

**Notes from the East Somerville Community ResiStat Meeting
With representatives from Assembly Square Developers
Federal Realty Investment Trust and IKEA
January 23, 2008 – The Edgerly School**

City & State Officials Present:

James Henry, from the office of State Senator Anthony Galluccio
Dennis Sullivan, Alderman-at-Large and BOA President
William Roche, Ward 1 Alderman
Michael Lambert, Chief of Staff for the Mayor
Katie Brillantes, Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst, SomerStat Office

FRIT/IKEA Representatives Present:

Bob Walsh
David Webster
Sandi Wolchansky
Pat Merwin
Hugh Hahn
Patrick Dunford

These are the notes from a discussion that took place following a formal presentation by Assembly Square Developers. The full presentation is available at:

<http://www.somervillema.gov/section.cfm?org=somstat&page=1057>

The notes were recorded and summarized by a City employee and are for informal purposes only. The notes are *not* an official legal transcript and should not be interpreted as official policy statements of Federal Realty Investment Trust, IKEA, or the City of Somerville. All estimates and forecasts given are informal and unofficial unless otherwise stated in the official presentation. The notes are summarized by topic:

Traffic on Major Roads:

Residents had the following questions/concerns:

- **Timing:** A resident asked how much lead time residents will get on the traffic improvements. Will residents get to see if they work before the opening?
- **Scope of Study:** A resident asked if the traffic mitigation plan includes Wellington Circle. Another resident suggested that the State should rebuild the Sullivan Square bypass bridge between Broadway and Rutherford Ave in Charlestown. Another resident commented that major changes would be needed to improve existing traffic, and that they would feel more reassured if the scope of the traffic redesign were bigger.
- **Volume:** A resident asked if the anticipated traffic volume could be numerically quantified.
- **Paid Parking:** A resident suggested that IKEA should charge a fee for parking to discourage vehicle traffic.

Assembly Square Developers Responded:

- **Timing:** Traffic improvements will all likely be in place one to two months before the opening. The new traffic signal equipment will have monitoring capability so that they will be collecting traffic data throughout the project.
- **Scope of Study:** To date, the traffic study has focused primarily on the site access in Somerville, and is primarily reviewed by the City of Somerville. Routes have been computer-modeled. The development will also have to undergo a Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) review which will include Wellington Circle and Sullivan Square. The traffic study including those locations is now underway. Major changes to State roads are outside the City's jurisdiction. Changes in signaling, preferred-route signage, and real-time traffic flow control will significantly reduce congestion. The most significant traffic offset will be the T station. Jim Henry of Sen. Gallucio's Office also announced that Boston is undergoing a \$1 million review of Sullivan Square.
- **Volume:** Studies estimate that at peak volume, there may be about 500 vehicles coming in to the site per hour and 500 going out. This would be about 5,000 cars per day (just over 10,000 total trips). Traffic would be divided among three primary entrances/exits which will help avoid congestion at any one point. Estimates are based on studies of seven actual IKEA stores around the country, including the New Haven IKEA, which is similar in size and setting. Studies for most IKEAs indicate that peak traffic would primarily be on weekends and would not significantly impact weekday rush hour traffic.
- **Paid Parking:** The issue of paid parking would be reviewed by the Transportation Management Association, though at this time it seems unlikely that there would be paid parking.

Traffic Impact on Side Streets/Abutters:

Residents, particularly Mt. Vernon Street residents, were concerned about the impact on residential side streets. Residents had the following questions/comments:

- **Local Traffic:** Some residents are concerned about traffic from Boston and Cambridge and that local drivers would use their side streets if traffic on major roads backs up. Mt. Vernon Street residents reported that they already see a significant amount of local "cut-through" traffic, which they say is going faster than they are comfortable with.
- **Commercial/Delivery Traffic:** Mt. Vernon Street residents felt the ban on commercial trucks on their street was already not being well-enforced and were concerned about IKEA delivery trucks also using their street.
- **Monitoring:** Residents stressed the need for ongoing monitoring of the project after it is completed.
- **Changing Restrictions:** Mt. Vernon Street residents wondered if they could restrict traffic on their street to local traffic only.

