

Symmes Hospital Reuse and Feasibility Plan

Phase 2: “Interactive Response” Analysis of Existing Site Conditions

This document summarizes a series of technical memorandum outlining the initial Strategic Assessment phase of work for developing a reuse and feasibility plan for the former Symmes Hospital Site in Arlington, Massachusetts. The work included an inventory of base information including a review of previous site analyses, a reconnaissance of the site and environs, and meetings with the Symmes Advisory Committee (SAC), Town staff and other key stakeholders to identify needs, concerns, policies and priorities with regard to future development on the Symmes site. The memorandum’s highlight the assets and liabilities for reuse of the Symmes property organized into the following four areas:

- Architecture/Urban Design
- Transportation
- Environmental/Infrastructure
- Market/Financial

The summary bullets provided below are from a presentation during the public Design Workshop entitled “Interactive Response,” held on August 28, 2002. Copies of the Strategic Assessment technical memorandum’s and more information on the “Interactive Response” is provided on the Symmes Website at www.symmesarlington.org.

Architecture and Urban Design**Building Inventory and Structural and Mechanical Analysis****Orientation**

- Existing Complex
 - (5) Buildings built between 1909 and 1982
 - Main Hospital - 170,000 sf, Nurses' - 25,000 sf
- Existing Mech/HVAC systems
- Potential future uses considered
 - Housing
 - Office
 - Laboratory
- Evaluating reuse potential
 - Depth of plan
 - Floor to floor heights and plenum space
 - Access to natural light/ventilation

Reuse Potential of Existing Buildings**Nurses' Building**

- Existing Building (built 1917)
 - 25,000 sq. ft. on (5) floors
- Small floor plate and shallow depth: ideal for housing, small for office/lab
- Floor to Floor heights tight - not feasible for ceiling distributed ducted air system
- Window sizes offer access to natural light and ventilation

North Building

- Existing Building (built 1982)
 - 52,000 sq. ft. on (3) floors
- Large floor plate and deep plan: not well suited for housing, ideal for office/lab
- Floor to Floor heights adequate for new ducted air systems
- Continuous aluminum strip window openings offer good access to natural light and ventilation

East Building

- Existing Building (built 1909)
 - 31,400 sq. ft. on (4) floors
 - Occupied by Lahey Clinic
 - Extensively renovated in mid 1990's
- Mid sized floor plate and plan depth: possible housing reuse, small for office/lab
- Above ceiling space minimal for new office/lab HVAC system
- Window openings offer adequate access to natural light and ventilation.

South Building

- Existing Building (built 1964)
 - 67,200 sf on (5) floors
- Large floor plate and wide plan: not well suited for housing, ideal for office/lab
- Adequate above ceiling space for ducted air systems for office, but potentially tight for Lab use
- Exterior aluminum curtain wall system offers potential for good access to natural light and ventilation

West Building

- Existing Building (built early 1950s)
 - 24,400 sf on (4) floors
- Smallest floor plate of all 5 buildings. Reasonable for housing but small for office and lab use
- Adequate space for horizontally ducted air systems
- Existing window openings small, offering limited access to natural light and ventilation

Urban Design**Town Wide Context**

- Transportation
- Open Space Systems
- Land Use

Neighborhood Context

- Neighborhood Compatibility
- Open Space System and Pedestrian Network
- Surrounding Land Use
- Mixed Use Character

Site Context

- 18.5 acres on a hill, 150 feet above Summer Street
- 9.2 acres of open space
- Rock outcroppings give visual appeal
- 7 acres reasonably undisturbed
- *The site is not conducive to large-scale recreational use*
- *Promontory and overlook is the ultimate open space amenity*

Site Land Use

- 200,000 sq. ft. of building space and 560 parking spaces
- R-1 zoning could provide 150 single family units
- PUD zoning could provide up to 750,000 sq. ft. mixed use
- *With PUD, density supports costs for public improvements and maintenance*
- *Public uses and open space requires a balance of private investment on the site to be fiscally achievable.*

Transportation**Traffic****Roads**

- Summer Street: approx. 18,000 vpd. (Oct. 1998)
 - Little growth in volume over last 10 years
- Grove Street: approx. 5,500 vpd. (Oct. 1998)
- Brattle Street: approx. 3,500 vpd. (Oct. 1998)
- Streets in the area are local, many are private.

