

Milk Square Area

Urban Design Framework



Somerville Planning Board
Adopted December 16, 2021



INTRODUCTION

An Urban Design Framework (UDF) is an officially adopted plan identifying the desired arrangement, appearance, and function of urban features within a specific area of Somerville. UDF's either build upon prior planning to provide additional standards or guidance or provide basic planning for any geographical gaps between officially adopted plans and overlay zoning that entitles redevelopment.

The Somerville Zoning Ordinance mandates that the Somerville Planning Board adopt a UDF for each sub-area of the Master Planned Development (MPD) overlay district. The content of a formally adopted neighborhood plan, station area plan, or small area plan may be officially recognized as the framework for a sub area or a UDF may be adopted as stand alone document. Development entitlement

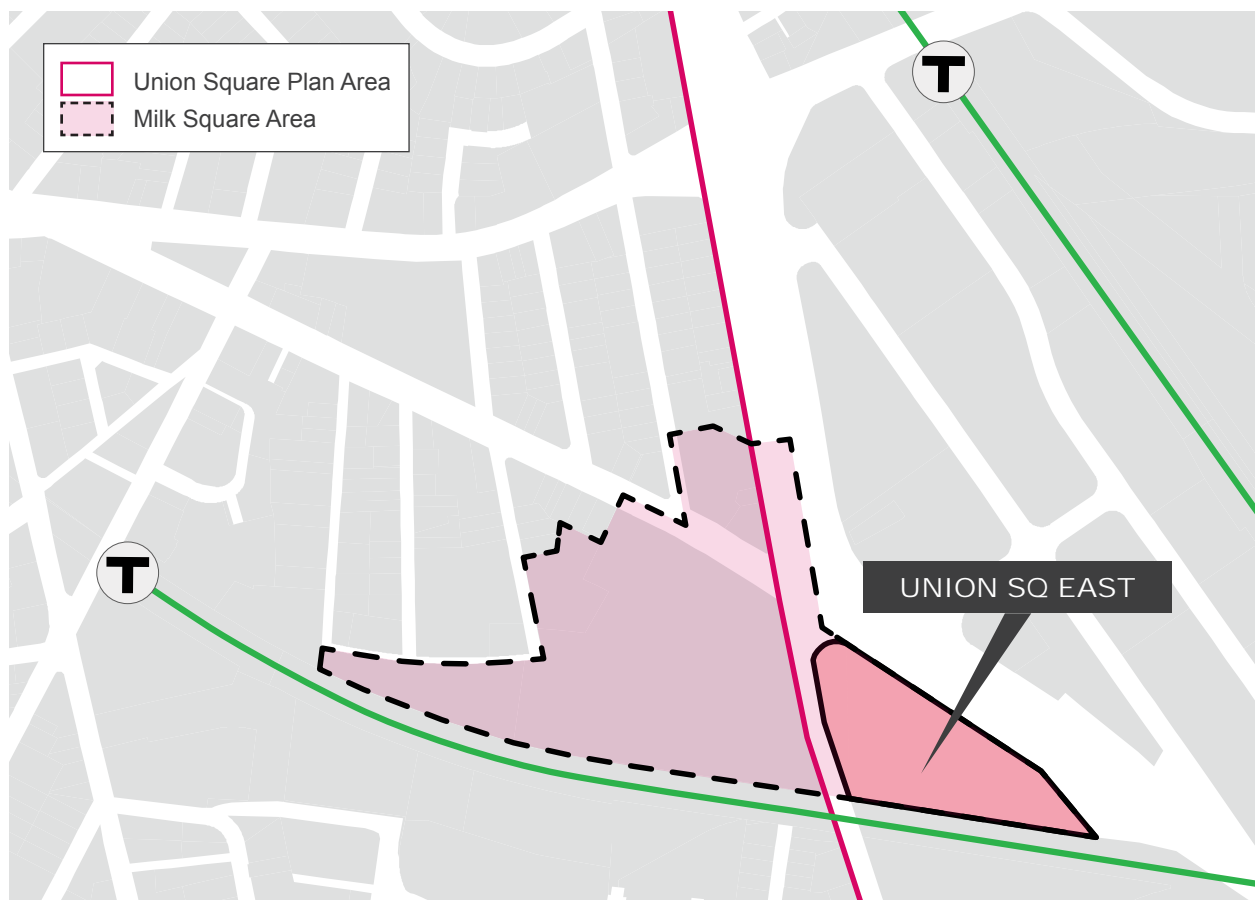
in accordance with the MPD overlay district is only applicable to sites following the formal adoption of a UDF by the Planning Board.

