



MEMORANDUM

To: The Honorable President and Members of the City Council
From: Eric Evans, Real Estate Officer, Department of Real Estate & Christine Griffin, Deputy Director Policy and Government Relations, Office of the Comptroller
Date: January 23, 2024
Re: CCB 24-0474 Acquisition of Property – Block 6990, Lots 1 – 7, and Block 6991, Lots 1 – 26, and the bed of Woodhouse Avenue needed for laying out or extending a public road and the widening of Ralls Avenue

Position: Favorable

The Department of Real Estate is reporting on City Council bill 0474 Acquisition of Property – 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.

Center Place Roadway Extension Project Purpose

Baltimore County (henceforth known as the County) is working to extend the road known as Center Place to provide a direct vehicular connection from the County's Main Street Commercial District in Dundalk to Broening Highway in Baltimore City. Creating a more direct connection between Baltimore City and the core of the Main Street commercial district will revitalize the historic Main Street in Dundalk. The connection will also fulfill a longstanding commitment to improving the quality of life for Baltimore City residents in St. Helena by diverting truck traffic and eliminating heavy commercial use adjacent to this residential area. Most of the land upon which the extension will be built is on County-owned parkland, but parcels, namely, the link and junction to Broening Highway, are on private properties in the City.

Currently, Center Place dead ends approximately a third of a mile before Broening Highway near the Dundalk Marine Terminal. Most of the extension will be built on 33 properties and a paper road, Woodhouse Avenue, located in the Holabird Industrial Park of Baltimore City. The properties are Block 6990, Lots 1 through 7, and Block 6991, Lots 1 through 26, and the bed of Woodhouse Avenue. Acquisition of these properties, located on the border between Baltimore City and the County, will allow the County to extend Center Place through the private properties to Broening Highway. The connection between Dundalk Avenue and Broening Highway will highlight Dundalk's industrial heritage and create a clear path from Baltimore City to Dundalk that leads travelers directly to the town's historic core and Main Street.

On April 5th, 2023, the Board of Estimates approved a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Baltimore City and Baltimore County, providing for the acquisitions and delineating each entity's responsibilities for the project.

The City's role is limited to the (i) acquisition of the properties, (ii) support for the County in obtaining required permits and/or approvals for the Project, and (iii) assisting the County as needed in obtaining support from other stakeholders, including the Maryland Port Administration. The City agreed to pursue and acquire the private properties directly from the owner through direct negotiation and/or condemnation for the abovementioned purposes. The County has agreed to provide the funding for the acquisition, development, and construction of the Project, including but not limited to the purchase price, consulting costs, condemnation litigation expenses, environmental assessments and remediation, appraisals, and relocation. Furthermore, the County has agreed to indemnify and hold the City harmless for any environmental matters.

Purchase Process

Two independent appraisals are obtained to determine the fair market value for the acquisition of the private properties. Under the MOU, the County is responsible for obtaining the two independent appraisals. The City's offer to the owner will be based on the fair market value as determined by the highest appraisal obtained by the County. In the event through direct negotiation, the owner and the City enter into an option agreement, the City will assign such option to the County subject to Board of Estimates approval.

If the negotiations with the owner are unsuccessful, the City will file a condemnation action in the Circuit Court for Baltimore City to acquire the private properties. The County has agreed pursuant to the MOU to provide the City funds for the acquisition and the litigation expenses for condemnation, including but not limited to, the expenses for mediation, updated appraisals, if any, experts' preparation and testimony for trial, transportation of jury, and post judgment interest. In the event the City obtains title through condemnation, the City will transfer title to the County upon approval of the Board of Estimates.

A trucking company currently occupying the properties must be relocated as part of the acquisition. The County has agreed to incur the relocation expense and the costs for the relocation consultant.

Ordinance

A City ordinance is necessary to authorize the acquisition of the 33 lots and the bed of Woodhouse Avenue by negotiation or condemnation.

The Department of Real Estate respectfully requests a favorable report enabling this ordinance.