

November 22, 2021

Stafford Brownfields Advisory Committee
Virtual Public Hearing via Zoom
5:00 p.m.

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TOWN CLERK

RE: Town of Stafford intent to apply for a Brownfield Cleanup Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Brownfields Program

Presenters/Co-Hosts: Amber Wakley, Grants & Marketing Specialist

David Perkins, Land-use Technician, and Code Enforcement Officer

Those Present:

Butch Clark, Rebecca Kraussmann, Roger Ingraham, Dr. David Mordasky, Beth Margura, David Palmberg, Sarah DeStefano (Weston & Sampson), Craig Miner (Weston & Sampson), Stephen Lawrence, Alice Lawrence, Sal Titus, Rick Hartenstein, Leonard Clark, Deb Szemreylo, Kim Milikowski. *Several unidentified callers were also attended the virtual meeting.*

The virtual Public Hearing was brought to order at 5:02 p.m. by Amber Wakley. Wakley began with presenter introductions and reiterated the meeting purpose, stating the Town's intention to apply for the FY22 Brownfield Cleanup Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. She encouraged questions and comments following the presentation, asked participants to sign in using the "chatbox", and went on to describe virtual controls, such as the "raise hand" feature and commenting. Wakley also reminded that all comments, questions, and answers would be included as part of the application package.

Together, Perkins and Wakley provided a review of the EPA Brownfield's Program and went on to present the draft application and draft Analysis Brownfields Cleanup Alternatives (ABCA) in conjunction with a visual slideshow. Wakley discussed the project description and goals: Stafford's overarching goals are to preserve the attractiveness of the community, increase the growth of employment and tax base, and improve the overall quality of life of residents. According to the 2012 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), commercial development is encouraged in the downtown where many underutilized buildings are present.

Perkins included detail about the former Witt School history and how the Site came into the Town's ownership. He went on to articulate assessment activities at the Site and contaminants of concern, including asbestos, polychlorinated biphenyls, and lead paint. He reviewed the draft ABCA and the evaluation of three (3) remedial alternatives: Alternative #1: No Action; Alternative #2: Abatement and Renovation; Alternative #3: Abatement and Demolition. He described the effectiveness, implementability, and cost of each remedial alternative. He explained Alternative #2 Abatement and Renovation is recommended since it's the most cost-effective option capable of reducing risk while having the smallest impact on the surrounding community and the environment, and in line with EPA's Clean and Green Cleanup guidelines.

mixed-use, mixed-income building that utilizes the bottom floors to create a permanent farmers/cooperative market, including a farm-to-table dining experience. The proposed mixed-use space retains the existing gymnasium and kitchen, developing space for much-needed recreation and entertainment opportunities while providing a legal space for farmers and entrepreneurs to pursue certified food ventures. In addition, and partnership with the Stafford Housing Authority, the upper floor is envisioned with affordable senior housing with an adult daycare center. The reuse scenario slide concluded the formal presentation. Wakley asked participants for comments and questions.

David Palmberg (Planning & Zoning Commission), said: After reviewing the narrative, he noted that while a small portion of the property - such as the ball fields near the river - are within a flood zone, the Witt School Building/Site is not. He suggested it be edited to accurately describe the site and to not potentially complicate future redevelopment. Perkins and Wakley noted they would make changes in the next draft edit.

Deb Szemreylo, Hampden Road (Stafford Agricultural Commission and Stafford Area Farmers and Crafters Market), asked: How many parking spaces were available at the Project Site. She mentioned the need for high-volume parking to accommodate both vendors and customers. She asked that several points of access/entrances be considered in the design.

Wakley commented that the parking lot would likely be reimaged/restriped to best accommodate new Site uses. She added that redevelopment and reuse planning is a future step in the process and that the Stafford Ag Commission would be an important project partner in that process.

Szemreylo, asked: If the addition of senior housing would be in conjunction with the renovations of Avery Park Apartments (*202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly and Low-Income Housing*) and if residents would move to the Witt School throughout construction.

Wakley commented that inquiry should be directed to the Stafford Housing Authority, as the timeline of the Avery Park renovation project is unknown.

Dr. David Mordasky, Buckley Highway (Stafford Ag Commission, chair, and Planning and Zoning Commission): Dr. Mordasky asked if he could summarize feedback from Ag Commission members. He shared that a brick-and-mortar co-op/market aligned with the vision of late commission member, Bruce Dobson. The Witt School venue wasn't strongly considered as a stand-alone farmers market, but there is strong favor in developing/partnering with a mixed-use concept incorporating the farm-to-table component, senior housing, and mentioned amenities. He added, having an agricultural tone to the facility is consistent with what the Commission feels agriculture in the Town of Stafford should represent – whether it's a venue for agriculture activity or farm-to-table experience. He said to *just* having a farmers market may not be sustainable, but offering diverse Ag options is a phenomenal idea and something he believes the Ag Commission would support in its entirety.

