

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

REAL PROPERTY REUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2009

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

City staff: Linda Finucane (Chief Committee Clerk), Ben Solomon-Schwartz (Senior Planner), Candace Havens (Chief Planner)

Also present: Phil Herr, Newton Housing Action Plan Initiative (HAPI)

#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: REFERRED TO 2010-2011 BOARD

NOTE: HAPI representative Phil Herr and Planning Director Mike Kruse presented this item to the Committee on May 25, 2009, when the Committee voted informally to support the concept. Mr. Kruse was at the Zoning Board of Appeals this evening, but Mr. Herr joined the Committee. Mr. Herr said that since May, additional studies were undertaken and various plans for reuse were discussed in HAPI workshops in June and September. HAPI will take it up again at its final workshop on December 17 and Mr. Herr anticipates that following that workshop, the study report incorporating a draft Request for Interest will be presented to the Mayor-elect. He reminded the Committee that out of the 8-9 sites identified for potential development by the Comprehensive Plan the Austin Street lot was chosen because it looked the least troublesome. Other than a grant of \$10,000, many people, including architects John Wilson and Rick Heym, have worked pro bono.

Site issues include infrastructure: water service in Austin Street is only a 6" main and the sewer line has a history of backups. The Engineering Division has recommended that a TV inspection be performed to determine the adequacy of storm drainage facilities. The intersection of Walnut and Austin Streets nearly-but-not-quite opposite Newtonville Avenue is seriously flawed and should be redesigned and reconstructed whether a new development occurs or not.

Because the parking lot is currently zoned Public Use, a rezoning will be necessary. HAPI recommends that a Business 4 District, which abuts the site, would be appropriate and allow more height – probably 4-5 stories maximum. A modest sketch shows a 4-story building above one below-grade level and containing about 18,000 sf of business floor area, 18 housing units, and sufficient parking for both the new uses and replacement spaces for the ones displaced from the parking lot. A more aggressive sketch shows approximately 24,000 sf of business floor area, all retail, and 30 housing units, plus required parking for the new uses and replacement spaces. Currently, the lot contains 159 parking spaces, of which 129 are available to the public, and a Goodwill trailer. Recent parking studies show that on average 81-90 spaces are occupied daily.

An aggressive alternate could create 58 jobs, 5 more Cabot School pupils, 1,290 trip ends per day (a 15.7% increase), new growth tax levy of \$304,000 with a net revenue after costs of \$40,000. Mr. Herr pointed out that if the site is transferred with no cost to a developer, the real cost is to replace the parking, which is approximately \$15,000 per space. Other gains would include the infrastructure improvements. Ideally, the project could be underway in 2011.

Should the new Mayor choose to proceed, additional steps include:

- refinement of the RFI by City staff and others
- issuance of the RFI
- review of responses by City officials/organizations including the Economic Development Commission and the Housing Partnership
- declaration of surplus by the Commissioner of Public Works and subsequent reuse process through the Board of Aldermen
- issuance of a Request for Proposals

Mr. Herr agreed to the Committee's request to return to its successor so that it might have a look at the refined RFI. The Committee then thanked Mr. Herr and asked him to convey its appreciation to the other members of various organizations who have worked on this proposal, and voted to hold the item and refer it to the next Board.

The following items were referred without discussion to the 2010-2011 Board of Aldermen:

- #212-08 ALD. YATES proposing that Section 2-7 be amended by requiring that branch libraries funded in whole or in part by neighborhood contributions be only made available to the original donor neighborhood association, its successor organization, or similar organization serving the same needs.
REFERRED TO 2010-2011 BOARD
- #470-08 ALD. HESS-MAHAN & BRANDEL requesting a discussion with the Executive and Planning & Development Departments re the development of a city policy with respect to augmenting cell equipment rental income by leasing municipal properties.
REFERRED TO 2010-2011 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.
REFERRED TO 2010-2011 BOARD

Respectfully submitted,
Carleton P. Merrill, Chairman