

STRATEGIC PLANNING SHARREBACK  
2020 - 2023

**Dear friends, neighbors, and partners,**

Thank you to each and every one of the 500+ individuals who participated in our strategic plan survey; the 30 elected officials, City staffers, property owners, and partners who sat down to talk with us about Union Square’s abounding priorities; and the dozens of Union Square business leaders who participated in focus groups. Many, many people truly **#LoveUnionSquare!**

Your input was critical to answering the question: “How can Union Square Main Streets (USMS) most impactfully serve its economic empowerment mission with its limited resources during such a momentous period of transformation throughout Union Square.”

The pandemic descended as USMS was deep in evaluating the contributions that you provided to our strategic planning efforts. We are so grateful to have had this community-driven plan to inform our decision making through this incredibly tumultuous period. We are excited to share this plan with you here.

Never has protecting the character and connectivity of our community been more critical than at this dawn of immense opportunity—and challenge. And never has USMS been more driven to expand the impact of our equitable, place-keeping, and partnership-focused programs.

Thank you for co-creating our path of service forward. And for being such engaged and valued members of the dynamic neighborhood of businesses and people in Union Square that our small team with a big agenda has been honored to serve since 2005.


Yours in Union & Optimism,



**Jessica L. Eshleman**  
*Executive Director*



**Zachary Baum**  
*Board President*



**Philip Parsons**  
*Board Vice President  
& Strategic Plan Chair*





## Protect the character of Union Square

### 1A. Document and communicate to stakeholders the nature of the character we want to preserve

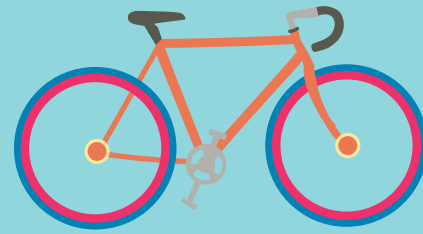
- i. Work with the City, neighborhood groups, local businesses, and the public to build consensus on a description of Union Square's character using survey data and other input as appropriate; Explicitly include diversity of business ownership to ensure inclusion of People of Color (POC) and Black and Indigenous POC
- ii. Provide research, education, advice, and incentives to developers and landowners to help them attract diverse and appropriate business tenants; include frame for inclusivity of POC

### 1B. Explore and advocate for initiatives that have broad impact on the character of the Square

- i. Bolster existing businesses' resilience with technical assistance and other support provided by the USMS Small Business Liaison
- ii. Prioritize diversity training and professional development for staff and Board
- iii. Cultivate leaders of color for committee and eventual Board service
- iv. Actively participate in zoning amendments and variances as appropriate
- v. Develop and encourage use of appropriately-scaled ground-floor development standards
- vi. Explore legislation to limit land-banking and vacancies and incentivize locally-owned, independent business tenancy

### 1C. Create experiences that celebrate the character and heritage of Union Square

- i. Tell the stories of business owners through business features and hiring a photographer to develop an archive of high-quality assets
- ii. Sustain, evaluate, evolve, and promote Fluff Fest, the Farmers Market and other events to:
  - a. be explicit about intentions to leverage events for purposes outlined in 1C above
  - b. achieve 30% participation rate at minimum from business owners/vendors of color
  - c. continue expansion of diverse programming connected to existing businesses to the greatest extent possible
- iii. Contribute to promoting the arts and creative economy in the Square by:
  - a. promoting partner events
  - b. creating business features
  - c. participating in zoning amendments
  - d. evaluating pursuing Cultural District designation





## Create a favorable environment for local businesses and advocate on issues that directly affect their ability to succeed

- 2A. Articulate what a favorable business environment is and work with the City and other stakeholders to achieve it**
- i. Survey businesses to document timelines for getting common permits and licenses, including ethnicity metrics, and work with the City to publish reports quarterly
  - ii. Develop multiple ways to gather input from the multilingual business community
  - iii. Provide regular feedback and recommendations to the City on business concerns
  - iv. Influence parking strategy planning to ensure appropriate distribution of parking throughout the district (also 3Ai)
  - v. Continue to foster collaboration and mentorship among local businesses
- 2B. Identify challenges faced by minority-owned businesses and minority employees and develop mitigation strategies**
- i. Dedicate 90% of bilingual Business Liaison's focus to serving independently-owned businesses owned by immigrants and POC and BIPOC individuals
  - ii. Survey minority-owned businesses to document and better understand perceptions of bias, obstacles to effective participation in business organizations, and cultural barriers
  - iii. Survey minority-owned businesses to document and better understand demand for additional business planning training and what kind, impacts from the lack of minority business organizations, and challenges to accessing capital
  - iv. Document impacts related to language as a barrier
- 2C. Mitigate commercial displacement**
- i. Advocate for small business displacement mitigation strategies such as "commercial inclusionary zoning" and/or rent control
  - ii. Assist businesses displaced or impacted by Union Square development
  - iii. Explore additional strategies using strategic planning intern report as a resource



