

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

REAL PROPERTY REUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2010

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

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

Also present: Josephine McNeil (CAN-DO), Phil Herr (Newton Housing Action Plan Initiative [HAPI]), and John Wilson (Newton Housing Partnership)

#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 5-0

#150-09(2) REAL PROPERTY REUSE COMMITTEE requesting that a working group consisting of Reuse members Aldermen Crossley and Linsky, along with Ward 2 Aldermen Albright and Johnson meet with the Executive Department, the Commissioner of Public Works, and the Planning Department to review the potential redundancy and future use of the Austin Street municipal parking lot and report its findings to the Real Property Reuse Committee by the end of October 2010.

ACTION: APPROVED 5-0

NOTE: The Committee discussed docket item #150-09 on November 24, 2009 and March 23 and May 25, 2010. Reports for those meetings are on the aldermanic web page under Committees/Real Property Reuse. The concept of developing the Austin Street parking lot and reconfiguring the parking began in 2005. The Newton Housing Plan Initiative (HAPI), whose goal is to help the city implement housing-related aims, particularly those articulated in the Comprehensive Plan, held a number of workshops. After exploring a number of potential uses, HAPI ultimately envisioned a mixed residential/commercial development that would retain a number of the current parking spaces for the existing businesses and the Senior Center.

In May the Committee reviewed and approved a Request for Interest (RFI) drafted by the Planning Department. The RFI was posted and the Planning Department received three letters of interest (attached). Responding were First Cambridge Realty, represented this evening by

Attorney Terry Morris; Newton Community Development Foundation, represented by Bob Engler; and, B’Nai B’rith Housing Newton England, represented by Holly Grace.

Consensus is this would be an opportunity for Newtonville and the city as a whole. A successful public/private partnership could bring the city not only tax revenue but in-kind benefits as well. By demonstrating how the city can do things well, it could be something to be emulated in other village centers. However, everyone concurred that the city needs to define what it wants vs. what it would like to allow a realistic assessment of the project’s financial viability. The multiple objectives need to be further refined. At this stage it is difficult to attempt to put together a pro forma. For example:

- metes & bounds of land
- baseline value of land
- sale or long-term ground lease
- acquisition cost
- baseline affordability
- on-grade or below-grade parking; financial feasibility of a two-level parking facility
- number/size of residential units
- practicality of second-floor retail.

The Committee was reminded of Warren Junior High, where the reuse languished for approximately ten years before it was finally converted to housing.

The conundrum is that although this committee has held preliminary discussions, the reuse process set out in §2-7 that requires a formal analysis by the Planning Department and allows the formation of a Joint Advisory Planning Group, both of which would define the “wants” to allow development of a Request for Proposals, has not been triggered because the property has not yet been declared surplus. The sole authority given to the Board of Aldermen in §2-7 is to set the *minimum* sale or lease price. Typically, the Board offers *resolutions* to the Mayor requesting that he impose other conditions relative to the sale or lease of the property and/or building. GL chapter 30B, the Uniform Procurement Act, requires the project go out to bid. The successful applicant will have to petition the Board for a change of zone (all city-owned land is zoned Public Use) and a special permit.

In an effort to advance this potential objective, Alderman Baker suggested forming a small group to meet with the Mayor, the Planning Department and the DPW Commissioner, whose jurisdiction the parking lot is under. It would report its recommendations to the committee at the end of October. The committee agreed and resolved that the group should include Alderman

Linsky and Aldermen Albright and Johnson, the two other aldermen from Ward 2, and that Alderman Crossley given her profession as an architect participate as well.

All other items were held and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Victoria Danberg, Chairman