

## Comments and Questions From the Symmes Public Workshop: Conceptual Alternatives

The following comments and questions were raised at the February 13<sup>th</sup> Symmes Advisory Committee public meeting to present conceptual reuse alternatives for the Symmes Hospital site. These questions were not answered at the meeting due to time constraints, however a brief answer to each of the questions is included below.

### Parking and Traffic

- Need new traffic study.
- We need steps to ensure that thorough traffic analysis done based on current data - not 1982 data - is done.
- Want appropriate traffic calming devices built into project.
- Why wasn't public transportation (enhanced) figured in equally with parking?

**The site uses must be able to handle the most reliable traffic demands we have for that site. While public transportation will help the traffic and parking issues, it cannot be depended on in designing the site.**

- What alternatives and solutions were considered for solving parking/traffic problems for the "community center" concept in the plan?

**Various parking solutions were considered including construction of a parking deck (cost prohibitive) and provision of shared parking with other adjacent uses (i.e., medical office space along The Ridge and residential space at The Overlook). In addition, contacts were made with facility directors at other built facilities in New England including YMCA, Wellness Centers, and Recreation/Health Clubs to determine what the parking demands were at these facilities. Results of this survey indicated that the parking demand at such facilities ranges anywhere from 2.9 to 6.4 spaces per 1,000 square feet. The Symmes plans provide parking at a ratio equivalent to approximately 3.3 spaces per 1,000 square feet.**

### Size of Development

- Are proposed structures significantly higher than existing ones?

**There are no proposed structures yet. These are just conceptual alternatives. For buildings under 35 feet in height, existing Town of Arlington zoning setbacks were used (10-foot side yard, 25-foot front yard, 20-foot rear yard). For buildings greater than 35 feet in height, a 100-foot setback from the property line was utilized.**

- What would a 6-story building look like from the distance in town?

**Depending upon use, approximately 16-24 feet taller than the existing hospital.**

- What are similar developments within 128 area specifically equal ground parking and building height?

**We are researching this.**

- How does a zoning by-law make sure we'll have the variety of uses (rather than just prescribe limits on impact)?

**The variety of uses will likely be shaped by the Urban Renewal Plan, although certain uses such as residential, commercial, or medical can be determined for specific areas through the zoning laws.**

- In calculating square footage, does it refer to the sum of all the usable area of all the floors in the buildings? Or, does it refer to the land size that will be developed?

**It refers to the sum of all the gross floor area in the buildings (useable space and common areas such as stairs, hallways, etc.).**

## **Medical Uses**

- How are we expanding health care with a wellness center?

**Plans provide space for medical uses similar to what is currently used by Lahey including nutritional programs, acupuncture, chiropracture, etc.**

- What is a wellness center?

**A community health resource facility that provides fitness facilities/equipment and health and wellness education to promote both curative and preventive healthcare. The facility may contain independent hospital affiliated physician offices, diagnostic imaging center, outpatient laboratory and/or rehabilitation services.**

- Why does medical use trump community use on the site if we're not using the hospital services?

**The expansion of medical services is part of the selectmen's mandate and therefore must be considered a key factor in any conceptual planning. After extensive research, it appears that expanding the physicians and ancillary services has the most potential given the state of the medical market.**

- Why can't it be justified that at least urgent care be viable at Symmes since, as it is, there is a 3-5 hour wait for services at the surrounding emergency rooms?

**It is certainly a desire, although after much research, we have found no organization or hospital that is interested in bringing urgent care or emergency room services to the site. The town is not in a position financially or otherwise to provide this service itself.**

- Is it accurate that the term "wellness" implies upscale therapies and (can't read)? How will this affect the current practitioners and businesses in town that provide this service? Look at

who the under served are - young, teens, and elderly, not yoga massage folk. Community is not the same as a Wellness center.

**Wellness implies proactive as well as reactive health care. Wellness can include fitness, aquatics, aerobics, as well as dietitian, stress, and other proactive care and therapies. It also includes traditional health care services that now are provided at this campus. Wellness can be expanded to include what the community wants. It can be multi-generational and serve multiple economic groups.**

- Wouldn't a large community nursing/retirement facility be a profitable and great service for this community and the Symmes site?

**A nursing home or retirement facility could indeed be a positive service at the Symmes site. In fact, the third scenario envisions this type of use.**

### **Public Space**

- Keep overlook as public space.
- Columbarium is happy medium between open space and revenue generating space.
- Define Open Space. Please describe the open space for each alternative- how do we get to it?

