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January 30, 2007

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Committee on Housing and Community Development held a meeting on January 30, 2007 with Chairman Rebekah Gewirtz presiding and Committee members Aldermen Thomas Taylor and William White also present and voting. Also present were Aldermen Dennis Sullivan and Robert Trane as well as Chief Assessor Richard Brescia, Phil Ercolini, Lisa Lepore, Chris Davita, Elise Martin, Mark Freidman and Attorney Ann Thomas, all from SPCD.

Mr. Ercolini addressed the members about economic development at Union Square, Brickbottom, Assembly Square, Davis Square, East Somerville, Boynton Yards and the former St. Polycarp property, as well as the extension of the M.B.T.A.'s Green Line through Somerville. During 2006, there was an increase of 62 jobs in the city and Somerville's unemployment rate was even with Cambridge's. The city is looking to establish small business assistance programs and would like to establish a storefront improvement program. At the present time, \$70,000 is available for such a project, with \$80,000 becoming available next year and an additional \$450,000 to be made available through Community Development Block Grants, (CDBG). Mr. Ercolini told the members that the city has commissioned Pinnacle Advisory Group to evaluate the potential demand for hotel development in five areas of the city. Mr. Ercolini also stated that an interdepartmental survey was conducted by Northeastern University to benchmark Somerville to other communities in the country. Finally, the members were told that the city currently has 15 projects either being developed or completed. Other topics briefly discussed included zoning initiatives for the revitalization of Union Square, municipal properties prospects, urban design and planning alternatives, prospective marketing and distribution, street design competition and park improvements at Perry Park, Allen Street and Stone Place.

Ms. Thomas addressed the members regarding the Master Land Disposition agreement, PUD preliminary development and the Mystic View settlement. During 2007, it is anticipated that the following action would take place:

- Filing of Phase 1AAA (mall)
- Filing of Phase 1AA (restaurant & IKEA)
- Filing of Phase 1A (mixed use along Mystic River)

Mr. Brescia told the members that there was a substantial increase in the commercial base during this past year, and with approximately \$31 million being spent at Assembly Square, the commercial base is moving upward. Historically, Somerville's commercial tax rate is lower than those of other communities, and at the present time, it is 37% lower than the City of Boston's. New construction in Somerville during FY-06 was 70% higher than in FY-05.

Alderman Taylor's motion *that the Director of Strategic Planning and Community Development provide the Committee on Housing and Community Development with a list of the types of jobs created in 2006 as well as the classifications of each* was approved.

Alderman White's motion *that the Director of Strategic Planning and Community Development provide the Committee on Housing and Community Development with data on employment and labor force growth in Somerville for FY-06 as well as data from the state detailing how the city's unemployment has declined, AND BE IT FURTHER ORDERED That the Director provide data on the city's 1.2% unemployment rate vs. the 4.6% unemployment for the state* was approved.

Alderman White's motion *that the Director of Strategic Planning and Community Development provide the Committee on Housing and Community Development with the method used by the state to determine Somerville's 2006 unemployment figures* was approved.

No papers were acted on.

Alderman Rebekah L. Gewirtz, Chairman
Committee on Housing and Community Development

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report of the Committee on Housing and
Community Development, January 30, 2007

In Board of Aldermen

Clerk