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MBTA eyes federal grant to help fund stalled Arborway Yard project

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 28, 2011 02:37 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

The MBTA plans to apply for federal grant funding that may give new life to the long-awaited \$224-million Arborway Yard project, which is indefinitely stalled because the transit authority says it currently can't afford the project.

The Federal Transit Administration has made up to \$750 million in unallocated discretionary bus and bus facilities funds available to public transit providers through its "State of Good Repair Bus" initiative.

The grant program will help "finance capital projects to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct rehabilitate bus-related facilities," according to a grant notice issued Friday.

"The MBTA feels the Arborway project is an excellent candidate for a grant, and General Manager Richard Davey has made it abundantly clear to staff that he wants the MBTA's application to make a very strong argument for funds," said T spokesman Joe Pesaturo in an e-mail.

He also added, "Please keep in mind that this is a competitive grant process, meaning there is no guarantee of an award."

While the program does not have a floor or upper limit for any single grant, there is competition from other public transit providers across the county. And, federal officials say the program "intends to fund as many meritorious projects as possible."

Additionally, the "FTA may elect to only partially fund some project proposals," and, thus, asks grant applicants to submit "scalable" project plans.

Those agencies that ultimately receive federal dollars through the program will need to pitch in between 10 to 20 percent of the cost of the project aspects selected for grant funding. The percentage of local cost sharing required is dependent on the project's parameters.

Grant applications are due by July 29. Projects selected by the FTA for funding will be announced in September or October.

Thirteen years after first being proposed, the Arborway Yard project's design

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was finalized [earlier this year](#) after a decade of back-and-forth negotiations between the T, city and local residents. However, the debt-riddled MBTA that has a long, costly list of needed repairs and maintenance omitted the project and its ever-growing price tag from the [five-year, rolling capital investment plan](#) it adopted in the spring.

The MBTA announced general plans for applying for federal grant assistance for the Arborway Yard project at a [City Council hearing](#) two weeks ago, according to the [Jamaica Plain Gazette](#).

A draft version of the MBTA's next, rolling five-year capital investment plan will be released before the calendar year's end, or shortly after the projects selected for the federal grant's funding will be announced.

Back in 1998, the Arborway Yard project's initial plans had called for a bus facility to encompass the entire, 17-acre site. But, a community committee formed shortly thereafter fought back and eventually reached an agreement with the T to consolidate its plans and leave room for around eight acres to be used for city development including affordable housing and youth recreation space.

The site along Arborway and Washington Street currently houses 118 compressed natural gas (CNG) buses in a facility built in 2003. That intended-to-be-temporary setup allowed buses from Bartlett Yard in Roxbury – which the T has since sold to a developer – to move to Arborway Yard the following year.

The now eight-year-old bus storage, fueling, maintenance and cleaning facility is three years overdue for a replacement.

The [JP Gazette](#) reported that longtime Forest Hills resident and the chair of the Community Planning Committee for the Arborway Yard, Henry Allen, was scheduled to meet with MBTA officials to learn further details about the federal grant application. Allen was not immediately available to comment this week.

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