

At Large Councilor Candidate, Stephanie Hirsch

Additional Responses to Davis Now Candidate Questionnaire, 10/23/2019

Density

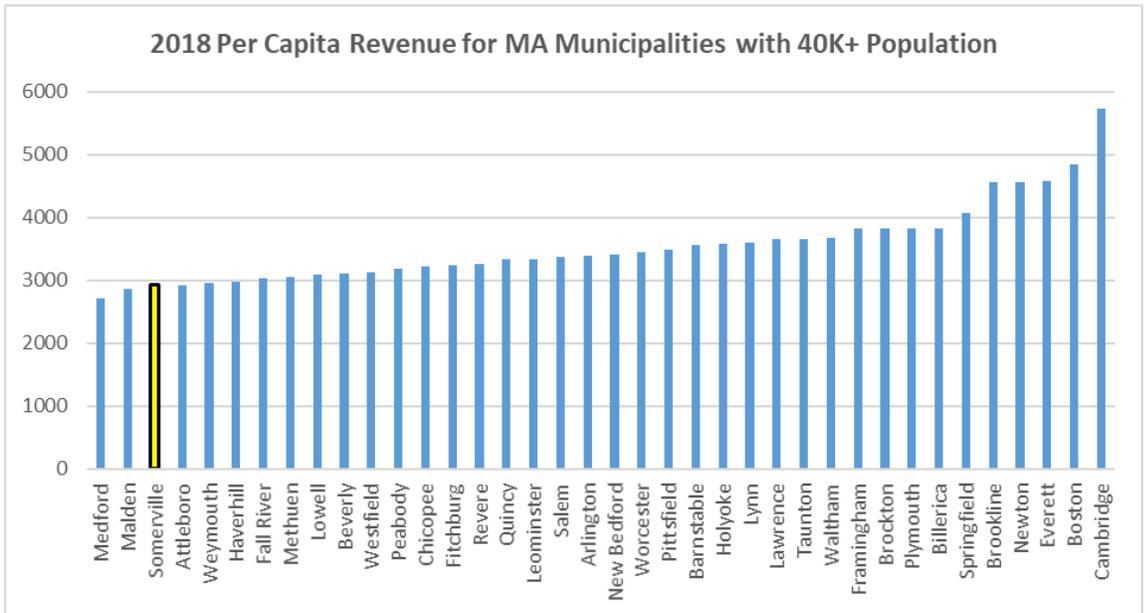
I support the Davis Now coalition’s position that additional height should not be “by right”. That said, I’d support a situation in which density could occur on certain lots in exchange for more community benefits, as Councilor Davis has outlined.

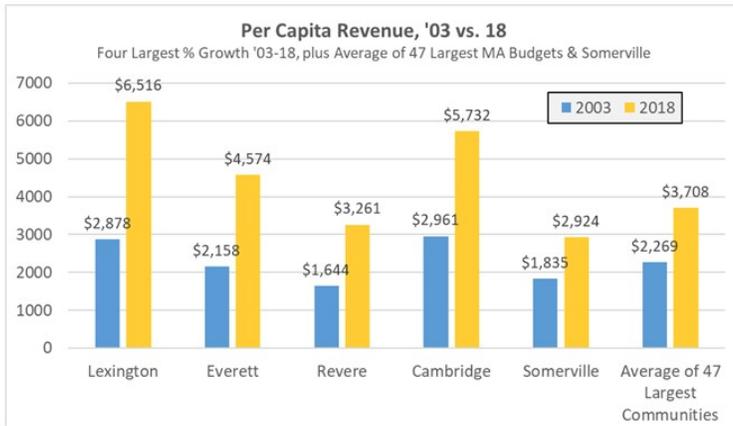
As I understand it, that process of allowing for some greater height could occur in these steps (paraphrasing Councilor Davis in places):