Intersections

- Summer/Brattle/Hemlock level of service below acceptable
- Improvements predict better level of service
- Summer/Grove failing due to northbound turn movements
- Summer/Grove and Summer/Oak Hill ranked as problems by residents
- *Mitigation will be required for any new development*
- *Summer/Brattle/Hemlock improvements slated for 2004.*

Site Access

- Primary is Hospital Road off Summer Street
 - Proximity to Summer/Brattle/Hemlock creates access problems (left turns)
- Secondary is Hospital Road off Woodside Lane
 - Neighborhood concerns (cut-through traffic)
- "Paper Street" connects site to Millet Street
 - Not developable for vehicle use
 - Neighborhood concerns about impacts

Access Modifications

- Primary access off Summer Street
- Secondary access points should be considered for integration
 - Connections to public uses on site
 - Access to Stratton and Bishop Schools
 - Maintain neighborhood character
 - Emergency vehicle access
- Relocate existing site access drive away from Summer / Brattle / Hemlock
 - May have physical constraints
- *Development will need to consider location and number of site access drives*

Pedestrian Facilities

- Site not connected to Town sidewalk network
- Adjacent residential neighborhoods lack adequate sidewalks
- *Development will need to consider on-site and off-site pedestrian connections*
 - *Especially to schools*

Bicycle Facilities

- Minuteman bikeway has access from Brattle Street
- No formal access to the Minuteman from Grove Street
- No on-street dedicated bikeways in the vicinity of the site.
- *Development will need to consider on-site and off-site improvements for bicyclists*

Public Transportation

- Direct access to the site provided by MBTA Route 67
- Connections to Turkey Hill, Arlington Center, and Alewife Red Line Station
- Service currently underutilized
 - Steep Grade (noise impacts)
- *Development will need to evaluate ridership to determine future need and balance for service*

Environment and Infrastructure

Environmental Assessment

Asbestos and Lead Based Paint

- Asbestos containing materials found in many buildings
- Asbestos removal has occurred in some areas.
- *Conduct a preliminary Lead Based Paint and Asbestos Materials survey*
 - *Develop cost estimates*
 - *Costs incurred if buildings are reused or demolished*

Above and Under Ground Storage Tanks

- Site contains several underground storage tanks
- *Reuse may require removal and closure*

Massachusetts Contingency Plan Releases

- Release attributed to hydraulic oil from an elevator (May 1994)
- Release of petroleum free product proved to be from a different origin
- Lahey owns the liability of clean up of the site
- Oil is generally not a problem for reuse, with appropriate deed restrictions
- *Remediation in bedrock can be time consuming and costly*
- *Remediation will require more analysis and negotiation given development scenarios*

Infrastructure**Wetlands**

- No wetlands on site, and it is outside of the floodplain

Water Supply

- Service provided by Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
- Water line connects to Summer Street (1910)
- Water line connects to Woodside lane (1963)
- 1,000 gallon-per-minute fire pump in North Wing (1980's)
- *Integrity of pipes should be considered, given their age.*

Sanitary Sewer

- Line connects to municipal system in Summer Street
- Sufficient capacity exists for hospital uses
- *Roots and brush in area may have penetrated pipes, should be evaluated*

Storm Drain

- Catch basins located in parking areas and along site access ways
- Storm drain lines discharge to Mill Brook
- Flows from larger storms bypass catch basins in Road (erosion problems)
- Neighbors report potential run-off problems and impacts
- *Capacity of pipes appears inadequate for existing impervious area and should be evaluated*

Gas Service

- High pressure gas service connects to Summer Street
- *Lines should be evaluated for adequacy*
- *Utility easement not maintained, issues with root and brush penetration and should be evaluated*

Electric Service

- Service provided by Nstar (overhead wire)
- Nstar upgrading service enhancement to Arlington

Soil Conditions and Bedrock

- Bedrock located at or near surface
- Soil on site is rock outcrop—Hollis complex
 - exposed bedrock, excessively drained, shallow, nearly level to very steep
- Bedrock outcrops are prevalent, depth to bedrock is very shallow.
- *Bedrock presents a need for potential blasting and will require careful consideration when developing final plans.*

Market and Financial

Demographic Trends

- Population is declining
 - Lost 7% in the 1980s, 5% in the 1990s
 - Fell from 48,200 in 1980 to 42,389 in 2000
- Minimal Growth in households
 - Net gain of 18 households during the 1990s
- Average household size has fallen from 2.58 in 1980 to 2.23 in 2001
 - County was 2.77 in 1980, 2.46 in 2001
- Median household income is \$66,800
 - 5% lower than County
 - Incomes growing faster than inflation
- Median family income is \$79,750
 - 21% higher than Boston MSA
 - Makes qualifying for affordable housing programs more difficult