Learn More!





## Advocate and drive action towards a more welcoming, walkable, and small-business friendly Square

### 3A. Increase the walkability of the Square

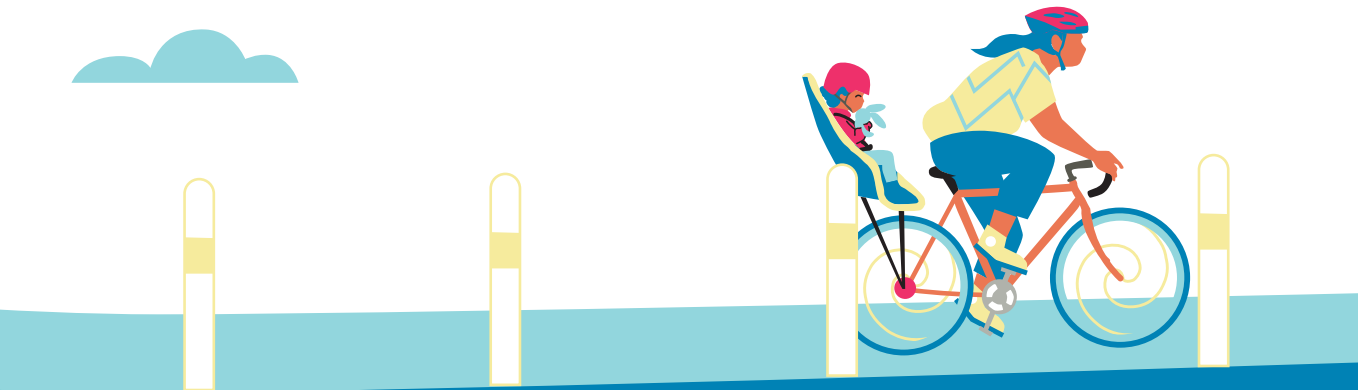
- i. Advocate for a mobility hub plan that addresses the proper location for parking while balancing access and walkability
- ii. Develop a walkability campaign to incentivize non-vehicular travel and increase daytime foot traffic
- iii. Collaborate with local grassroots traffic calming and pedestrian safety community initiatives
- iv. Advocate to reduce the amount of road coverage in Union Square

### 3B. Establish district-wide projects that upgrade the look of the Square

- i. Collaborate with the City to implement a brand strategy that establishes the identity of Union Square in the public realm
- ii. Add/improve multilingual wayfinding systems, plantings, lighting, green space and seating to make Union Square more welcoming and attractive
- iii. Create opportunities for temporary and permanent public art installations and performances with an emphasis on working with artists of color
- iv. Train Board & volunteers to walk the Square to report concerns to 311 & USMS
- v. Encourage landlords not planning imminent development to make improvements

### 3C. Establish a role for USMS in the public realm improvement process

- i. Broaden Board membership to increase urban planning and design expertise
- ii. Actively participate in zoning amendments and variances when appropriate (also 1Biv)
- iii. Monitor and attend relevant City meetings to provide comment on relevant projects
- iv. Actively participate in redesign of Plaza including outreach to diverse residents and patrons



### Did you know

500+ neighbors shared their thoughts and input on this strategic plan! The surveys they filled out were provided in English, Spanish, and Portuguese.



