

Somerville

Redevelopment Authority

2019 Annual Report

Prepared by the Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community
Development – Economic Development Division

November 2022

Somerville Redevelopment Authority

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) was founded in 1956, pursuant to the authority granted by the Massachusetts General Law Chapter 121B, § 3.

Staff and SRA Board member names below reflect the individuals who were in these roles during 2019.

SRA Board

Nancy Busnach, Chair (January-April)

Phil Ercolini, Chair (May-December)

Iwona Bonney, Secretary

Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor (February-December)

William Gage

Emily Hedeman (April-December)

Patrick McCormick (April-December)

Mayor

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development staff to the SRA

George Proakis, Executive Director

Thomas Galligani, Director of Economic Development

Sunayana Thomas, Senior Economic Development Planner

Eileen McGettigan, Special Counsel

<https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/somerville-redevelopment-authority>

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Introduction

The Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) has helped revitalize Somerville since its founding in 1956. Over the past six decades the SRA has significantly enhanced the City's neighborhoods, squares and industrial districts by fostering construction of new development in deteriorated and under-used property.

The SRA Annual Report for 2019 reviews the projects under the Authority's jurisdiction during this year. Submittal of annual reports are required by the Commonwealth's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). This report will be filed and recorded with DHCD.

Background

The SRA has helped revitalize Somerville since its establishment in 1956 under Massachusetts General Laws c. 121B. This law provides the SRA power to declare an area "substandard, decadent, and/or a blighted open area", to prepare an urban renewal plan for redevelopment of such areas and undertake eminent domain takings to implement such plans. Over the past six decades the SRA has significantly enhanced neighborhoods and commercial areas by fostering construction of new development in deteriorated and under-used property.

Meetings & Votes

Meeting date	Type	Vote count
January 10, 2019	Regular	2
February 7, 2019	Regular	4
March 7, 2019	Regular	4
April 25, 2019	Regular	3
May 23, 2019	Regular	2
June 20, 2019	Regular	3
September 5, 2019	Regular	4
October 17, 2019	Regular	2
November 14, 2019	Regular	3
December 12, 2019	Regular	4

2019 Project Highlights

Assembly Square

The jewel in the SRA's redevelopment crown, Assembly Square is Somerville's newest neighborhood, arising over the past decade from a moribund factory district centered around the former Ford assembly plant.

Development progress in the square progressed steadily through 2019. Early in the year, the Montaje Apartments project was completed and occupied. Federal Realty (FRIT) also continued construction of commercial buildings on Blocks 5B and 8 that started in December 2018, and which proceeded on schedule through 2019. FRIT and Puma will occupy 150,000 square feet and 125,000 square feet respectively in the building being constructed on Block 5B, and will together create approximately 550 additional jobs in the area. On Block 8, FRIT is constructing approximately 500 apartments units. Later in the year, FRIT also took possession of the Marketplace building, which it began leasing in December to temporary innovation tenants.

With new development in recent years has come a major increase in local employment, which totaled approximately 6,000 employees as of March 2019, including at two of the largest local employers: Partners Healthcare and Mass General Primary Care. FRIT also hosted a job fair in November, which attracted between thirty and fifty attendees. Throughout the year, the area welcomed several new businesses, including La Cucina, Assembly Dental, AR Nails, and Ruth's Chris Steak House, as well as temporary spaces from Thrive Exchange and New Age Astrology and a pop-up organized by Somerville Media Center. Artists for Humanity also hosted an exhibit on Blocks 7A and 8. In December, the square's K-Mart location closed.

In March, the Alloy condominium complex completed its affordable housing lottery.

Assembly Square was also host to several celebrations throughout 2019, including Memorial Day fireworks in May and a Silent Disco in June to celebrate Pride Month. New solar powered flower sculptures were also installed in public space along Assembly Row.

Lastly, the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) started a new neighborhood planning process in October to inform future efforts in the area.

