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March 16, 2010

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Committee on Housing and Community Development held a meeting on March 16, 2010 with Chairman Rebekah Gewirtz presiding and Committee members Aldermen Walter Pero and Dennis Sullivan also present and voting. Also present were Aldermen Thomas Taylor and William White as well as Monica Lamboy, Rob May and George Proakis from OSPCD.

188292 - Green Line extension and maintenance facility:

Ms. Lamboy reviewed a draft of a letter to be sent to Secretary of Transportation Jeff Mullen regarding the Green Line extension's Route 16 terminus. Chairman Gewirtz suggested a change to paragraph four of the letter and Ms. Lamboy said that she would ask the city's Director of Transportation, Mike Lambert, to reconsider the language. Revisions will be made to the draft and it will then be returned to the committee for further review. Chairman Gewirtz asked that a copy of the draft be given to Alderman Trane, as well. Alderman Pero suggested that the final letter be sent from both the mayor and the committee.

With regard to the maintenance facility, Ms. Lamboy told the members that MEPA has asked to study its design and that there is a June timeline for re-submittal. This would necessitate there being a public hearing on the matter sometime in May.

188866 - the state of business in Somerville:

Mr. May stated that OSPCD would like additional information from Aldermen White and Sullivan as to what their expectations are relative to the city's business community. Mr. May distributed a list of initiatives and described OSPCD's plans for the business community. Alderman White said that although planning for the future is a good thing, many of the businesses in the smaller squares are wondering about the here and now, so the question he has is what can the city do to help these businesses now? Mr. May said that the city has professional retailers with small businesses to help with making improvements to increase business and he also noted that Mass Development has small financial benefits to help small businesses. Alderman White asked that OSPCD gather information on the number of vacancies in the city's business community and prepare an inventory of what businesses have ceased and he also inquired about funding that might be available to businesses from the state. Alderman Sullivan said that his research indicated that businesses in Somerville are not thriving at the present time and he asked if there might be a correlation between ticketing and the lack of business. Chairman Gewirtz asked about the impact of parking and Mr. May said that extending parking meter operation to 8:00 PM has been beneficial to the city since residents fill those spots after 6:00 PM. Alderman Taylor pointed out that the parking meter policy might have a dual effect, i.e., as one problem is

solved, another may be created. Alderman White requested a detailed methodology of traffic in the city as it relates to the business community.

Stephen Mackey, from the Chamber of Commerce, told the members that the two main issues for the business community are regulations and the cost of doing business in the city and he said that the Chamber would like to increase its dialogue with the mayor regarding these matters.

Chairman Gewirtz stated that she would like to conduct meetings to get public input relative to what the business community envisions from local government. Alderman Taylor welcomes a public hearing sponsored by both the city and the Chamber of Commerce. Alderman Sullivan, although in favor of a public hearing, would prefer a town hall meeting. Ms. Lamboy told the members that OSPCD and the Chamber already have a town hall meeting planned and Alderman Pero asked that the next town hall meeting be coordinated with the committee. He also informed the members that the business block on Broadway, from the Post Office to Marshall Street is going to be vacant.

Ms. Lamboy and Mr. May told the members that OSPCD networks throughout the city and is attempting to identify which businesses might be at risk. OSPCD is considering designating liaisons for businesses in particular areas and then scheduling meeting with those businesses and the associated Ward aldermen. Mr. May stated that it is important for the city to welcome businesses and to include job training for them.

188722 – special permits:

Mr. Proakis and Ms. Lamboy spoke about the application process for special permits. During the review process, the project plans and designs are examined as well as the quality of the applicant seeking the special permit. Other city departments are consulted for their particular expertise, thereby allowing OSPCD to provide reasonable feedback to applicants prior to a decision being rendered. Mr. Proakis stated that case law exists for the denial of an applicant. Alderman White suggested that this matter might be better suited for discussion by the Committee on Land Use and he asked the OSPCD staff to clarify some particular information (contained on page 3, section 6C)

The next meeting of the committee will be on April 5th at 6:00 PM

The committee discussed matters before it and took action on the following item:

188351: Communication from Mayor - Conveying the Administration's position on the interrelationship of the I-Cubed program and a second head house at the Orange Line Assembly Sq. station.

RECOMMENDATION: Should be placed on file

VOTE: Unanimous, 3 - 0 in favor

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