



## Memorandum

To: Barney Heath  
From: Russell Preston  
Date: March 29, 2018  
Reg: Email from Lenny Gentile on March 26, 2018

We are pleased to supply the following answers to Mr. Gentile's questions:

**Question - As you collect comments and data from the public do you plan to organize this information so that it is clear which information came from homeowners and businesses along the Washington Street corridor, including abutting streets, and which information came from other sections of the city? If so, how will this information be cataloged and presented?**

Our practice is focused on engaging directly with communities, stakeholders, and individuals as it is our experience that including many minds in the shaping of a plan for a community's future results in great plans. We focus significant attention on the public process and put large amounts of energy into co-creating a process that works within each unique community.

With that said, we also take direction from our clients and local leadership. Each community has a different dynamic and engagement expectations. In Newton, we look forward to learning from everyone involved how to best balance the needs of local residents with the community as a whole. If the community's priority is to more heavily weight the desires and concerns of nearby residents, we can accommodate that within an open, public process that allows people with different perspectives and opinions to work together to create a plan for the future of the study area.

Over the course of the process, we will capture information from the stakeholders and the public in various forms which often include paper surveys, maps, visual preference surveys, and notes taken during interviews and in small group meetings. Depending on the type of feedback we are receiving from a stakeholder, and when appropriate, we can request information about that person's relationship to the study area (i.e., business owner, resident, etc.). We will also be preparing visuals such as site plans, maps, and illustrations, as well as zoning code materials for real-time review and feedback during



the course of the planning process. The responses to these materials by both city leadership, stakeholders, and the community at large is incredibly helpful for understanding whether the work is on track or missing the mark. This catalog of material will be provided on the project's website and can be made available in raw or summary form.

It might be helpful to read the article written by Russell Preston on civic engagement that was published in Architecture Boston that talks about our approach in more detail: <https://www.architects.org/architectureboston/articles/bring-joy>

**Question - When making recommendations to the City Administration and City Council how much weight will be given to comments to immediate abutters vs. comments from other stakeholders across the city?**

Prior to making recommendations to the City Administration or City Council in any formal way, the vision plan and code will be vetted through multiple feedback loops and drafts with the community. If we hear from people that the materials in progress are not on track or not meeting expectations, we will go back to the drawing board during the next round of work until we achieve strong consensus. We find that including multiple feedback loops with various revisions happening between each is essential to ensuring the plan and code are on target with the community's vision. We will look to the city to help us calibrate to what degree the voices of immediate abutters should be more heavily weighted than the interests of other stakeholders. With such an important study area, there will likely be issues that are at a very micro scale that have to do with the interests of a small group, as well as issues at a macro scale that could affect an entire neighborhood or multiple neighborhoods. Balancing these various elements is a critical matter that will require us to take our lead from the city.

**Question - At our last City Council meeting, it was reported that your company has done work in Boston and Mashpee in addition to Somerville. I don't remember hearing anything about this work at the original presentation we were given along with the Zoning and Planning Committee. Can you describe the work that you did in these communities? Please be specific.**

Mashpee Commons - Principle has been working with the developer of Mashpee Commons since 2015, helping to shape the transformation of a suburban strip mall into a series of mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods that provide a town center for a community that historically has not had one. After more than 25 years of development,



restricted by local zoning to strictly commercial uses, the developers are working with the town, the broader community, and the regional planning agency to shape a vision and draft a form-based code for these new neighborhoods. Principle has been working with the Mashpee Commons team to lead the public process, create the vision plan for the project, and draft the zoning. This process has included several visioning workshops, educational panels, and an upcoming public master planning and coding charrette. In addition to this work, Russell Preston worked directly with the development from 2003-2011 master planning future phases of the project as well as designing and building several mixed-use buildings and public spaces.

Boston - Part of Principle's mission is to help build truly authentic places. This objective has led us to partner with New Urban Partners and work with them to develop a series of mixed-use, infill buildings in the neighborhood of Mission Hill as well as the adaptive re-use and preservation of several historic structures in the Financial District of Boston as well as Beacon Hill.