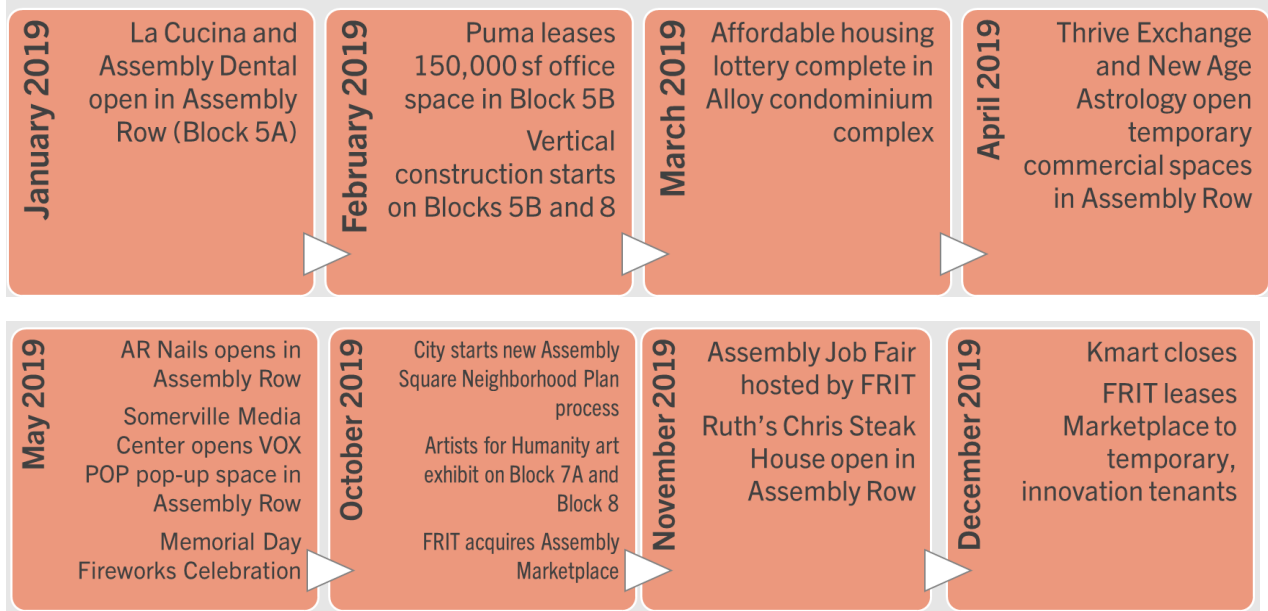


Figure 1: Assembly Square 2019 Redevelopment Milestones

Union Square

Building upon legal and zoning groundwork completed in 2017 towards implementing the SRA's Union Square Urban Revitalization Plan and development progress made throughout 2018, development continued steadily in Union Square in 2019. Water main and utility construction were completed, and work on waste and stormwater infrastructure began early in the year. In January and May, Union Square Associates (US2), the Master Land Developer for the Urban Renewal Area at Union Square, submitted Environmental Impact Reports to the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act Office (MEPA). In March, US2 also began the Planning Board permitting process and brought on Skanska as a laboratory co-development partner, and the SRA approved the D2 Block development phase. In September, US2 then received six Design and Site Plan Review permits for individual buildings on the D2 Block. In October, the Community Benefit Agreement between US2 and the Union Square Neighborhood Council was also approved (161-2-4), and US2 began marketing for the D2 Block. US2 then closed on site transfer for the D2 Block in December.

US2, the City, and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) also continued to coordinate on construction of the Green Line Extension station at Union Square, which is on schedule to be completed in 2021. US2 and the MBTA are designing an elevator for the new station, to be funded by the City of Somerville.

