A Vision and Plan for the
UNION SQUARE GATEWAY
A Vision and Plan for the Union Square Gateway

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Prepared by: MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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A Vision and Plan for the Union Square Gateway aims to inform future growth in the Union Square Gateway study area in Somerville, Massachusetts. This plan provides an understanding of the historical and contemporary neighborhood setting, offers short- and long-term context-specific proposals, and suggests appropriate implementation strategies. The upcoming MBTA Green Line extension and partial de-elevation of Route 28/McGrath Highway has brought increased attention to this area of the city. This plan is based on both the 2012 SomerVision Comprehensive Plan and 2012 Union Square Revitalization Plan, as well as additional examination of the study area. This plan focuses on green infrastructure, a diverse mix of commercial and residential development through both new and repurposed buildings, and increased pedestrian and cyclist accessibility. Overall, it offers a proactive strategy for future land use, economic development, and neighborhood revitalization that can meet the needs of Union Square residents and benefit Somerville and the region at large.
Overview

The City of Somerville sits just north of Boston on the eastern coast of Massachusetts. The City is currently in the process of planning for new transit-oriented development (TOD) in a string of neighborhoods along the proposed path of the MBTA Green Line extension, scheduled to begin construction in 2014. The Green Line extension will have two spurs, separating at the existing Lechmere station in Cambridge. One spur will travel northwest and extend into Medford; the second, shorter spur will take a more southerly path along a commuter train track and end at a new station in Union Square at the edge of the study area.

In the fall of 2013, the Mayor’s Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) invited the Community Growth and Land-Use Planning course in MIT’s Department of Urban Studies and Planning to assist Somerville in planning for development near the proposed Union Square T station. Somerville city planners dubbed this area “The Union Square Gateway.”

Though the study area as it exists lacks cohesiveness, it is a unique area that is full of potential. There are few residential properties, while aging industrial and large, underutilized properties abound. Much of the area is comprised of large landholdings: there is big box retail, as well as massive storage buildings, a car tow lot, and numerous junk yards and used auto dealerships. The southern edge of the project area borders Cambridge; the eastern edge is bounded by the aging McGrath Highway and Brickbottom, known for a cooperative artist community there. To the west is the increasingly vibrant Union Square neighborhood. Ongoing plans for the Union Square core will upgrade streetscapes and sub-surface infrastructure. A design process is underway to ground the McGrath highway between Somerville Avenue and Cross Street and replace it with a boulevard. On the other side of the highway, the City plans to remove a trash transfer facility and redevelop the area into a new neighborhood. The Union Square Gateway sits at the crux of all these plans; an undefined place awaiting a plan.
Historical Context

Union Square is the oldest commercial district in the City of Somerville. Famous for its role in early American history, it sits at the foot of the hill where the first American flag was raised. By the early 20th century, the Square was linked to Cambridge and Boston through an extensive electric streetcar network. It was this transportation network, coupled with extensive local industry in the Square, which led to the inflow of both residential and commercial density.

Contemporary Union Square and the adjacent study area now show little resemblance to this earlier period. Beginning in the 1950s, loss of local industry and a shift towards auto-orientated transportation caused dramatic drops in both population and commercial density. The Union Square area became increasingly disconnected, largely bypassed by the broader transportation network. While train service and the new highway system skirted the area, neither created meaningful linkages for Union Square to either Cambridge or Boston. Within the study area boundaries, civic and commercial investment dropped off, and a once vibrant and varied industrial base gave way to one focused primarily on automotive repair and resale businesses.

Recently, Union Square has shown signs of recovery. An increasing number of restaurants, artist studios, and commercial flex-spaces have helped reintroduce some of the neighborhood’s earlier vibrancy. While this recovery has been welcome and promising, its effects have failed to be felt within the study area.

SomerVision

The SomerVision Comprehensive Plan includes many goals, policies and actions that inform our proposal. These include:

• To make Somerville a regional employment center with a mix of diverse and high-quality jobs;
• To transform key opportunity areas into dynamic, mixed-use and transit-oriented districts that serve as economic engines to complement the neighborhoods of Somerville;
• To facilitate thoughtfully-designed, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development and reuse opportunities in commercial corridors, squares and around transit stations that are sensitive to neighborhood context, and serve existing and future residents and businesses;

“Union Square has changed a lot in the past 20 yrs. It’s a dining and entertainment destination, a place with cultural impact and street and performance art. The area always had a strong artistic community.”

Study area resident

FIGURE 2.2
The study area in large context
• To link Somerville’s corridors, squares and growth districts to support future development and economic activity;
• To support a business-friendly environment to attract and retain a diverse mix of businesses that can start in the area, grow in the area and stay in the area;
• To invest in the talents, skills and education of people to support growth and provide opportunities to residents of all social and economic levels; and
• To promote municipal financial self-determination and reduce fiscal dependence on state aid and residential taxes and fees

Somerville’s overall planning goals focus on creating a vibrant, transit-oriented city with a variety of residential areas, commercial development, and open space. As part of this strategy, current proposals categorize Somerville into three types of areas: 1) Areas to Conserve; 2) Areas to Enhance; and 3) Areas to Transform. In addition, SomerVision provides growth estimates for Boynton Yards and Union Square which includes the study area.

The study area holds only 15% of the entire land area of Somerville but 85% of the proposed additional square feet of new development included in the SomerVision plan. The Union Square Gateway area is comprised of two areas as defined by the comprehensive plan: approximately 75% of the area known as Boynton Yards and 50% of the area of Union Square. Calculating the numbers proposed in the SomerVision plan gives the following estimation for future growth in the Gateway area:

• 2,775 new jobs, which holds 13% of the entire city growth and is equivalent to 975,000 of new commercial sq. ft.
• 550 new housing units, which comprise 602,500 sq. ft. of new residential development.

In total, the SomerVision plan projects an additional 1,577,500 sq. ft. of development for the study area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Area (acres)</th>
<th>Buildable Area (acres)</th>
<th>% of Total Area to Transform</th>
<th>% of Citywide Growth Target</th>
<th>Job Growth Target</th>
<th>New Housing Target (units)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boynton Yards</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Square</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4300</td>
<td>850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 2.4
SomerVision Development Estimates
Course Methodology

The course was premised on three key questions, posed by the City of Somerville:

• What is an appropriate vision for the neighborhood?
• What interventions can the City make to encourage that vision?
• How might the City finance its interventions?

Before addressing the Somerville planners’ questions, we sought to understand the project area through extensive fieldwork and outreach to community members. We considered the nature of the neighborhood’s character and how it could be strengthened to address concerns about building form, site circulation and pedestrian amenities, without detracting from the unique character of the adjacent areas. We walked the area in groups and individually at different times of the day and night, taking photographs, making drawings, and speaking with people we met in shops and on the street. We also gathered first-hand knowledge and input through a series of interviews with residents, civic leaders, business owners, and community developers in the area.

Throughout the course, we supplemented our hands-on research with readings relevant to contemporary planning practice and the evolution of the discipline. Class time included guest lectures from Somerville planning officials, and presentations from our instructors about the history, tools, and principles required for envisioning and initiating a plan, with an emphasis on linking smart development and transportation. We studied innovative zoning, mixed-use development, and incentive strategies to broaden housing affordability, economic development planning, community design, placemaking and form-based codes, landscape planning and the greening of places, and sprawl and smart development.