- Before the new zoning passes, Councilor Davis will make an amendment to roll back the Davis Square map to represent a placeholder until the more complex zoning tools needed to ensure appropriate growth and community benefits can be fully developed.
- Then, perhaps in the spring of 2020, the Council will review a proposal to apply those tools to Davis Square. This may include an overlay district or density bonuses for certain zones. An overlay is zoning that’s specific to Davis Square and that supersedes the citywide zoning. Density bonuses would, potentially, apply to all parcels with a specific zone (MR4, for example). For areas that could accommodate additional stories above the currently zoned four stories, subject to step-backs and other design standards to ensure that the massing is not imposing, an overlay or density bonus would define specific community benefits that are required to be provided in exchange for the greater height. Those benefits could include more open space, ground-level affordable retail/commercial space, or affordable housing.
- Any proposed design for these lots will still require approval via a special permit or Site Plan Review, which will require a community process to discuss issues above and beyond the required community benefits. The Planning Board or Zoning Board of Appeals would then consider whether or not to grant the developer permission to proceed. (That said, the Council has consistently raised concerns about those Boards’ alignment with community interests, so on our end, we will continue to work to change the responsiveness and/or authority of the City’s most powerful Boards).

I do want to affirm, though, that density near transit is important for increasing our commercial tax base (Somerville remains the third from the bottom in terms of revenue per capita to spend, as compared to other larger MA municipalities. Also, we have experienced below-average revenue growth in the last 15 years. See charts). Additional revenue is the only way we can afford to pay for the other priorities shared by residents in Davis and throughout Somerville, such as

infrastructure improvements and traffic calming. Density is also important for creating jobs, for adding day-time business for Davis Square businesses, and for delivering very important community benefits, like affordable housing and open space.





Per Capita Revenue, and 2003-2018 Change				
Municipality	2003	2018	\$ Change	% Change
Lexington	\$2,878	\$6,516	\$3,638	126%
Everett	\$2,158	\$4,574	\$2,416	112%
Revere	\$1,644	\$3,261	\$1,617	98%
Cambridge	\$2,961	\$5,732	\$2,771	94%
Somerville	\$1,835	\$2,924	\$1,089	59%
Avg 47 Largest Municipalities	\$2,269	\$3,708	\$1,439	63%

Small Business Preservation

Among the benefits we want for Davis Square are strategies to preserve existing small businesses and to create room for new businesses as well as service organizations. I support the ideas that Councilor Davis has outlined to achieve that goal, and hope they serve as a model for steps we can take in districts throughout the city.

Councilor Davis mentions that his plan would include these mechanisms:

- "Zoning that requires multiple, small- and varied-sized commercial units at the street level in the central business district. This would help maintain the pedestrian experience and avoid the effect that buildings like One Davis (CVS) and 212 Elm (Citizens Bank) have in closing off long stretches of sidewalk."
- "An expansion of the 'Market Hall' concept to be a year-round facility that could house (for example) the farmers market, serve as an incubator for the next generation of small businesses not yet ready for a full brick-and-mortar lease in the Square, and even provide a temporary space for displaced businesses while existing buildings are rebuilt... so those business might be able to survive the construction process and then move back. It also could serve as another draw to bring people in to Davis, some of whom will then visit other businesses."
- "An emphasis on commercial development over residential in the CBD. There's some room for adjustment here because we desperately need housing as well (under the right circumstances) but generally speaking we should be looking for developers who will build space that brings in daytime office workers. Davis Square is at its most active in the evenings and weekends. If we foster a larger daytime customer base, small businesses should benefit."

Street and Sidewalk Design

Regarding traffic planning and the method of improving the conditions of the sidewalks, in my opinion, any change to public space and road design should be the result of a neighborhood process that listens to all voices. In most cases, I believe that the closest neighbors should have the greatest say about their area, unless it's a case where neighborhood needs have to be balanced against a citywide impact and values of equity and integration. If neighborhood preferences conflict with citywide needs, then there should be a compromise that accommodates neighborhood preferences.

