

Symmes Hospital Reuse and Feasibility Plan

Phase 1: Discovery Summary of Themes

This document summarizes the first phase of developing a reuse and feasibility plan for the former Symmes Hospital site in Arlington, Massachusetts. Referred to as “Discovery,” this phase of work provided the consultant team the opportunity to gain an understanding of the extensive work done to date by the Symmes Advisory Committee (SAC), and to obtain input from residents and stakeholders on their desires, issues and concerns for the future of this significant parcel of land.

The “Discovery” phase included meetings with the SAC on June 23, 2002 and on July 2 and 25, 2002 to discuss goals and objectives of the Working Groups organized around the following different land uses envisioned for the Symmes property: Residential, Commercial, Medical and Public Use. Additionally, at the SAC meeting on July 25, 2002, a presentation by residents from the surrounding neighborhood was given to provide VHB and the SAC with an overview of the Symmes site’s history and concerns about impacts that redevelopment may have upon their neighborhoods. “Discovery” concluded with a public Design Workshop on July 30, 2002, in which approximately 250 people shared insight on the site’s assets, a “wish list” for potential future land uses, concerns with redevelopment, and questions that should be addressed by VHB and the SAC.

“Discovery” also included a review by the VHB team of documentation and background material developed by the SAC, including the results of a community survey conducted to gain community input on options for reuse of the site.

The following sections summarize the findings of the VHB team during the “Discovery” of the former Symmes Hospital site. The sections provide a summary of the site’s assets, and goals and concerns stated by the community, and are listed according to the four land use areas being considered by the SAC Working groups. More information related to the “Discovery” phase of work is provided on the Symmes website at www.symmesarlington.org.

Financial Viability**Board of Selectmen's Policy**

The Arlington Board of Selectmen developed a policy statement for the Town ownership of the Symmes campus, under which the Town could control the destiny of the site. Preliminary studies showed that the Town could benefit financially, as well as be able to ensure responsible and sensitive development. The Official Policy Statement regarding the debt exclusion to acquire the Symmes property sets forth commitments regarding the financial viability for the Symmes reuse plan, as summarized below:

- Overall redevelopment outcome must be at least self-supporting
- Income should eliminate over-ride's tax burden
- Additional income to help fund Town services

Community Input

The following bullets summarize comments received from participants in the "Discovery" Design Workshop on July 30, 2002, related to the financial viability of the Symmes reuse plan.

- Fully evaluate returns for recommended uses
- Development should generate income
- Private development should fund public uses
- Town should not fund infrastructure improvements
- Redevelopment should look to financial future

Residential Use**Board of Selectmen's Policy**

The Arlington Board of Selectmen's Official Policy Statement regarding the debt exclusion to acquire the Symmes property sets forth commitments to support residential development as part of the Symmes reuse plan, as summarized below:

- Mixed-use development with limited residential component
 - Should include affordable housing
- Support increased density only to gain affordable housing
- Overall redevelopment outcome must be at least self-supporting

Residential Working Group

To implement the policies of the Board of Selectmen, on behalf of the Selectmen, Town Manager, the Redevelopment Board and Town Meeting members, the Residential Working Group, made up primarily of advocates for affordable housing and neighborhood interest groups, has guiding principles for evaluating residential uses which include:

- Open Process
- Integrated Planning: site, neighborhood and town
- Neighborhood Impact: physically integrated, traffic, parking, shadows
- Appearance and Design: improve appearance, reuse buildings?
- Housing Types: mixed, ownership and rental
- Affordability: \$58,300 (80%) & \$89,040 (120%) of median income
- Maximize Benefits to Arlington Residents & Employees

Community Input

The following bullets summarize comments received from neighborhood residents at the SAC meeting on July 25, 2002 and from participants in the "Discovery" Design Workshop on July 30, 2002. The bullets summarize key themes and trends related to a "wish list" for residential development that emerged during both public discussions. These suggestions will be further evaluated by the consultant team and the SAC in future phases of work.

- Promote community image
- Integrate scale and density with surroundings
- High demand for affordable housing
- Subsidies for affordable housing
- Impacts to neighborhood, schools, etc.
- Provide diverse range of housing opportunities
- High demand for higher-end residential/condo's
- Retirement and senior housing
- Co-housing may be an option

Survey Results

The town wide community survey regarding reuse of the Symmes property received approximately 2,000 responses. The responses suggested 46 different residential uses. A breakdown of the top five responses is provided below.

- The Top-Five
 - Affordable Housing 39%
 - Elderly Housing 16%
 - Assisted Living 13%
 - No Affordable 9%
 - Mixed Housing 6%

Commercial Uses**Board of Selectmen's Policy**

The Arlington Board of Selectmen's Official Policy Statement regarding the debt exclusion to acquire the Symmes property sets forth commitments to support commercial development as part of the Symmes reuse plan, as summarized below:

- Mixed use (predominantly office and some medical)
- Overall redevelopment outcome must be at least self-supporting

Commercial Use Working Group

As part of the goals set forth to guide the actions of the SAC, the Commercial Use Working Group is working to evaluate potential commercial uses for the site, under the following parameters:

- Uses could include office, R&D, others
- Commercial could finance other uses
- Commercial shifts tax burden away from residential

Community Input

The following bullets summarize comments received from neighborhood residents at the SAC meeting on July 25, 2002 and from participants in the "Discovery" Design Workshop on July 30, 2002. The bullets summarize key themes and trends related to a "wish list" for commercial development that emerged during both public discussions. These suggestions will be further evaluated by the consultant team and the SAC in future phases of work.

