

Somerville

Redevelopment Authority

2022 Annual Report

Prepared by the Somerville Office of Strategic Planning and Community
Development – Economic Development Division

May 2023

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.

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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 2022 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 Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) was founded in 1956, pursuant to the authority granted by the Massachusetts General Law Chapter 121B, § 3. 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 to 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 on deteriorated and under-used property.

Meetings & Votes

Meeting date	Type	Vote count
January 19, 2022	Regular	2
February 16, 2022	Regular	4
March 16, 2022	Regular	2
April 20, 2022	Regular	2
May 18, 2022	Regular	3
June 15, 2022	Regular	3
September 21, 2022	Regular	3
October 19, 2022	Regular	3
November 16, 2022	Regular	5
December 21, 2022	Regular	2

2022 Project Highlights

Assembly Square

Assembly Square is one of Somerville's newest neighborhoods, arising over the past decade from a moribund factory district centered around the former Ford assembly plant. 2021 had seen Assembly Square work to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many existing businesses reopening and new business coming in.

Development of several projects had also continued steadily throughout the year, including completion of a 500-unit apartment building at Miscela (Figure 1).

This development progress continued in 2022.

BioMed Realty continued development of Phase 1 of the Assembly Innovation Park while holding community meetings related to Phases 2 and 3 (see Figures 2 and 3 below). The first phase of development includes an approximately 497,000 square foot lab building that is estimated to be completed in 2024, while the second two phases refer to two additional predominantly lab and office buildings. Federal Realty Investment Trust (FRIT), a prominent developer in Assembly Square, also pursued permits from the Somerville Planning Board for a 7-story lab building on Block 7A, though these had not been obtained by the end of 2022.



Figure 1: Miscela residential tower, which brought 500 new apartment units to Assembly Row, including 31 income-restricted units.

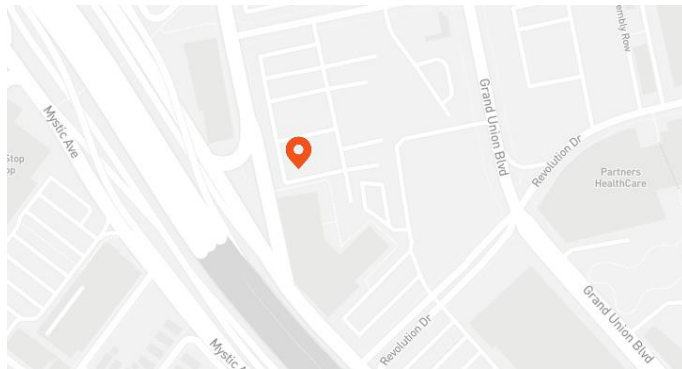


Figure 2: The location of BioMed Realty's Assembly Innovation Park in Assembly Square.
(Source: <https://www.biomedrealty.com/developments/Assembly>)



Figure 3: A rendering of BioMed Realty's Assembly Innovation Park once all three phases are complete. (Source: Assembly Innovation Park Brochure)

2022 also saw the expiration of the Assembly Square Revitalization Plan on August 1st. The plan was originally approved in 1980 for a twenty year period, and was then extended in 2002 for twenty additional years in the face of renewed planning interest in the area and an acknowledgment that several of the original plan's goals had not been met. This updated plan stated ten goals, including:

- To develop Assembly Square, an underutilized and decadent area, with a mix of residential, office, research and development, retail, hotels, cinemas, performing arts centers and institutional uses, giving preference to structured parking;
- To increase the real estate investment and tax base of the project area and thereby that of the City of Somerville as a whole;
- To improve the utility infrastructure in Assembly Square and encourage remediation of former industrial sites to a level suitable for the proposed mix of uses, including residential;
- To construct a new Orange Line Station on or near Yard 21 and to obtain an Urban Ring connection to Assembly Square; and
- To increase Somerville's supply of affordable housing units.

Both public and private development over the past twenty years have helped realize many of these goals.

Union Square

Legal and zoning changes completed in 2017 laid the groundwork for implementing the SRA's 2012 Union Square Revitalization Plan (USRP), allowing for significant development progress since 2018. In 2021, much of the work of Union Square Associates (US2)—the Master Land Developer for the urban renewal area outlined in the USRP—focused on developing what the USRP labeled “Disposition Parcel 2” (commonly called the “D2” parcel, or 10-50 Prospect Street; see Figure 1), and on preparing other sites for future development.