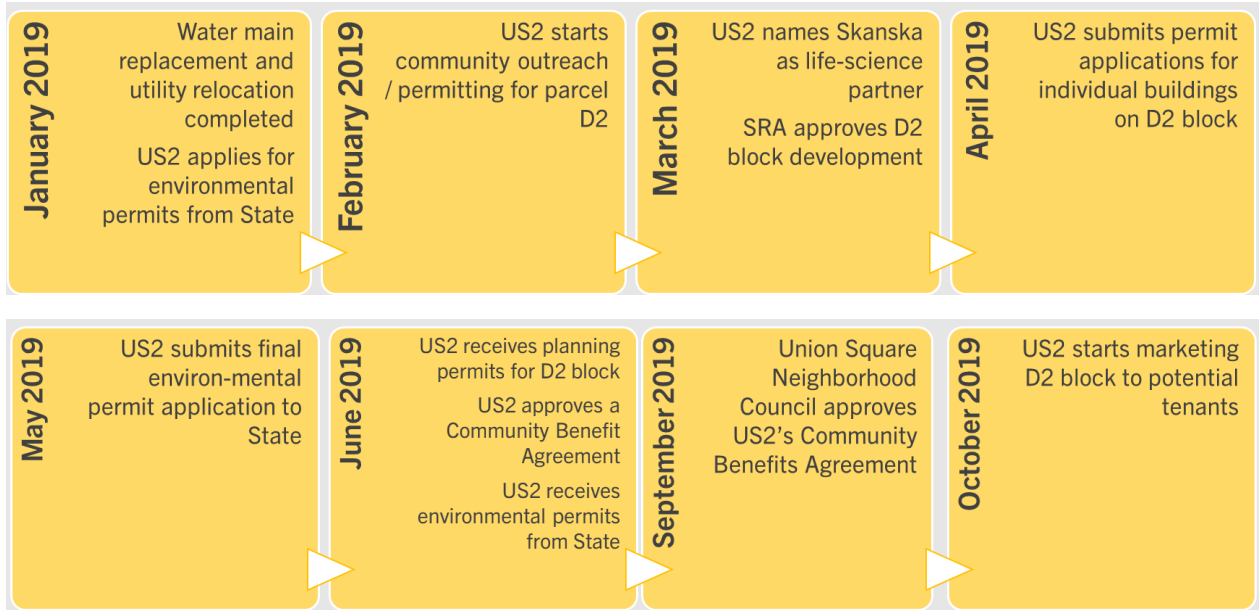


Figure 2: Union Square 2019 Redevelopment Milestones

Boynton Yards

Strategically located near Downtown Boston and Kendall Square and walking distance from the new Union Square GLX subway station, Boynton Yards was first redeveloped by the City in the 1990's, when blighted industrial property and brownfields were cleared and replaced with light industrial buildings and a new South Street. Development firm DLJ renewed these efforts in 2019, when it started improving South Street to prepare for construction of a 9-story lab building and 10-story mixed-use building at 101 South Street. The company expanded its plans by acquiring the former Gentle Giant site at the end of the year, with intentions to further develop the area.

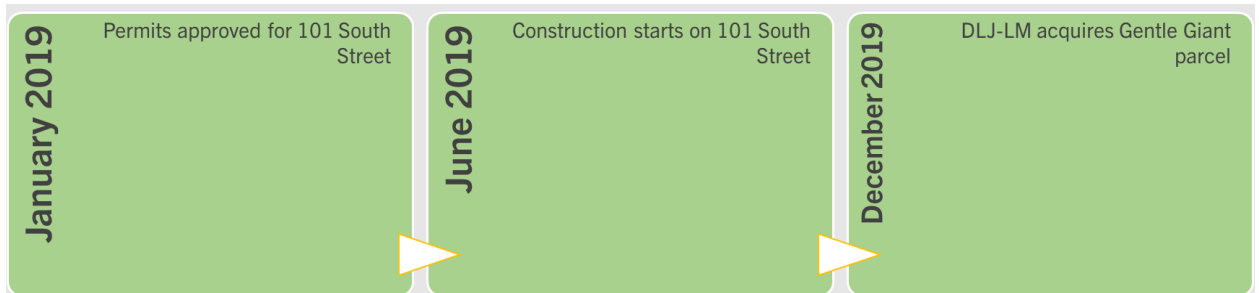


Figure 3: Boynton Yards 2019 Redevelopment Milestones

Winter Hill

In 2019, OSPCD conducted several community meetings regarding redevelopment of the former Star Market site at 299 Broadway. 95% of attendees expressed wanting the City to manage the redevelopment process, through either a Demonstration Project Plan or an orthodox Urban Renewal process.