Throughout the process, we considered what kinds of specific interventions the City could make to encourage appropriate projects and guide impending changes in the neighborhood. We also considered which vacant and underutilized structures in the district could serve as redevelopment catalyst sites and what the most appropriate uses for these sites would be. As we learned about zoning, we studied the existing codes and guidelines within the district, questioning how they could be changed to ensure that the project area would develop into a walkable, neighborhood-oriented residential, retail and mixed-use place.

In October 2013, we convened a public meeting to present our initial findings, and sought feedback from attendees. We used this feedback to guide us as we created our plan during the second half of the course. In December 2013, we presented our final plan at a second community meeting, and again solicited feedback in order to fine tune our proposals to the community’s needs.
Land Use

The Union Square Gateway study area is not composed of one cohesive neighborhood with distinct characteristics, but instead offers a variety of assets, some for conservation and others for redevelopment.

The area is part of Somerville’s Ward 2 and makes up 20% of the total built area of the ward, equivalent to 3% of the built area of the City of Somerville. The study area has only three small residential pockets and as a result, the population density in the area is low; compared to other areas in Somerville, Ward 2 has the lowest population density – five to seven people per acre. However, the residential pockets are denser than is typical when compared to the overall city average.

Land use analysis reflects the mix of residential, commercial, industrial, and vacant pockets within the study area. To measure the differences, we compared each land use type occupancy share of the area to its corresponding shares in the seven other wards of the city. The equation for the land use assessment is expressed by:

\[
\frac{\text{sum sq. ft. of land use type } x}{\text{area y population}} = \frac{\text{total sum sq. ft. of land use type } x}{\text{Somerville total population}}
\]

The analysis reveals that land usage differs in the study area from the rest of Somerville. A set of sliders represents the range for each land use type, represented on a scale of 0 to 13.

As can be seen in Figure 3.2, the study area falls at the far end of nearly all scales, which indicates uneven development. The concentration of commercial uses

"The area is plagued by inadequate and improper zoning; bad old zoning and people take advantage of it."

Study area resident
reflects the dominance of Target and Twin City Mall, while the high score of industrial use represents the clusters of industrial buildings south of the train tracks. The scales all indicate the lack of open space within the area, few institutional buildings, and a low concentration of residential use. The goal of this plan is to create a more balanced land use mix, enhancing uses like residential and open spaces.

Disinvestment and Median Income
During our initial work, we also identified that the area has undergone a long process of economic disinvestment, beginning as early as the 1940s. Eighty-five percent of buildings were built prior to 1940, while only 41 buildings were built during the last 70 years, consisting mostly of industrial structures located in the southeast corner of the study area. The median household income in the Gateway in 2010 was $46,088. Both MHI and average household income (in 2010 inflation adjusted dollars) were lower in the Gateway tract than in Union Square or neighboring

“Somerville’s big problem is that we are very heavily residential. It’s got a very high college educated population, with great energy, which can support home-grown cultural activity and lively dining and entertainment sector. There is lots of interesting retail, but all the folks who live here leave the city to go work someplace else.”
Participant at community meeting
Cambridge census tracts.

**Industry Typology and Amenities**

Due to high residential density in Somerville, the local employment per capita for the city is relatively low; the ratio is only 0.27, compared to 1.06 in Boston and 0.97 in Cambridge. Somerville, Boston and Cambridge share labor pools. We defined two key industry types within the study area – auto-related industry and food – that may help inform future development.

**Auto-related Industry**

Overall, Somerville has a higher employment share in auto-related services than any of the surrounding cities. In total there are 22 auto-repair and 60 personal car service businesses in Somerville. This industry has historic roots in the longstanding Somerville Ford Motor Company plant, which opened in 1926 along the Mystic River, now the site of the Assembly Square redevelopment project. Although large-scale auto manufacturing is no longer present in Somerville, supporting auto-related businesses, such as sales, parts and equipment, and maintenance services remain – predominately concentrated in East Somerville, including in the study area. The prevalence of auto-related business cannot be ignored, and must be integrated into area-specific proposals.

**Food Industry**

There is a diversity of food service businesses within the area: food production businesses (e.g. Taza Chocolate, Pretty Things Brewery); food retail businesses (e.g. a range of restaurants and grocery stores); a farmers market; and urban agriculture (e.g. South Street Farm). These establishments encompass the entire food system, and provide a strong foundation for further development within this sector.

**Education**

The school nearest to the study area is the K-8 Albert F. Argenziano School at Lincoln Park. Interviews with the Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development indicate that existing school capacity is sufficient to serve the residents.
Health Services

Somerville has six community health centers, including one hospital (Central Street Health Center). The Union Square Health Center is the facility nearest to the study area but Cambridge centers are also nearby and include the East Cambridge Health Center and Cambridge Pediatrics.

Existing Transportation

The study area is heavily oriented towards automobile use. The road network can be broadly classified within two categories. The first category is high traffic volume arterial roads. The main examples are Somerville Avenue, Washington Street, Prospect Street, Medford Street, and McGrath Highway. The intersections of these highly-trafficked roads create high-density junctions which limit pedestrian connectivity. The intersections highlighted in Figure 3.4 function as entrances and gateways into the area. The network of roads and access to adjacent neighborhoods and the regional transportation network influences the overall character of the Gateway. A large number of auto repair shops, towing companies, big box retail stores and fast food restaurants take advantage of the study area’s good location and the high traffic volume of local roads.

The second category of roads in the study area includes small networks of secondary streets. These networks have limited external connectivity and often non-traditional grid layouts, which result in low traffic volume. Several of these secondary networks correspond with residential pockets within the Gateway, for example Allen and Merriam Streets between Somerville Avenue and the train tracks. These secondary streets are also present in non-residential areas. For example, the streets within Boynton Yards make up a low-density, non-grid network that connects a small residential pocket with an area predominated by light industrial space.

The area’s limited residential and retail density and the relatively few destinations, coupled with the area’s excellent connectivity to the regional roadway system creates a situation wherein much of the traffic within the Gateway is cut-through traffic. In 2002, it was estimated that approximately 75% of all eastbound traffic and 60% of westbound traffic was cut-through. This condition in the study area requires attention, as the introduction of higher-density traffic would lead to increased congestion and reduced pedestrian safety.

“How do we make the area one continuous neighborhood, so that it’s accessible to people who live/work in other neighboring areas – and so they can they get there without a car? How do we make more convenient retail, entertainment, cultural offerings along the way? It should feel like the neighborhoods are growing together as a viable contiguous unit.”

Participant at community meeting

FIGURE 3.5

Much of the study area is within walking distance of the two proposed Green Line Stations and the possible third station at the intersection Medford Street and Somerville Avenue.
transportation within the Gateway study area.

Green Line Extension

The MBTA Green Line extension is a transformative project for Union Square and the entire surrounding area. Phase 1 of the project has already commenced and includes reconstruction of the Medford Street Bridge. Phase 2 – with an estimated completion date of 2017 – includes the creation of Union Square and Washington Street T-Stations. Figure 3.5 illustrates that much of the western portion of the Gateway is accessible from the stations within a quarter-mile radius – equivalent to a five-minute walk.

