

MEMO

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Rick Mitchell
RE: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary Strategic Plan
DATE: October 28, 2022

Pursuant to the request by Planning Board this memo lays out the framework and action steps of Strategic Plan to identify the highest and best uses of the property in relation to the interests of Gordon Theological Seminary (GCTS) and the town of Hamilton.

As background, Emil Dahlquist and I were charged to explore options for the reuse of the property in conjunction with my efforts to get the town of Hamilton and GCTS to engage in a joint, cooperative investigation into viable options for reuse of the 100-acre property. As result of these efforts four consulting firms were contacted by Emil and myself with two, Abramson and Associates <https://www.abramsonassoc.com> and Gamble and Associates <https://gambleassoc.com> responding and interviewed by Select Board Chair, Shawn Farrell, Emil, Town Manager, Joe Domelowicz, myself, and Ken Barnes and Meirwyn Walters from GCTS. Both consultants previously worked together and decided to team in making a proposal for a strategic plan. After several rounds of negotiations, a scope was agreed upon for an intensive 4-month infrastructure, economic, and market analysis of potential reuse options, with GCTS contributing \$30K towards the \$93K cost (final contract and scope attached). A key requirement of the study is mounting robust public engagement to ensure abutters and towns people's concerns and opinions are heard and incorporated into final recommendations. The schedule calls for the study to be completed early January with findings and recommendations for reuse/rezoning the property. The goal, to provide objective, expert analysis and public input to aid and advance the Planning Board's development of a new reuse bylaw for consideration at spring town meeting.

Key Activities to Date & Forthcoming

Abutters Meeting held 10/18 at GCTS with approximately 25 people in attendance to introduce the consultant team, key individuals from town/GCTS, and solicit abutters input on concerns and preferences for potential reuses. Comments ranged from preserving as open space, maintaining public access, understanding change was coming and minimizing impacts expressing hope for uses such as something like New England Biolabs, a conference center, and some elements of affordable housing, to name a few. A full written summary is being prepared by consultants. Materials used attached.

November 14 Public meeting at Community House. On the 14th at 7 pm the first meeting for general public will be held from 7 to 8:30 pm to again introduce the consultants, key players, and solicit input on concerns and thoughts on potential reuses.

Second Public Meeting to present preliminary findings and summary of public comments is to be scheduled early December. Citizens will again be asked to comment early findings and recommendations to further refine final potential reuse recommendations.

Final Report January 2023. Final report is scheduled to be delivered in early January 2023. A third public meeting to present the findings and recommendations is not part of existing scope, but has been proposed as an additional service. Personally, I believe it should be held to ensure maximum public participation and awareness of recommendations.

Additional Efforts

At the suggestion of Emil, Jonathan Whitten of KP Law (and seasoned expert in land use and zoning) has been engaged by the town to monitor the strategic plan and its findings and, as appropriate, provide direct assistance to the Planning Board in consideration and drafting and new by law required to facilitate reuse of the GCTS property.

Planning Board Role

Given the transfer of GCTS to new ownership and its reuse will be the largest land transfer and redevelopment in many decades it is imperative planning board members become and stay informed and involved in the public process that will shape the character and finances of the town for the remainder of this century. It is hoped this memo and future conversations with and among planning board members will aid in shaping a positive outcome.

Attachments:

- Final signed contract
- Abutter handouts