At Large Councilor Candidate, Mary Jo Rossetti

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1. The majority of public opinion supports preserving the current 4-story zoning for the Davis Square central business district, and *opposes* rezoning it for Mid-Rise 5 and 6 stories. **Would you stand with the public, by *opposing* the administration’s proposal to rezone the Davis CBD for 5- and 6-story buildings by right?**

Yes, absolutely! Although there are some sites which may be welcomed by the community to expand, each site comes with its own distinctness. Given the enormity of this potential site for future development, I would instead support keeping in place the CURRENT zoning code for Davis Square (not what’s on the table). This would allow the Council and Community time to take up the future Zoning of Davis Square at a later date (i.e. amend the new Zoning Code in the future if adopted soon). As I have previously stated (via e-mail to greater than 40 concerned residents), “This particular decision will NOT be made soon. The City’s Planning Department’s recommendation to the Planning Board was not anticipated by me, nor my colleagues, in that fashion. There WILL be more community discussion.....the Council’s most recent Report of the Land Use Committee begins with attention given to Davis Square. As the Report states, I too await Councilor Davis’ outcome of important ongoing discussions with staff (whereby special Conditions & Safeguards could be incorporated). This would of course allow the citizenry to strongly weigh in before any decision was made (e.g. protection of our current small businesses). “

2. The Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning definition in the proposed Somerville Zoning Ordinance would increase the height limit for 4-story buildings in Davis Square from the present 50 feet to 65 feet. This 30% height increase would significantly increase the scale of buildings in Davis, without adding any square footage. **Would you *oppose* this proposed 30% increase in allowable height for 4-story buildings in Davis, which does not increase the square footage available for development?**

Again, each site has its own uniqueness. If a Building were to be considered for the sole purpose of commercial use, typically each floor is at a slightly higher height than residential. As I stated in the above question, we have to regroup, both as a Council and Community, before any decisions are made.

3. The Davis Square Neighborhood Plan includes illustrations of a dramatically simplified main intersection but does not include any analysis of intersection timing movements, traffic conditions, or impact on feeder streets. **Would you support making it a priority that the administration engage an outside traffic engineer and urban design professional to conduct a comprehensive study of how redesigning the Davis intersection would impact traffic conditions and the surrounding feeder streets?**

Yes.

4. DavisNow has developed [a comprehensive “punch list”](#) for the restoration of Davis Square, focusing in particular on repairs and ongoing maintenance of Davis’s brick sidewalks and crosswalks. **Would you be willing to proactively assist DavisNow in our attempts to get the administration to move forward with a plan to repair and maintain Davis Square as identified by our punch list?**

Yes.

5. Davis Square is the only location in Somerville with primarily brick sidewalks. The administration has responded to the DavisNow punch list with a proposal to remove brick surfacing throughout Davis and replace it with concrete, at a greater cost than originally budgeted for repairing the existing bricks. Meanwhile, the town of Lexington recently banned concrete sidewalks due to material failure, and the city of Newburyport maintains brick sidewalks throughout their beautiful downtown. **Would you be willing to direct the administration to proactively find ways to repair and upgrade Davis Square’s signature brick sidewalks?**

Yes.

At Large Councilor Candidate, Bill White

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Attached please find my response to the questionnaire. I would like to supplement two responses.

With regard to question 2, we have not had the opportunity to discuss that proposed change in detail with planning staff. A 4 story apartment building still has its height limited to 50 feet. A general building can have a height of 55 feet, to incorporate a larger retail height for the tenant on the first floor. I would be ok with that change. A commercial building is the one proposed to have the height of 65. It is described as having commercial uses on all floors. I assume that the City may be envisioning a 4 story office or life sciences building with retail on the first floor. I do not know the reasons justifying that degree of height (average of 16ft. per floor) for three floors of office or life sciences above a retail use. If that height was necessary for a 4 story office or life sciences building, then perhaps it might be considered through a special permit but I cannot see it at this time as one allowed by right.

