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T denied federal grant funding for stalled Arborway Yard project

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By **Matt Rocheleau**, Town Correspondent

Federal transit officials have rejected the MBTA’s application for grant money to help fund the long-awaited \$224-million Arborway Yard project, which remains indefinitely stalled because the transit authority says it can’t afford the project.

“We’re bitterly disappointed,” said longtime Forest Hills resident Henry Allen, who chairs the Community Planning Committee for the Arborway Yard, a group that formed several months after the project’s plans were announced in the summer of 1998.

“We certainly intend to continue to press the MBTA and the transportation office and the governor to fulfill their promise to this project,” he said in a phone conversation Wednesday. “It will be a fight, quite frankly, and it won’t be easy.”

Thirteen years after first being proposed, the Arborway Yard project’s design was [finalized earlier this year](#) after a decade of back-and-forth negotiations between the T, city and local residents.

The MBTA, saddled with debt and a costly list of needed repairs and maintenance, omitted the project from the [five-year, rolling capital investment plan it adopted in the spring](#).

Some hope was renewed when the MBTA [announced this summer it would apply](#) for federal grant assistance to help pay for the Arborway Yard plans.

The Federal Transit Administration had made up to \$750 million in unallocated discretionary bus and bus facilities funds available – with no floor or upper limit for any single grant -- to public transit providers through its “State of Good Repair Bus” initiative.

But that program was one of three highly-competitive federal transit grant programs, all of which announced winning projects this week.

Between the three programs, 839 project applications representing \$4.9 billion in funding requests were sent from transit providers across the country. Less than half of the applications were approved. The winning projects will share around one-fifth of the total federal dollars requested.

Several Massachusetts transit agencies' projects received [\\$28.9 million in total](#) through the grant programs, \$22 million of which was awarded through the “State of Good Repair Bus” initiative including \$18.4 million that will allow the state's transportation department [to replace its entire statewide regional fleet](#) of

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30 buses.

Late Monday the MBTA learned the Arborway Yard project would not receive any federal grant funding, according to an e-mail today from T spokesman Joe Pesaturo.

“No other grant requests are pending,” for the Arborway Yard project, he wrote.

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 the Arborway and Washington Street currently houses around 115 compressed natural gas (CNG) buses in a facility built in 2003. That intended-to-be-temporary setup allowed buses from Bartlett Yard in Roxbury – property 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.

Though news that the recent federal grant application was denied, CPCAY chair Allen said the application process itself had some positive impacts.

“With this federal grant application we got a lot of new energy behind this initiative,” much of which came in the form of supports letters local elected officials, organizations and residents mailed directly to United States transportation secretary Ray LaHood, he said. “We’re going to try to mobilize those folks to target the T now to get this done.”

The MBTA’s next, rolling five-year capital investment plan will be hashed out over the coming months and is expected to be adopted sometime in the spring.

“It’s shovel ready,” Allen said of the project. “It’s got to get back into the Capital Improvement Plan. Really the next three or four months are crucial for that.”

He said his committee and its supporters recognize the T and most other public agencies are struggling financially right now and that some other projects are considered higher priority.

“But, we continue to believe this should be a very high priority to the T and the community and for the T following through on promises they’ve made,” said Allen. “It’s been an uphill battle for 13 years, but we will keep pressing on ... We will leave no stone unturned.”

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