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ROXBURY

City given 4 ideas for Roxbury land; developers say Walmart not in plans

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 3, 2011 01:23 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Four groups have submitted proposals to develop roughly three-and-a-half acres of vacant, publicly-owned land in Roxbury.

The available space, [two parcels](#) separated by Melnea Cass Boulevard and abutting Washington Street and Shawmut Ave on either side, are in an area where Walmart has reportedly been looking to build its first Boston store, according to [a recent Boston Business Journal report](#).

However, since filing their proposals with the city's redevelopment authority last week, each private development team has told Boston.com that no one from their group has been in talks with the mega-retailer, nor do any of the teams have plans to do so.

Also denied were rumors that Walmart has been in talks with the private owners of a set of several nearby parcels that combined comprise about 2.8 acres of property, currently used as a school bus depot, at the intersection of Melnea Cass Boulevard and Washington Street.

The owners of those parcels are David and Deborah Smookler. David Smookler is a partner at the [Dartmouth Company](#), a real estate firm the Boston Business Journal listed in their recent report as being in talks with Walmart.

But, reached last week at his office where according to his employer's website he is "involved in representing national retailers and developing expansion strategies for stores opening in the Northeast," Smookler said that property is not on the market and denied having had any talks about it with the global retailer.

"That property is rented out. We have no dialogue going on with [Walmart]," he said. "We're very happy with the tenants we have there."

A recently-formed team that calls itself Washington Crossing Partners, LLC, is the only one of the four developers that submitted proposals for both pieces of land – Parcel 9 and Parcel 10 – the city requested ideas for.

Their idea, dubbed "Washington Crossing," calls for a \$125-million, 365,000

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square-foot mixed-use development that would comprise roughly 250 parking spaces to accompany commercial and retail space along with 144 workforce housing units, 14 of which would be townhouses.

“Our goal is to match the Roxbury community’s vision for development of the area,” said Thomas J. Bauer, principal of Bauer Properties-Equity, one of several partnering entities involved in the proposal. “We’re not looking for big-box retailers,” but rather smaller companies that can work well alongside the area’s existing local business.

Some commercial space would be marketed to educational and academic institutions eyeing research and satellite office space. The retail component would include expansion opportunities for local and minority-owned businesses, such as Tropical Foods, which sits on an adjacent parcel. Other smaller retail components might include a coffee shop and/or business support services, such as Fed Ex/Kinkos.

Development team Parcel 9 Partners, LLC – a joint venture between New Atlantic Development and Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation – have proposed a \$28.5-million project called “Shawmut Green,” which focuses solely on Parcel 9.

The project would include a mix of 78 workforce rental and ownership housing units; 11,000 square feet of destination and locally-owned retail; a 2,000 square-foot entrepreneurship training center, created in conjunction with United Neighbors of Lower Roxbury; and both permanent and rotating public art installations, supported by institutions such as the Museum of Afro-American Art and ACT Roxbury.

“There’s definitely no Walmart in our proposal,” said David Price, Nuestra CDC’s director, who added that conventional financing will allow his team’s proposal to be ready to build quickly. “We don’t need the economy to recover to start this.”

Also proposing to develop just Parcel 9 is team Urbanica Design + Development, which has submitted an idea for a 10-story hotel with between 150 and 162 rooms. The submitted plans, which are being called “Melnea Hotel & Residences” and can be seen in two parts -- [the first here](#) and [the second here](#) -- would include around 20,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial, restaurant and community space; 52 mixed-income housing units and 139 parking spots.

That team’s leader, Kamran Zahedi, said his group has also not spoken to Walmart. “In that area you need more of an urban design than would work for a Walmart,” he said.

Proposing development solely on Parcel 10 is a recently formed group called Madison Tropical, LLC – a joint venture between Madison Park Development Corporation and Tropical Foods International, which also submitted a [full copy](#) of their proposal to Boston.com.



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That proposal would add commercial and residential uses to Parcel 10 and integrate the parcel with the adjacent building and property now owned by Tropical Foods.

According to one of the team's members, the development group has also had no discussions with Walmart.

The idea calls for a 20,000 square-foot, modern supermarket for Tropical Foods and another 20,000 square feet of second-floor warehousing and office space in one building. A second building would house 36 mixed-income apartments with street level retail and upper floor office space. A third building at 2101 Washington St. would be converted into 30 affordable apartments with street level retail. The plans call for grade-level, landscaped parking and pedestrian walkways connected to the public sidewalk system.

The four different proposals will be reviewed internally by city redevelopment authority staff before being presented to the community. No decision will be made before the four ideas are presented during at least one, not-yet-scheduled public meeting, a city redevelopment spokeswoman said.

The city does not have to necessarily select any of the proposals, and it is likely that the current proposals will change, at least slightly, before clearing the subsequent Article 80 public review process.

The two tracts are near Dudley Square, where major development activity is scheduled over the coming years, as well as near the neighborhood's border with the South End. Broad [goals for development](#) of the parcels are laid out in the proposal request from the city's redevelopment authority and the state transportation department – each of which own portions of the two parcels.

Those goals include: implementing the neighborhood's strategic master plan with an emphasis on maximizing economic development and job creation, including for jobs for neighborhood residents; opportunities for community and/or minority equity and ownership, local small business development, and more home ownership opportunities.

The request also recommends developers focus on offering ideas that will: encourage economic growth of adjoining parcels and other nearby developments – including Dudley Square's business district; reinforce the physical, social, and economic fabric of Roxbury; leverage the neighborhoods resources; build with sustainability; and have a successful transit-oriented design.

The objectives for developing the land were worked out through a three-year partnership with community members, residents' groups, the city and elected officials to create the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan, which provides a strategic framework for 10 to 20 years of future economic growth.

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