2022 saw more steady growth. Throughout the year, US2 continued vertical construction on the D2 parcel's two residential buildings (located on the “D2.2” and “D2.3” subparcels) and on an office and life sciences building at the corner of Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street (located on the “D2.1” subparcel). US2 also moved forward with demolition and permitting work on the USRP's Disposition Parcel 3 (the “D3” parcel). Public meetings were also held to capture input for the Union Square Plaza and Streetscape Design project, which is intended to create a new civic space in the heart of Union Square.



Figure 4: Disposition parcels identified in the Union Square Revitalization Plan. (Source: Union Square Station Associates' Coordinated Development Special Permit Application to the Somerville Planning Board.)

While US2 is recognized as the Master Land Developer for the disposition parcels identified in the USRP, the current owner of Disposition Parcel 6 (the “D6” parcel) also hosted a community meeting in September regarding a proposed lab building on the site, though this project was not approved as of the end of 2022.

Beyond private development, March 2022 also saw the completion of a long-awaited milestone in Union Square: the opening of the Green Line Extension's (GLX) Union

Square station, which connects Union Square to Boston through the MBTA Green Line's D Branch. (See Figure 2.)

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

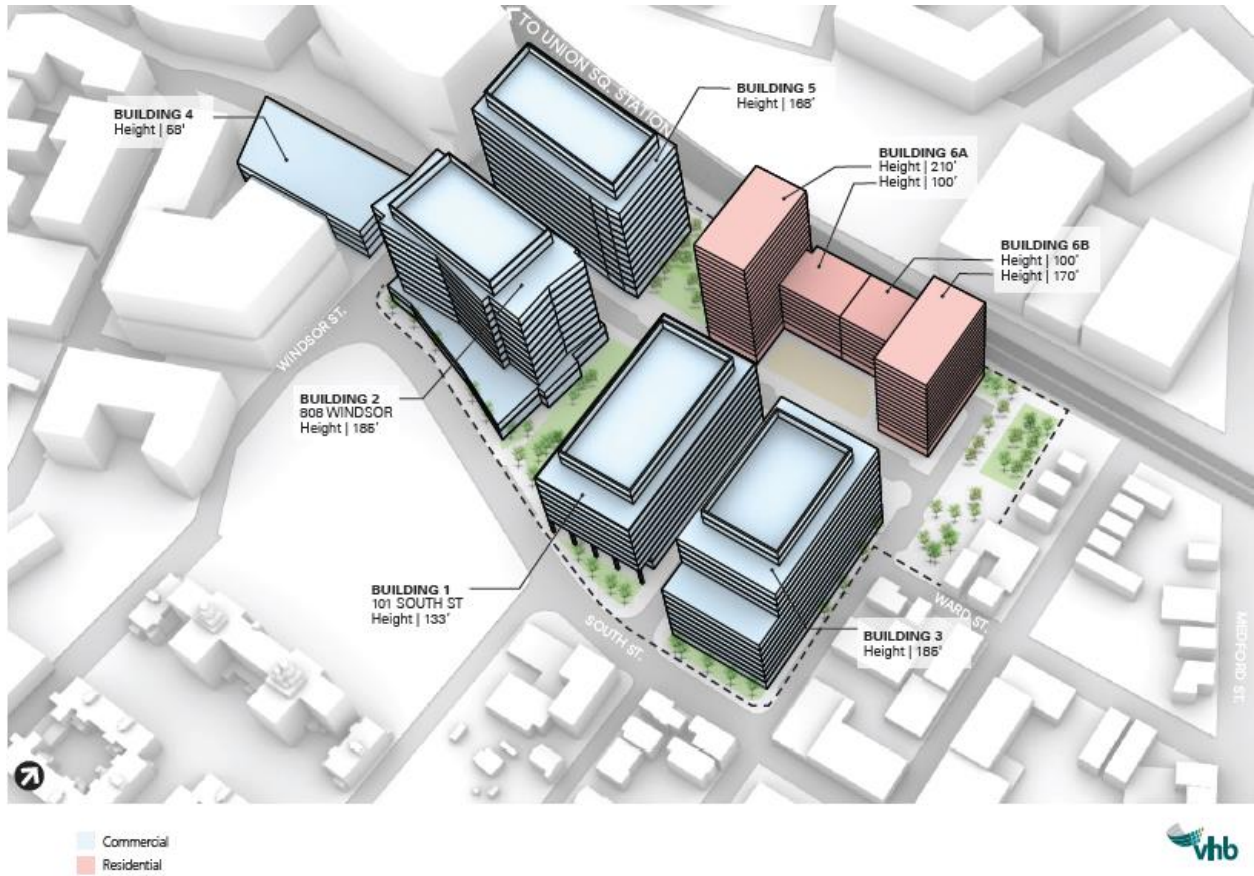
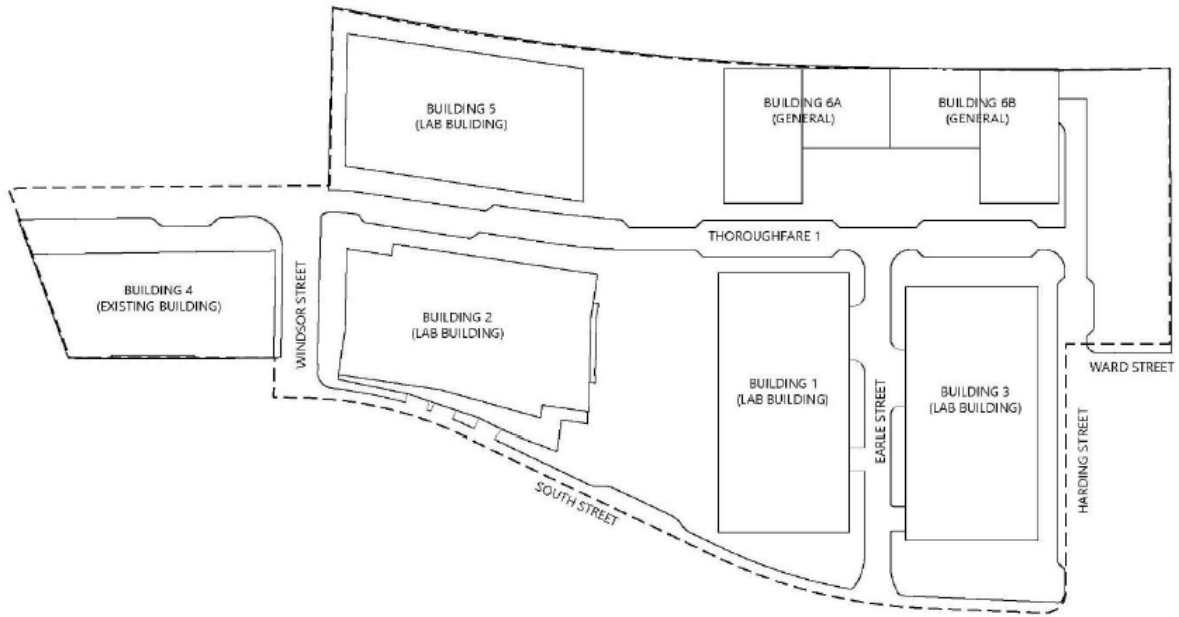
