

Memo To: Symmes Advisory Committee, Arlington Redevelopment Board and
VHB Consultant Team
From: Members of the Brattle Hill Neighborhood Association
Date: November 7, 2002

Constituency Report to SAC on recent discussion and recommendations from membership meetings

The Brattle Hill Neighborhood Association, through recent meetings and electronic conversations, has identified key concerns and questions regarding the proposals for development at the Symmes site. At this time, we are formally asking the SAC, ARB and VHB team to incorporate these items into the ongoing analysis and to re-examine some of the core assumptions utilized to date.

Our primary concerns focus upon:

- **Density** of development driven by defined parameters to date
- The assumptions of the **financial modeling**
- Definition of **revenue neutrality**

These three issues are intricately linked, so we ask you to consider the following discussion and questions.

Density

We have begun to see the implications of the constraint for the redevelopment to be revenue neutral in a five to ten year time frame. According to the plans presented by VHB, a direct result of this constraint is a development that exceeds three times the existing square footage. This magnitude of density would not integrate well with the neighborhood, and it is questionable that it would fit in with the character of the town of Arlington. An extension of the timeline for the repayment of the bond should be considered as a possible mechanism to moderate the density of development. While an adjustment to the time of repayment for the bond is an adjustment to commitments upon which the town voted, it must be noted that at the time of this vote, the community did not have any significant insight into the ramifications of this commitment.

The development that occurs at the Symmes site will remain for many years. It would be unfortunate to make a long-lasting and highly visible mistake because of a bond repayment approach that was conceived at a time when its precise implications to the density of development were not known. We now have the information, and the time, to avert a mistake and we should seize this window of opportunity to revisit the timeframe for the repayment of the bond.

Key Questions

Because we believe that the current proposals have resulted from very good efforts, we can only think that we've arrived at this difficult point because some of our assumptions may not be workable. We'd like to work with

the SAC, ARB, and consultants to reconsider some of these assumptions. Here are some key questions

- What does revenue neutrality mean? Can we generate some working definitions that give us different opportunities? And what effect does it have on the proposal if we extend the timeline for revenue neutrality to 15 years? 20 years?
- What is the minimum density in terms of square feet of development, traffic and population that would achieve revenue neutrality? What models of development emerge when we vary the mix of factors?
- What opportunities exist to increase revenue neutrality during the development process in order to “buy time”? What possibilities can we explore to increase rental income in existing buildings? Can we raise the odds that our current tenant can stay? Can we take advantage of current and potential rental income to offset some of the proposed development on site? Can we develop a few additional tenants related to the core we now have?
- How does the financial model change when some of the inaccuracies of the last version are fine-tuned? (Issues raised included current operating cost savings at the site, the size of rental income, land costs per unit of housing, etc.)
- Are we truly convinced that the original buildings can not be re-fitted for other uses and must be destroyed?
- There are also additional assumptions that we know that you will look into soon. Can we make a statement about what are the acceptable additional burdens, if any, that the town is willing to accept in terms of elements, for example, like traffic and schools, as a result of this development so that we have some way to measure whether the proposed burdens will be acceptable?

Recommendations:

Redo the financial model and resulting proposals reflecting:

- ◆ A longer time-line to achieve revenue neutrality
- ◆ Less Density
- ◆ Greater revenue from sale of land to developers
- ◆ Exploration of an increase in tenants and potential rental income during development period
- ◆ Exploration of less demolition – more building reuse.

In closing, we are very concerned that despite the very good efforts of everyone involved, the current proposal for the redevelopment of Symmes abandons in spirit and implementation much of what we voted for in the override. We are concerned that we are about to develop this very special property in a way that we won't be proud to see or to leave for future town residents. We'd very much like the help of the SAC, ARB, and consultants to think about this carefully.

We also have a number of secondary concerns, which we will summarize and present at another time.

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