



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE**  
**JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR**

**STAFF PRESENT**

MADELEINE MASTERS, *PLANNING DIRECTOR*  
LORI MASSA, *PLANNER*

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

DEBORAH FENNICK  
PETER WIEDERSPAHN  
JAMES KIRYLO

**Meeting Minutes & Recommendations**

The Somerville Design Review Committee held a public meeting on **Thursday December 11, 2008** at **6:30 pm** in the Somerville High School Library, 81 Highland Avenue, Somerville, MA.

**Revisions to the Assembly Square Preliminary Master Plan:**

The presenters included representatives from Federal Realty Trust, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. and Street-Works LLC. The goals of the changes to the Master Plan are to create a viable mix of retail and residential units in the early phases of the project to create a sense of place and to refine the open space and circulation. There are no changes to the proposed uses which are truly mixed within buildings. The views of Boston and the water are two foci of the plan and Main Street connects them. The blocks along Main Street would be large enough for internal parking but would not be mega-blocks that would hinder the walkability of the street.

The Applicants presented the proposed changes to the plan:

- The bicycle and vehicular access within the development and to the rest of the City:
  - G-Street would have a shared use path for pedestrians and bicycles;
  - A-Street would be eliminated which would increase the depth of the MDC greenway;
  - The median along Main Street would be wider;
  - One lane on each side of Assembly Square Drive would be on-street parking; and
  - Alleys were added/reconfigured so that loading would not occur on Main Street.
- The old plan lacked a gateway to the north, which the proposed roundabout would create. The roundabout is also a traffic calming measure that would eliminate a turn conflict at B-Street and bring people into the heart of the project.
- Some heights of residential and office building have shifted around to have lower heights on Main Street.
- There would be rain gardens along G-Street.
- The height of the building adjacent to Assembly Square would be reduced from 216 feet to ~75 feet with a 155 foot building set back to allow more light to reach this plaza.
- The block at the main entrance by A-Street was consolidated to better configure parking but the building massing would break down its scale.
- The cinema was moved from the first floor to upper stories because it is not a pedestrian friendly use.

- The orientation of the office buildings at Assembly Square Drive and IKEA Way were rotated so that they better address the corner. A2 and M blocks now face each other to create a great corporate address on Assembly Square Drive.

The DRC asked the following questions:

- Q: Is there less open space in this plan?  
A: The amount of usable open space has increased but overall the amount of open space is slightly smaller because some of the rooftop amenities have been scaled back.
- Q: How large are the open spaces?  
A: Assembly Square and the road around it would be designed with similar elements so that the road feels as if it is incorporated into the square. The size is roughly the size of Post Office Square in Boston. The park on the water was increased and now has dimensions for active uses. The Main Street mall increased to allow viable uses there.
- Q: What is the difference between a rotary and a roundabout?  
A: The size and speed differ. Powder House is an example of a rotary. The new entrance would allow people to view the water while entering the development.
- Q: What are the sustainable design features?  
A: The mixed-use nature of the land is a sustainable feature but the building design detail is not established yet. They hope to achieve LEED silver certification for neighborhood development and each building would be LEED certifiable. Other elements of low impact development may include storm water management, green roofs, light color roofs, low demand irrigation, drought tolerant landscaping, rain gardens, rooftop rainwater collection for irrigation, tightly space street trees, and street sweeping. IKEA is creating its own low impact development features.
- Q: The height of the residential tower on block A2 will shade the open space on Main Street as will the height on block C because they are on the southwest side of the street. Has the solar orientation been considered?  
A: They have shifted buildings based on shadow studies. The residential tower is located near the T-stop, it would have views of Boston and it is an anchor to Main Street.
- Q: Why not shift the tall buildings at block F where the shadows would be least impactful?  
A: Building heights step down towards the Mystic River to conform to Chapter 91 regulations.
- Q: The DRC asked for more explanation of the alleyways.  
A: Alleys on blocks B and C would be covered and D and E would be open to the sky. They would be forty feet to the building faces and would be one-way. The Applicants explained that they have designed similar alleys in other locations and they work well.
- Q: What would be the nature of the pedestrian access to the T-stop?  
A: The sidewalks would be eighteen feet along the major streets and fourteen to sixteen along minor streets. These dimensions were used in other successful projects.
- Q: What is the phasing plan?  
A: There is a map of phase 1. The goal is to create vibrancy at Main Street. Office, retail and residential are part of the first phase.

- Q: When will the T-stop be constructed and are there assurances that it will be built?  
A: The plan is for the T-stop to be completed in 2013. Congress has appropriated the funds and FRIT is contributing a large amount to the project and is doing the design for the station.
- Q: What is the plan for the breakdown of ownership of residential units?  
A: The first phase would be 2/3 rental and 1/3 condominium. The future phases would make the breakdown to be 50% rental and 50% condominium or 60/40. The first phase would be 350 rental and 140-175 condos.

The DRC made the following comments and recommendations (underlined):

- The road between blocks L1 and K previously had an opening to the tracks but did not provide vehicular access. A building now terminates the street. The DRC approved of this change that creates a better designed open space.
- It is a good plan to have people living and working in the development in the first phase to create a sense of place.
- The new entrance with the roundabout, elimination of A-Street, and shifting B-Street, creates a clearer entrance than the old plan. The first building here used to be an island but the combined block is not. The reconfiguration also increases the amount of waterfront green space which is a positive move.
- G-Street is better defined.
- The alleys and access from Main Street functions well.
- The DRC had reservations about the height of the buildings on blocks C and A2 with the solar orientation. The designers should continue to review shadow impacts but they can see how A2 will create a landmark and provide views of Boston.
- The guidelines for the sustainability of the buildings should be aggressive.
- One member was surprised at how much retail is proposed.
- There should be a lack of uniformity so that it does not feel like a mall or big box retail with the amenity of the river. The connections to the community are important.
- The DRC is encouraged by the progress of the plan. The new plan produces better defined exterior open spaces than the previous plan.

#### **Other Business:**

- Assembly Square DRC / City-wide DRC relationship
  - Members of the Assembly Square DRC will be recommended to be appointed to the City-wide DRC to fill vacant positions.
  - Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance to combine the boards will be submitted to the Board of Aldermen in January.
- Permit Streamlining
  - The committee reviewed the current and proposed permit process flowchart.
  - They discussed receiving written public comments administered through staff before the meeting to address concerns that may change the design of projects.