The UDF for each sub area helps to ensure planning, development, and architectural and landscape design are coordinated while also informing the Planning Board's discretionary permitting of proposed master plans or single building proposals authorized by the MPD overlay. Each sub-area may be built out by a single developer under one master plan, multiple developers under multiple master plans, individual developers of contributing lots, or some combination of the above. A UDF can also ensure coordination between private development and capital improvements planned by the City of Somerville within the same area.

PURPOSE

The Milk Square Area UDF addresses development in a unique area of Somerville where the Union Square, Boynton Yards, and Brickbottom neighborhoods meet at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and McGrath Highway. Western portions of the area are also within the plan area of the Union Square Neighborhood Plan and include multiple suburban-style big box and pad commerce buildings with corresponding parking lots. The area also includes land located between Medford Street, McGrath Highway and the Green Line right-of-way that is regulated by Union Square East (USQE) sub area of the Master Planned Development overlay district. This smaller yet significant site is the only portion of the Milk Square Area that was included in the new Somerville Zoning Ordinance upon its adoption. As planning evolves, the sub areas entitling redevelopment in the zoning ordinance are expected to be expanded, amended, or changed to implement adopted plans. Similarly, the Milk Square Area UDF and the land area subject to it is also expect to evolve.

The following pages identify desired urban design characteristics for the Milk Square Area including the intended street network and character of new thoroughfares, the ideal locations and types of civic spaces, and advantageous sites for certain permitted building types.



VISION

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan guides the transformation its south-eastern area into an Urban Employment Center that will play a critical role in the development of new commercial space within close proximity to two Green Line transit stations and local educational and other technological institutions.

Redevelopment of the Milk Square Area specifically can create a physical and visual gateway into the greater Union Square area for visitors arriving via various modes of transportation. New development is envisioned to be primarily high-rise commercial surrounding the proposed public square along McGrath transitioning to mid-rise mixed use and residential moving west toward the existing low-rise neighborhood between Allen and Merriam Streets.



KEY PRINCIPLES

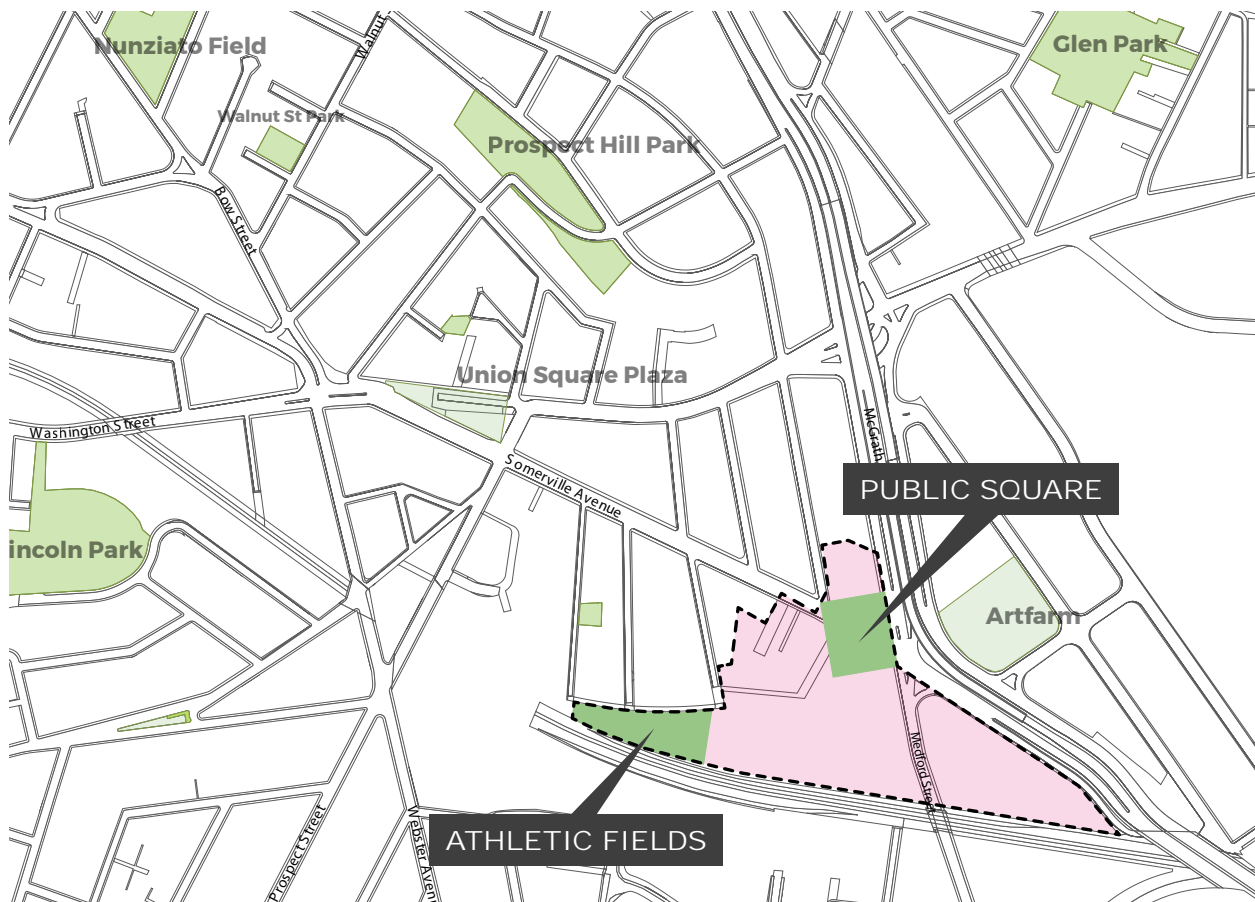
1. Establish a new public square civic space at the existing intersection of Somerville Avenue and McGrath as a terminating vista and symbolic gateway into Somerville.
2. Establish a new civic space along Charlestown Street with athletic fields and a potential connection point for a pedestrian bridge to Boynton Yards.
3. Create a new street network for the Milk Square Area that facilitates movement by all modes of travel while interconnecting to existing streets in Union Square, Boynton Yards, and Brickbottom.
4. Consider the ability or adaptability of proposed development to accommodate the reconstruction of McGrath Highway into an urban boulevard.
5. Concentrate larger commercial parking facilities closer to McGrath (Route 28) and control vehicular turning movements to reduce automobile traffic within the redevelopment area.