This work can be viewed at our website at the following links:

<http://www.principle.us/mission-hill-massachusetts>

<http://www.principle.us/project-broad-street-downtown-boston>

**Question - A criticism that I have received from some residents of Somerville is that your firm came to the project with a pro-development bias that was shared by several members of the city administration and that you worked to help promote that agenda. Can you please comment on this criticism.**

Thank you for asking this question and coming to us to check the facts as this topic does have bearing on your local conversation. I would suggest that your committee review the City of Somerville's comprehensive plan, SomerVision, as it has been a guiding document informing all of the work that we have accomplished with that city and continues to guide the work we have ongoing with them. Here is a link to that document:

<https://www.somervillema.gov/somervision>

SomerVision defines a number of clear goals for the City that are also worth taking note of:

- 30,000 new jobs,
- 125 acres of publicly-accessible open space



- 6,000 new housing units with 1,500 of those being permanently Affordable.
- 50% of all new trips being by transit, bike, or walking.
- 85% of new development being sited in transformative areas of the city.

In addition to defining these goals, SomerVision also identified which areas of the city are opportunity areas that can be transformed to accept the lion's share of this targeted growth, such as areas to the east of Union Square. The SomerVision Map also defines areas of the city that need to be enhanced such as the existing neighborhood centers as well as existing subway station area, such as Davis Square, and new subway station areas, such as Gilman Square.

Our work in Somerville, with the Somerville by Design project, has been to develop multiple neighborhood and station-area plans to clearly define how these various areas of the city can help to accomplish the goals set out in the City's comprehensive plan. With that in mind, our mission has very much been about planning for development as well as creating new public spaces such as parks and squares. As established in SomerVision, the City of Somerville is looking to grow and continues to refine that vision for how to grow through years of community-led planning and visioning. To help meet this goal, we were directly asked by the City to lead public planning and visioning processes to help the community figure out how to grow in a form and with the kind of development and design that would be authentic to those neighborhoods.

Principle has worked with Somerville to create plans for Gilman Square, East Somerville, Winter Hill, Lowell Street, and Ball Square with strong community support in each case. We currently are working with the planning staff to complete plans for Davis Square and East Somerville as well as beginning work on several more details urban design projects for public spaces within Union Square.

Our work in Union Square was more challenging and involved balancing and responding to a number of very complex relationships. When we were hired to lead the public visioning process in Union Square, the City had already selected a Master Developer for a number of parcels within Union Square and near to the planned Green Line Subway Station. The agreements made between the City and the Master Developer was an existing condition that our team had to manage as we engaged with the community to craft their neighborhood plan. Our role in the process was to balance, to the best of our ability, the guidance offered by SomerVision for this area of the City, the interests of the community, the needs of the City for infrastructure and tax-base, and the expectations given by the City to the selected Master Developer, as well as the requirements from the MBTA. This was a complex process that resulted in a lot of hard



work, collaboration, direct communication, shared understanding, and problem-solving between the numerous groups involved. At the end of the day, the vision and neighborhood plan reflected many of the ideas and priorities of everyone involved, and because of the sincerity of the process, the outcome was of a quality and richness that would not have been possible without the incredible community involvement in shaping and molding the plan. The neighborhood plan for Union Square has gone on to be approved by Somerville's City Council and amended to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

We understand that each place we work is unique and each has its own expectations about what the future should hold for their community. With that understanding, we approach each of our projects with the desire to help those communities in which we work create places that future generation will be proud were preserved, enhanced, or transformed by the work that was done with our help whether that is shaping development in Somerville, saving the agrarian countryside in Newcastle, Maine, preserving a neighborhood's character in Higgins Beach, building brand-new neighborhood on Cape Cod, or enhancing a post-industrial district with a vibrant arts community in Providence. We love doing this work and are excited to engage with Newton to help create a vision and supporting regulations for the Washington Street Corridor.