



Diane Nichols Tradd
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

Kevin E. Coughlin
Deputy Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kevin J. Murphy, City Manager

FROM: Diane N. Tradd, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

SUBJECT: COUNCIL MOTION OF 5/23/17 BY COUNCILOR LEAHY
REQUEST CITY MANAGER EXPLORE POSSIBILITY OF LOCATING THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL IN THE
HAMILTON CANAL DISTRICT

The City Council, City Administration and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) has strived for the Hamilton Canal Innovation District (HCID) to be a successful redevelopment, turning a blighted area into a reinvigorated and thriving space that functions as a “transit-oriented, mixed-use Master Plan that will ultimately produce tax revenues approaching \$4 million per year, strengthen and diversify the existing downtown market, and create significant employment opportunities” as noted in the HCID Master Plan.

It’s also important to point out that the HCID Master Plan indicates that the district presents “an opportunity on a scale paralleled only by the City’s founding, and the creation of the Lowell National Historical Park. This Master Plan has been formulated with tremendous public input and support to ensure that the potential of this opportunity is realized.”

Since the adoption of the HCID Master Plan by the City Council, a lot has happened within the district. The Appleton Mills redevelopment converted a dilapidated building into 134 housing units; 110 Canal was rehabilitated and is currently occupied by UMass-Lowell’s Innovation Hub on the 3rd and 4th floors. Infrastructure along the south side of the area is by and large complete. Most recently, the Commonwealth has begun construction on the new Lowell Justice Center with the planned 250,000 square foot courthouse that will be a regional draw to the area. Additionally, the City has received MassWorks and EDA funding to construct the infrastructure on the north side of the district, making this side of the district primed for redevelopment. While many development opportunities remain in the district, the steps that have been taken to date signify the importance of making this 20 year plan a reality.

In response to the request, DPD is compelled to call attention to the significant issues that would result with attempting to locate the proposed new Lowell High School in the HCID. The City Council at a minimum should be aware of the following elements for consideration:

- *State and Federal funding received, such as MassWorks and EDA funding.*
As the City Council is likely aware, the HCID is a part of the Jackson/Appleton/Middlesex (JAM) Urban Renewal District. Throughout the JAM plan, the City has received State and Federal funding to accomplish the goals and objectives of both the JAM plan and HCID Master Plan. These include funding from MassWorks, EPA, CDBG, State Earmarks, EDI, EDA, GROW, URDG and Chapter 43D funds for a plethora of purposes, including Appraisals, Land Acquisitions, Survey and Planning, Relocation Expenses, Demolition and Clearance, Design Services, Infrastructure Improvements, Environmental Remediation and Property Management expenses. A number of these sources are typically connected to economic impact and job creation objectives. Should the High School be relocated to this area, it is more than likely that the City would need to relinquish not only the MassWorks and EDA funding it currently has, but also may need to return additional funding that was received previously that were also intended to move toward these objectives.

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- *Traffic impacts*
The street layouts and upgrades intended for the HCID and surrounding area have been completed with the expected projections of the district built out as intended in the Master Plan and Form-Based Code. Deviating from this with the construction of a new high school would require a new traffic analysis that could impact the design of a number of upcoming projects, including the Lord Overpass, Thorndike Street widening and Extension of Jackson Street into a new four-way intersection with Thorndike Street, Fletcher Street and Dutton Street, as well as the design of some surrounding streets in order to accommodate the altered traffic flows.
- *National Park Land Exchange*
The National Park Service (NPS) and City have repeatedly met and have taken steps toward completing a land exchange that would allow the City to obtain the current NPS Visitor's Center parking lot and bus parking lot (parcels 15 and 16 of the HCID). The land exchange has always been predicated upon the City sticking with the HCID Master Plan and Form Based Code. Deviations from these documents would very likely make the land exchange unpalatable to the NPS, meaning the City would not be able to acquire these 2.02 acres. This would mean that the north side of the district would only have 4.4 acres available for development.
- *HCID Parking Garage*
The City recently signed a contract with Walker Parking Consultants to design the 900 +/- space parking garage for the district. This makes up about 1.44 acres in the north side of the district. This is an element critical to the land exchange with the National Park Service. Additionally, this garage is intended to support the development throughout the HCID, including the aforementioned Justice Center. The construction of a new high school would make the development of the remainder of the district that much more challenging as the parking required for the school would jeopardize the viability of other projects intended in the district.
- *New State Approvals needed*
The unique aspects of the HCID have included not only the previously mentioned inclusion in the JAM Urban Renewal District but also the pre-permitting conducted by the City to streamline development for interested entities. This pre-permitting includes MEPA permitting and a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) from the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA). Again, should any deviation from the HCID Master Plan or HCID Form Based Code occur, it is more than likely the City would be required to obtain new approvals from DHCD and EOEEA, not to mention the local land use board approvals necessary to approve any necessary variances from any zoning requirements.

DNT/ns
5/25/17

cc: Joe Giniewicz, Urban Renewal Project Manager