

# Somerville

## Redevelopment Authority

**2020 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 2020.

### **SRA Board**

Phil Ercolini, Chair  
Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor  
Iwona Bonney  
William Gage  
Emily Hedeman  
Patrick McCormick

### **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  
Lauren Drago, Urban Revitalization 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 2020 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 16, 2020	Regular	2
April 22, 2020	Regular	2
May 20, 2020	Regular	0
June 10, 2020	Special	4
June 24, 2020	Regular	3
July 22, 2020	Regular	3
August 19, 2020	Regular	2
September 16, 2020	Regular	4
October 21, 2020	Regular	3
November 18, 2020	Regular	4
December 16, 2020	Regular	2

## 2020 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.

Despite the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, retail and development activity continued steadily in Assembly Square during 2020. While only 25% of retailers were operating in April, by July, this had increased to 83%. Many restaurants also filed for outdoor dining permits during the year to be able to continue serving their customers.

Construction also initially halted on Blocks 5B and 8—which at the time were 60% and 50% completed, respectively—but had resumed by August. Office and retail space in Block 8 is now projected to open in July 2021, and will welcome businesses including Warby Parker, Shake Shack, Sweet Green, and CVS. Residential units are expected to begin to be occupied in Q3 of 2021. In June, 2020, the Somerville Planning Board also reviewed permitting applications for an Edge Assembly project located at 74 Middlesex Avenue and an XMBLY project located at 5 Middlesex Avenue.

Assembly Square development also played a direct role in pandemic response. The former K-Mart space that closed in 2019 was used as a site to decontaminate personal protective equipment (PPE), while Federal Realty, a main developer in Assembly Square, contributed fifteen meals per week to the Somerville Homeless Coalition.

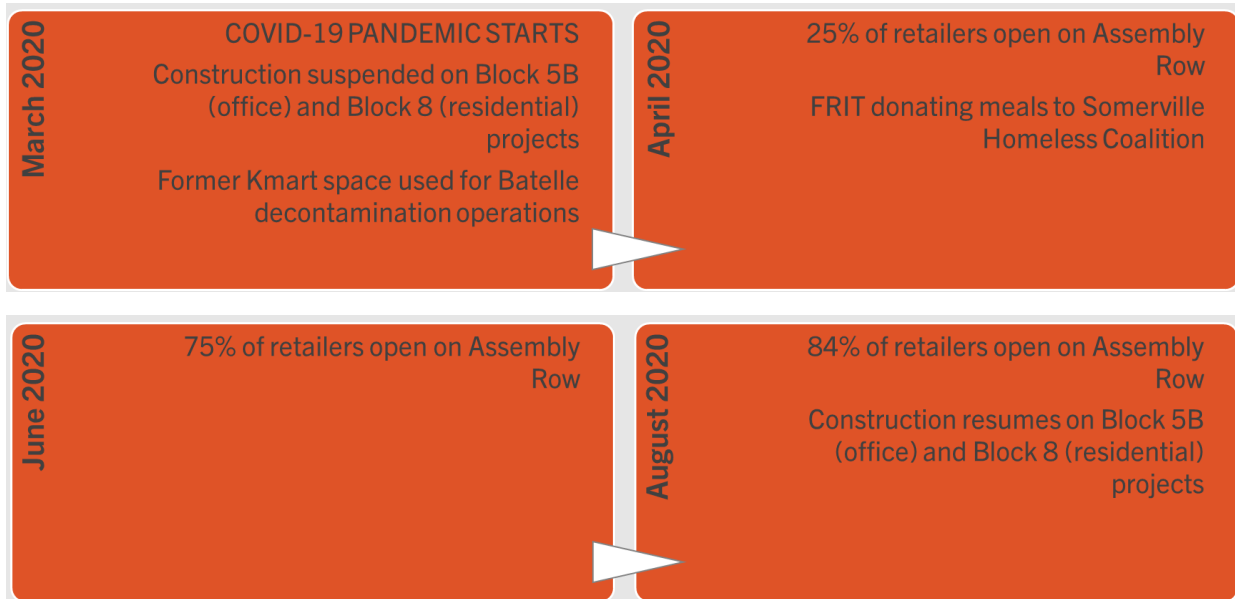


Figure 1: Assembly Square 2020 Redevelopment Milestones

## Union Square

Legal and zoning changes completed in 2017 laid the groundwork towards implementing the SRA's Union Square Urban Revitalization Plan, allowing for significant development progress in 2018 and 2019.