replaced with light industrial buildings and a new South Street. A development team comprising DLJ Real Estate Capital Partners and Leggat McCall Properties (LMP) renewed these efforts in 2019, and has created the Boynton Yards Master Plan (approved by the Somerville Planning Board in 2021) to guide up to 1.4 million square feet of mixed-use development on South Street that is expected to generate nearly thirty million dollars of community benefits to the City and seventy million dollars in infrastructure improvements. One of these buildings in the Master Plan area, 101 South Street, was complete by the end of 2021.

In 2022, the DLJ/LMP team continued to lease space in 101 South Street to new tenants, started foundation and then vertical construction work on their second lab building in the Master Plan area (808 Windsor Street), and amended their Master Plan with the Planning Board to allow for construction of a third lab building (see Figures 3 and 4). The DLJ/LMP team, the SRA, and the City also collaborated to provide DLJ/LMP with an easement to build sidewalks on SRA-owned land within the project area on behalf of the City. Towards the end of 2022, the DLJ/LMP team then presented to the SRA regarding their intention to submit an application for an additional Boynton South Master Plan that would be adjacent to their initial Master Plan area, though this was not completed in 2022. If this additional plan moves forward, the team and SRA will need to work collaboratively on a property ownership authorization that will help the team relocate South Street and complete a required civic space in the area. Beyond DLJ/LMP-led development, the Somerville Planning Board also approved projects from other development teams at 495 Columbia Steet and 600 Webster Avenue, both of which are located within Boynton Yards.

