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US2 celebrates the Union Square Station Plaza ribbon cutting

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Shown (from left) are: Kara Pellaton (US2); Greg Karczewski (US2); mayor Ballantyne; Shauna Gillies-Smith (Ground Inc.); Jeff Fishbone (Cranshaw Construction); and Tom Galligani (city of Somerville).

Somerville, MA Mayor Katjana Ballantyne and US2, the developers of the 20-acre USQ project, celebrated the opening of Union Square Station Plaza.

Station Plaza is a central design element within USQ and is the first of 12 new public spaces within the USQ master plan. By transforming an old metal scrap yard into a public oasis, Station Plaza responds to an unmistakable community desire for more open space, delivering an 18,000 s/f public

open space that links USQ's initial phase with the existing fabric of the neighborhood. Located at 50 Prospect St., Station Plaza connects USQ's new life sciences building and residential tower, 10-50 Prospect St., with the entrance to the new transit station, Union Square Station. US2 tapped Ground Inc., a female-owned, Somerville business, to design Station Plaza with sustainability and charm at the forefront of the design.

"Today is a very celebratory day for Somerville, Union Square and USQ. Station Plaza is a stunning centerpiece in our USQ development, and it invites the community to enjoy Union Square in a new way. In listening to the community's desires, The City of Somerville identified a vision for new public spaces like Station Plaza. We are so appreciative of the City of Somerville and Ground Inc. for helping us to create this thoughtful and spectacular civic space for all, and we cannot wait to see residents, workers and visitors enjoy it," said Greg Karczewski, president of US2.

"Union Square Station Plaza is more than just a space; it's part of a shared vision for a more inclusive, sustainable, and connected Somerville. I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has been part of this project including our hardworking City staff, the entire Somerville community, and especially US2 and Ground Inc. We would not be here today without their vision and commitment to developing this space from an old, unused scrap yard, into a stunning new public resource," said mayor Ballantyne.

"My work as a landscape architect is to set the stage for the drama of urban life. Somerville has a powerful energy and a unique ability to bring public spaces to life. We were so excited to be able to contribute this design to Union Square and we can't wait to see it in action," said Shauna Gilles-Smith, founding principal, ground inc.

In designing Station Plaza, Ground Inc. drew inspiration from the Millers River, which once ran through Union Sq., using the dynamic movement of the river as a metaphor. Station Plaza features swerving paving, reminiscent of water flowing, as well as of the flow of people coming to and from Union Sq. Lining each edge of the plaza are multiple "eddies" of seating, steps, and other gathering opportunities, while a sloping green along the street mimics a river's bank.

Station Plaza will celebrate public art. A cascading amphitheater marks the plaza's design, from which the city's love for festivals, celebrations and impromptu street performances can be showcased. Currently a large-scale mural, Restoration, by local artist Sophy Tuttle anchors the north end of the space, at 10 Prospect St. The Plaza features infrastructure to enable and support a variety of art installations in the future.

Visitors can settle in and watch the bustle of Union Sq. from an array of seating options, spanning over 600 linear feet, including both permanent concrete seat walls, seating platforms, and moveable tables and chairs. Its spatial organization accommodates ease of movement while encouraging lingering, meeting and even gathering for special events. Each evening, the sculptural shape of the seat walls will be highlighted with integrated lighting.

Helping Somerville achieve goals in sustainability, more than 70% of Station Plaza's surface is pervious, allowing water to percolate into the soil to filter out pollutants and recharge the water table – an unusual level of smart water management for such a major public space.

Boasting a diverse tree and plant palette, Station Plaza uses predominantly native and drought tolerant plants, including such trees as Black Gum, White Oak and American Hornbeam, shrubs including Serviceberry, Summersweet, and Winterberry, and more than 10,000 individual perennials, grasses or bulbs including Hay Scented Ferns, Pennsylvania Sedge, and Iris versicolor. A total of 54 trees were planted with 11 different species, ranging from smaller flowering trees to those that will provide an abundant canopy to mitigate the urban heat island effect. All trees have been given ample soil conditions for their roots to thrive, as well as silva cells to provide root capacity underneath hardscape areas and offer additional on-site stormwater management.

In the Spring of 2023, USQ delivered its first residential community, Prospect Union Square (20-50 Prospect St.), and began welcoming residents to its 450 units, including 90 affordable units. To the north of Station Plaza is 10 Prospect, a seven-story tower that will host up to 500 lab and innovation professionals when occupancy begins in 2024. Union Square Station Plaza is the first of 12 new open spaces in the USQ master plan, including a 29,000 SF park. Each of these new public spaces addresses community priorities and desires for active and passive green space, plazas, parks, places for community gardening, and dog-friendly areas.

As part of Somerville's economic revitalization, US2 aims to transform Union Square into a regional transit-oriented employment district that can proudly claim to be Somerville's "downtown." Like the grist mills and brickmaking that long ago fueled Somerville's economy, USQ will ignite a new economy as it attracts a diversity of industries – life sciences, technology, innovation and arts. Across 2.4 million square feet of new commercial spaces, USQ will welcome companies at all stages of growth, from new start-ups to growing companies to mature multi-national companies. USQ's commercial space will offer expanded opportunities to work and live in the neighborhood, as well as increase Somerville's commercial tax base by \$8.5 million annually and offer economic mobility for a wide range of Somerville residents through the creation of more than 4,000 construction jobs and 5,300 new permanent jobs.

To bring the initial phase of USQ to fruition, the team at US2 is working with Cranshaw Construction on residential and station plaza construction and Gilbane Building Company on lab construction. Bozzuto leads the residential leasing and property management. JLL focused on the property's life sciences and innovation leasing and Graffito SP handles the property's retail and placemaking leasing.