

# NOTES FROM STEP MEETING 25 September 2006

September 25, 2006, 7-9 PM

VNA Assisted Living Facility Community Room, Lowell Ave. Somerville

Attendees: Ellin Reisner, Andrea Yakovakis, Karen Molloy, Wig Zamore, Jim McGinnis, Kristie Chase, Steve Mulder, Ken Krause, Lori Segal, Fred Berman

Notes written by Karen Molloy

## 1. **STEP listserv, moving it from yahoo, augmenting it with forums/posting board, or blog**

Some on the STEP listserv have voiced discontent with having the listserv hosted by Yahoo because of some of Yahoo's policies (attempt to collect unnecessary private info, willingness to turn over user data to the government, the ads...). Should we move the STEP listserv to another listserv program? Jim McGinnis (STEP listserv moderator) will investigate other programs and the feasibility of doing so. One potential hassle would be if people were required to sign up for the new listserv.

We discussed whether STEP could use a different or additional mechanism for ongoing topic threads, such as a forum or a blog where people could discuss land-use, air quality, Green Line station design, parking, disability/accessibility issues, and other Somerville transportation-related issues. The benefit of this kind of setup is that it could be ongoing and only for people who seek out the thread; subject matter experts could participate and many could exchange ideas and information. The potential downside – but only if we replaced the listserv with this scheme – is that people who never post on the STEP listserv but read the messages to keep an ear to the ground, will lose out. We wondered whether both could co-exist; the listserv for announcements and a forum or blog hosted on the website for some ongoing discussions of major topics. People would be required to log into the blog or forum with a legitimate email account – we wouldn't want it to allow people to post anonymously, potentially ranting irresponsibly with personal attacks of the sort we've seen on some other sites. Steve Mulder (STEP webmaster) will investigate the tools we could use on our site.

## 2. **Update on the STEP bus survey**

The bus survey, which has been translated into Spanish,

Portuguese, and French is available on the STEP website and is linked from the City website. It has been posted on the STEP listserv and on other local listservs and in Denise Provost's e-newsletter. The paper survey has been distributed around the city at various bus stops by STEP members and various community agencies.

The survey distribution was publicized in the Somerville Journal "Community Notes". As of 25 September, 139 have responded to the online survey, 30 have turned in filled-out paper surveys. We expect approximately 250 respondents by 30 September, the survey deadline. STEP volunteers will enter the data from the paper surveys and then Steve Mulder will take first pass on analyzing the data. We'll turn the data over to Tufts; Alex Heil has offered work with his students to analyze the survey data.

We will be presenting the survey results to the City and to the (T) for Green Line mitigation.

### **3. Green Line Forum Update**

The Green Line Community Forum is an umbrella of like-minded groups: STEP, Somerville Bike Committee, Cambridge Health Alliance, Friends of the Community Path and Livable Streets. Ellin reported that the Green Line Community Forum is working on mission statement, which Ellin will forward. The organization is also working on a letter to the gubernatorial candidates reminding them of the SIP commitments and asking for their stand. There has been a lot of talking during the race about the commuter rail projects (Fall River, New Bedford) but not about the SIP commitments. Ellin will ask Mayor Curatone to address this issue publicly. STEP could publish a letter in the Somerville Journal about the lack of conversation about the SIP commitments in the candidates' campaign discourse.

### **4. Update on status of the Green Line project**

On 11 October The East Cambridge Planning team will hold a meeting at the Sonesta on the design of the Lechmere North Point project. It is important to have STEP presence at this meeting. Discussion ensued regarding the impact the new station could have on the community when it is moved away from its current location near the Cambridge Galleria and proximity to East Cambridge neighborhoods.

Another project related to the Green Line Extension is the eventual redesign of Route 28 where the overpass needs to come down with the next 10 yrs (irreparable structural deterioration). Once the overpass comes down the route should be designed as a boulevard and accommodate the Green Line.

In spite of the large public support for Somerville projects and the multiple Somerville project items listed in the TIP, not one Somerville project in the TIP in the last 4 yrs has been done.

**5. Planning for World CarFree Day in 2007 with Livable Streets, Walk Boston, MassBike, APT etc.**

Discussion was tabled; no one from the other organizations attended the meeting, nor did the person who proposed the agenda item. Planning and coordination for 22 September 2007 World Carfree Day (<http://www.worldcarfree.net/wcfd/>) needs to start soon.

**6. Somerville Parking Proposal**

Fred Berman presented his proposal for zoning variances for parking for future housing developments. He wanted to enlist STEP's support for a proposal to the BOA to explore the viability and benefits of implementing a change in parking policy such that when the Zoning Board grants a variance for higher density residential development, they can also approve a reduction in the minimum required number of on-site parking spaces, and prescribe the issuance of special parking permits for residents in that housing complex allowing them to park anywhere in Somerville except within x-number of blocks of their address.

The goals of his proposal are to discourage second cars, promote denser development without adding to traffic and parking congestion, and reduce the cost of housing development by reducing the parking requirement without burdening abutters with increased competition for on-street parking.

The legality of some of the proposal details needs to be established first.

Fred's proposal comes on the heels of Mark Chase's presentation last week (at the Main Library) based on ideas presented in Donald Shoup book "High Cost of Free Parking", which puts forth various ideas on how or solve the parking dilemma in

dense commercial and residential areas. [First chapter of the Shoup book is available as a free download at: [www.planning.org/bookservice/highcost.htm](http://www.planning.org/bookservice/highcost.htm).]

About 30% of Somerville households do not own any vehicle. However, parking takes up a huge amount of space in Somerville; at least 1/4 the city is reserved for parking. If Somerville had a modest on-street parking fee in effect now, the collected fees could recover the \$12million in City budget cuts this year.

Wig mentioned that South Boston has constrained parking requirements for new developments. This effort was community-led; the community became educated on the issues and how to control parking congestion; thus the locals asked for new parking requirements for future developments.

Next STEP meeting: 23 October. Location TBA.