In May 2022, the SRA also heard a presentation from Groundwork Somerville, a local nonprofit focused on urban agriculture and youth development that licenses land from the SRA in Boynton Yards. Groundwork was seeking approval for a summer schedule of events, including a gala and a series of concerts. The SRA approved this application.



Figure 5: The Green Line Station at Union Square, which opened in March 2022.



Figures 6 (above) and 7 (below): The site plan and proposed building massing for the amended Boynton Yards Master Plan, passed by the Somerville Planning Board in 2022. (Source: Boynton Yards Master Plan Special Permit application.)

Winter Hill

Between 2019 and 2021, the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development conducted a community engagement process regarding redevelopment of the former Star Market site at 299 Broadway, which led to the adoption of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan (WHURP) in 2021 by the SRA and City Council that was then approved by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. This plan declared 299 Broadway and several surrounding sites as “decadent,” meaning substandard, and gave the SRA the power to take the sites through eminent domain if needed. (See Figure 5 for the included sites.) However, Mark Development, a private developer, planned to privately acquire the 299 Broadway site and the adjacent 15 Temple Street site without the use of eminent domain, and began petitioning for a zoning change to allow for a total of 280 or more housing units to be built on the site.

In 2022, Mark Development updated their redevelopment proposal for 299 Broadway to now partner with a local affordable housing developer, Beacon Communities, and to



Figures 8: The site plan for the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan, including the Star Market site located at 299 Broadway and several other surrounding sites declared “decadent.” (Source: Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan.)

structure the development as two mixed-use buildings made up of approximately three hundred dwelling units above ground floor retail spaces. 45% of this residential area would meet state affordability requirements. In September, the Mark Development and Beacon Communities team then received approval from the Somerville Urban Design Commission on the architectural portion of their project. However, while the plan moved forward, Mark Development had not yet purchased the 299 Broadway site as of the end of 2022.

In February 2022, the City also began hosting meetings of the Winter Hill Civic Advisory Committee (CAC), which is a group made up of local residents and stakeholders that makes recommendations to guide City and SRA decision-making regarding urban renewal projects in the WHURP area. The CAC met several times throughout the year, including general meetings and a site walk of the 299 Broadway property, and they prepared a multi-lingual survey to collect information from area residents about the desire for ground floor uses on the site. The CAC also wrote a letter to the SRA and the Zoning Board of Approvals to show support for the project proposed by the Mark Development and Beacon Communities team.

Inner Belt

In late 2018, OSPCD had informed the SRA about the possibility of acquiring a four-acre site at 90 Washington Street in the Inner Belt that could serve as the site of a new Public Safety Building (PSB) as well as for associated commercial, residential, and civic development. (See Figures 6, 7, and 8 on the following pages.) In 2019 and 2020, 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 demolition of Cobble Hill Plaza. In 2021, work proceeded to determine details of both the PSB and non-PSB portions of the site, including the creation of a Public Safety Committee focused on the PSB uses.

2022 saw significantly more engagement regarding potential uses at 90 Washington Street, including a public forum for the site hosted in February with over one hundred attendees, a listening session hosted by the Mayor in May for the residents of Cobble Hill Apartments, and an interactive session hosted by OSPCD in August that used Lego blocks to help participants express desired building massing. Through this engagement, the City and SRA learned that local residents and other stakeholders want to see more civic uses, green space, affordable housing, and retail space on the site, and heard concerns around issues like noise impacts and whether the City actually needs a new PSB. Given the complex nature of potentially developing PSB and non-PSB uses on the same site, the City then decided to use a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process to



Figure 9: A map depicting the location of the 90 Washington Street parcel within the Inner Belt neighborhood, near its intersections with East Somerville and Brickbottom. (Source: 90 Washington Street Request for Qualifications.)