Assembly Square Developers Responded:

- **Local Traffic:** Signaling will be improved at Mt. Vernon Street, Broadway, and Lombardi Way. Most vehicle traffic is not anticipated to be local. Developers will work with the State and City to place traffic flow signs on highways and major roads to keep traffic off side streets.
- **Commercial/Delivery Traffic:** IKEA delivery trucks won't use small local roads unless making a direct delivery to that neighborhood. Mt. Vernon Street is not appropriate for tractor trailers and IKEA drivers would be directed onto more truck accessible routes instead of Mt. Vernon Street.

- **Monitoring:** The Transportation Management Association will review traffic once the project is operational. In addition, the City of Somerville will review traffic monitoring data every six months for the first two years after opening to evaluate traffic congestion. As the full project unfolds over time, developers will be able to study and make changes as needed.

City Officials Responded:

- **Changing Restrictions:** City officials responded that there is a petitioning process that residents can use to designate their street “Local Traffic Only” during certain hours. This petition requires that at least 2/3 of households agree to the proposed change for the Traffic Commission to consider the proposal; if residents can get more than that, the case will be stronger. The Ward Alderman can help residents strategize and think about the impact of such a change on other neighboring streets.
http://www.somervillema.gov/CoS_Content/documents/forms/TrafficCalming2.pdf

Pedestrian & Bike Access:

Residents had the following questions/comments:

- **Promotion:** Residents wondered what developers will do to promote biking/walking to, from, and within the site, both by customers and employees.
- **Ease of Use:** Representatives from East Somerville Neighbors for Change mentioned that they had petitioned the State to extend the timing of the crosswalk signals at Broadway & McGrath. They wondered what standards would be used for the new crosswalks at Shore Drive and other major road crossings. Representatives from East Somerville Main Streets expressed an interest in ensuring that the major pedestrian points of entry to the site are contiguous with major pedestrian paths in the abutting neighborhoods. This ESMS representative was particularly curious about the recommended flow of pedestrian traffic from the Foss Park / Winter Hill side.
- **Kensington-Foley Crosswalk on Mystic Ave:** Residents expressed concerns about this crosswalk being difficult to use because of the high speed of traffic, and lack of signal. They asked if a stop light could be placed at that crosswalk.
- **Other Access:** A resident asked if there could be pedestrian/bike access across the Amelia Earhart dam across the Mystic River at Draw 7 Park.

Assembly Square Developers Responded:

- **Promotion:** There will be a documented plan with recommended routes for employees walking, biking, and busing to work. There will be signals and bike lanes within the development. There will be detectors at stop lights for bikes, similar to those used for cars.
- **Ease of Use:** There will be a continuous bike path along the Mystic River, including a new connection under Route 28. There will also be continuous bike and pedestrian paths along Assembly Square Drive, with connections to new or existing bike lanes and sidewalks at both ends. Developers will modify roadway, signals, and lanes on Lombardi Way (where Assembly Square Drive crosses Mystic Ave and under I-93), making easier bike access from Broadway. Signals across Rt. 28 at Assembly Square Drive will follow the new, longer guidelines for crosswalk lights being used at Broadway & Rt. 28.
- **Kensington-Foley Crosswalk on Mystic Ave:** This crosswalk will be repainted, ADA ramps redone, and pedestrian-scaled lighting will be improved. Developers will place flashing beacons that come on when a pedestrian is crossing. Putting in a stop light at

that location would not only back up traffic, but could potentially give a false sense of security to pedestrians. Instead, the light will only start flashing once pedestrians cross a sensor, so that drivers on Mystic Avenue will be alerted that something is happening.

- **Other Access:** The Amelia Earhart Dam is DCR property and not part of the existing project.

