

Design Workshop #2 "Interactive Response"

The following sections are a compilation of public comments received during the second Design Workshop to develop a Reuse and Feasibility Plan for the former Symmes Hospital site in Arlington, Massachusetts. The workshop, sponsored by the Symmes Advisory Committee (SAC), was held at the Arlington Town Hall on Wednesday, August 28, 2002, and was facilitated by the Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. consultant team. The workshop was attended by over 150 people.

The purpose of the workshop was two-fold: to provide a Summary of Themes from the first phase of work, including ideas for reuse of the site and an understanding of community concerns and potential impacts from redevelopment of the site; and to present the preliminary findings from the Strategic Assessment phase of work. The Strategic Assessments included an overview of the following technical analyses of the former Symmes Hospital site:

- ▶ Building Inventory and Structural and Mechanical Analysis
- ▶ Preliminary Urban Design Analysis
- ▶ Preliminary Transportation Assessment
- ▶ Preliminary Environmental Assessment
- ▶ Preliminary Infrastructure and Soils Condition Assessment
- ▶ Demographic, Employment and Real Estate Overview

Community members responses to the presentations are summarized in the following sections, and are provided in the order in which they were received.

Summary of Themes

The following bullets summarize comments and questions that were received following a presentation by the Symmes Advisory Committee Working Group Chair people regarding work done to date by each of the four Working Groups.

- ▶ Q: Has there been any calculation on the return to taxpayers of bonded debt?
- ▶ A. The plan should be at least revenue neutral, possibly generating positive returns. Costs/revenue are self contained in the Enterprise Zone, and there is no impact on the tax rate yet. Depending on how quickly we work to develop the site, costs may never impact the tax rate or, if the process moves slower, it may

affect the tax rate for a few years. Financial implications of each alternative will be analyzed to determine impacts to town revenues.

- The implication of public amenities to the (Summer Street area) neighborhood is important. There is a richness of community life that comes from having a public space (like Robbins Farm).
- Consideration should be given to having a branch library on the site.
- Q: Has the YMCA or other service providers been contacted to see if they are interested? Other Working Groups should use the Medical Use Group's model for soliciting interest.
- A: There will be a market forum in the next few months that will look at interest from various public and private entities related to various types of uses.
- What are limits on the Public Use principles, and to what degree can they be adjusted, pushed (especially for neighborhood concerns)?
- Q: What form/shape will new development take? As density increases, there is a need to keep impacts on the neighborhood in mind.
- A: There will be a design analysis during the alternatives phase to look at trade-offs for various and to fully evaluate impacts.
- Concern that the town focus on cost may result in the loss of an amenity that may not be cost-effective. We don't want to end up with something that we don't want because of financial constraints.
- With the current uncertainty of market conditions, analysis of different uses should be done with respect to market cycles.
- Residential Group should review the \$58,000 cutoff for median income, it seems high (especially for young families). The groups should evaluate subsidies for affordable housing.
- Q: Will there be a range of housing for income levels? Renters and homeowners all contribute to tax base.
- Medical Group should evaluate what percentage of the site medical uses could occupy? This answer needs to get out to the community.
- A sensitivity analysis for uses/plans is needed.
- Medical Use Working Group should try to maintain different types of care (i.e. respite care).

Site Assessments

The following bullets summarize comments and questions that were received following a presentation by the VHB consultant team highlighting the key findings of the different site assessments of the Symmes property.

- There should be a mixed age component, where seniors can interact with children, maybe in a co-housing situation.
- Q: Are existing buildings dependent of each other?
- A: Yes, one or more could come down without effecting the others. (only the boiler system is integrated)
- There is a certain degree to which the economics are challenging. Density will be a key factor. How the project might be phased (e.g. housing first with office to follow based on market) should be a key consideration.
- The tax base in Arlington is not diverse. A large number of residents is not necessary. Prudent, though affordable housing is key.
- Think about the site's assets and its meaning to the community over the long term, consideration should not just limited by a strict fiscal analysis.
- There should be a breakdown on the financial effect of demolishing the buildings, rehabilitation, or new uses.
- Utilize local architectural/design schools/students for ideas and design possibilities.
- Town control of the site means the site should be designed according to the Town's interests. Don't just be market driven.
- Wetlands are non existent, but what about endangered species? If verification of endangered species has not been done, it needs to be done.
- Q: Someone said that there was a pond on the site?
- A: It has been confirmed that there are no wetlands; there might have been in past.
- Concern about losing public transportation, and the additional connections it provides to the town. The site needs pedestrian connections to schools. Summer Street is traffic problem for pedestrians to cross. Would like to build upon existing public transit, however there will be a need to justify use.

- Medical Use Working Group should talk to Primary Care Physicians, not just hospitals. Need to expand PCP usage. Do PCPs want to run own practices or cede to hospital?
- Q: Is office space realistic up at Symmes?
- A: Access is a problem for office users, visibility and views are an asset.

Additional Comments

The following comments were handwritten by participants in the workshop during open discussions following the adjournment of the meeting.

- Please provide comments on the following questions:
 - How many of our (Arlington's) medical personnel were lost to Winchester? Can we interview some of these personnel to determine what, if anything, might have enticed them to stay? What in Winchester drew them?
 - Some statistics I have heard indicate that although our population has decreased, the total number of automobiles in Arlington has increased significantly. Is this true? If so, why is it not reflected on traffic counts? (Are traffic counts from 1998 perhaps no longer accurate?)
 - Also, have traffic counts been done on Oakhill and Woodside Lane? On a Saturday in the spring these roads carry (by my counts) 3,000+ cars a day.
- Please maintain woods (wildlife sanctuary) at bottom of hill.
- The focus seems to be "up there", please remember there is a "down there" also.