

August 31, 2026

VIA EMAIL:

Davis Square Neighborhood Council
Board of Directors
c/o Elaine Almquist, President

RE: Transit-Oriented Housing Development | Davis Square

Dear Davis Square Neighborhood Council Board of Directors:

It has been a pleasure working with you in good faith regarding the transit-oriented housing development proposed at 231-249 Elm Street in Davis Square. We are very grateful to the Davis Square Neighborhood Council (the ‘DSNC’), its members and its Board of Directors – and to all of the community stakeholders – who have dedicated their time, energies and efforts in a spirit of partnership to shape a housing development project reflective of the shared objectives of residents and small businesses in Davis Square.

While there was an opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the City of Somerville’s acute housing crisis – and despite all of the good faith collaborative engagement – there has been no reciprocity from the City’s leadership over the past three years. Accordingly, at this time, we will not be moving forward with our transit-oriented housing development in Davis Square.

In addition to the production of approx. 500 units of housing (including approx. 125 units of affordable housing), the housing development would have generated a multidimensional positive-feedback-loop and meaningfully benefited residents, small businesses and the City of Somerville. Over the past three years, we have been very aware and mindful that the development would be a core component of Davis Square’s identity going forward – accordingly, we understood that we had an inherent responsibility to proceed in a deliberate, measured and inclusive manner.

We knew that there was deep community interest in the development project (rightfully so) and that there was a wide-ranging spectrum of opinions and perspectives. We sought to embrace a spirit of stewardship and, as such, it was incumbent upon us to engender a comprehensive dialogue and create the times, spaces, opportunities and forums for the community to provide their input and to shape the project. Key themes consistently articulated by the Davis Square community included:

- Urgent need for workforce housing
- Importance of housing near a transit node
- Density is the key to solving the housing crisis
- Union job creation is important
- Incorporation of The Burren into the mixed-use housing project
- Small-scale artisan retail character is important
- Variety of retail options are desired
- Davis Square needs a catalyst
- The City of Somerville needs to generate meaningful tax revenue

Despite a constant lack of direction from City leadership, we were enthused by the progress that we made working with the DSNC (and other stakeholders) in an organic fashion. The input provided by the DSNC (and other stakeholders) undoubtedly improved the housing development and drove the evolution of the development into a mosaic which reflected the interests of various stakeholders, including:

Priorities Identified by the Davis Square Community:	Copper Mill's Modifications and Key Components of the Mixed-Use Residential Housing Project:
There is an acute shortage of housing; transit-oriented housing is critical to the future of Davis Square:	▪ Approx. 500 units of residential housing would have been created directly adjacent to a key transit node (the MBTA's Davis Square Red Line Station).
Delivery of affordable housing is imperative:	▪ Approx. 125 units of affordable housing would have been created (25% of the housing units).
Union job creation is important:	▪ The unions are in urgent need of work for their members. ▪ Copper Mill had committed to building the housing development with 100% union labor. ▪ Copper Mill had committed to entering into a PLA with the Greater Boston Building Trades. ▪ Copper Mill had committed to working with the North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters. ▪ Over 1,000 union jobs would have been created by the project. ▪ Like all members of the workforce, union members and their families need housing proximate to their places of work.
Enhancement and expansion of the public realm and pedestrian experience:	▪ Pursuant to feedback, the building had been redesigned and had been setback meaningfully from the property line to further enhance and expand the public plaza and support local businesses. ▪ Various redesigns were presented (varying heights, etc.) based on stakeholder input.
Preserve retail character and curate a mix of small-scale unique artisan tenants:	▪ Artisan retail spaces would have been purpose-designed to accommodate small-format retail in a cost-effective manner (e.g. shared restrooms, shared storage space). ▪ Three long-standing local Davis Square businesses had requested tenancy in the new mixed-use development which would have allowed them to stay in Davis Square for years to come.
Long-term home for The Burren:	▪ Copper Mill worked with business owner Tommy McCarthy ensure a long-term home for The Burren; accordingly, Tommy McCarthy endorsed the development in a written letter to the Mayor's Office.
Housing should help facilitate key existing Somerville residents' needs:	▪ The housing development would have created opportunities for current Somerville residents to age in-place and stay in the community that they have always lived in.
Relocation of residential lobby to Grove Street (from Elm Street):	▪ Residential lobby was redesigned and relocated to Grove Street, further enhancing activation on Elm Street.
All loading and delivery should take place 'off-street':	▪ The loading, delivery and trash-removal components were redesigned to be fully internalized within the building.
Creation of permanent, sustained jobs is important:	▪ Over 100 permanent jobs would have been created onsite.
New tax revenue generation is critical for the City:	▪ The building would have generated substantial (and perpetual) new tax revenues for the City.
Provide subsidized opportunities for small businesses:	▪ Copper Mill had committed to give two new retail spaces for occupancy at no cost.
Davis Square needs a catalyst:	▪ The residential building would have generated a positive-feedback-loop and stimulated and sustained businesses (existing and new) in Davis Square. ▪ The project would have rejuvenate the Davis Square ecosystem, particularly given the reduction in foot-traffic due to the Green Line opening and post-covid consumer habits.