PUBLIC SPACE

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan proposes an important new public square located at the intersection of Somerville Avenue and McGrath. The space is conceptually named “Milk Square” to honor the original name of Somerville Avenue, Milk Street, and its design should serve as a key terminated vista to the multiple vantage points provided by the axial street network. The space is perfectly situated to serve as a landmark and entrance into Somerville for those traveling along the future McGrath Boulevard.

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan also identified a large active space between Charlestown Street and the GLX tracks to accommodate some of the City’s need for athletic fields. With cooperation from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), this concept is still a viable option and well removed from the near-highway ultra-fine particulate matter. A potential Community Path extension crossing Medford Street along the GLX tracks could allow pedestrians and cyclists from BrickBottom to access the Charlestown Street athletic fields.

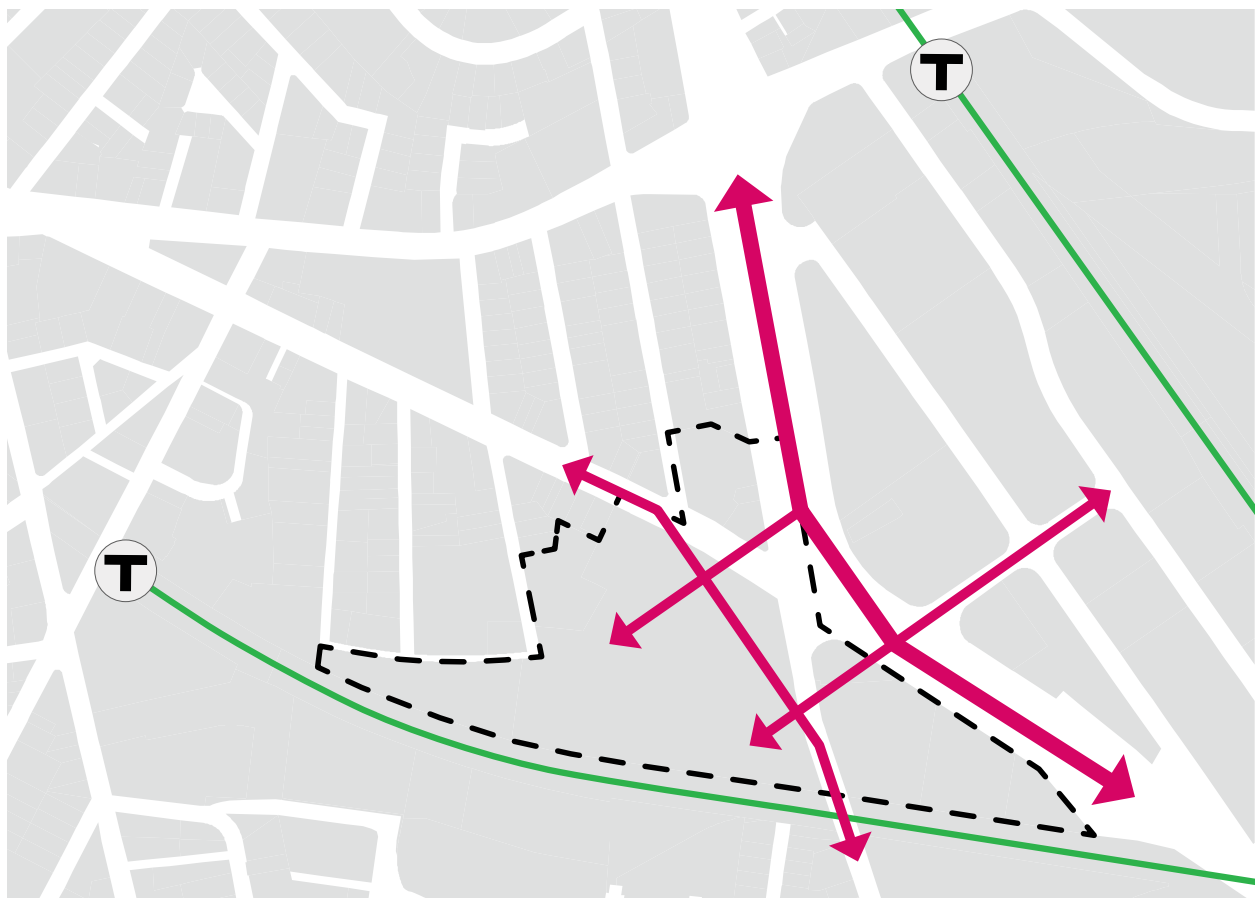


STREET NETWORK

Redevelopment of the Milk Square Area must improve connectivity for all modes of transportation between the neighborhoods of Union Square, Boynton Yards, and Brickbottom. Planning for the future street network of the area anticipates the grounding of McGrath Highway and its reconstruction as a multi-modal urban boulevard by MassDOT. A bridge over the Green Line right of way will always remain, but the McGrath Boulevard project will drastically improve the physical impact of this state roadway to the surrounding neighborhood once brought to ground level.

Proposed master plans and any contributing single building proposals should focus proposed transportation mitigation on improving pedestrian routes to nearby transit services including the Union Square and the East Somerville stations of the Green Line as well as nearby bus stops. Although MBTA bus service may continue to be routed along Somerville Avenue and through the area in the future, submitted plans should not depend upon the MBTA to adjust service when planning for access to bus services.