Age Distribution of Households

- Strong growth in households in peak earning years
 - 35 to 44 and 45 to 54
 - Gained 1,800 households
- Loss in 15 to 34 cohort of 1,500 households
 - Younger age groups may be “priced out”
- County experienced similar trends
 - Lost households in the youngest cohort
 - Gained in all others
- Strongest growth in the 45 to 54 cohort

Households by Income

- 25% of households have income of less than \$35,000
 - Number decreased by 2,600 since 1990
- 64% of households have incomes of more than \$50,000
 - Number increased by more than 4,000 since 1990

Low Income Housing Needs

- Poverty rate was 4.6% in 1989
 - Declined to 4.1% by 2000 Census
- 1,714 Persons had incomes below the poverty level
 - 183 persons under age 18
 - 387 persons over age 65
- Elderly made up 27% of individuals living in poverty, but 44% of the households living in poverty

Households At Risk

- Census 2000
 - 11,186 owner-occupied units
 - 7,825 renter-occupied units
- At risk of paying more than 30% of income for housing costs
 - 15.5% of owners (1,733 households) at-risk
 - 34% of renters (2,678 households) at-risk

Unemployment

- Town has outperformed State and County
 - Town rate consistently the lowest by 1% to 2%
 - Strong downward trend for all areas
- 64% of households have incomes of more than \$50,000
 - Number increased by more than 4,000 since 1990

Households by Income

- 25% of households have income of less than \$35,000
 - Number decreased by 2,600 since 1990
- Stable labor force
 - Ranges from 25,300 to 25,600
 - Growth limited by growth in housing stock
 - County experienced a gain of 20,000
- Majority of labor force does not work in Arlington
 - Employment opportunities limited within the Town

Changes in Employment, 1995 to 2000

- Construction and retail trade sectors gained employment
- Wholesale trade, FIRE, personal/business services and professional services all lost employment
- Loss in professional services is deceptive
 - Sector lost 370 jobs, but entire loss is attributable to the loss of more than 700 health services jobs
 - All other subsectors experienced employment gains

Changes in Health Services Employment, 1995 to 2000

- Arlington and surrounding communities all experienced a loss of establishments, indicating consolidation within the industry
- Belmont, Somerville and Winchester experienced gains in total health services employment
- Winchester gained almost 800 jobs
- Arlington has 14.4 health services workers per 1,000 residents
- Surrounding communities have an average of 49.9

Residential Real Estate Market

- Arlington pricing lower than surrounding communities
 - Median price for SF homes was \$372,500 in 2001, up 64% since '97
 - Median condo price was \$274,500, up 120% since '97
- Community has higher number of transactions annually than surrounding communities
 - Average of 475 sales annually
 - 2.5% of housing stock turns over annually
 - Partly due to being "more affordable"

Office Real Estate Market

- High vacancy at the present time
 - More than 1 million vacant SF in immediate area
 - Almost 15 million SF available in Boston and suburbs
 - Another 30 million SF "available"
- Rental rates in Arlington and Belmont are lower than other areas
 - No Class A space in Arlington
 - Rates around \$18/SF
 - Up to \$45 in Cambridge, Lexington

Medical Office

- Limited market activity during last ten years
- Sales range of \$50 to \$245 per SF
- Less than 125,000 SF sold in ten years
- Average building size of 22,000 SF
- Skewed by one property in Somerville

Food for Thought

- Should Symmes Hospital be demolished?
 - Buildings are difficult to retrofit for office or residential
 - Medical market has been consolidating
 - Even after significant investment, property will be less competitive than new construction
 - Mix of desired uses within a single building will be difficult
 - Market for newly constructed residential is very strong now

Food for Thought II

- Cost Implications of Reuse/Redevelopment
 - Estimated investment at decision point - \$10 million (\$50/SF)
 - Demolition adds +/- \$2 million (\$10/SF)
 - Estimated developable land area is 8 acres
 - Investment per acre for development parcel is \$1.5 million per acre
- Dense development will be necessary to recover investment
 - 500,000 SF = \$24/BSF, 200,000 SF = \$60/SF

Fiscal Impact 101

- Incremental costs to provide municipal services vs. incremental revenues generated
 - Cost and revenues associated with both residents and employees
 - Residential uses impact school enrollments
 - Number of children varies by unit type and # of bedrooms