




CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE, MAYOR

Office of the Executive Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor

FROM: Monica R. Lamboy, Executive Director 

DATE: February 10, 2011

SUBJECT: Declaration of Harris Park and Adjacent Right-of-Way as Available for Disposition pursuant to G.L. c. 30B, s. 16

The Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) respectfully requests that you forward the attached declaration of surplus to the Board of Aldermen (BOA) for their review and approval. Approval by the BOA would declare Harris Park and the section of Cross Street East adjacent to Harris Park as "surplus" so that they could be made available for redevelopment after the existing Harris Park is moved away from the expressway to a new location on Cross Street East closer to Broadway. In early 2008, the BOA authorized the disposition of this same property as part of an anticipated land swap in the area. Since then, the City has successfully secured grant funds to purchase three parcels on Cross Street East, so a land swap is no longer needed. Instead, staff is recommending the disposition of the property as it will no longer be needed for a park and there is no other municipal use identified for the property.

BACKGROUND

On January 27, 2011, the Board of Aldermen approved a Home Rule Petition authorizing the City to discontinue the existing Harris Park in East Somerville and replace it with a new Harris Park in a different location. At the same time, they authorized the acquisition of three parcels 15-25 Cross Street East and the acceptance of grant funds and capital funds to cover the cost of acquisition. The relocation of Harris Park makes the current site surplus and available for disposition. The total land area recommended for disposition is 20,960 s.f.

The park's current location adjacent to the access road to Interstate I-93 and the highway itself is an unwelcome environment for children. In contrast, the site would be highly desirable for a private development where proximity to the highway and easy access to Boston would be a competitive advantage.

On Monday November 26, 2007 the Mayor and the Alderman Roche held a neighborhood meeting at which nearby residents were informed about Park relocation concept. All acknowledged that the current site for Harris Park was not ideal and were amenable to the consideration of alternate locations. Comments were received that the design of any new park and any commercial facility are of interest to the abutters as they would want the facilities to be positive contributors to the neighborhood. Staff indicated that any development project on existing Harris Park site would receive its vehicular access from Mystic Avenue southbound and Blakely Road, etc. and not through Cross Street East.

THE DISPOSITION PROCESS

A Request for Proposals (RFP) process will be held before the BOA takes any action to actually dispose of the property. This will allow the City to select the preferred buyer, one which will not only offer a price that equals or exceeds the appraised value, but also has the expertise and track record to develop the site in a manner that is beneficial to the Somerville community. Through an RFP process, the City can establish its expectations and see what the private market can offer.

A Technical Advisory Committee will rank the proposals for consideration by the Mayor and the Mayor will forward his recommendation to the Board of Aldermen. Respondents may be asked to present their proposals to the Technical Advisory Committee, at a community meeting, before the Board of Aldermen, etc.

Final disposition will require approval of the Board of Aldermen. If the City is successful in identifying a buyer, future BOA action will be needed to discontinue the street and rezone the property to a use other than parkland.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board of Aldermen:

1. Declare Harris Park and the section of Cross Street East adjacent to Harris Park (see map) available for disposition under G.L. c. 30B, s. 16.
2. Authorize staff to proceed with a Request for Proposal.