During 2020, despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Union Square Associates (US2), the Master Land Developer for the Urban Renewal Area at Union Square, progressed on permitting and construction prep for the D2 Block. US2 also aided in responding to the pandemic by contributing meals to frontline health workers and by releasing \$200,000 of Community Benefits funds to staff of Union Square Main Streets (USMS.) The D2 Block was also temporarily used as the site of a farmer's market in collaboration with USMS. The pandemic paused infrastructure and streetscape work on Somerville Avenue in March, but this work had resumed by May.

Regarding the Green Line Extension station in Union Square, construction continued through the advent of COVID-19. The SRA also approved the Environmental Protection Agency's approval of remediation plans for the station.

In November, the SRA approved the execution of closing documents for the transfer of land needed to develop both the Green Line Extension station and the D2 Block. However, this land disposal was delayed until 2021.

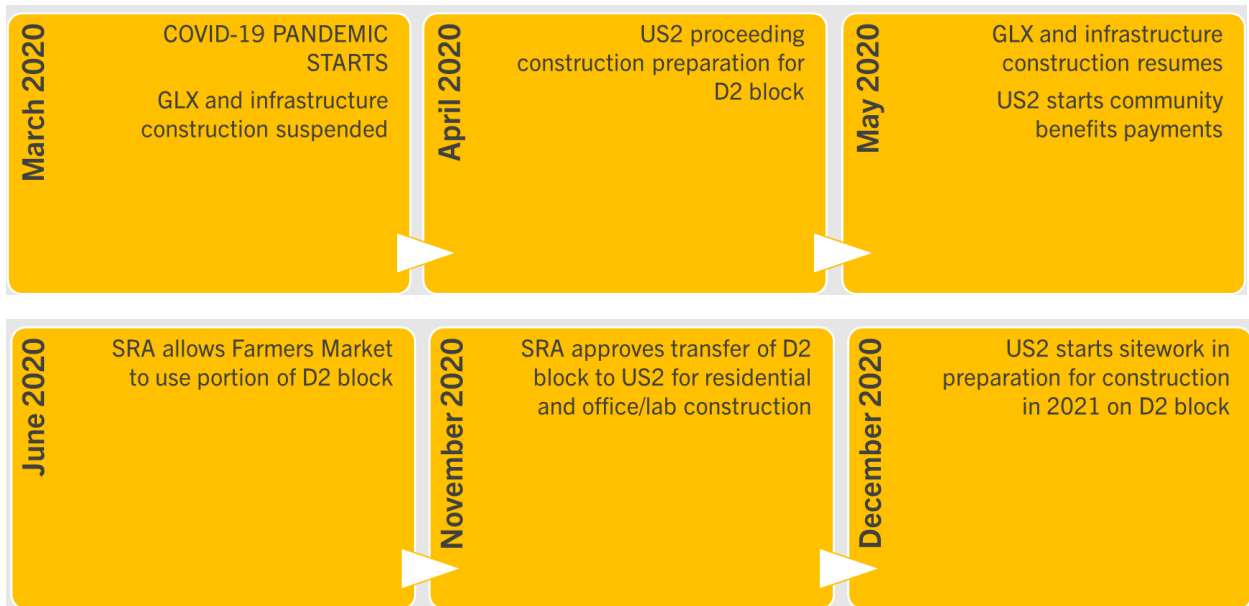


Figure 2: Union Square 2020 Redevelopment Milestones

## 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, and is working to redevelop a portion of the area.

In 2020, DLJ began work on widening sidewalks on the SRA-owned easement at 101 South Street as part of the development of a nine-story, 270,000 square foot lab building and another ten-story, 140,000 square foot building on the property. DLJ later asked the SRA to amend the provisions of the Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) to allow development of up to 1.4 million square feet of mixed-use development on the site. Separately, DLJ began meeting with the Union Square Neighborhood Committee to determine what community benefits the development would produce.

