

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

REAL PROPERTY REUSE COMMITTEE REPORT

THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2013

Present: Ald. Albright (Chairman), Ald. Gentile, Crossley, and Fischman; absent: Ald. Laredo, Linsky, and Salvucci; also present: Ald. Harney, Hess-Mahan

City staff: Candace Havens (Director of Planning & Development), Eve Tapper (Chief Planner for Long Range Planning), Linda Finucane (Assistant Clerk of the Board)

#384-11(4) JOINT ADVISORY PLANNING GROUP and PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT filing their separate reports pursuant to Ordinance Sec. 2-7(2)b) identifying alternatives for the future use of the former Parks & Recreation site at 70 Crescent Street, Auburndale, which was declared surplus by the Board of Aldermen on February 6, 2012.

ACTION: HELD 4-0

NOTE: The committee reviewed the April 5, 2013 Planning Department memorandum, attached. One of the questions raised at the February 26 meeting was the number of vehicle trips per day generated by the Parks & Recreation Department. Although the exact number cannot be confirmed the site supported 25 employees with their vehicles which, assuming that each employee remained on-site making only two trips per day, generated approximately 50 trips per day, in addition there were 12 department cars, trucks, and an average of 10 visitors per day, all of which would have generated 50-100 total vehicle trips per day. The projection for a low-rise residential development is 10-20 vehicles trips per day. Although it is likely this number would be somewhat higher, it still would be fewer trips and no trucks.

The Planning Department recommends that the Commissioner declare surplus the portion of the site currently used as a playground to allow flexibility in the design of the proposed residential development and improve access to the playground for the entire neighborhood. The relocated park should be at least equal in size to the existing playground, which is approximately 37,000 square feet, which still leaves 67,000 square feet for residential development — nobody has expressed interest in a larger development. It was pointed out that the city would have to determine whether the park is protected Article 97 land before declaring it surplus. If it is determined that it is subject to Article 97 a change in status will require a two-thirds vote from the General Court.

The committee reviewed with architect and JAPG Chair Mark Armstrong a compilation of the density studies (Attachment A of the April 5 memorandum) prepared by the JAPG which helped them come to the conclusions in their report. The scenarios range from low-density 7 single-family dwellings; medium density of 8 cluster units; medium density of 12 cluster units, medium density of 16 cluster units, and medium density of 21 townhouse units and from 1200 to 1800 sq. ft. , 2-5 stories. Square footage can provide diverse units, however, interior space, e.g. the number of bedrooms, cannot legally be regulated. Although cluster development is not that

popular it tends to be compact and promotes, albeit shared, open space. While Floor Area Ratio does not apply to attached dwellings it can be used to get a sense of density; however, it is not a design tool like other elements such as modulated facades. For example, porches break up the mass of the 10 units at 192 Lexington Street. Neighborhood context needs to be considered relative to density and design. The Request for Proposals can include some controls.

The diversity of a project is driven by the market: bigger units subsidize smaller, affordable units. The committee was in agreement that 25% of the units should be affordable. Rezoning the parcel from Public Use to Multi Residence 1 prior to the RFP allows a potential developer to know upfront what can be done on the site whether by right or by special permit. Rev. Howard Haywood of Myrtle Baptist Church reiterated his support for the affordable housing component.

Jeremy and Jessica Merle of 96 Crescent Street believe that the square footage of the units should be consistent with the rest of the neighborhood.

The committee was not prepared to vote this evening. Crucial to further discussion is whether the existing playground is Article 97 land. The committee voted 4-0 to hold the item. All other business was held without discussion and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan S. Albright, Chairman



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Candace Havens
Director

M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: April 5, 2013
TO: Real Property Reuse Committee of the Board of Aldermen
FROM: Candace Havens, Director of Planning and Development 
Eve Tapper, Chief Planner for Current Planning
RE: Disposition of 70 Crescent Street
MEETING DATE: April 11, 2013
CC: Josh Morse, Acting Commissioner of Public Buildings
Bob DeRubeis, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation

In response to questions raised at the Real Property Reuse Committee public hearings held on February 26, 2013, the Planning Department is providing the following information for the upcoming working session. This information is supplemental to staff analysis previously provided at the public hearing.

