



Diane Nichols Tradd
Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

Kevin Coughlin
Deputy DPD Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kevin J. Murphy, City Manager

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

SUBJECT: COUNCIL MOTION OF 01/23/2018 BY COUNCILOR LEAHY
REQUEST CITY MANAGER UPDATE THE CITY COUNCIL REGARDING THE MERRIMACK
VALLEY FOOD BANK (MVFB)

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) staff had their first meeting with the Merrimack Valley Food Bank (MVFB) regarding identification of a new space in November of 2014. At that time, DPD was informed of the organization's site specifications for a new location as listed below:

1. 40,000 s.f. building or 2 + acre lot
2. Purchase versus lease
3. Preferably single-story building
4. Multiple loading docks
5. Tractor Trailer accessibility
6. Easy access to Lowell Connector/Highway
7. Existing walk-in freezers and food storage
8. Non-contaminated site (due to food storage)

At this initial meeting, several privately owned sites were discussed: 137 Phoenix Avenue (former USPS distribution facility); 170 Lincoln Street; other potential parcels of land along Tanner Street. Unfortunately for the MVFB, all had some level of contamination. By mid-2015, the two top contenders, 137 Phoenix Avenue and 170 Lincoln Street, were sold to Somerset Industries and to Patriot Care (Medical Marijuana Dispensary) respectively.

In late 2016 and throughout 2017, DPD staff had several meetings with the MVFB's real estate consultant, Mr. Demetrius Spaneas, of Land & Sea Real Estate. Mr. Spaneas inquired about redevelopment opportunities in the HCID and other City owned properties. During this time period, DPD conducted several site searches and identified several other privately owned properties that were on the market either for sale or lease, i.e. 450 Chelmsford Street (former RMV building); 55-75 Phoenix Avenue and 92 Bolt Street. The property owner of 450 Chelmsford Street was unresponsive. The property at 92 Bolt Street was rapidly sold to a private entity. 55-75 Phoenix Avenue was believed to have potential, however, after further investigation, DPD found several environmental issues, specifically related to its location within a flood plain, presenting redevelopment challenges on this parcel. Most recently, another property on Industrial Avenue East was identified as a suitable site and it is currently on the market for sale, however, according to the MVFB's Executive Director, Amy Pessia, the asking price is well above their budget.

The site search for the MVFB has been extremely challenging due to very limited inventory of large, single-story warehouse facilities in Lowell available for sale (or lease) as well as the lack of buildable, non-contaminated land. The City's new Director of Economic Development, Andrew Shapiro, is scheduling a meeting and tour with the MVFB's Executive Director, to better understand the organization's challenges in finding a suitable location and to brainstorm on "outside of the box" alternatives.

In addition to site selection services, DPD continues to support MVFB's mission through financial (annual CDBG funding) and technical assistance such as determination of environmental conditions and zoning concerns, as well as through letters of support in grant applications that will aid in the facility's expansion. DPD will continue to update the Food Bank when new properties come on the market and will remain engaged with the organization as they identify a property/site for their expansion.

DNT/ns

2/2/18

cc: Andrew Shapiro, Director of Economic Development