Stephen Lawrence, Tetrault Road, asked: How will the project would be financed?

Wakley said the Town of Stafford is requesting \$600,000 from the EPA with a cost-share match of \$130,000. The Town will also work to leverage other funding sources.

Leonard Clark, Westford Road (Stafford Historic Advisory Commission, chair, and Planning Zoning Commission): He agreed with the pursuing Remedial Alternative #2. He inquired about the acquiring private investment and asked if the Witt School site would remain in ownership of the Town of Stafford.

Perkins confirmed the Site would remain in ownership of the Town under the proposed project.

Stephen Lawrence, Tetrault Road: inquired to the anticipated timeline.

Wakley began, the project would likely not commence until 2023. Sarah DeStefano (Weston & Sampson) added if the Town was successful in its grant application, they would be notified in approximately May 2022 and the money would not become available until October 1, 2022. The Town would then need to procure QEPs and contractors, which would likely extend to 2023. The Town will have approximately three years to complete the project.

Rebecca Kraussmann, Hillcrest Drive (Historic Advisory Commission and Historic Society Museum): Asked if we were successful in obtaining Cleanup Grant funds, but unsuccessful in obtaining redevelopment funds, would we still receive full funding for cleanup?

Wakley said that this proposal is specifically for the cleanup of the Site and redevelopment/reuse funds would be sought separately using State, Local, and Federal sources. DeStefano added that the goal of the EPA Brownfields Program is to get this property for reuse and the proposal is our best-anticipated action.

Kraussmann, added: The proposed reuse scenario is the best chance the Witt School has for redevelopment, that the team has done a great job and a new hope has been given to the property.

Dr. Mordasky: Asked where future development inquiries are directed, if the Ag Commission or other groups has ideas or would like to be active participants in the reuse process.

Wakley said all of the Project Partners would work in tandem to realize reuse goals that would best serve the community. For now, she asked all questions and comments be directed jointly to the Town of Stafford Grants & Marketing Office & Building/Zoning Department. DeStefano spurred the discussion about future State and Local funding opportunities, such as grant programs through the State Department of Economic Development. She said active and collaborative partners will strengthen these

opportunities. Wakley explained different programs the Town would pursue to leverage additional project funding.

Leonard Clark asked to comment: The Stafford Historic Advisory Commission (SHAC) has been working on this [Site] for 2½ years, and what I see right here, right now is the best thing I've seen so far. I really want to say "thank you" to Amber, Dave and all those involved for getting us to this point. I think we're on the right track.

Perkins commented that over the years, there have been ongoing conversations between various commissions, boards, and groups. He believes that the proposed reuse is the best compromise from those meetings/conversations. Perkins credits the desire to keep the Site under the ownership of the Town to the Stafford Historical Advisory Commission. He thanked the Commission for their efforts and diligence with this project. Wakley added that SHAC has been an integral part of the process and extended appreciation for their research, expertise and time contributed to the project.

Alice Lawrence, Tetrault Road (Economic Development Commission), commented: There seem to be no negatives in applying and partnering with the EPA Brownfields Cleanup Program. She asked if there were any downsides.

Perkins said there were no negatives from his point of view. Wakley said she agreed. DeStefano also explained the nationwide competitiveness of the program and even if the project went unfunded in this round, the Town is positioning itself positively for future competitions, and possibly at a time with an anticipated increase of funding allocations derived from the recent Infrastructure Bill.

Roger Ingraham, Highland Terrace (Stafford Historic Advisory Committee, Lions Club), said: His neighborhood, which sits adjacent to the Site, has always been concerned about the reuse since it could directly impact the nature of their community. He said the proposed reuse is great and appreciates the work accomplished to integrate community input. He went on to ask, what measures will be taken to further protect the property from further deterioration and/or vandalism from the project?

Wakley made a note that action items need to be created to best protect the property while it awaits redevelopment. Perkins added that specific funds are not budgeted to the Site and that it will be a topic of conversation in the upcoming budget planning process.

Beth Magura, West Stafford Road (Stafford Historic Advisory Commission): Agreed that protection of the property is critical and inquired about current security measures.

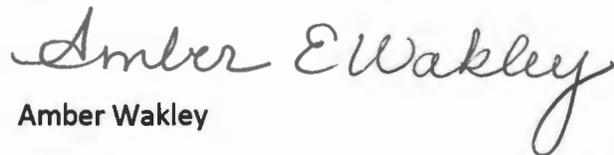
Wakley commented that the building does have an interior security/alarm system and expanded use of security cameras is being explored.

There were no additional comments or questions.

Wakley said comments/questions would be accepted through Monday, November 29, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. and that inquiries can be directed to amberw@staffordct.org or 860-851-8102. She encouraged the community to visit explorestaffordct.com/brownfields where the evenings' presentation will be available for future viewing and commentary. Wakley and Perkins thanked the participants and they look forward to the future of this project.

The public hearing adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Amber Wakley