McGrath Highway Grounding

While short-term improvements to the portion of the McGrath Highway which abuts the Gateway are ongoing, the deterioration of the existing infrastructure, as well as the expected increase in development related to the future T-Stations, has provided MassDOT with an opportunity to redevelop McGrath Highway. It is currently proposed that the McCarthy Overpass be grounded between Medford Street to the north and Poplar Street to the south. Transforming the elevated McGrath Highway to an at-grade boulevard is expected to reduce traffic volume on McGrath without adding capacity, while also leading to significant improvements in mobility and connectivity.
Boynton Yards Transportation Network and Utility Capacity

There is an ongoing subsurface analysis of drainage in Boynton Yards, as well as a study of a potential new street grid network. The lack of underground infrastructure means that this area is particularly prone to flooding. Expanding this municipal utility capacity can help support the expected expansion of density within the area. In addition, Boynton Yards’ street network is non-traditional, and does not include a road that directly traverses the area, limiting connectivity. Restructuring the existing road network can create a more coherent and developable area, by increasing vehicle circulation.

Prospect Street and Webster Avenue Reconfiguration

Proposals have been made to reconfigure Prospect Street and Webster Avenue for two-way travel between Somerville Avenue and the Prospect Street/Webster Avenue intersection. This configuration would create space for bicycle lanes, slow traffic by eliminating the existing one-way multi-lane roadway, and slightly reduce the amount of traffic that passes through the study area.

Green Infrastructure

Stormwater management and flooding hazards pose a significant challenge in and around the area. Much of this has to do with the area’s topography: many of the lowest-lying points in Somerville are within or adjacent to the future Green Line tracks, as seen in Figure 3.7.

In addition, the combined sewer system that runs through most of Somerville does not have the capacity to handle large rain events, further contributing to flooding in the lower-lying parts of the city. As a result, the study area receives stormwater runoff not just from the immediate area, but also higher points within Somerville. This low-lying area roughly corresponds to the historic path of the Millers River, which was gradually filled in during the 19th century. In the 1800s, the Millers River was used as a sewer and dumping ground for local industry. One particularly notorious polluter was a large slaughterhouse located near what is now Twin City Plaza. The smell and health effects led to some of the first public health-based anti-pollution laws in Massachusetts. Today, the area’s flooding problem is amplified by an extremely high level of impervious surface in the immediate area; Ward 2, which encompasses the study area, has the lowest rate of both permeable surface and canopy cover in Somerville.

Relative to the surrounding area, the Union Square Gateway area is relatively lacking in public open space, which is one potential means of including permeable surface within the public realm. Within the boundaries of the area, there is only one designated public open space – the Allen Street Community Garden. This former brownfield site illustrates both the challenges and opportunities present within the area. The prevalence of industrial
uses in the area has left a number of sites contaminated. These sites pose a challenge for development in general; however, the community garden is one example of how leveraging EPA funding for brownfield remediation can create more public space in this area.

Parks and open spaces around the site area, such as Vinal Street Park and Stone Park, provide precedents for different types of park uses that can accommodate a variety of users, or simply act as a passive space to serve as a retreat from the busier parts of the public realm. When strategically located, such parks can serve as sites for stormwater absorption and groundwater recharge.

There are also examples of small-scale urban agriculture uses in the area, including the South Street Farm to the south of the site, and the container garden outside Fringe Studios. Such projects have the potential for multi-functionality as open space, green infrastructure, and food production. Overall, there is a greater need for public open space within the study area, and this creates opportunities to leverage these spaces to address flooding issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Somerville Neighborhood</th>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>% Trees</th>
<th>% Impervious Surface</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Hill</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis Square</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Somerville</td>
<td>471.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magoun, Albion</td>
<td>148.1</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powderhouse</td>
<td>118.6</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect Hill</td>
<td>123.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Hill</td>
<td>225.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Hills</td>
<td>231.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tufts</td>
<td>143.8</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward 22 Cobble Hill</td>
<td>571.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Somerville</td>
<td>224.7</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Hill</td>
<td>206.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerville (Citywide)</td>
<td>2719.5</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 3.8
Stone Park, outside of Union Square (facing page)

FIGURE 3.9
Comparison of Impervious Surface and Tree Canopy in the City of Somerville
Neighborhood Character

In order to attain an in-depth understanding of the Union Square Gateway area, the planning team analyzed maps and walked around the site and its neighboring areas at different times of the day and week to understand the characteristics of the neighborhood. This section presents the team’s perception of the area based on these visits.

Community Perceptions

The existing uses of buildings in the study area create patterns: pockets of residential, big box retail and industrial are interspersed with auto-related, community and commercial activities. Visible throughout the site were vast expanses of parking lots and impervious surfaces. Some of the buildings were identified as active, in terms of serving as destinations for people within the neighborhood and from outside, and some were more inactive.

Characteristic Zones

Based on the existing building uses, observations, analysis of the built form, and resultant urban fabric, characteristic zones were mapped. A gradient of urban fabric – from fine-grained residential zones, to zones with a combination of fine and wide grained fabrics and uses, and finally zones with a much wider and larger grain like the industrial, auto-related and big-box retail use zones – was observed. The residential zones consist of one to three story houses on tree-lined streets and smaller scale built fabric. Mixed use zones have greater variety in building sizes, heights and activities. Industrial, big-box retail and commercial activities. Visible throughout the site were vast expanses of parking lots and impervious surfaces. Some of the buildings were identified as active, in terms of serving as destinations for people within the neighborhood and from outside, and some were more inactive.

Study area resident

“Two tiny, long-standing tight knit neighborhoods peacefully coexist with the commerce nearby – like Gentle Giant – they consider themselves neighborhoods, though often feel forgotten.”

Two tiny, long-standing tight knit neighborhoods peacefully coexist with the commerce nearby – like Gentle Giant – they consider themselves neighborhoods, though often feel forgotten.

• Ward Street: A section through a mixed use and mixed fabric zone showed the relatively low building heights, the high and visually overpowering light poles and overhead cables, and the low amount of street lighting and low activity during the evening and night hours.
• Water Street: A section through areas with auto uses showed the opacity of high fences along the street, and low activity during evening and night hours. Commercial areas on the other side of the street showed manicured lawns, but the landscaped zones were unused and inactive.
• Prospect Street overpass: A section through the overpass near the proposed T station showed narrow sidewalks and high speed traffic which make it a predominantly vehicular path. This presents an opportunity to rethink the design of this street to make it more pedestrian friendly, especially because of the expected foot traffic after the coming of the T station.
• Linden Street, Merriam Street: A section through a typical residential street showed front yard fences, trees, light poles, one-way streets and high houses that define most of the residential pockets within the study area. These house typologies are very specific to Somerville and represent a significant asset for the study area.
• Medford Street underpass: At the underpass, a major height difference was noted between the vehicular and bike paths and the pedestrian paths, along with few streetlights and low illumination and the presence of elements like the overhead track bridge, barbed wire fences, the lack of activity along the street edges, and opaque solid walls along the edges – all present an opportunity for major streetscape improvements and potential activation.

