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At a town hall-style meeting with community business leaders on March 20, Mayor Joe Curtatone spoke enthusiastically about the changes expected to sweep Somerville in the next decade, touting the city's current assets while reiterating the theme that "we're just getting started" on transforming the city.

Why does he believe that? A positive attitude, he told 70 business leaders and town officials at the Davis Square Theater.

"People from all over ask me, why are people in Somerville so happy? Because we're all pulling together. It's an infectious attitude that permeates everything we do," said Curtatone.

At his eighth annual meeting with the Chamber of Commerce, Curtatone praised the city's business community, which expanded by 33 new businesses in the first three quarters of 2012. And he touted his vision of Somerville as a place where people live near where they work, where the Green Line Extension will add thousands of jobs in the east part of the city, and where the percentage of residents who live within a half mile of transit will rise from 15 to 85 percent once the Green Line Extension is completed. And he said he thinks Somerville's can-do attitude will help accomplish those changes.

But audience members at the town hall meeting expressed concerns about the potential effects of those changes, on issues ranging from parking to diversity. Some questions addressed how Curtatone and other officials will ensure that Somerville remains a place where recent immigrants and middle class people can afford to live.

Curtatone said he is concerned about maintaining the city's diversity, and about keeping young graduates in the Northeast as the cost of living rises in the region.

"As we think about what we'll be in the next 20 years: who can live there? What are recreational activities and jobs?" said Curtatone.

But Curtatone didn't offer any specific examples of how Somerville might ensure that the city remains diverse, beyond saying that he will advocate for more affordable housing in the city.

One audience member asked how city officials will ensure property owners and landlords in the city's eastern neighborhoods know about the projected sweeping changes of the next decade.

Curtatone pointed to the city's Central Broadway Initiative, a funding package for small business assistance and improvement in that area, as a potential educational opportunity. He also said officials need to make sure property owners know that the Green Line Extension is expected to transform that area.

The mayor listed several neighborhoods—Brickbottom, Inner Belt, Union Square, East Somerville and Winter Hill—that are expected to be transformed by the Green Line Extension. And he praised smaller parts of Somerville life as well, calling the city an active community where everyone knows their neighbor; touting businesses like Taza Chocolate that have gained international recognition; extolling street festivals, dog parks and community gardens.

However, he was also questioned on neighborhood disputes. One conflict over the future of Somerville involves parking. That controversy, played out in arenas such as meetings about a proposal to remove parking spaces on Beacon Street to make way for a cycle track, involves whether the city should prioritize parking and drivers over pedestrians and cyclists. Several questions at the town hall meeting involved that controversy, including one question about whether limiting parking spaces will hurt Somerville businesses.

But Curtatone said parking spaces are not what draw people to Somerville.

"You have Millenials, hipsters who want to live in a vibrant, walkable community. People don't move here for parking," he said.

Another audience member complained that the parking meters in Davis Square are operational until 8 p.m., instead of 6 p.m. But Curtatone said the parking situation in Davis is designed to shuffle people through at a speed that allows them to get the goods and services they require, then move on.

"We don't want some car parked in Davis at 6 p.m. for six hours. We want new consumers coming in," he said.

Other questions dealt with specific projects, such as the proposal for a hotel in Davis Square, the fate of the former site of the Powderhouse School, and the fate of the Union Square Post Office.

Curtatone said he does not know who purchased the Union Square Post Office, but he assured the audience that city officials will make sure the new business there complements the city.

"The city won't support some free-standing retail operation that doesn't align with our vision of the future," said Curtatone.

As Somerville strives to attract a creative class, its festivals and street parties expand correspondingly. One question dealt with how the city can encourage such events. Curtatone said he thinks the city should have block parties during blizzards and festivals, but that city officials need to revise old ordinances that make such events difficult.

"We've learned in the last decade that we need to make it more easy," said Curtatone. "We've evolved into a creative

neighborhood, but our ordinances are behind."

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