and text styles to look uniform, and Kristi will take care of this. Andrea will look at the text to make sure it fits for our stated goals.

The maps need to be updated, too. The brochure map has been worked out by Steve, and we can also add the idea for extending the Green Line to Porter on the large map. There was some discussion on how great it would be to have the Green Line extend to Porter Square, and how that would benefit both Somerville and Cambridge.

Other comments, suggestions or ideas?

Trolley buses are a great compromise between buses and trains, because they don't pollute as much because they are electric. There are some operational issues with these trackless trolleys, but they certainly are a good idea in terms of pollution. The buses are very noisy, and the electric ones would be quiet. There was some general discussion of how trolleys are better than buses, and someone mentioned that Portland is just now installing a street-running trolley system.

A map to show bike and pedestrian access and connections for the neighborhoods in Somerville would be helpful. This sort of map would help with planning of the Community Path. It was also mentioned that the Community Path should be planned along with the Green Line extension. There was some discussion on how important it is to connect the Community Path to downtown Boston.

Operational analysis has been done on the two proposed maintenance facility locations in Inner Belt, the one proposed by the Green Line planners (Yard 8), and the one proposed by the City of Somerville (Scheme H). The Yard 8 proposed location has problems with trains going both ways, and would require a manually operated switch, which stops the train while the driver has to walk from the front to the back of the train. There are operational issues with both locations.

Pedestrian plazas, like the updates being made in Times Square in New York. Redundant roadways through Union Square could be improved, and perhaps a pedestrian plaza could be added to Union Square. This brought up a general discussion of how Union Square could draw in more pedestrian traffic.

There will be a planning meeting held by the city on July 8th at 6:30 at the Argenziano School (290 Washington Street) for a Union Square transportation study and planning meeting.

National Rail-Volution conference will be in Boston this year in the fall. Ellin submitted a presentation proposal but has not heard back if it was accepted. There will be interesting speakers at this conference, and people can sign up for this if they are interested.

The Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council is doing their annual “Data Day” at Northeastern on July 15th, and Wig will have a table there.

The next meeting will be July 27th at 7:00pm at the Visiting Nurses Association.