Study area resident

“Not very pedestrian oriented, possibly not even auto oriented. It’s got a no-man’s land feel rather than being oriented towards one particular use. It contains large expanses of undifferentiated pavement mixed with vaguely differentiated roadway. It has a free-for-all, frontier quality.”

The overall analysis of the streetscapes in the study area yielded a few common areas for improvements – the need for increased street lighting in order to enhance the safety and walkability of the areas at night, the need for more human-scale and transparent street walls, the need to put the infrastructural services such as electrical lines underground, the need for increased permeable surfaces along and adjacent to the streets, the need for improved paving design in order to demarcate the various areas on the streets and as a traffic calming measure, the need for universally accessible sidewalks, the need for more active uses along the edges of the streets in order to activate them and a need for improved street maintenance.

An analysis of the street lighting in the area was also done to identify zones that have little lighting, and thus, are not conducive to nighttime pedestrian activity due to the feeling of unsafety. On walking the area at night, most of these dimly lit pockets along
FIGURE 3.10
The study area includes a wide variety of streetscape conditions that vary by land use mix. The two street sections on the left illustrate streetscape conditions in residential pockets, while the two on the right illustrate the conditions on Medford Street and the elevated portion of the McGrath Highway.
the sidewalks were found deserted. These dimly lit zones presented specific opportunities for potential streetscape improvements within the study area to make the area more pedestrian friendly and active.

FIGURE 3.11
Street lighting is sparse on stretches of Somerville Avenue and Medford Street, contributing to pedestrian-unfriendly nighttime conditions
FIGURE 3.12
Existing zoning underlines the study area's compartmentalized residential, commercial and industrial pockets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoning District</th>
<th>Max. Height</th>
<th>Max. FAR</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>35 ft</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>Establish and preserve quiet neighborhoods of one- and two-family homes</td>
<td>Parking requirements generally 1-2 per unit depending on # of bedrooms; detailed dimensional requirements and limited types of permitted uses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>40 ft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establish and preserve medium density neighborhoods of one-, two- and three-family homes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NB</td>
<td>40 ft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Establish and preserve areas for small-scale retail stores, services and offices which are located in close proximity to residential areas</td>
<td>Small-scale businesses that minimize impacts on surrounding neighborhood; parking requirements vary by permitted uses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCD 45</td>
<td>45 ft</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Preserve and enhance business areas for retail, business services, housing, and office uses and to promote a strong pedestrian character and scale in those areas</td>
<td>Flexibility of “Use Clusters”; ground floor commercial; continuous street wall; reduced parking requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCD 55</td>
<td>55 ft</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Establish and preserve general commercial and high density residential areas consisting of multi-family developments</td>
<td>Supports large commercial strips, such as shopping centers and automobile related establishments, where customers primarily use automobiles to reach individual businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>50 ft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Establish and preserve business areas bordering main thoroughfares that are attractive to a wide range of uses</td>
<td>Parking requirements vary by permitted uses; preference for on-site, off-street parking if project requires special permit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB</td>
<td>50 ft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Establish and preserve general commercial and high density residential areas consisting of multi-family developments</td>
<td>Supports large commercial strips, such as shopping centers and automobile related establishments, where customers primarily use automobiles to reach individual businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOD 55</td>
<td>55 ft</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pedestrian-oriented near transit hub locations; wide range of uses; supports street activity; 15% affordable housing (17.5% in TOD 135)</td>
<td>Parking must be located in structure; 80% maximum ground coverage; ranging from predominantly residential uses in TOD 55 to higher density office, commercial and institutional uses in TOD 135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOD 70</td>
<td>70 ft (Green)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Establish and preserve primary goal to permanently protect open space resources; intended to include publically owned open space, but may also include private owned space upon consent of the owner</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TOD 100</td>
<td>100 ft (Green)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Establish and preserve primary goal to permanently protect open space resources; intended to include publically owned open space, but may also include private owned space upon consent of the owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOD 135</td>
<td>135 ft (Green)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Establish and preserve primary goal to permanently protect open space resources; intended to include publically owned open space, but may also include private owned space upon consent of the owner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OS</td>
<td>35 ft</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Encourage the preservation of open space for parkland, recreation, reservations, community gardens, rivers and streams and their shorelines, waterfront access, cemeteries, historic sites, urban plazas and squares</td>
<td>Primary goal to permanently protect open space resources; intended to include publically owned open space, but may also include private owned space upon consent of the owner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 3.13
A summary of existing zoning designations within the study area
With the coming Green Line, the Gateway to Union Square will become a key node connecting Somerville, Boston and Cambridge. This will soon be one of the fastest growth areas in Somerville. The City of Somerville must plan wisely for the inevitable development that will follow the new T stop at Union Square, and the potential grounding of the McGrath Highway. Both large projects signal a desire to move away from the car-dominated character of the area, towards a more pedestrian-friendly and public transit-oriented neighborhood.

There is a great opportunity to transform the site between these projects into a more vibrant, dense and sustainable place. It should mirror the strengths of Somerville’s other successful neighborhoods, and build on the objectives of prior planning initiatives. This will require a planning framework that creates jobs and housing for a diverse and growing population, while also holding development to the highest standards of environmental design. We do not envision a single character for the area, but rather see this site as a convergence of several neighborhoods, each providing different services for Somerville’s growing population.

Based on our research, Somerville’s previous planning efforts, and the community feedback we’ve received, we have developed the following six primary objectives for development in the area between Union Square and the Twin City shopping center:

1. **Preserve tight-knit residential enclaves and historic, industrial buildings.** These aspects are the life and character of our study area, and should guide future neighborhood design solutions.

2. **Promote ecologically sensitive development that fosters greening and improved water management.** This includes reducing impervious area, increasing the tree canopy, implementing multi-functional green infrastructure, and creating new open public space.

3. **Use zoning and parcel sizing to encourage diverse residential and commercial activity and job creation.** Different regions within our study area will be better suited to different kinds of housing and commercial activity, though these uses will likely change over time. Plans should include adaptable spaces and a heterogeneous mix of parcel sizes.

4. **Reduce car dominance.** Create more pedestrian- and bike-friendly streetscapes, implement traffic calming measures, and reduce parking lot surface area.

5. **Maintain residential and commercial affordability.** Using a mix of mandatory and voluntary regulations for development, ensure that new buildings include a meaningful percentage of affordable units. This is critical in maintaining a diverse population and allowing for small business growth.

6. **Facilitate community development.** By creating new commercial and recreational destinations and neighborhood amenities, we aim to encourage public activity.
The vision statement and the design principles, coupled with the sub-areas defined during the initial analysis, result in two levels of design interventions proposed for the study area.

The larger scale interventions included in this plan include streetscape improvements such as enhanced street lighting, better paving, design for universal access, and increased amounts of street planting. These interventions also include the introduction of new street grids in order to increase connectivity and enhance access to the newer developments without disturbing the existing residential neighborhoods. In keeping with the expected increase in demand for development related to the Green Line extension, the built form promotes higher density of commercial, retail and mixed-use spaces with a conscious effort to encourage human scale architecture and urban design within the area.

Stormwater management in the form of roof gardening and urban agricultural opportunities, adaptive re-use of existing industrial buildings, along with an emphasis on providing public open spaces and promoting public art, are overarching themes in the design proposal. The underlying principles of this plan are walkability, density/vibrancy, mixed-use, and increasing pervious surfaces. The result is an overall plan for the study area that recommends cohesive elements of urban form, streetscapes, use and urban furniture, while encouraging sub-areas with their own specific design characteristics.