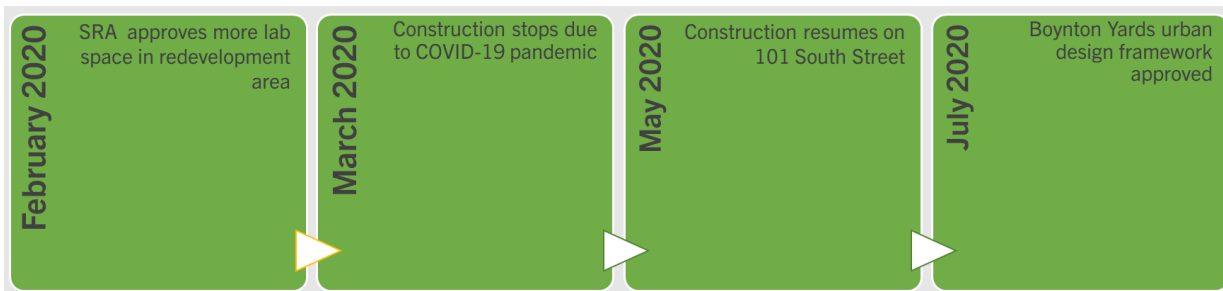


Figure 3: Boynton Yards 2020 Redevelopment Milestones

## Winter Hill

At outreach meetings hosted by the City in late 2019 and early 2020 regarding the development of the Star Market at 299 Broadway, 90% of attendees expressed preferring redevelopment of the site and 85% expressed wanting this to happen through an Urban Redevelopment Plan. In response, the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) drafted the Winter Hill Urban Redevelopment Plan, which was sent to the SRA for review in August 2020 and approved in the fall.



Figure 4: Winter Hill 2020 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. In 2019, the SRA and City Council then each approved several steps in the redevelopment process, including a payment for the taking of the property through eminent domain and the preparation of Cobble Hill Plaza for demolition.

In 2020, although demolition of Cobble Hill Plaza was initially delayed due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demolition project manager, Colliers, resumed work by June and had finished by August. The City then underwent a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to find a Public Safety Building designer, which led them to hire Context Architects.

In 2019, the City had also entered a legal battle with Corcoran Jennison regarding the use of eminent domain at 90 Washington. While the court had ruled in favor of the City, Corcoran Jennison appealed, and then legal proceedings were stalled due to COVID-19. The case was taken up by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court in November, and arguments are set to be heard in February 2021.

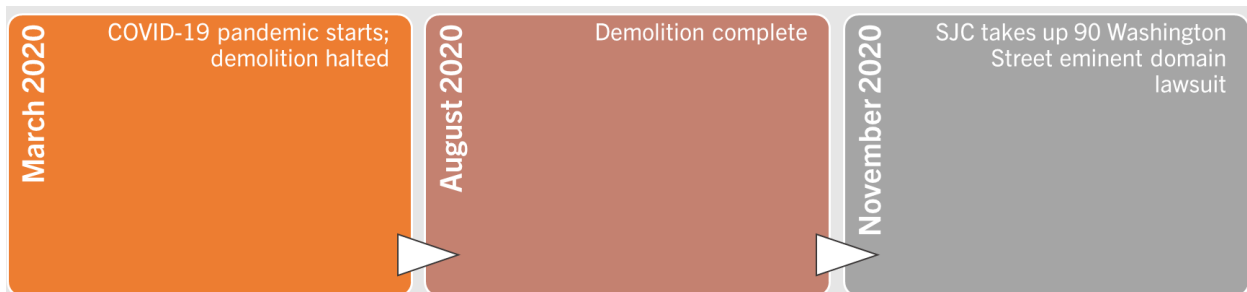


Figure 5: Inner Belt 2020 Redevelopment Milestones