PETITION #384-11(4)

70 Crescent Street

Did the JAPG and the Planning Department look at the site holistically? The City-owned property has two distinct uses on it – the buildings and facilities now and formerly used by the Parks and Recreation Department and a playground fenced off from the structures and accessible only via the private property of Myrtle Baptist Church. When the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation declared the site surplus, he only included the portion of the property where the buildings are located. The playground area was not included. Nevertheless, both the JAPG’s and the Planning Department’s reports include a recommendation that any new development on the site should improve access to playground which is a well-used neighborhood amenity. In addition, there were several questions and comments regarding the playground/open space at the Committee’s public hearing and subsequent scoping session in February. The Planning Department believes that the playground portion of the site should be declared surplus as well to officially open up the entire site for potential reuse. This should only be done with a condition that a playground remain somewhere on the site and that it be publicly accessible at all times.

Will the reuse proposed by the JAPG and the Planning Department be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood? The role of the JAPG and the Real Property Reuse Committee at this stage in the process is to recommend whether to issue an RFP for the sale or lease of the site. While there is significant discussion in the JAPG ‘s and Planning Department’s reports about the number of housing units that might be appropriate on the site, these are only estimates of what would be

allowed by right or with a special permit if the property were to be rezoned to Multi Residence-1 or Multi Residence-2, which are the predominate existing zones in the surrounding area. If a by-right development is proposed then there are set dimensional standards that must be met for any construction and these are the same as those that must be met by other residences elsewhere in the neighborhood. If the site is developed with more density than is allowed by right, a special permit from the Board of Aldermen would be required and as with all special permit applications, the Board must find that the proposed development “will not adversely affect the neighborhood.” The Planning Department is comfortable that these safeguards will ensure that any proposed reuse of the site will fit in with the surrounding area.

How did the JAPG determine what it considers the appropriate density for the site? Attachment A is a compilation of the density studies prepared by JAPG members to aid the group in coming to their conclusions. The JAPG report itself details how these studies were used. In particular, the JAPG wants to ensure that any project is both beneficial to the City and economically feasible and attractive to a private developer.

What will the traffic impacts of a new use on this site be on the surrounding neighborhood? The Planning Department’s report includes a section on infrastructure. The report notes that based on Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Trip Generation Manual standards, which are used most often to project traffic generation for particular uses, a low-rise residential condominium development such as the use recommended by the JAPG memo will generate between 10-20 vehicle trips per day. In contrast, a single-tenant office building, similar to the former Parks and Recreation Department use, generates between 50-100 vehicle trips per day. One member of the Committee asked that the Planning Department confirm the actual number of trips generated by the Parks and Recreation Department. While we do not have a firm number, there were at least 20 employees on site. That figure alone translates to more than 40 trips per day (each employee roundtrip to work and home) if they stayed on site the entire day. This also does not include the truck traffic that was likely generated by the vehicle used to maintain the City’s parks system. As this was the Department headquarters, there were also “customers” who came to the site.

RECOMMENDATION

If the Board would like to explore reuse of this site holistically, the Commissioner of Parks and Recreation must declare surplus the portion of the site currently used for the playground. This area was not included in the Commissioner’s original declaration.

The Planning Department recommends that the Committee approve this docket item and recommend to the Mayor that he issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the reuse of the entire site with the following conditions:

1. The Commissioner of Parks and Recreation declares the entire site surplus to allow flexibility in the design of a residential development and park area and to facilitate improvements to vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle access to the site and the amenities thereon.
2. If the location of the existing playground is moved, the new park area should be at least equal in size to the existing amenity.

3. The Site should be rezoned to MR-1 to keep the scale of any new development compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.
4. A minimum of 25% of new housing units on the site should be “affordable.”

Existing Condition



Low Density 7 Single Family



Medium Density 8 Cluster Units



Medium Density 12 Cluster Units



Medium Density 16 Cluster Units



Medium Density 21 Townhouse Units