Proposal

FIGURE 4.1
Proposed Union Square Gateway Sub-Areas
Introduction

Sub-Area A includes the proposed Union Square T-stop, Prospect Street from Webster up to Somerville Avenue, and a chain of nearly vacant parcels linking Somerville Avenue to Boynton Yards. Presently, the east side of Prospect Street is highly underutilized as light-industrial storage and scrap yard, including the all-but-invisible Bennett Circle, which horseshoes off Prospect Street. The west side of the street is home to an electrical grid power transformer, the Crossfit gym facility, and a Dunkin Donuts.

Site Plan

On Prospect Street, we envision CCD and TOD70 development, creating a lively streetscape composed of four and five story buildings, with ground floor retail and residential above. This will include development on the two southern corners of Prospect and Somerville, adding character to the neighborhood, and creating a more pedestrian friendly intersection. Traffic will become two-way, and likely include a traffic light outside the T-stop to allow for easier pedestrian crossing. There should also be a widened sidewalk on the T-stop side with a curb indent to allow buses to stop without obstructing traffic. Bennett Circle, which is presently not much more than a dirt path,
will be a pedestrian street, allowing for new businesses to be sited there facing the park, directly adjacent to the T-stop. Opportunities also exist to make the T-Station itself an icon for a greener Somerville, through artworks, a green roof over the platform, or other means.

Proposed Activities and Uses

This area is characterized by TOD development and a large stormwater park that greets passengers exiting the T. The park is situated on the chain of nearly vacant parcels already under ownership of the Somerville Redevelopment Authority; many of these parcels are low-lying and flood-prone. The park will double as green infrastructure, featuring recreated wetlands, and a variety of other programming opportunities (dog park, community garden, winter ice rink, native forest meditation area). The park will also feature a green bridge that will serve as a pedestrian and cyclist path across the train tracks, linking to a community path on the south side of the tracks that extends east to meet the Somerville Community Path on the other spur of the Green Line. The park will feature entrances on Somerville Avenue, Bennett Circle, Merriam Street, Webster Avenue, and Windsor Place, effectively serving neighborhoods in all directions.

Case Studies

The Qunli Stormwater Park in China is an example of a low-lying green space designed to function as open space and green infrastructure. Underground pipes around the park funnel stormwater into a network of ponds, allowing water to slowly infiltrate into the earth and relieving pressure on the sewer system. A network of elevated boardwalks gives visitors dry paths above the ponds to explore and take in views of the park.

Closer to home, the Chuck E. Harris Playground in East Somerville is a much smaller example of a similar idea. The playground is mostly permeable, allowing it to absorb rainwater, while serving as a great play space on dry days. The play equipment and park signage educate visitors about the history of the neighborhood and its important connection to the Charles River.

FIGURE 4.5
Qunli Stormwater Park, China

FIGURE 4.6
Chuck E. Harris Playground in East Somerville

Rendering of the Green Gateway Sub-Area, before and after
SUB-AREA B
Boynton Yards

Introduction
Sub-Area B includes the southwest corner of the study area, between the Somerville/Cambridge city line and the train tracks. Presently, this area is composed of mostly light industrial uses, including Gentle Giant Moving Company, Green and Yellow Cab, and Green City Growers. Jamspot Studio and Taza Chocolate are also adjacent to this area. The remaining area is comprised of parking lots, as well as vacant and semi-vacant parcels. Overall, the area and existing buildings appear highly underutilized. This may be due in part to topography; many of the vacant or parking lot parcels are low-lying and flood-prone.

Site Plan
Our plan envisions this area to be one of the commercial centers within the Union Square Gateway area, in which industrial-style buildings serve new businesses and flexible live-work spaces. Zoning is primarily TOD 135, which is appropriate and should lead to the long-term development of higher density buildings, e.g. eight+ floors. The plan also supports proposals to adapt the existing street grid network within Boynton Yards. Columbia, Windsor and Earle Streets could all potentially be extended up to, and across, the train tracks, thereby improving both vehicular and pedestrian connections.

FIGURE 4.9
Illustrative plan of the Boynton Yards Sub-Area (facing page)

FIGURE 4.10 & FIGURE 4.11
Projected build-out of the Boynton Yards Sub-Area (square footage and location by use type)
Proposed Activities and Uses

Due to its location in a low-lying area, and considering the existing food system-related activity, this area can benefit from the development of urban agriculture which can provide interim, and potentially long-term, activity on vacant sites. This site can also serve as the eco-infrastructure to hold storm water. This type of development can be supported through innovative policy incentives, including an urban agriculture overlay district, as well as a mixture of additional tax and height incentives aimed at promoting agricultural usage.

Case Study

Several industrial pockets in Montreal have undergone redevelopment that has focused on both rejuvenated light industry and artist life-work space, while also including urban agriculture and community gardens.
The Community Center Sub-Area C is bounded by Washington Street to the North and Somerville Avenue to the South, in between Union Square and McGrath Highway. This plan outlines three distinct areas for intervention in this sub-area. The first intervention includes streetscaping improvements on both Washington Street and Somerville Avenue. The second recommendation is the redevelopment of the existing Public Fire Safety Building site, between those two streets. The third recommended intervention is the creation of a public plaza in the area immediately surrounding the intersection of Somerville Avenue and McGrath Highway.

The proposed design for the Community Center Sub-Area C focuses heavily on beautification, identity and connectivity.

The existing Public Fire Safety Building and its adjoining parking lot represent an opportunity to connect three distinct residential neighborhoods to the North, East, and South, making it a perfect location for a community amenity. As a part of the development on the community center site, this plan proposes two structures - a community center with a public library, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use Type</th>
<th>Square Footage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>38,132 sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>40,485 sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic/Institutional</td>
<td>74,917 sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Light Industrial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>54,915 sq ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>72,333 sq ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>280,782 sq ft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Projected build-out of the Community Center Sub-Area (square footage and location by use type)
a commercial building with spaces for private businesses and City government offices. Both buildings will include two to three stories of garage parking. We also propose a neighborhood park and sculpture garden on the eastern-most side of the community center site. Given its central location and community oriented use, a park here has the opportunity to express the identity of Somerville with a welcoming and creative atmosphere. Additionally, given the site’s history of flooding, development on this site should emphasize permeable surfaces. By removing the existing parking lot and focusing on garden space and a green roof, the proposed development will decrease rainwater runoff, decreasing the area’s vulnerability to storms.