With regard to question 5, the use of bricks would have to be such that they do not lead to the mobility problems that we have experienced in this City with the use of bricks in the past. Over the course of the years, I have had serious complaints from mothers who push baby carriages, folks who walk with walkers or canes, people unsteady on their feet and wheelchair user about the impact of missing or elevated bricks on them. The City should insure that the appropriate types of bricks and the necessary level of maintenance and replacement are used whenever the City constructs brick sidewalks or crosswalks.

Thank you,
Bill White

At Large Councilor Candidate, Jack Connolly

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A professional architect in our group has prepared the attached analysis of potential square footage available for development under 4-story, 5-story, and 6-story zoning scenarios. **This shows that the current 4-story zoning can add an additional 1.27 million square feet of development to Davis Square**, with 5-story zoning adding an additional 220,000 SF and 6-story zoning adding a further 120,000 SF after mandatory setbacks. The percentage of the total development possible under 6-story zoning that is contributed by the 5th floor is 9%, and by the 6th floor is 5%. Though this analysis is approximate, we believe it is detailed and accurate enough to be worth enclosing to assist you in responding to our questions. The majority of public opinion supports preserving the current 4-story zoning for the Davis Square central business district, and *opposes* rezoning it for Mid-Rise 5 and 6 stories.

1. Would you stand with the public, by *opposing* the administration's proposal to rezone the Davis CBD for 5- and 6-story buildings by right?

YES! As a lifetime Somerville resident active in Davis Sq. since the 1970's, I will join all members of the public to vehemently OPPOSE any rezoning beyond the current 4 story 50' height.

2. The Mid-Rise 4 (MR4) zoning definition in the proposed Somerville Zoning Ordinance would increase the height limit for 4-story buildings in Davis Square from the present 50 feet to 65 feet. This 30% height increase would significantly increase the scale of buildings in Davis, without adding any square footage. **Would you oppose this proposed 30% increase in allowable height for 4-story buildings in Davis, which does not increase the square footage available for development?**

YES! I would adamantly oppose the 30% increase in allowable height for Davis Square, as this would alter the unique character of Davis Square; Davis should not replicate Harvard or Kendall Sq.

3. The Davis Square Neighborhood Plan includes illustrations of a dramatically simplified main intersection but does not include any analysis of intersection timing movements, traffic conditions, or impact on feeder streets. **Would you support making it a priority that the administration engage an outside traffic engineer and urban design professional to conduct a comprehensive study of how redesigning the Davis intersection would impact traffic conditions and the surrounding feeder streets?**

YES! Additionally, I would support immediate City Hall Bidding process be undertaken to seek qualified firms to handle the job.

4. DavisNow has developed [a comprehensive “punch list”](#) for the restoration of Davis Square, focusing in particular on repairs and ongoing maintenance of Davis’s brick sidewalks and crosswalks. **Would you be willing to proactively assist DavisNow in our attempts to get the administration to move forward with a plan to repair and maintain Davis Square as identified by our punch list?**

YES! I am already doing my best to assist this restoration, as I was part of the original planning group (Davis Sq. Task Force) that configured the current layout of Davis Sq. and I am currently making this effort a major plank of my campaign to be elected to the Somerville City Council as a Councilor at Large November 5th 2019.

5. Davis Square is the only location in Somerville with primarily brick sidewalks. The administration has responded to the DavisNow punch list with a proposal to remove brick surfacing throughout Davis and replace it with concrete, at a greater cost than originally budgeted for repairing the existing bricks. Meanwhile, the town of Lexington recently banned concrete sidewalks due to material failure, and the city of Newburyport maintains brick sidewalks throughout their beautiful downtown. **Would you be willing to direct the administration to proactively find ways to repair and upgrade Davis Square’s signature brick sidewalks?**

YES! Whether elected or not, I will be focused on making this a major City budget priority for our signature sidewalks in Davis Square, and I will communicate directly with all City Councilors on this vital preservation effort needed in Davis Square.

Always my best,

Jack Connolly