Despite an exhaustive community engagement process over the past three years – which included approx. 75 separate stakeholder engagement events, consisting of large-format auditorium meetings, small-group working sessions, family-style meals & discussions, office hours, design working sessions, and various ad hoc / individual meetings – the housing development has not made any material progress with regards to procurement of approvals due to the apathy of City leadership.

The most glaring paradox of this entire arc is that the City of Somerville was the one who had reached-out to us three years ago and asked us to formulate a viable housing development for the property (despite the fact that the City had rezoned the property for commercial use – not housing – in 2019). However, over the past three years – and particularly over the past 12 months – the City has consistently broken its own promises, missed its own deadlines and failed to provide any tangible direction regarding the housing development project. And, just to be clear, we are firm believers in – and proponents of – in-depth project review, community engagement, and approval processes and procedures; a project of this size and complexity certainly warrants scrutiny, granular review processes and multi-faceted stakeholder engagement. However, our most potent frustration has been, precisely, the lack of any type of defined linear process from City leadership.

Since the City reached-out to us three years ago with its request that we pursue a transit-oriented housing development, we have sought to be responsive to City leadership in various capacities – we have completed dozens of designs and redesigns at the request of the City; we have studied complex engineering matters for the City (e.g. Davis Square water-tables); we have been patient and accommodating to the City when they have asked us to ‘wait’ or ‘pause’ at various times; we have conducted exhaustive stakeholder engagement; we have made community commitments which far exceed typical development commitments. We have sought to move this housing development forward in good faith. However, there has been no reciprocity from City leadership; we consistently asked City leadership, ‘what is the next-step that we should take?’ – the City was never able to direct us towards any actionable next-step that resulted in forward progress for the housing development.

At times, City leadership would send us down a path, only to obstruct it later. For example, the City directed us to pursue a ‘40B’ application and committed to co-signing the application with us – however, the City then reneged on that commitment; when we again approached the current City administration in early 2026 about resubmitting the application with the City as a co-signer, they also refused. Notably, if the City had been a co-signer, it would not have been an implicit endorsement of the housing development as proposed (i.e. there would still have been a very in-depth public review process), however it would have at least signaled that the City and the developer were aligned in the pursuit of housing production (but for some reason the City was not willing to do so). Furthermore, the City consistently gave us misleading information. For example, the current City administration assured us that the Davis Square Neighborhood Plan (which has been ‘in-process’ since 2019) would be completed and implemented in the first-half of 2026 (that did not happen); subsequently, once it was clear that commitment was not going to be upheld, City leadership assured us that the neighborhood plan would be completed by the end of 2026 (another commitment which was not upheld). The City is currently projecting that the neighborhood plan will be completed by November 2027 (however, that timeline does not include the actual zoning adoption which will take even longer into 2028).

The lack of any adherence to a defined process – with established sequential steps and delineated timeframes – creates incredible volatility and paralysis with regards to the viability of a large-scale housing development. Due to the confluence of all the dynamics articulated herein, large-scale housing development is not currently feasible in the City of Somerville and we will not be proceeding with our housing development in Davis Square. We are very grateful to the DSNCR, its members, and all community stakeholders for engaging in earnest with us over the past three years – thank you. While there are plenty of exogenous ‘macro’ challenges for residential housing development, in this case, it is the self-inflicted headwinds caused by the City of Somerville’s leadership that have extinguished the City’s largest housing development.

Respectfully,



Andrew J. Flynn