

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

REAL PROPERTY REUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

TUESDAY, MAY 25, 2010

Present: Ald. Danberg (Chairman), Ald. Baker, Crossley, Linsky, Fischman, Merrill, and Gentile; absent: Ald. Salvucci

Other Aldermen: Ald. Albright, Fuller, Shapiro, and Blazar

City staff: Candace Havens (Interim Director of Planning & Development), Ouida Young (Associate City Solicitor), Joseph LaCroix (Fire Chief), Linda Finucane (Assistant Clerk of the Board)

#160-09        DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT requesting discussion of potential redevelopment of a block of land bounded by Willow, Centre and Lyman Streets, to include the existing 60,850 sq. ft. Fire Department headquarters and Station #3 site.

ACTION:        HELD 7-0

NOTE:         Attorney Jason Rosenberg and architect Anatol Zukerman of Archiart Associates joined the committee. Mr. Zukerman and architect Russ Feldman of TBA have worked for several years with Giancarlo Micozzi, who owns the parcel that contains the Dellaria Salon. Mr. Feldman was unable to attend this meeting. Mr. Rosenberg explained that this evening's PowerPoint reflects refinements made to this private/public partnership proposal over the past three years. He said this project is not intended to replace any parking spaces that in the future may be lost in the triangle lot. Located on the periphery of the Newton Centre business district, the site contains 2.4 acres (Mr. Micozzi owns 9,700 sq. ft.; the city owns 61,000 sq. ft. and the MWRA owns 37,600 sq. ft.). Essentially, the proposal includes a new fire station and headquarters funded in exchange for the right to build a mixed-use development of housing and commercial/retail space. According to Mr. Rosenberg, several developers have expressed interest in the project.

The current iteration includes:

- A new fire station, which will include headquarters and the relocated wire division;
- A 3-tier parking deck, with one deck below grade, containing 308 parking spaces, with another 17 spaces on Lyman Street in a proposed shadow lane. 215 spaces would be for commuters and 22 spaces reserved for the Fire Department.
- 88 or 92 units of housing (14 affordable units) with one parking space each; units are one- and two-bedrooms, ranging from 857 to 1072 sq. ft.
- Commercial uses require approximately 159 parking spaces. Preliminary discussions with potential tenants include a 15,000 sf grocery store. In meetings of the Newton Centre Task Force and with neighbors, other uses people would like include a bakery and hardware store.

- Cross sections show the tallest building at 5-stories, the same as the rear of Casselman House, stepping down toward Willow Street to 3 stories, which approximates the height of the homes on Willow Street.
- No building may occur on the MWRA property and the MWRA does not sell property or give easements, but a retaining wall is proposed along that property to level the grass area and create more usable open space.
- A marker memorializing the muster of pre-Revolutionary War troops on the Green is proposed.

Although the Dellaria parcel is crucial to this proposal, ultimately, it is the Fire Chief who controls the development as proposed by his decision whether or not to surplus the fire station and headquarters. If the Chief declares the buildings surplus, that triggers the actual reuse process as circumscribed in ordinance §2-7. Ms. Young pointed out that the only authority given in §2-7 to the Board of Aldermen is setting the *minimum* sale or lease price. Authority to negotiate more than that minimum price is given to the Mayor; however, the Board in the case of significant reuse projects includes conditions that are expressed in *resolves* to the Mayor. These are usually conditions recommended by the Joint Advisory Planning Group (JAPG) and the Planning Department in their reports, which are also required by ordinance. It is highly unlikely that the Board of Aldermen would waive the formation of a JAPG for a project of this size.

Alderman Crossley expressed her excitement about the proposal. It is fortunate that people have put this level of energy and creativity to think outside the box. The city is desperate for small housing units to let older people who downsize remain here. Alderman Fuller praised the creativity of the business people involved, but feels the city should have a vision for Newton Center beyond getting a new fire station/headquarters. When informed that a new fire station/headquarters would cost approximately \$5-7 million and the new project would result in approximately \$1 million annually in taxes, Alderman Shapiro said he is troubled by the *quid pro quo* aspect. Alderman Fischman pointed out that the city doesn't have \$7 million to shell out. Alderman Gentile brought up that fire station #3 is still scheduled for renovation. Although he had reservations, he has tried to keep an open mind about this proposal, but squeezing 90 housing units plus parking and commercial/retail space on 2.4 acres doesn't excite him. Why jam every piece of open space in the city. He is not interested in pursuing a project he sees as not good for the city or in the long run for Newton Centre. He is concerned about wasting staff time, particularly when the Planning Department is so short staffed. Alderman Merrill agreed with Alderman Gentile. Chief LaCroix said that station #3 is still scheduled for renovation, but that does not include headquarters or the EOC, 26 circuits for mutual aid that is now housed in a conference room.

Ms. Havens asked the committee what it saw as the next step. Members, with the exception of Alderman Gentile, agreed that it would like to see the following:

- Project feasibility report;
- Costs and benefits analysis for this proposal;
- Economic costs and benefits and the parameters for development if the city were to develop the site.

John Pears, who is an architect and member of the Economic Development Commission, said he would be happy to help the Planning Department pro bono.

The Committee voted 6-1, with Alderman Gentile opposed, to ask Ms. Havens to prepare the aforementioned reports as well as an outline to be reviewed by the Chairman and Vice Chairman as a step towards crafting a Request for Interest.

The item was held 7-0.

#150-09            DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT requesting a discussion re the potential redevelopment of the Austin Street municipal parking lot in Newtonville for mixed-use development, including affordable housing.

ACTION:           HELD 7-0

NOTE: The committee discussed this item on March 23, 2010. The site was visited by several committee members and Ms. Havens this morning. Last week, Ms. Havens e-mailed committee members and the ward 2 Aldermen an updated Request for Interest (RFI), dated May 15, 2010. Several members questioned the specificity of the RFI, but were persuaded that a fair amount of detail is necessary to generate interest in the property; although, if it is too specific it could fail to generate any response. The Committee did suggest that perhaps the RFI clarify the permitting process in Newton, i.e., reuse, zone change, special permit, etc.

Although Philip Bram Way, the driveway that runs from Austin Street to Highland Avenue, looks like a private way, it is part of the Austin Street lot. The city envisions it remaining as it is, a way to the Senior Center and a de facto service road for businesses, but the whole parcel is in play, at least at the onset. Not separating it could contribute to the density of a proposed project as added value to a developer.

The Committee was pleased with the RFI and agreed that Ms. Havens should post it on the city's website on June 1. The item was held 7-0.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Danberg, Chairman