Intersection design and control of turning movements will play an important role in both automobile and bicycle traffic patterns and safety. Crosswalk and sidewalk design will need to be coordinated with signal timing to properly choreograph movement around and through the area.



PARKING

The total build out of the Milk Square Area should provide no more than 0.6 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area. Today, the Union Square East (USQE) sub area of the MPD overlay district exists within the larger plan area of the Milk Square Area UDF. This sub area requires all off-street parking to be provided as commercial parking facilities rather than accessory parking associated with any specific use. These commercial parking facilities may provide a maximum amount of commercial parking spaces in total within the area, along with a maximum number of those same spaces that may be provided as reserved parking spaces for specific users.

Not all of the commercial parking spaces permitted by the USQE sub-area should be provided within the current sub areas boundary (Dec 2021). The zoning for the USQE sub-area is expected to be expanded, amended, or changed to implement additional planning of the Milk Square Area. Development of the Milk Square Area as a whole will necessitate additional parking facilities and parking demand will likely exceed the original maximum for the sub-area. The MPD overlay provides a Special Permit to exceed this parking maximum, but any increase permitted may not exceed 0.6 spaces per 1,000 square feet of floor area.

Where available, curb-side space for on-street parking should be metered for short-term, high turnover customers or provided as coordinated locations for ride share pick-up/drop-off and package deliveries.