**Proposed Activities and Uses**

To create friendly and active streets connecting McGrath Highway to Union Square, this plan treats Washington Street and Somerville Avenue as catalyst sites. As such, several streetscape interventions are proposed including street planting, lighting, and street furniture. Since these streets are automobile corridors, it is important to utilize traffic calming measures in order to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The streetscaping here needs to incorporate unique wayfinding that will support the identity of the area. The wayfinding should be geared towards pedestrian and automobile traffic and should have a consistent character throughout. Improved street walls and store fronts, which when coupled with streetscape improvements, will make the area more appealing for local business owners. More shops, cafes and restaurants along these streets would ensure all-day activity, creating a more vibrant and attractive space. The third focus in the Community Center Sub-Area consists of the construction of three adjacent public outdoor plazas at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and McGrath Highway. These plazas will act as an anchor for activity and encourage pedestrian flow between Union Square and proposed new development adjacent to the plazas.
SUB-AREA D
The Central Gateway

Introduction
The Central Gateway Sub-Area C encompasses the area that is now occupied by Target, as well as the adjoining surface parking lot. The site front faces the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Medford Street, near the bend of the existing McGrath Highway overpass. This plan envisions this site as a major commercial corner, with the opportunity for an anchor tenant to be prominently located beside a pedestrian plaza.

Site Plan
In order to encourage connectivity across the study area and better serve proposed development within this sub-area, two new access streets are proposed within the site. In addition to improving site circulation and relieving traffic congestion at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and Medford Street, the addition of streets within this area will subdivide the site into smaller parcels. This creation of smaller parcels will encourage the development of smaller-scale projects that fit into the context of the residential area to the west of the site, while providing a transition toward the height and scale of developments to the east (see the New Industry Sub-Area E section).

Development toward the western edge of the site will face the proposed park in the

![Projected build-out of the Central Gateway Sub-Area](image)
FIGURE 4.25
Rendering of the Central Gateway Sub-Area, before

FIGURE 4.26
Rendering of the Central Gateway Sub-Area, after
Green Gateway sub-area. This area will include amenities that serve both new and existing residents, such as a dog park or other public recreational open spaces that provide an entry to the Green Gateway park. Establishing pedestrian connections across the train tracks is a primary objective of this plan. To this end, it is proposed that three streets are extended on the south side of the train tracks to connect with the present Target site. The paths serving as extensions of Merriam and Earle Streets will be pedestrian and bicycle bridges. The new roadway extending Harding Street will be open to automobile traffic as well.

The intersection of Somerville Avenue and Medford Street will also feature a public plaza previously mentioned in Sub-Area C. A mixture of ground floor retail and restaurants at this intersection will contribute to a lively pedestrian environment, while helping to create an entrance to the greater Union Square area.

Proposed Activities and Uses

This site will be largely mixed-use, with an emphasis on ground floor retail. Above these ground floor retail spaces, there will be commercial uses, with a small number of residential units as well. There will also be a parking garage, which will concentrate much of the existing parking on the site into a smaller footprint. This will allow for a significant decrease in the amount of impervious surface that is currently on the site. In addition to removing paved surface parking, new development should also include green roofs and permeable pavement, to be incentivized through zoning and new proposed city regulations.

The plaza at Somerville Avenue and Medford Street will offer programmable space, and host events such as small food truck festivals or craft markets. This plaza space would serve as a complement to Union Square, forming two anchor spaces connected by a pedestrian-friendly Somerville Avenue.

Case Study

The Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis is an example of a project that effectively incorporates an anchor retailer into a multi-story space. Instead of the typical big-box model, the Target at the Nicollet Mall occupies a smaller footprint on the ground floor, and is co-located with complementary smaller commercial uses. This helps create more pedestrian traffic, which is beneficial to both Target and adjacent retailers.
**SUB-AREA E**

**New Industry**

**Introduction**

The New Industry sub-area will unify what are now the Pat’s Tow and Planet Storage sites. This sub-area will employ adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and focus on high-density office and commercial development.

**Site Plan**

The two parcels in the New Industry sub-area are on either side of the existing train tracks. We will connect them by building over the tracks. This “skywalk,” will be the base for two office towers. Double-sided retail along the corridor within the skywalk will encourage connectivity through the New Industry sub-area, and into the Twin City sub-area. The design of the outdoor public plazas we propose should be consistent with the skywalk to establish a distinct identity for the site. Additionally, we encourage the City and the MBTA to partner to add a T stop to this site. We expect a significant increase in retail in this area, and a convenient T stop would dissuade shoppers from driving.

The historic brick building at 35 Medford Street should be preserved and repurposed. Uses for the building should be compatible with the commercial and office uses that are proposed for the entire sub-area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use Type</th>
<th>Square Footage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>74,079 sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td>261,441 sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>312,395 sq ft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civic/Institution</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Light Industrial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>213,500 sq ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>861,415 sq ft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Projected build-out of the New Industry Sub-Area (square footage and location by use type)**

**FIGURE 4.28**
Illustrative plan of the New Industry Sub-Area (facing page)

**FIGURE 4.29 & FIGURE 4.30**
Projected build-out of the New Industry Sub-Area (square footage and location by use type)
Proposed Activities and Uses

This plan will create a higher-density commercial center along McGrath Highway, bringing more jobs to the area. While we propose a mix of uses, the emphasis on the development in this sub-area is commercial. Mainly, these will be office buildings with ground-floor retail. At the intersection of Somerville Avenue and McGrath Highway, an iconic tower will announce the Gateway. We emphasize permeable surfaces and green roofs that can act as vertical gathering places. The high buildings here will offer attractive views of the city, which will become destination sites. We propose around 12-floor building heights. If careful consideration is given to the character of these buildings and the physical environment they create, they will integrate seamlessly into the landscape and not diminish the street level experience.

Case Study

Woodies Building in Washington DC is an excellent example of a building that maximizes space without dehumanizing the streetscape. The building incorporates an inviting façade to encourage diverse uses and street activity.
Introduction

The Twin City Plaza sub-area is located on the southeastern edge of the Gateway, bounded by the McGrath Highway to the north, Medford Street and Gore Street to the South, and Rufo Street to the east. This area also shares a border with the City of Cambridge that runs along Medford Street and across the Plaza’s parking lot. The sub-area is divided into 9 parcels totaling nearly 70,000 gross square feet. Currently the site is home to various types of retail establishments, surface parking lots and warehouse storage facilities.

Twin City Plaza is a single-story outdoor shopping mall with over 27 stores, including a supermarket, discount variety store, gym and other large-scale business chains. The building footprint forms an “L” shape with shop entrances facing eastward and southward and delivery entrances to the north along the McGrath Highway.

On the eastern edge of the Plaza is an indoor ice skating rink and Gold Star Mothers Park. On the western side of the sub-area, between the shopping center and the train tracks, is the Millbrook Cold Storage building. This former warehouse was recently purchased by Berkeley Investment and is undergoing regulatory review to be renovated as a 100-unit apartment building with artist work space on the ground level.

The area to the south of Twin City Plaza is mainly residential. To the north of the...
Plaza, known as the “Inner Belt,” the area is heavily industrial, with the “Brickbottom” artist live-work lofts being the notable exception.

Site Plan

Our proposed site plan calls for several interventions. A pedestrian at-grade crossing and renovated access points to the elevated portion of the McGrath Highway will improve connections across the Grand Junction train tracks. Additionally, the plan will increase the amount of green space along the tracks and behind Twin City Plaza and beautify open plaza space with landscaping along the edge of the train tracks. We also envision garden space on the rooftop of Twin City Plaza.

The Twin City Plaza buildings are currently detached from the streets and designed for shoppers who drive rather than those traveling by foot or bicycle. One strategy to better integrate the shopping center with its surrounding environment is to bring the building’s footprint to the street line. This would enhance the visual appearance of the shopping center and support a more pedestrian-oriented character. The site could also accommodate a greater density of commercial uses, enabling several extra floors of office space.