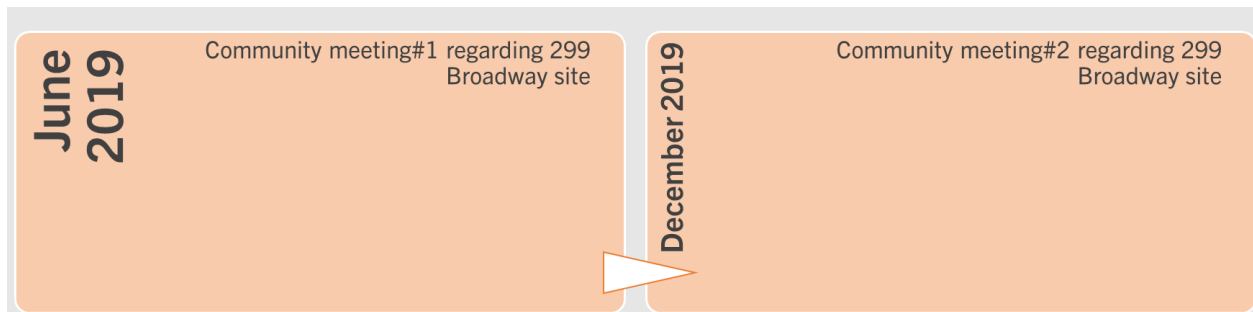


Figure 4: Winter Hill 2019 Redevelopment Milestones

Inner Belt

In late 2018, OSPCD had informed the SRA about the possibility of acquiring a four-acre site at 90 Washington Street that could serve as the site of a new Public Safety Building as well as for associated commercial, residential, and civic development. Home of the former Cobble Hill Plaza shopping center, the property was vacated for construction of mid-rise apartment buildings in 2016 until internal conflicts among its ownership stalled momentum.

In February 2019, the SRA approved a Demonstration Project Plan (DPP) for 90 Washington Street, along with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for urban renewal of the site with the City Council. In March, the City Council then also approved the 90 Washington Street DPP and MOA, as well as a pro tanto payment of \$8,778,000 for the taking of the property through eminent domain. The SRA approved this taking shortly thereafter.

The former owners of the site, led by Corcoran Jennison, initiated court action to stop the taking process. Although the taking was upheld in court, Corcoran Jennison appealed to the Appeals Court. However, in a case regarding Boston's Yawkey Way this year, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that Redevelopment Authorities can exercise eminent domain to take property under DPPs, and do not have to follow MGL 30b to dispose of taken land afterwards.

OSPCD also obtained \$810,000 in October to demolish the existing Cobble Hill Plaza, and a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in November to find a project manager for the demolition.

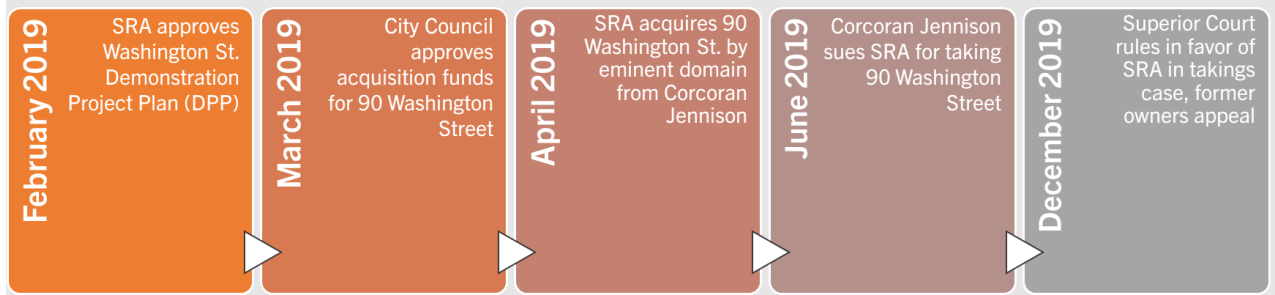


Figure 5: Inner Belt 2019 Redevelopment Milestones