

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone
City of Somerville

From: Edward C. O'Donnell
Director, Economic Development
Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development

Date: October 1, 2014

RE: Relocation of Police and Fire Departments

In August of this year, I submitted a communication outlining steps to date in identifying possible relocation sites for the City of Somerville's ("the City") Fire and Police Departments. The relocation of the City's public safety departments is necessitated by both the inadequacy of the present facility at 228-234 Somerville Avenue and the progress to date of the Union Square Revitalization Plan. At the time that communication was submitted in August, it was assumed that the information would be shared with the members of the Board of Aldermen. Although the communication was listed as an agenda item for one of the Board's standing committees, circumstances warranted that a presentation on the item be postponed.

As part of that earlier communication, it was written that, "In considering possible sites for the Somerville Fire Department and Somerville Police Department, the presumption was that service coverage requirements would dictate that the Fire Department should remain proximate to Union Square." After examining a number of publicly and privately owned sites, it was the staff's opinion that the most acceptable and workable site was the now vacant property at 515 Somerville Avenue. That earlier communication included correspondence from Chief Kevin Kelleher of the Somerville Fire Department, attesting to the property's suitability for relocation from the current Union Square site. Among the factors cited by Chief Kelleher were:

- a. Proximity to Union Square;
- b. Reduced wear and tear on equipment;
- c. Potential to utilize space for training purposes;
- d. Relocation of certain uses now stationed at 266 Broadway, thus providing for more efficient use of space at that location;
- e. Potential to relocate present operations at Lowell Street station to the 515 Somerville Avenue site, thus making that property available for re-use and to offset the price of acquisition and construction.

Massachusetts General Law (“M.G.L.”) Chapter 30B, the Uniform Procurement Act, stipulates among other matters how municipalities may acquire real property. According to M.G.L. 30B, municipalities are not required to solicit proposals to acquire property if (the) local jurisdiction has determined that it needs a particular piece of property because of its unique qualities or location. In this case, the City’s Purchasing Agent has concurred with the staff’s opinion that 515 Somerville Avenue represents a unique property for use by the Somerville Fire Department.

Pursuant to the possible acquisition of the 515 Somerville Avenue site, the City sought to acquire a professional appraisal on the property, attesting to a fair market value. To that end, the City entered into a contract with the Reynolds Company of Quincy, MA (“Reynolds”), a well-qualified and well-experienced appraisal and consulting company. On September 29, 2014, Reynolds submitted to my attention their appraisal report which set the fair market value of 515 Somerville Avenue at \$4,875,000.

It is the staff’s opinion that the acquisition of the property at 515 Somerville Avenue can only be accomplished through an eminent domain taking for a public purpose. The City is prohibited by M.G.L. Chapter 40, Section 14 from acquiring the property through a more traditional negotiated agreement, given the limitations of paying no more than one hundred and twenty-five percent (125%) of the average assessed value of the previous three years.

The 515 Somerville Avenue property is currently owned by DEVB, LLC of Somerville which acquired the site in April, 2014 for \$4,600,000. In seeking the financial resources to acquire the site for the public purpose of relocating the current Union Square facility, it should be stated that the City can expect off sets to that cost through the anticipated acquisition of the D1 Block by its Master Developer partner. Further, if the nearby Lowell Street site were to be consolidated at the 515 Somerville Avenue property, as current plans call for, that site could be declared as surplus and made available for disposition.

The staff expects to enter into a similar appraisal contract to determine fair market value for a unique site that could support the relocation of the Somerville Police Department. We will make the results of that appraisal available when received.