The plan also proposes a multi-story, structured parking garage to reduce the amount of impermeable surfaces in the existing parking lot. This option will create opportunities for

Proposed Activities and Uses

We maintain the primary use of Twin City Plaza as a regional shopping destination. However, additional development should increase available green space, reduce the amount of impermeable surfaces and parking lot coverage, and diversify commercial uses throughout the site. Uses such as offices and restaurants would increase the development capacity of the site and create jobs in the area.

Case Studies

The Greene Development in Dayton, OH (right) is a shopping center that incorporates streetscape elements to enhance the pedestrian experience. Wide sidewalks, planters, evenly dispersed lighting fixtures and trees are relatively low-cost interventions that would bring the Plaza to a more human scale.

FIGURE 4.37
The Greene Development in Dayton, OH
Land Use Proposal

The plan’s goals emphasize the increase of space and density of commercial uses, which are reflected in the proposed land use mix of additional sq. ft. for the area. This plan projects 2,700,000 sq. ft. of new development, which will support an additional 7,700 new jobs to the area. The share of new commercial space represents 70% of the total projected development. The recommendations outlined in this plan add 300 new housing units to the area, in addition to the 400 units that are already in different stages of development.

Additionally, this plan proposes a notable increase in both civic and open space land uses, which are presently almost non-existent in the study area. Commercial and mixed-use land use also show a significant increase, but comparably less due to their already dominant presence.

Zoning

The zoning ordinance forms an integral part of the process that is responsible for the way in which a city is planned and built. Zoning divides the city into zoning districts and includes a set of guidelines including permitted uses, permitted building heights, Floor Area Ratios (FARs), and allowable ground coverage for each of those districts. Through this ordinance, the public, and city planners shape the way in which the city exists and grows. Within our study area, there are three smaller pockets of residential areas zoned as RB (Residential-B) districts, areas of BA and BB (Business-A and Business-B) zoning, two corridors of CCD 35 and CCD 55 (Corridor Commercial District), and large areas of the TOD 70, TOD 100, and TOD 135 (Transit Oriented Development) districts. Using the existing zoning guidelines for each of these zones as a base, the planning team recommends a set of changes to the zoning district plan for the Union Square Gateway study area.

Implementation
FIGURE 5.2 & FIGURE 5.3
Proposed land use mix in the six sub-areas

Legend
- Residential
- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Open Space
- Civic/Institutional
- Light Industry
- Parking

SUB-AREA A
The Green Gateway
- 20% Residential
- 12% Mixed Use
- 22% Commercial
- 25% Open Space
- 9% Civic/Institutional
- 14% Light Industry
- 10% Parking

SUB-AREA B
Boynton Yards
- 23% Residential
- 25% Mixed Use
- 15% Commercial
- 9% Open Space
- 19% Civic/Institutional
- 30% Light Industry
- 71% Parking

SUB-AREA C
The Community Center
- 9% Residential
- 25% Mixed Use
- 9% Commercial
- 19% Open Space
- 36% Civic/Institutional
- 30% Light Industry
- 14% Parking

SUB-AREA D
The Central Gateway
- 32% Residential
- 30% Mixed Use
- 15% Commercial
- 23% Open Space
- 9% Civic/Institutional
- 9% Light Industry
- 10% Parking

SUB-AREA E
New Industry
- 25% Residential
- 36% Mixed Use
- 9% Commercial
- 19% Open Space
- 71% Civic/Institutional
- 10% Light Industry
- 10% Parking

SUB-AREA F
Twin City
- 14% Residential
- 26% Mixed Use
- 22% Commercial
- 19% Open Space
- 14% Civic/Institutional
- 27% Light Industry
- 14% Parking
Phasing
This plan outlines a phased approach for development within the Union Square Gateway study area that will allow the City of Somerville to allocate its resources appropriately, shape the pace and scale of opportunities for developers, and preserve the built character of the existing residential pockets.

Phase 1 – Short-term
The initial phase of development should focus on investments in critical infrastructure, as well as projects to help create community support and confidence for long-term aspects of the plan. General improvements in infrastructure will support future redevelopment and should include streetscape improvements, enhancements to the existing network of electrical transmission lines, and first stage implementation of an improved sewer/stormwater drainage system. In anticipation of the completion of the Union Square T-Station in 2017, development should be centered within the Green Gateway Sub-Area. Work on the Community Center Sub-Area should also be planned and initiated. Focusing on the Community Center Sub-Area will engage the community and reinforce a key plan goal – to enhance conditions for the area’s existing population. Work in Boynton Yards can focus on creating the necessary development incentives, essential demolition and remediation, and proposed street grid improvements.

Phase 2 – Medium-term
Phase 2 would include completion of infrastructure and development projects begun in Phase 1. The primary focus will be increased commercial, mixed-use, and light industry densities across several of the sub-areas. Development within Boynton Yards of both urban agriculture and flex-commercial space will increase. Work on the public plaza (part of the Central Gateway and Community Center Sub-Areas) will commence. Redevelopment on the existing Target site is a central focus of this phase. Higher density development and adaptive reuse of select existing sites within the New Industry Sub-Area will commence. The Twin City shopping area will undergo work to shift its main frontage towards the rest of the study area. The repurposing of the parking lot for additional commercial space will also begin.

FIGURE 5.4
Phase 1 of proposed build-out

FIGURE 5.5
Phase 2 of proposed build-out
Phase 3 – Long-term
Phase 3 will include the completion of large, long-term commercial and mixed-use development projects. One major focus should be on the completion of the TOD within Green Gateway, Boynton Yards, and the Central Gateway. This phase will also include further development of landmark sites within the New Industry Sub-Area, and further commercial expansion within the Twin City Sub-Area. Potential creation of a T Station at the current Pat’s Tow parcel will be explored during this phase.

Funding Sources
There are several funding sources available to support the enhancement and redevelopment of the Union Square Gateway area. In order to support future commercial uses and the growth of jobs, the City qualifies for a range of state-based programs, such as the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) and District Increment Financing (DIF). At the federal government level, the area is highlighted as a priority for New Market Tax Credits (NMTC), which could raise substantial funds toward mixed-use developments through strategic partnerships with nonprofits, community development finance institutions and investors in tax credit equity. Developers with experience or strong interest pursuing this funding mechanism should be prioritized. Accordingly, the City may be eligible for public works grants administered by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) as a flexible source of funding for site-specific infrastructure improvements. Other federal funds connected with Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) could complement other federal grants.

The Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) will remain strategic partners in implementing major roadway and transit projects. The Green Line extension and de-elevation of the McGrath Highway are opportunities to leverage funds to maximize the neighborhood impact of these existing projects.

Funding for affordable housing can be accessed by the current designation of the gateway area as a Qualified Census Tract (QCT) by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), meaning that developers may receive up to a 30% bonus in equity when applying for Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). State and federal historic tax credits may also be used to renovate and re-purpose a handful of industrial sites that present opportunities for reuse.

