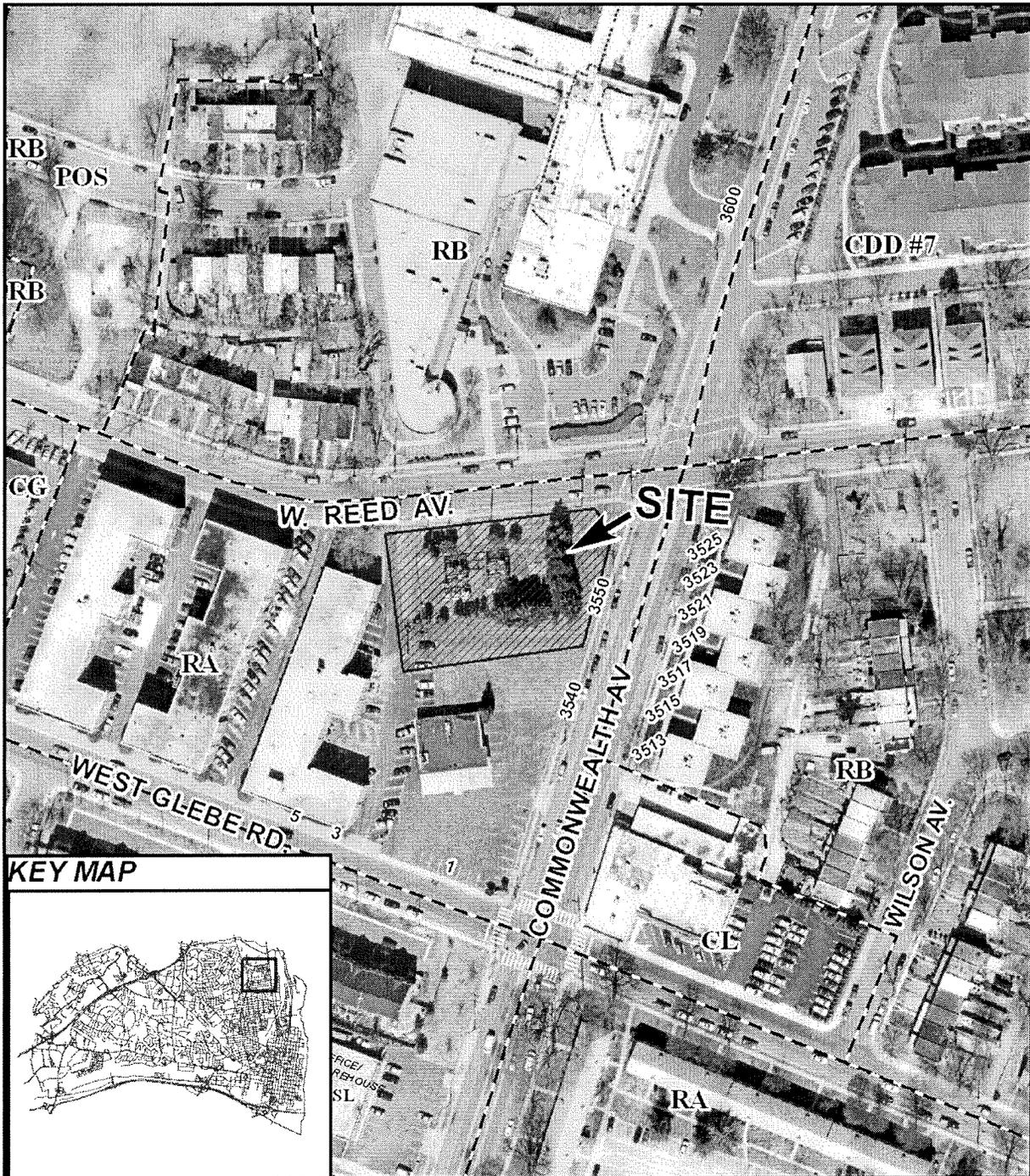


DOCKET ITEM #12

***City Charter Section 9.06 Case #2009-0001
3550 Commonwealth Avenue***

Issue: Acquisition of 3550 Commonwealth Avenue	Planning Commission Hearing:	June 2, 2009
	City Council Hearing:	N/A
Description: Consideration of a proposal by the City of Alexandria to acquire the property at 3550 Commonwealth Avenue, pursuant to the provisions of Section 9.06 of the City Charter.		
Staff: Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities and Office of the City Manager		

PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION:



**CITY CHARTER,
SECTION 9.06
CASE #2009-0001**

06/02/09



I. DISCUSSION:

The City has negotiated a tentative agreement subject to City Council notification to purchase the property at 3550 Commonwealth Avenue in conjunction with the City's Open Space Master Plan. Section 9.06 of the City's Charter requires that the Planning Commission approve any acquisition or sale of public land. The Planning Commission is charged with ensuring that any such acquisition, sale or change is consistent with the City's Master Plan.

When acquired, this will be the eleventh parcel purchased by the City with open space funds as part of its Open Space Master Plan. Three of the previously approved parcels are located on Strand Street, four parcels along Four Mile Run on Mount Vernon Avenue, and individual parcels on Raleigh Avenue, South Early Street and East Del Ray Avenue. The Planning Commission voted to approve each of those acquisitions, finding such acquisitions consistent with the City's Master Plan.

Property Description:

The property under consideration is located at 3550 Commonwealth Avenue, at the corner of West Reed Avenue. The 22,964 square foot property is zoned RA and is currently occupied by a dormant Virginia Electric Power Company substation. The property is adjacent to the Glebe House Apartments (to the west) and a church to the south. Cora Kelly School and Recreation Center and Four Mile Run Park are immediately across West Reed Avenue. The subject parcel is part of the Potomac West Small Area Plan.

Alexandria Master Plan:

The City's Open Space Plan, adopted in 2003 as a chapter of the City's Master Plan, defined fifteen goals as the framework for open space protection and preservation. Acquisition of this property helps the City to meet a number of these goals:

- Goal #1 recommends enriching existing parks. Acquisition of this site, nearby to the Four Mile Run Park and Cora Kelly School and Recreation Center would enhance/expand the utility of these areas and provide an additional buffer between the school site and the neighborhood. The removal of an unsightly vacant power station will also serve to enhance the existing school and park properties. This site also provides additional open space opportunities for nearby residents.
- Goal #2 recommends that the City seize opportunities quickly when land suitable for open space usage becomes available, including developed commercial or industrial land that could be converted to open space uses.
- Goal # 7 recommends preserving, maintaining and where possible, expanding open space and natural areas around schools for both the schools and the community at large.
- Goal #9 recommends creating open space from vacant land, and in particular to look at vacant land near existing parks (e.g. Four Mile Run Park).

Acquisition of this property for use as open space will thus enhance the City's ability to meet the goals of the Open Space Plan.

Analysis:

The proposed purchase of this property for use as open space represents a continued commitment by the City to the implementation of the Open Space Plan, and to Council's Strategic Plan, which envisions serious efforts to ensure a quality of life for all its citizens. Additionally, the Open Space Advisory Group has reviewed and recommends approval of the acquisition of this property for open space. The City will be financing the acquisition of the property through the City's Open Space Fund Account.

Future Use of the Property:

The City's contract for the purchase of this property requires the property owner to demolish and remove the existing substation, along with satisfactory completion of all necessary environmental remediation. After these actions, in the short term, due to the current economic and fiscal climate, the properties will be seeded and minimally landscaped. When economic and fiscal conditions improve, staff would initiate a planning and design process for the open space. The public will be invited to participate in this design process, with review from the Park and Recreation Commission.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve this request, finding that the proposal is consistent with Section 9.06 of the City Charter of Alexandria, Virginia, for the acquisition of public land. The acquisition is consistent with the Master Plan, including specifically the Alexandria Open Space chapter.

STAFF: Mark Jinks, Deputy City Manager
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Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator