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March 30, 2009

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Committee on Housing and Community Development held a meeting on March 30, 2009 with Chairman Rebekah Gewirtz presiding and Committee members Aldermen William Roche and Dennis Sullivan also present and voting. Also present were Aldermen Maryann Heuston and William White, Administrative Assistant Jessie Baker, Monica Lamboy, Robert May and Arn Franzen from SPCD.

Public Hearing - Open Space Plan:

There were no speakers in favor or against the proposal. The Public Hearing was closed.

The committee discussed the 2008 – 2013 Open Space Plan. By way of explanation, the Open Space and Recreation Plan is a state mandated plan that assesses the city's open space parcels and recreation facilities and proposes a 5-year strategic action plan for the renovation of parks, playgrounds and other open spaces. SPCD conducted a public process in order to address the concerns of Somerville residents.

Alderman Heuston inquired about renovations to Lincoln Park and how the proposed skateboard park would affect zoning in Union Square. Mr. Franzen stated that it was too early to discuss particular renovations at Lincoln Park at this time. Mr. May explained that corridors would be used to move MBTA and Commuter Rail riders into Union Square.

Mr. May gave a presentation of the plan and noted the following highlights:

- The City of Somerville is 4.1 square miles in size with a population of approximately 77,478 people, or about 29.5 people per acre,
- The total public open space is 141 acres or 5.37% of the city with only 45% (63.52 acres) of it owned by the city,
- The city manages 46 parks, playgrounds, and ball fields for residents and renovated 11 parks/community gardens from 2004 through 2007,
- Park renovations average about 2.75 per year and typically have a 15–20 year lifecycle,
- The Ed Leathers Community Park was opened in August, 2008 at the former site of the Kemp Nuts Factory, and features extensive lawn and open space, large shade trees, flowering shrubs, play opportunities for children, off-leash recreation area for dogs, and an elevated terrace/informal stage,
- Groundwork Somerville and the Green Team educated residents about environmental and health issues in Somerville, promoting community stewardship

Some of the plans goals include:

- The renovation of existing parks and open spaces to improve condition of Somerville's recreational areas and ensure attractive, safe and accessible public lands,
- Securing more land to expand Somerville's total open space acreage and ensure access to open space in every neighborhood,
- Analyzing and improving access for persons with disabilities to parks and open space, as part of ongoing ADA compliance,
- Increasing tree canopy and green spaces to promote urban health and sustainability and reduce the heat island effect,
- Increasing Off-Leash Recreational Area (OLRA) opportunities throughout the city and creating a new skate park,
- Raising the bar for sustainable design and building practices in city parks and open space projects,
- Reducing brownfields and converting them to more desirable uses and
- Improving accountability and setting departmental vision through a series of strategic planning documents.

Alderman Sullivan suggested that SPCD discuss the plans with various youth groups, such as Little League and Pop Warner, and that the Recreation Department be involved in the process, as well.

As for the waterfront development at Assembly Square, Ms. Lamboy informed the members that Federal Realty and the Department of Conservation and Recreation would develop that area and that there would be a public process before any work begins.

Chairman Gewirtz advocated that Kenny Park be included for renovations in the next open space plan.

No papers were acted on.

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