

West Newton Armory JAPG
Notes from October 14, 2020 Meeting
Zoom Meeting
7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
FINAL

In attendance:

JAPG: Jonathan Katz, Anita Lichtblau, Ted Hess-Mahan, Sue Parsons, Mitch Fischman, Larry Bauer, David Koven, Barry Abramson.

Newton Planning Department: Amanda Berman, Director of Housing and Community Development, Eamon Bencivengo, Housing Development Planner, Barney Heath, Director of Planning,

Affirmative Investments (AI) Consultant Team: David Ennis, Adam Goldstein, Tara Mizrahi, Adam Goldstein, Michael Kaufman, Project Architect, and Albert Rex, Historic Consultant

Ward 3 City Councilor Malakie, Ward 3 Councilor-at-large Wright, and Members of the General Public.

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting (09/10/2020)

Unanimously approved by roll call without reading or comment

2. AI Consultant Team Presentation

Focus was on historic issues. On 10/16, AI will provide pro formas and some design concepts to JAPG in advance of meeting with them following Monday (10/19/20).

Albert Rex summarized process relative to historic process and tax credits (he will follow up with a written summary – timing not specified) and David Ennis spoke to process and analysis issues.

Major points were:

- AI met with DCAMM which was very positive about working/engaging in a dialogue with City. AI reported that the building does not have to be retained but if City wants to make changes to it, the City would need to work with DCAMM and Mass Historic Commission (MHC).
- A Memorandum of Agreement between DCAMM, MHC and City (to be represented by City's Historic Commission and Planning Dept.) would specify a process for review.
- While building is not currently on the national register, it is eligible for listing, so would effectively be treated as such for regulatory review.
- A Project Notification Form (PNF) would be required resulting in a finding of either adverse effect or no adverse effect.
- Extensive renovation, partial demolition, and full demolition are all possibilities. DCAMM would want to see analysis and good faith effort has been made to attempt to avoid, minimize, or mitigate alterations or demolition and why less intrusive approaches are not viable.
- There is precedent for full demolition of armories in MA.

- DCAMM can put an historic covenant on the property (i.e. the level and nature of alteration that would be allowed) either negotiated with the City and MHC prior to the City's RFP of property or kicked down the road to be negotiated with the developer.
- MHC would be more accepting of alterations negotiated with municipality than with developer. If the City can RFP the property with the maximum alteration that could be made already staked out rather than leaving that for the developer to negotiate, the more attractive the opportunity (and lower the project cost/risk) to potential developers.
- A PNF has already been submitted to MHC and a finding of adverse impact is anticipated in one month. The negotiation process might take anywhere from 3 to 7 months.
- The building is very unlikely to be physically and financially viable for an affordable housing project without significant changes that would render it ineligible for historic tax credits.
- The Natick and Plymouth armories in which the headhouses and drill sheds were retained with significant changes to the drill sheds did not get historic tax credits. The Lynn Armory, currently being redeveloped for affordable housing, did get historic tax credits, but that was a very different building and entailed a challenging appeal process.
- Retaining the headhouse while significantly altering or demolishing the drill shed would not result in partial tax credits – It's all or nothing. Would need to retain 2/3 of the volume of the drill shed open to be eligible for tax credits but this would not be an adequate intervention for housing.
- AI will be presenting analysis of 4 alternatives
 - Retaining building (both headhouse and drill shed) with substantial alterations. This is not anticipated to be financially viable
 - Two scenarios in which headhouse is retained with some modifications and drill shed is demolished and replaced with new construction at two different levels.
 - Complete demolition with new construction.
- Maximum build-out scenario(s) entailing partial or total new construction assume 40B exceeding current zoning, constrained by height (max 5 stories), massing, parking, traffic considerations that could plausibly reach community consensus.
- A scenario such as that in Natick or Plymouth in which walls/foundations of drill shed were retained with significant alteration along with headhouse is not being carried forward to analysis because AI's preliminary capacity analysis and experience indicate that would not yield enough units for an affordable housing project (as opposed to market rate as in Natick and Plymouth) without historic tax credits to be financially feasible.
- Cost estimates in pro formas will be based on AI's experience with multiple projects. At this point "there's nothing to show a cost estimator". Hard cost per sq ft is estimated at: \$425 for historic preservation; \$400 for headhouse; \$350 for new construction, assuming non-union.

Committee members raised following issues:

- Need to consider aesthetic and community issues as well as financial performance.
- Depending on cost, financial feasibility of armory redevelopment alternatives, may want to consider alternative entailing development of affordable housing at alternate location.

3. Other Committee Discussion

Following AI presentation, committee discussed report and various other points, notably:

- Report edit to clarify that if City were to acquire property for municipal use, price would be FMV for the intended use which, based on past experience with other DCAMM armory dispositions, would be significantly discounted from FMV without such constraint (e.g. perhaps 25% of unconstrained FMV; best expressed in a range).
- AI should provide a permit chart/road map and schedule. This should be provided in time to be inserted or excerpted/summarized in JAPG report.
- Planning staff would like to negotiate MOA in advance of RFP with assistance of AI.
- It would be good to have Newton Historic Commission attend next JAPG meeting to bring them into process, fully understand issues.
- DCAMM wouldn't allow City to profit from lease.
- City has given AI parameter of project that can get done with a set amount of City funding per unit.
- Planning staff indicated prevailing wage would be required if CDBG, HOME funding involved.
- Committee schedule going forward:
 - Target late October/early November to allow Reuse committee to conclude by end of year
 - Reuse committee meeting Oct 20 and 3rd week of Nov
 - AI is fairly close to completing Phase 1. They'll provide pro formas and preliminary concept plans adequate to understand by Friday with narrative report to follow at later date
 - Next JAPG meeting to be scheduled for week of Oct 26 to allow time for follow-up Q&A with AI, if any required
 - A final JAPG meeting will be scheduled for week of Nov 2 to finalize report recommendation

Meeting adjourned

Submitted by Barry Abramson