- Income and uses in area would support commercial
- Commercial *can* complement open space
- Bring jobs to Arlington
- Commercial would maintain bus service
- High profile buildings could harm views
- Need Class A office space
- Hotel and conference facility
- Business incubator/start-up space
- Restaurant

Survey Results

Of the approximately 2,000 responses received to the town wide survey regarding reuse of the Symmes property, 97 different commercial uses were suggested. A breakdown of the top five responses is provided below.

- The Top Five
 - Research 27%
 - Office Space 19%
 - Spa/Health/Wellness 9%
 - Bio-Tech 9%
 - Professional Office 8%

Medical Use Working Group

Board of Selectmen's Policy

The Selectmen's Official Policy Statement regarding the debt exclusion to acquire the Symmes property states commitments to support medical uses as part of the Symmes reuse plan, as summarized below:

- Promote expanded health care services
 - Outpatient and other medical services
- Mixed use development of predominantly general office and some medical

Medical Use Working Group

The SAC's Medical Use Working Group, consisting of physicians and lay people with careers or interests in promoting health care improvement, are implementing the policies of the Selectmen with stated goals to promote and evaluate medical and health care uses for the site. The Medical Use Working Group has been brainstorming uses that would support health care facilities and meeting with various health care institutions to investigate interest in locating to the Symmes site.

- Present Medical Use
 - Lahey, Health South, Other Physicians
- Town Wide Survey Results
 - Medical Use first
- Medical Interest in Symmes
 - Visiting Nurses and Community Health, Inc., The Children's Room, Arms Around Arlington, Board of Health, Boston Herb Institute
- On-going Outreach
 - Regional Hospitals
 - Other Health Care Providers

Community Input

The following bullets summarize comments received from neighborhood residents at the SAC meeting on July 25, 2002 and from participants in the "Discovery" Design Workshop on July 30, 2002. The bullets summarize key themes and trends related to a "wish list" for medical uses that emerged during both public discussions. These suggestions will be further evaluated by the consultant team and the SAC in future phases of work.

- Existing medical facilities provides opportunities
- Medical community exists to provide referrals
- Need local medical and emergency services (elderly)
- Lahey operations may limit additional services
- Interested providers may not be profitable
- Emergency/inpatient facilities financially impossible to maintain
- Include alternative therapies in medical uses

Survey Results

Of the approximately 2,000 responses received to the town wide survey regarding the reuse of the Symmes property, 63 different medical uses were suggested. A breakdown of the top five responses is provided below.

- The Top Five
 - Doctors Offices 28%
 - Emergency Room 18%
 - Clinic/Outpatient 12%
 - Laboratory Facilities 11%
 - Full Hospital 7%

Public Use

Board of Selectmen's Policy

The Selectmen's Official Policy Statement regarding the debt exclusion to acquire the Symmes property states commitments to maintain the parcel's present proportion of open space by the Town to support public uses as part of the Symmes reuse plan. In addition to the open space commitment, the Public Use Working Group of the SAC, which is comprised of representatives of groups and individuals with interest and expertise in public uses, has proposed to expand the definition of public uses to include more than just open space, proposing to expand their focus to include community based uses on the site.

Public Use Working Group

Because the community is making a significant investment in the future of the Symmes property, the Public Use Working Group seeks to ensure that part of the return on that investment should be the benefit of public uses on the site. As such, the guiding principles of the Public Use Working Group include the following:

- Open public planning process
- Evaluate uses on the basis of consistent criteria
- Enhance and protect open spaces
- Address unmet and under addressed Town needs
- Provide space for community interaction
- Respect and relate to abutting neighborhoods
- Be open to all residents
- Involve user fees if needed
- Take advantage of views and geography
- Public uses should be part of a mix of uses

Community Input

The following bullets summarize comments received from neighborhood residents at the SAC meeting on July 25, 2002 and from participants in the public Workshop on July 30, 2002. The bullets summarize key themes and trends related to a “wish list” for public uses that emerged during both public discussions. These suggestions will be further evaluated by the consultant team and the SAC for future phases of work.

- Maintain existing woods
- Views as public space – open to all
- Buffer space between abutting uses
- Family Resource Center similar to Tot Stop
- Cultural center and museum, with performance space
- Fire Station on Summer Street
- Recreation Center, swimming pool and playgrounds for different age groups
- Multi-use community center

Survey Results

Of the approximately 2,000 responses received to the town wide survey regarding reuse of the Symmes property, 89 different public uses were suggested. A breakdown of the top ten responses is provided below.

- The Top Five
 - Open Space 25%
 - Park 20%
 - Swimming Pool 12%
 - Walking Path 9%
 - Playground 8%