Assembly Square T Stop:

Residents had the following questions/comments:

- **Promotion:** Residents wondered what developers will do to promote biking/walking to, from, and within the site, both by customers and employees. A resident commented that lots of college students and grad students will want to go to IKEA, and that going by T to IKEA should be promoted to them as an *event*.
- **Ease of Use:** A resident suggested that there should be a second headhouse to the T stop. Residents also wondered how easy it would be for employees to use public transit.
- **Other Uses:** A resident was concerned that Assembly Square could become a parking lot for people getting on the T and going downtown.

Assembly Square Developers Responded:

- **Promotion:** There will be promotions for people to come on the T and then use home delivery. There are similar models for IKEAs in urban transit-oriented settings in Europe, and a few US locations like Portland, OR. In Portland, there has been significant public transit use by students.
- **Ease of Use:** Employees will have incentives like subsidized T passes to take public transit to work. As with all IKEAs, employees will also have access to lockers and showers to promote walking and biking to work. Before the Assembly Square T stop is built, developers will run shuttle buses to either the Sullivan Square or Wellington Orange Line stations.
- **Other Uses:** Developers will address the parking concern raised if it becomes a problem.

Pollution:

Residents had the following questions/comments:

- **Air:** Residents raised concerns about changes in air quality resulting from the increase in traffic. A resident asked about the air quality study planned and what happens if the study shows that air quality has significantly degraded over the life of the project.
- **Noise:** Residents expressed concerns about potential increases in noise pollution.
- **Storm Water Runoff:** Residents had questions about the storm water runoff plan mentioned in the presentation.

Assembly Square Developers Responded:

- **Air:** FRIT has funded an air quality study, which is being managed by an independent third party. The T station is a key component of the project. Stopped, idling vehicles tend to cause significant amounts of pollution, thus the traffic flow improvements should reduce the amount of time cars spend stopped and idling.
- **Noise:** A noise study has not been conducted. Given the location next to major highways, there will probably be no significant increase in noise.
- **Storm Water:** The storm water will be discharged below the dam, which will reduce the runoff into the Mystic above the dam. There will also be catch basins in the site that will

act as filters. Much of the new parking is also underground, reducing rain on parking surfaces. Overall, the storm-water-related pollution will likely be reduced.

Employment:

Residents had the following questions/comments:

- **Jobs Agreement:** A resident from East Somerville Neighbors for Change expressed their appreciation for the jobs and hiring agreement. However, the resident was concerned that the agreement did not contain any definitive consequences for IKEA if Somervillians are not actually hired. The resident encouraged other residents in the community to continue to monitor this agreement as hiring progresses. Another resident asked if the hiring data the City is requiring will be available to the public.
- **Hiring criteria:** One resident asked if IKEA would be hiring people of all ability levels and ages.
- **Other Jobs:** A resident asked about non-IKEA jobs, like jobs related to the construction and development of the site.

Assembly Square Developers Responded:

- **Jobs Agreement:** Developers will want the help of the community and of community organizations in order to maximize the Somerville applicant pool. City officials responded that the data being collected will be available to the public, but that the purpose of the data is primarily to help the City evaluate its own outreach efforts.
- **Hiring criteria:** IKEA has no restrictions on employee age or ability level, provided the applicant is qualified to do the job. IKEA prides itself on having an intentionally diverse workforce.
- **Other Jobs:** Construction will all be done using union labor.

Other Businesses in the Development:

- Residents asked if FRIT had a particular hotel company in mind for the planned hotel and for the office space.
- Assembly Square Developers responded that a hotel company hasn't yet been identified. Developers commented that it probably would not be a full-service hotel. Developers also mentioned FRIT is already marketing the planned office space.

Neighborhood:

- A resident asked about the impact to the property values of abutters' houses. This resident wanted to know what the advantage of this development would be to abutters.
- Developers responded that they had not heard of any significant change in residential property value in other similar locations. Developers pointed out that the development will bring a variety of community benefits including significant new tax revenue, a new T-stop, and improved infrastructure.