## Strengthen the neighborhood connection to, and support for, businesses and USMS

### 4A. Increase community visits to Union Square businesses

- i. Assist businesses with social media strategies to reach more local customers
- ii. Build on current marketing campaigns (e.g., #LoveUnionSquare campaign) to attract customers, prioritizing diverse businesses
- iii. Position USMS events to benefit businesses to the greatest extent possible
- iv. Develop better understanding of where customers originate to more effectively target campaigns

### 4B. Increase community support of the local business community

- i. Develop a strong narrative on the impact of shopping local at small businesses
- ii. Incorporate/promote the City of Somerville's Diversity Catalog and/or other similar listings in USMS campaigns

### 4C. Build relationships between the community and USMS

- i. Articulate USMS' mission and values to the community
- ii. Promote short-term volunteer opportunities for residents (e.g., bulb planting, farmers market, etc.)
- iii. Increase USMS "Community Supporter" contributors (also 6Aii)



Volunteer!

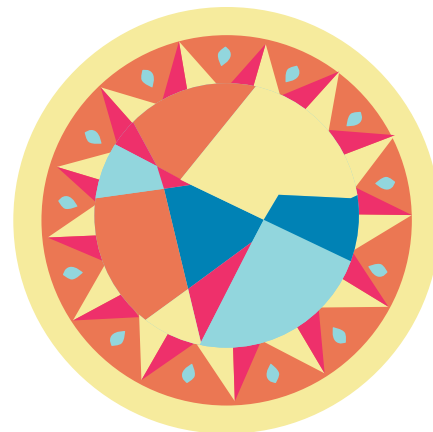




## Strengthen collaboration with City government and other nonprofits

### 5A. Establish USMS as a primary resource for all things Union Square

- i. Present a summary of USMS goals and achievements to the City administration and City Council annually
- ii. Present annual report detailing Union Square business diversity composition in conjunction with promoting the City's Diversity Catalog
- iii. Initiate collaborations with more partners dedicated to expanding equitable economic opportunity
- iv. Build on relationships cultivated during COVID relief efforts to position USMS as a resource, a convener, and a voice for all things Union Square





## Develop short- and long-term funding solutions

- 6A. Ensure that planned programming is funded through June 2023**
- Create a financial model that monitors the progress of supplementing federal funding with private
  - Expand USMS individual, unrestricted donor base of Community Supporters
  - Grow business membership revenue
  - Secure three 3-year recurring sponsorships
  - Research grant-making organizations to meet short- and long-term goals with an emphasis on funders aiming to expand economic opportunity for minority businesses
- 6B. Make recommendation about future business model by June 2023**
- Research alternative business models; assess fit and timing
  - Create a financial model to project the impact of alternate business models
  - Cultivate relationships with and support from stakeholders: elected officials, city staff, property owners, and the public to advance preferred business model
  - Initiate conversation with business and wider community about alternative models
- 6C. Increase organizational capacity**
- Identify and secure resources to assist with fundraising and grant writing
  - Organize a fundraising training session for Board of Directors
  - Increase volunteer capacity to address existing and emerging needs



*"I love the way USMS works, and the fact that you operate as a 'public radio-like' model where you help out businesses whether they pay or not, made us want to donate even more!"*

– Community Supporter





# THANK YOU

We are grateful to the many individuals who invested their time and efforts into this strategic planning process.

We'd also like to extend a special thank you to the members of our Board and Strategic Planning Team for their leadership, vision, and support. We are also forever indebted to our strategic plan consultants, Empower Success Corps, whose guidance, expertise, and nuanced understanding of USMS' competing priorities made this endeavor possible.

The contributions of each of these individuals (and more!) will help lead us into our next 17 years of service and beyond.

**Thank you.**

## USMS Board of Directors

**Zachary Baum** *President, Resident, Bow Market\**

**Philip Parsons** *Vice President, Resident & Strategic Planning Chair\**

**Mike Katz** *Clerk, Resident\**

**Jen Palacio** *Treasurer, Tiny Turns Paperie*

**Jim McGinnis** *Member at Large, Resident\**

**Debbie Musnikow** *Play Union*

**Laidy Saenz** *Quanta Startup Services and Workspaces*

**Jacob Taylor** *Resident*

**Jess Willis** *The Independent + Vera's*

Many thanks to former Board Members **Rob Buchanan** and **Stella Downie** for their *Strategic Planning Team service*, and **Maria Rondeau** of *celeste*, whose efforts contributed to the success of this process.

*\*Strategic Planning Team member*

## USMS Staff

**Jessica Eshleman** *Executive Director\**

**Kait Stinchcomb** *Director of Special Projects*

**Michael Robles** *Small Business Liaison*

**Sarah Brugge** *Program Manager*



Love Union Square?  
Donate Here!