

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

REAL PROPERTY REUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

TUESDAY, MAY 26, 2009

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

Other Aldermen present: Ald. Linsky and Albright

Also present: John Wilson (Newton Housing Partnership), Phil Herr (Chair Comprehensive Planning Committee), Rob Gifford (Economic Development Commission)

City staff: Michael Kruse and Candace Havens (Planning Department) and Linda Finucane (Clerk)

#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: Alderman Linsky voiced his support of this item before he left to attend the Committee on Community Preservation. Phil Herr gave a PowerPoint presentation (attached) and an overview of HAPI, the Newton Housing Plan Initiative, whose goal is to help the city implement housing-related aims, particularly those articulated in the Comprehensive Plan. The 11 organizations that participate in HAPI have held 5 workshops and identified approximately a dozen actions including exploring several public sites for potential reuse. Alderman Johnson noted that the concept of developing the Austin Street lot with reconfigured parking began in 2005. Last year, interns for the design firm Sasaki Associates included development of the lot as part of a sketch plan made for Newtonville square. That sketch showed one large residential structure. HAPI envisions a mixed residential/commercial development. The committee agreed that although the existing parking lot appears to be underutilized, it is important to retain a number of parking spaces for the existing businesses and the Senior Center.

The purpose of bringing this item before the committee – where the process will begin if a proposal is submitted and the parking lot declared surplus– is to get a sense of the physical, economic, and political feasibility for a public/private partnership development. Currently, the concept is in a preliminary stage and several steps away from the city's issuing a request for proposals. If the sense of the committee is positive, the goal is to put together a package of information by the end of 2009 so the city can begin the formal process for such development. If there is no positive sense, then at least the impediments will be identified and can be addressed. Mr. Kruse asked for a straw vote from the committee this evening.

In response to questions relative to the current economic downturn, Lynn Sweet, of LDS Consulting and a member of HAPI, said that now is the time to plan and that to developers and financiers a project this size is considered small and therefore less risky.

The Chairman asked the committee for a straw vote as to whether the Planning Department should proceed to put together a package to present the committee and the public. The committee voted 7-0-1, with Alderman Gentile abstaining, in the affirmative. The item was held, as were the other items, and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Carleton P. Merrill, Chairman