**As part of the planning process, future open space on the Symmes campus was characterized as follows:**

**“Delicate” Open Space – this includes space that is part of a delicate natural environment that includes steep slopes, vistas, rock outcroppings, and natural drainage areas.**

**“Contributing” Open Space– this includes open space on the Symmes campus that contributes to the overall system and includes lawn and forested areas.**

**“Connective Tissue” – this includes land that connects open space areas, creating integrated open space network that is connected both internally as well as externally to the broader regional system including the Minuteman Bikeway, surrounding schools, etc.**

- What is the public use in the three concepts? We need more than just recreation.

**Protection of the site's 50% open space was one the Board of Selectmen's stated priorities for the site. Public access to that open space - including a public vista park to be developed atop the hill -- will be protected and enhanced. The potential for other facilities serving the public will continue to be explored.**

- Hold this asset until capital funding can build a community center - not using taxpayers' money.

**The Town has to pay back the money borrowed within a certain time frame and is not in a position to hold the asset indefinitely.**

- If 65,000 square feet have been allocated to combination of community and wellness, how much s.f. is currently being used for medical use by Lahey now? If the medical use continues, what if anything is left for use of the community?

**Currently about 30,000 square feet are used for medical services at the Symmes campus. Depending upon demand, this use could expand by another 10,000 or more square feet. 20,000 square feet to 30,000 square feet would offer substantial space for a community fitness center complementing the medical services. Space of this amount could encompass fitness rooms, aerobics, and aquatics.**

- If community center does not have a place holder on the plans before it goes to town meeting, what chance does it have to get built?

**The community center does have a placeholder in the 65,000 square feet earmarked for the medical/fitness use. What the Symmes Advisory Committee did remove from the scenarios was an additional 30,000 square feet contemplated to be dedicated as community rooms, possibly including the performing arts center. This change was made not because the community rooms were not a wonderful idea (they are a great idea!), but because parking and traffic stress created by this additional use could not fit on the site within the parameters previously set out. In addition, attempts to squeeze the parking on to the site drove the economic considerations in a direction that made this facility too expensive.**

- What ideas from the community center concept can be included in the wellness/residential portions of the plans?

**The types of community programs that can be included in a community wellness center are two-fold. For general programs, a wellness center can offer community meeting rooms, swim lessons, martial arts classes, and exercise classes and personal training. On the clinical side, there a variety of programs that can be offered including acupuncture, aquatic therapy, massage therapy, nutrition counseling, pre- and post-natal programs, CPR classes, and blood pressure screening.**

- What's the % of open space with each alternative? Does alternative 3 have the least?

**Alternative 1 allocates approximately 9.7 acres (54 percent of the site) to open space.**

**Alternative 2 allocates approximately 9.4 acres (52 percent of the site) to open space.**

**Alternative 3 allocates approximately 9 acres (50 percent) of the site to open space.**

## **Residential Uses**

- Want 25%-30% affordable housing.

- Why not mandate 30% affordable housing if that's our goal?

**The Symmes Advisory Committee has had to balance open space, medical uses, residential uses, and minimal neighborhood and environmental impact among other things in considering the reuses of this site. When the Town (or the advisory committee) mandates 15 percent affordable housing it means that the cost differential between the construction cost of the housing and the selling price has to be borne by the developer. Differently expressed, this differential has to come from the profits on the rest of the development. Of course, the developer still has to make an overall profit on the development in order to secure bank financing. The only two variables on the site are the permitted uses and the amount of those uses. In order to generate the funds to build the affordable housing the overall size of the project has to be increased.**

**Limitations on the developable space, the interests of the neighborhood to keep development contained and other cultural and environmental factors lean to constraining the size of the development. The three scenarios contemplate between 365,000 and 410,000 square feet of development. Increasing the mandated affordable housing to 30 percent would cause the amount of development to be increased by another 150,000 square feet.**

**Setting 30 percent as a goal rather than a mandate encourages the use of subsidies, developer incentives and private donations to increase the amount of affordable housing while keeping the total development area constrained.**

- What incentives will be put in place to get to 30% affordable housing from 15%?

**The incentives that can be put in place to encourage 30 percent affordable housing can include local, state or federal subsidies such as C. D. B. G., or incentives within the proposal process, such as giving favorable consideration to those developers who offer more affordable housing within the same space without sacrificing quality standards.**

- Why are the affordable units only targeted to 80% of median income? There are public funds for low-income people.

**While the affordable housing market is under served, this area is especially under served and it was felt that we should at least take a small step in trying to remedy that. Also, in the developer's roundtable the developer community indicated that there were many programs in the region targeting very low-income groups, but few programs targeting teachers, police officers and firefighters and other civil servants caught in the squeeze of ever-increasing housing prices.**

- Can people who buy affordable housing resell at a profit? Who gets the money? What control will the town have?