It is also suggested that the City seek state-based funds related to smart growth policies and rezoning. Similar to the strategies employed in the Assembly Square Row redevelopment, the City may wish to draw boundaries to create a Growth District Initiative within the study area. This approach may expedite local and state permitting, assist with the remediation of environmentally hazardous sites, and provide financing sources for other infrastructure improvements. Sites located near the Green Line station may be eligible for Chapter 40R funds, which would decrease the cost of building affordable housing.

The experience and qualifications of developers in being able to meet program requirements will be essential to realizing the vision for the area. Attracting development companies familiar with financial incentives and subsidy programs should be a key priority of the City of Somerville.
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<tr>
<th>Intervention Type/Goal</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Sub-Area</th>
<th>Detail of Zoning/Policy Proposal</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Improve Streetscape</td>
<td>Enhance pedestrian character and built form of Washington Street and Somerville Avenue</td>
<td>Community Center</td>
<td>Extend CCD zoning on both sides of Washington Street and Somerville Avenue from Union Square to McGrath Highway</td>
<td>City and State</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage desirable uses and development along Medford Street</td>
<td>New Industry</td>
<td>Have CCD zoning on Medford Street, especially along its Western side</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase activity along streets</td>
<td>Boynton Yards</td>
<td>Propose CCD zoning along some of the new streets proposed in Boynton Yards</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Plant trees along commercial corridors with increased amounts of foot traffic</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Target specific areas, including areas adjacent to the Fitchburg train tracks and Prospect Street near the entrance to the Green Line station</td>
<td>MassDOT, OSPCD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Space sidewalks appropriately for more walking room and space to plant trees and place street furniture</td>
<td>Community Center</td>
<td>Analyze the street and sidewalk widths of Washington Street and Somerville Avenue</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Install streetlights on streets with poor visibility</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>One location could be the underpass of the Medford Street Bridge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Design new public plaza spaces at gateway intersections</td>
<td>Community Center, Central Gateway</td>
<td>Partner with developers to ensure new public plazas at the Community Center site, the corner of Somerville Ave and McGrath Highway and the area around the Green Line station</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traffic Calming</td>
<td>Install new bike paths along train tracks &amp; arterial roads</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Locate bike paths on Prospect Street, Washington Street and throughout Green Gateway</td>
<td>City, state, and federal</td>
<td>MassDOT, OSPCD, MAP-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reduce road width on Washington/Union Square Plaza intersection</td>
<td>Community Center</td>
<td>Determine feasibility of reducing lane widths and extending sidewalks with excess road space</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repaint crosswalks with textured paving</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Textured paving can help beautify an intersection and increase safety for pedestrians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixture of Uses</td>
<td>Promote higher mixture of residential, commercial and retail uses within the developments</td>
<td>Boynton Yards</td>
<td>Propose an overlay district for Boynton Yards, superimposed over the BA and BB districts, that promotes mixed use in terms of commercial, light industrial, urban agriculture, and residential. Encourage the repurposing of industrial spaces</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote a better mixture of uses within sub-areas</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Rethink the minimum and maximum square footages based on both zones and permitted uses</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Permitted Uses</td>
<td>Reduce auto-related land uses</td>
<td>Boynton Yards, Twin City</td>
<td>In the BB zoning district, remove auto-related uses because they detract from the envisioned character of this sub-area and would create a different type of traffic flow that would be unhealthy for a business/residential mixed-use environment</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Disallow storage facilities</td>
<td>Boynton Yards, Twin City</td>
<td>Self-storage facilities are currently allowed in the BB zoning district. We recommend they be removed because they do not match the fabric of a mixed-use district</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intervention Type/Goal</td>
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<td>Sub-Area</td>
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<td>Funding</td>
<td>Partner(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive Re-use</td>
<td>Promote repurposing of existing industrial fabric</td>
<td>Boynton Yards</td>
<td>Provide incentives to renovate and maintain historic buildings that are structurally sound</td>
<td>State and federal historic tax credits</td>
<td>OPSCD, MHC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green Infrastructure</td>
<td>Create Municipal Stormwater fee</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Either add a fee to water bill, or link sewer bill to % impervious surface</td>
<td>Municipal stormwater fee</td>
<td>OPSCD, DPW</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Implement green infrastructure best management practices with new streetscaping</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Streetscaping projects should include where appropriate: tree plantings, bioswales, curb cuts,</td>
<td>DPW</td>
<td>DPW</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Promote urban agriculture</td>
<td>Boynton Yards</td>
<td>Create an urban agriculture overlay district; offer tax breaks to land owners using property</td>
<td>City and State</td>
<td>OPSCD, Health Department</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Promote use of green roofs on appropriate buildings</td>
<td>Green Gateway, Boynton Yards, New Industry,</td>
<td>Offer FAR bonuses as incentive to developers; remove zoning barriers to rooftop farming;</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Require LEED certification for new development</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Amend zoning code to require LEED certification for any new building projects (as in Boston)</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built Form</td>
<td>Permit trading of air rights</td>
<td>Green Gateway, New Industry</td>
<td>Offer air rights to development projects along Fitchburg Line that propose desirable uses</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote a finer grained urban fabric</td>
<td>Boynton Yards, Twin City</td>
<td>In BA and BB zoning districts, several of the commercial and industrial services are currently</td>
<td>OSPCD</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote a finer grained urban fabric and higher densities</td>
<td>Green Gateway</td>
<td>Rezone TOD100 on Prospect Street to TOD70 as we believe it is more in line with the existing</td>
<td>OSPCD, EPA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expansion of Green Space</td>
<td>Decrease the amount of impervious surfaces</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Set requirements for maximum % impervious surfaces on new development; offer FAR incentives</td>
<td>City, State, EPA</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Convert contaminated sites to public parks</td>
<td>Green Gateway, Boynton Yards</td>
<td>Leverage brownfield remediation funds to clean up contaminated sites in the proposed Stormwater</td>
<td>OSPCD, EPA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zone new open space areas near the Green Line station</td>
<td>Green Gateway, New Industry, Community Center</td>
<td>Implement OS (Open Space) zoning in the Green Gateway area, pedestrian plazas at Somerville</td>
<td>OSPCD, EPA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Revised text to be inserted into the table.
## Union Square Gateway Plan Implementation

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affordable Housing</td>
<td>Promote the growth of affordable housing through mixed-income developments</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Developer participation in the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program should be highly encouraged since most of the area is designated as a Qualified Census Tract (QCT)</td>
<td>Equity towards Total Development Cost (TDC)</td>
<td>MA EOHED / Equity Investors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preserve affordable housing by establishing requirements for developers</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Ensure that developers meet targets of setting aside a portion of total housing units as affordable at different income levels. If the City of Somerville acquires land, then restrictions can be placed on land covenants and deeds.</td>
<td>Public/private partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expand Job Density</td>
<td>Pursue state and federal grant sources</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>The area is eligible for several types of grants that support larger-scale commercial development, such as New Market Tax Credits (NMTC) and the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP)</td>
<td>Public/private partnership</td>
<td>MA EACC / MA EOHED / US EDA / Equity Investors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td>Propose new Green Line station at Pat's Towing site</td>
<td>New Industry</td>
<td>A new train station at Pat's Tow would increase connectivity for the New Industry and Twin City Plaza areas, which are farther from the Union Square station.</td>
<td>State and federal</td>
<td>MBTA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>