

FROM	NAME & TITLE	CHRIS RYER, DIRECTOR	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING 8 TH FLOOR, 417 EAST FAYETTE STREET		
	SUBJECT	CITY COUNCIL BILL #24-0474 / ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY – BLOCK 6990, LOTS 1 – 7, and BLOCK 6991, LOTS 1 – 26, and the bed of WOODHOUSE AVENUE		

TO

The Honorable President and
Members of the City Council
City Hall, Room 400
100 North Holliday Street

DATE: February 9, 2024

At its regular meeting of February 8, 2024, the Planning Commission considered City Council Bill #24-0474, for the purpose of authorizing the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore to acquire, by purchase or condemnation, the fee simple or other interests in certain property known as Block 6990, Lots 1 through 7, and Block 6991, Lots 1 through 26, and the bed of Woodhouse Avenue needed for the purpose of laying out or extending a public road and the widening of Ralls Avenue as shown on Plat 240-A-56-A in the Office of the Department of Transportation; and providing for a special effective date.

In its consideration of this Bill, the Planning Commission reviewed the attached staff report, which recommended amendment and approval of City Council Bill #24-0474 and adopted the following resolutions, with seven members being present (seven in favor):

RESOLVED, That the Planning Commission concurs with the recommendation of its departmental staff, adopts the findings and equity analysis outlined in the staff report, with consideration for testimony and facts presented in the meeting, and recommends that City Council Bill #24-0474 be **approved** by the City Council.

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Eric Tiso, Division Chief, Land Use and Urban Design Division at 410-396-8358.

CR/ewt

attachment

cc: Ms. Nina Themelis, Mayor's Office
The Honorable Eric Costello, Council Rep. to Planning Commission
Mr. Colin Tarbert, BDC
Ms. Rebecca Witt, BMZA
Mr. Geoffrey Veale, Zoning Administration
Ms. Stephanie Murdock, DHCD
Ms. Elena DiPietro, Law Dept.
Mr. Francis Burnszynski, PABC
Mr. Liam Davis, DOT
Ms. Natawna Austin, Council Services



Brandon M. Scott
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Sean D. Davis, Chair; Eric Stephenson, Vice Chair

STAFF REPORT



Chris Ryer
Director

February 8, 2024

REQUEST: City Council Bill #24-0474 / Acquisition of Property – Block 6990, Lots 1 – 7, and Block 6991, Lots 1 – 26, and the bed of Woodhouse Avenue:

For the purpose of authorizing the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore to acquire, by purchase or condemnation, the fee simple or other interests in certain property known as Block 6990, Lots 1 through 7, and Block 6991, Lots 1 through 26, and the bed of Woodhouse Avenue needed for the purpose of laying out or extending a public road and the widening of Ralls Avenue as shown on Plat 240-A-56-A in the Office of the Department of Transportation; and providing for a special effective date.

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

STAFF: Matt DeSantis, AICP

PETITIONER: Council President (at the request of the Department of Real Estate)

SITE/GENERAL AREA:

Site Conditions: The site is located in the St. Helena neighborhood statistical area and is comprised of 34 total parcels and covers roughly 2.4 total acres. The property is used for commercial truck storage and is mostly unimproved gravel with some grass. There is an office trailer at the northeast corner and the site is enclosed with barbed wire fencing.

General Area:

The site is at the southwest corner of the St. Helena neighborhood and in very close proximity to the Port of Baltimore. The western edge of the property abuts Baltimore County and the partially constructed Center Place. St. Helena Park lies to the southeast and attached dwellings are found directly across the street to the north, Riverview Avenue.

HISTORY

- At their September 3, 2009, hearing, the Planning Commission recommended favorably for CCB#2009-0377 which proposed acquisition of the same exact parcels as are currently identified.

ANALYSIS

Background: As evidenced by the above-listed legislation from 2009, this project has been a long time coming. The intent is that Baltimore County and Baltimore City, working cooperatively, propose to extend the partially constructed Center Place so as to make a direct connection

between Ralls Avenue / Broening Highway and Dundalk Avenue. The road was partially constructed in 2010, but then County funding decisions have put the completion of the project on hold.

Proposal: Baltimore County has been spearheading this project for many years and is desirous of a direct connection between historic Dundalk and the Port of Baltimore as well as other parts of Southeast Baltimore City. The proposal is to acquire the subject parcels, either through private sale or condemnation so that 1) Ralls Avenue may be slightly widened and 2) Center Place may be extended across the City/County line and connect with Ralls Avenue. As Baltimore County lacks condemnation powers within City limits, the City is working in partnership with Baltimore County government on this project.

While the initial bill in 2009 emphasized a public park improvement, the current assumption is that the site is heavily contaminated after years of heavy industrial use. At this point in time, the planned improvements do not include park space, but that would not necessarily be precluded from happening in the future should funding for appropriate remediation be allocated. At the minimum it is anticipated that landscaping improvements could be made along with the new roadway construction. Designs for the overall improvements, which include stormwater management features, are still conceptual.

Funding/Ownership: Baltimore County will be shouldering the entire financial burden of this initiative, from reimbursing the City for the land acquisition (if they are ultimately not successful in privately purchasing the land from the property owner and the City is required to move forward with condemnation) to paying for the construction costs of the improved roadways. It is anticipated that the County will ultimately assume ownership of the land and the roadways and maintain them in perpetuity. Access easements will be placed on the public roadways, so while owned by the County, would serve as public streets.

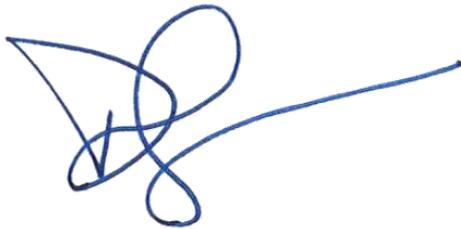
Finding of Public Purpose: The proposed acquisition for the construction of a public street clearly provides a public benefit. The St. Helena community and the Dundalk business community have been advocating for many years in support of this initiative. The Port of Baltimore's very large employee base generates a very large number of vehicle trips, many of which utilize St. Helena's small neighborhood streets. One of the intentions of this roadway improvement is to divert much of this traffic from using local neighborhood streets since motorists will have a direct connection from Dundalk Avenue along Center Place to both Dundalk Marine Terminal and Seagirt Marine Terminal.

Equity:

- Impact:
 - How might the proposal impact the surrounding community in the short or long term?
 - This bill in the short term would enable the City to acquire the land through purchase of condemnation. In the long term, it would facilitate the construction of a public roadway that would have beneficial environmental impacts on both the St. Helena and Dundalk communities.

- How would this proposal impact existing patterns of inequity that persist in Baltimore?
 - The St. Helena community is one that is frequently overlooked, as it straddles the City/County line. As such, investments in public infrastructure tend to be unfortunately lacking. This project is one that has been promised to community residents for at least 15 years.
- Engagement:
 - Has the community been meaningfully engaged in discussing this proposal?
 - How are residents who have been historically excluded from planning processes being authentically included in the planning of the proposed policy or project?
 - This bill represents a project with many years of history and strong community support. There are several letters of support for this bill that have been submitted and made available for Commission review.
- Internal Operations:
 - How would this bill impact staff time or resources?
 - There is no anticipated specific impact on staff time or resources.

Notification: Notification of this action was sent to the St. Helena Community Association, Dundalk Renaissance, the property owner, and the property owner's attorney. It was also posted in accordance with Planning Commission guidelines. Additionally, the meeting agenda was sent to over 18,100 recipients via GovDelivery.



Chris Ryer
Director