

City of Alexandria, Virginia

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1-22-02

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 14, 2002
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*
SUBJECT: PURCHASE OF LAND FOR A NEW DASH FACILITY

ISSUE: City Council consideration of the purchase of land for a new DASH facility.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That City Council:

1. Receive this report and schedule it for public hearing on January 26, 2002.
2. At the conclusion of the public hearing, authorize the City Manager to proceed with the acquisition of 6.6 acres of land located between South Quaker Lane and Roth Street from the CSX Corporation, and the acquisition of 3.1 acres of land, also located between South Quaker Lane and Roth Street, from Pepper Lane, LLC.

BACKGROUND: Over the past several years, the City has discussed purchasing 9.7 acres of vacant land (Attachment 1) next to the current DASH facility to eventually construct a new bus maintenance facility for the DASH Bus System. City Council has provided staff with general direction to proceed to acquire the land. However, as state funds will be used to purchase the land, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) requires that City Council consider this issue at a public hearing.

The recent key dates in the history to acquire the 9.7 acres of land are as follows:

- January 2000 City Council has Work Session with City staff and DASH and directs staff to proceed with the purchase of the 9.7 acres.
- May 2000 City Council approves reallocation of state Urban Funds from the canceled King Street Underpass project to the purchase of land for DASH.
- June 2000 Planning Commission approves a 9.06 for the acquisition of the 9.7 acres.
- March 2001 Proposed City Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for FY 2002 to FY 2007 reflects the purchase of land for DASH as a CIP project.

- May 2001 City Council approves the FY 2002 to FY 2007 CIP with DASH land acquisition funding as proposed.

DISCUSSION: The existing DASH facility, located at 116 South Quaker Lane, is a converted warehouse, which is approximately 36,000 square feet in size. It was purchased in 1988 from CSX Corporation to accommodate a projected DASH fleet of 30 to 35 buses and related office and administrative support functions. At that time, DASH operated 19 buses and employed 50 individuals. In order to keep pace with growth in transit ridership demand and expanded transit service in the City over the last 13 years, DASH bus operations since then have grown to a fleet size of 49 buses and 104 employees. DASH ridership has increased from 2.2 million in FY 1994 to 2.6 million in FY 2001. It is expected that ridership will grow to 2.8 million in FY 2003 and continue its growth in subsequent fiscal years. Since the initial 1988 acquisition of the warehouse property, DASH property has only been expanded one time with the purchase in 1998 of 1.5 acres of land adjacent to the DASH facility for additional bus parking.

The growth of some 158% in the size of its bus fleet since 1988 (from 19 buses to 49 buses) has created a severe overcrowding situation at the current DASH facility. Efficient bus maintenance is difficult as there are only two repair bays; there should be about 7 bays for repairs and maintenance, according to Metro Magazine, January/February 1998, "How to Estimate Bus Maintenance Space Needs." This means that repairs have to be conducted in inadequate space or that buses under repair have to be moved frequently in and out of the two repair bays. Storage of parts, materials and supplies is inadequate and not as secure as desired. Also, the bus wash facility and some bus storage are inside the maintenance facility, but not well isolated from maintenance activities. The non-office portion of the current DASH facility is also largely a single open area that is inefficient to heat and cool, and inefficient in its functionality (as it was not designed as a bus maintenance facility, but as a railroad car repair facility). The office and employee ready room and locker areas are also severely overcrowded. Bathroom facilities are also inadequate. The space needs for a fleet of the current size of DASH were calculated at about 60,900 square feet in a study conducted by Harry Weese & Associates in 1995. The current DASH facility is some 41% smaller than this.

While the DASH staff has made the facility work under difficult circumstances, the facility is beyond the point of providing a reasonable maintenance, office and employee facility for a bus operation the size of DASH. Importantly, the overcrowding of the current DASH facility effectively precludes any significant future expansion of the DASH system.

One goal of the City's ongoing Comprehensive Transportation Policy and Program is to reduce the number of potential vehicles on City roadways by increasing the use of public transportation, carpooling and other forms of high occupancy vehicle travel. At the November 2001 City Council retreat, several immediate and continuing improvements were presented to increase the use of transit. Paramount to any increase in transit ridership is the provision of safe and reliable bus service. Without adequate bus service more single-occupant vehicle usage will result, and City streets will become more congested. In order to provide safe and reliable bus service in the future, it will be necessary to expand the DASH bus system.