**Any affordable unit will have a deed restriction, filed with the Registry of Deeds, that controls the resale price. The Zoning Bylaw requires that affordable housing be resold at a price affordable to someone at 75% of median income (paying 30% of**

**their income for housing costs). The price of housing is therefore completely separated from appreciation in the private real estate market, and is instead tied to Increases in area median income.**

- Town bylaws require affordable housing to have the same sq. footage as market rate, but the proposals show smaller units. Was this an oversight, or do we propose to change the bylaw or variance.

**It is the intention of the Symmes Advisory Committee that all plans will comply with the Town bylaw.**

- How come each alternative is supposed to be 30% affordable housing, yet each comes out to a different number of units?

**30% is based on the total number of housing units for each alternative. Since there are different numbers of total housing units for each alternative, the number of affordable units will also be different.**

## **Commercial**

- How can you be so sure that the residential market will hold out? In March 2001 it was commercial. In October it was dead. How will you know it won't have legs later?

**We can't. The best we can do is give our best estimate based on all the market research and indicators that are out there now. We also have the reality of minimizing the impact of the project on the tax roles so we need to make a decision now.**

## **Other Neighborhood Impact (besides traffic parking)**

- What in depth (non contractor) process will be established to address potential damage to neighbors' property?

**The SAC had extensive meetings with neighbors early in the process. The Committee developed a comprehensive list of grievances, complaints and concerns of neighbors and abutters. The Committee intends to develop a neighborhood impact mitigation plan that can become part of the urban renewal plan and provide guidelines for developer and Town behavior during the redevelopment of the site.**

## **Financial**

- Is it financially viable to redevelop the entire site as detached housing and reintegrate into the surrounding neighborhood?

**It is not feasible to develop the entire site as detached housing and still meet the objectives set by the Board of Selectmen. The objectives concerning financial viability, maintenance of open space, and preserving medical uses, would likely all be compromised.**

- Has just providing high end housing been considered? Will this solve the recoup of debt and density issues?

**Providing only high-end housing does not meet the Board of Selectmen objective of balanced mixed-use and does not meet the Town's overall objective of increasing affordable housing. In addition Town bylaws require that any development include 15 percent affordable housing. Finally, developing only high-end housing might prove financially risky, since it depends on steady demand that the high-end market.**

- Why not leave north building standing and vacant, to wait for better opportunity for medical services? Please estimate to cost of doing this.

**The third conceptual scenario leaves the north building standing. This is certainly a viable consideration. However leaving a building standing to “wait” for a potential market change is not economically viable, nor within the town's charter to provide neutral or positive financial impact for the taxpayer.**

- Why didn't the model consider subsidies?

**The model in all cases does not include subsidies because they cannot be forecasted in the normal sense of the word. Generally speaking subsidies are subject to competition among competing applicants and generally there are more applicants than subsidies. The Symmes Advisory Committee has been developing scenarios wherein the outcomes can be forecasted within a normal business or commercial sense. By providing alternate scenarios the Town will have the option of responding differently to different market conditions. By allowing the use of subsidies within the context of *project goals*, the viability of the project is not critically dependent upon its achieving the subsidy.**

- There are a variety of interest groups each advocating their own agenda. The SAC used ONLY the fiscal model to make their decisions. Why can't we extend the time for revenue neutrality so as to include public amenities?

**First, the SAC has not used ONLY a fiscal model to make decisions. However, since the entire development process is financially connected and has broad impact on the taxpayers of the town, the fiscal model is an important tool in making decisions. Two important facts must be kept in mind. First, at the time of the debt exclusion referendum, the voters were told that the project would have a neutral or positive tax impact. So there is a legal requirement that the Town proceed with fiscal prudence in the planning of the redevelopment of the site. Second, the voters were not told that the objectives of the purchase were to develop public amenities. The purpose was to allow the Town to control the redevelopment of residential, commercial, and medical uses at the site in a way that would be beneficial to the town and not harmful to the neighborhood. To the extent possible, the SAC has been attempting to include amenities that could fit within these bounds.**

**The severe financial straits that the town faces in general means that there is no flexibility to "delay revenue neutrality".**

- Didn't the selectmen's policy indicate revenue neutrality? Your slide stated profit, not revenue neutrality. Please explain.

**The selectmen's policy calls for a redevelopment that is at least revenue neutral and that will, after a few years, provide a positive financial contribution to the Town. The policy further states that the funds available after repayment of the debt service will be available for use by Town Meeting. All of the activities of the SAC have scrupulously adhered to these guidelines.**