WICKED LOCAL SOMERVILLE
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Officials unveil proposal for grounding Somerville's McGrath Highway

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Wicked Local Somerville
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Somerville — State agencies are beginning the long process of grounding McGrath Highway, the elevated road that bisects East Somerville and that officials call an outdated relic of a discredited era of urban planning.

At a meeting at the Argenziano School in Somerville on May 15, Massachusetts Department of Transportation officials said their agency is now in the planning stages of converting McGrath Highway from an elevated road into a ground-level boulevard.

Ralph Denisco, a planner with Nelson/Nygaard who's working with the state on the project, said the agency was faced with four options for the aging highway: keep it, move it, bring it down or partially ground it.

"People want to bring it down," said Denisco.

Officials at the meeting said they were enthusiastic about the possibility of knitting together neighborhoods, fostering economic growth and complementing the Green Line Extension that's expected to transform the eastern half of the city in the next decade.

"The exciting thing for me is knowing that at some point in my lifetime, I won't be looking at the monster that's there," said Ward 2 Alderman Maryann Heuston.

Residents agreed that the state should ground McGrath, but questioned specific tenets of the proposal, such as the plan to build a six-lane highway.

"I think you guys have made fantastic strides," said Carice Reddien, a Cambridge resident. "But check your assumptions. Make sure this isn't through a highway design lens."

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