Confirmation that transit services will need to expand in the City is one of the outcomes of the ongoing Regional Bus Study that is being conducted by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) for WMATA's regional bus system, as well as for all local bus systems. The purpose of the study is to determine if, and to what degree, the WMATA bus system and local bus systems are responding to current markets. Projections of future demand for all bus systems through the year 2020 are also part of the WMATA study. The Regional Bus Study concludes that DASH is serving the existing market reasonably well, but makes two major service recommendations for DASH to accommodate future demand. These recommendations are:

1. All DASH routes should have an urban service frequency of 15 minutes (the time between buses at a certain location). Currently, DASH routes have a service frequency between 20-30 minutes.
2. Three new bus routes are needed to serve areas of major growth – Carlyle, Potomac Yard and Cameron Station – and the King Street shuttle should continue to operate.

In the WMATA ongoing Regional Bus Study, it is estimated that increasing the service frequency to 15 minutes on all DASH routes will require an additional 22 buses, and the new service recommended for unserved or under served markets will require an additional 28 buses. Implementing the service recommendations in the Regional Bus Study could increase the DASH operating fleet to 109 buses (49 existing buses, 22 buses for urban service standards, 28 new service buses, plus 10 spare buses) over time. Before any specific new service is implemented, we would undertake a more in-depth analysis and reach a determination of the exact bus routes, which may change these preliminary numbers.

In order to accommodate the future expanded DASH bus fleet that is needed to meet the needs identified in the WMATA study, it is estimated (using data from the 1995 Weese study, as well as standards that WMATA uses in planning its bus facilities) that 8.5 to 10 acres of land are needed. This acreage would be sufficient to construct a larger building to facilitate DASH bus maintenance, larger administrative and support space for the employees to support bus growth, employee parking, and space for buses to park overnight.

The two parcels that are proposed for purchase total 9.7 acres, with net usable acres of 8.7 once the land where Business Center Drive is located is factored out. These two parcels are currently vacant; one contains 6.6 acres and is owned by CSX Corporation, and the other is 3.1 acres and is owned by Pepper Lane, LLC. The location of the two parcels proposed for purchase is well suited for DASH use. The property is zoned industrial, is in a central location in the City, abuts the rail corridor, and is compatible with the adjacent area. Having DASH located near the City's maintenance facilities on South Quaker Lane also enables the City and DASH to work more closely together. There are few locations in the City that are as well suited for a bus maintenance facility.

The acquisition of land and then the construction of a new facility for DASH will free up the current 36,000 square foot DASH facility for City maintenance use. While inadequate for DASH and not well designed for a bus facility, the DASH facility is basically a sound facility that the City can use

to relieve some of the overcrowding at our Maintenance Facility Complex on South Quaker Lane. The needs of the City departments of General Services, Transportation & Environmental Services, and Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities exceed the capacity of this maintenance complex which contains five main buildings. Many of the uses in these buildings are inconsistent with the buildings' original purpose (such as office use in areas not designed for offices). Some of the existing buildings at the complex also need significant roof, HVAC, and ADA related improvements. Employee work, toilet and locker room space is also not adequate in some instances. The freeing up of the current DASH facility will provide the ability to relieve some of this overcrowding and will provide some improved indoor storage, vehicle parking and work and employee space.

FISCAL IMPACT: Funding for the acquisition of the 9.7 acre parcels will be provided by State Urban Funds and a City match of 2%. Actual purchase costs will be determined in negotiations with the properties' current owners. Specific funding for the construction of the new DASH facility has not been determined, but State transit monies, Urban Funds, or other transportation funds are the likely funding sources. If a regional sales tax referendum is approved, the new DASH facility, as well as the capital costs of expanding the DASH fleet, would be prime candidates for funding from this new funding source. A new DASH facility can also be planned and constructed so as to expand in phases, as the DASH transit system grows in size. By purchasing the land at this time, the City will be prepared to move forward when the funding for a new DASH facility is secured.

ATTACHMENTS: 1. Map: Location of Proposed Land Acquisition for DASH

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LOCATION OF PROPOSED LAND ACQUISITION FOR DASH