Figures 10 (left) and 11 (right): An aerial view of 90 Washington Street and a close-up map showing the site's boundaries. (Sources: 90 Washington Street Request for Qualifications (Figure 7) and October 2022 Community Meeting (Figure 8).)

learn more about what local developers thought was possible for development. This RFQ was drafted in late 2022 and was initially intended to be released in November, but this was pushed to early 2023 due to timeline- and market-related concerns. The City also began planning to provide temporary civic and green spaces around the perimeter of 90 Washington Street in 2023.

In 2022, Somerville Ward 1 City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin also brought complaints to the SRA regarding the state of snow storage by the Somerville Department of Public Works on the 90 Washington Street site. In response, the DPW Commissioner promised improved snow storage practices on the site, given the site's central role in the City's snow removal operations.

Gilman Square

Located just down the hill from Somerville City Hall, Gilman Square is a neighborhood that's identity is still coalescing, particularly given the new GLX station that opened at its center in December 2022. The City currently owns a parcel located directly adjacent to the station at 350 Medford Street (known colloquially as "the Homans site" due to a building that used to be located there), which it is considering disposing of for redevelopment in the coming years. This development may also tie in a nearby triangular park at the intersection of Medford and Pearl Streets.

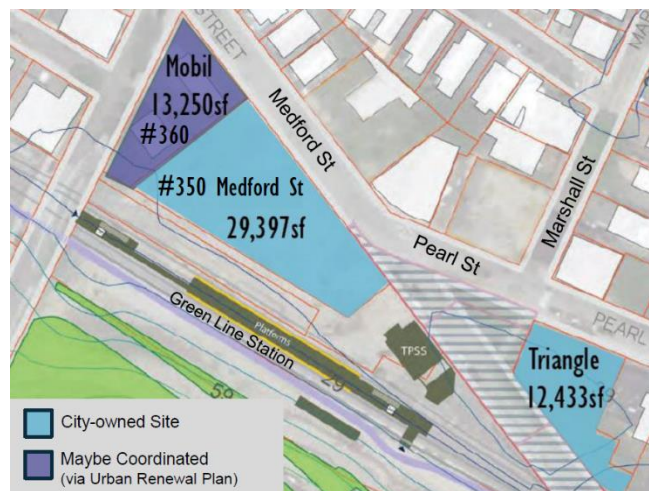


Figure 12: Three sites being considered by the City for redevelopment in Gilman Square, including a Mobil station that the SRA and City have considered acquiring with an urban renewal plan.

In September, the City made an early presentation to the SRA about development potential at 350 Medford Street and the triangular park. This conversation also discussed the potential for the City to acquire a Mobil station site directly adjacent to the Homans site, either through direct purchase or through the use of an urban renewal plan. The addition of the Mobil station in a disposition parcel would expand development options at the site. Given the possibility of acquiring land through an urban renewal process, the City proactively created a Civic Advisory Committee (CAC) made up of members of the public to provide input into this process. At this time, however, the SRA has not taken any actions to acquire the Mobil station site.

Land owned by the SRA

Below is a list of properties currently owned by the SRA as of April 2023, listing the property ID, site address, land and total property values, lot size, and the Somerville Zoning Ordinance zone in which each property falls. This data was compiled from the Somerville Assessor's Database. Four of these parcels are located in Boynton Yards, one in nearby Union Square (this parcel is part of 50 Prospect Street, or the D2 parcel of the Union Square Revitalization Plan), and one in the Inner Belt (90 Washington Street). The total assessed property value across the six SRA-owned properties totals approximately \$5.298 million, with over half of that value being derived from 90 Washington Street.

A map of these properties can be found on the following page.

Property ID	Site address	Land value	Total property value	Lot size (acres)	Zone
106-A-3B	90 Washington St	\$3,539,200	\$3,583,400	3.9887	CIV
96-A-43	0 Windsor Pl	\$372,500	\$372,500	0.0513	CI
97-A-7	138 South St	\$587,200	\$621,200	0.2681	CIV
97-A-8	100 South St	\$314,100	\$326,000	0.0876	CIV
97-D-9	24 Medford St	\$214,500	\$214,500	0.0318	MR4
82-D-L5	NA (portion of 50 Prospect St)	\$224,408*	\$224,408	0.0843	UR

*The value for lot 82-D-L5 is estimated here based on its share of the area of what the Somerville Assessor's Office currently lists as parcel 82-D-26A, the value and area measurement of which are meant to capture this subparcel in addition to several others. The value of parcel 82-D-26A is listed as \$5,291,300, and the area is listed as 1.9877 acres. To estimate the value for lot 82-D-L5, one can take the area of the lot, 0.0843 acres, and take the ratio of that area to 1.9877, and then apply this ratio to the overall value of \$5,291,300 to get a value of \$224,408.

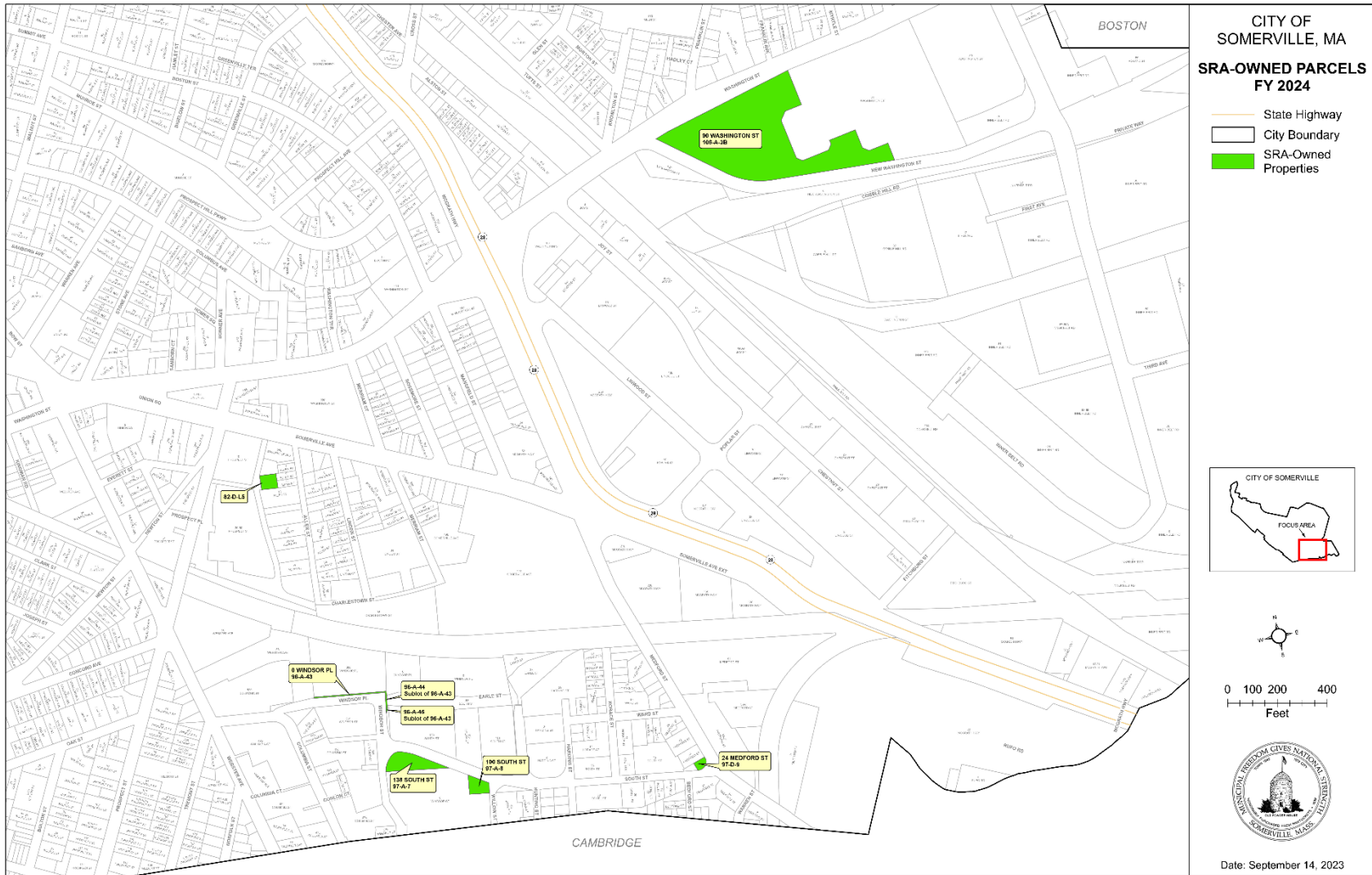


Figure 13: A map of properties owned by the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. (Source: Somerville Assessor's Database.)