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Gary Christenson, Mayor

TO: The Malden City Council
FROM: Mayor Gary Christenson
RE: Financial Papers on Roosevelt Park
DATE: March 28, 2023

On the Docket for tonight’s meeting, I have requested additional funding associated with the proposed renovation of Roosevelt Park. This memo is to accompany the requests and to provide a full and accurate background in the hopes that it facilitates a discussion that at this point needs to take place. Of course, I will make available the city staff who have worked hard on this project over the years to be part of that discussion.

Regulatory Approvals

It is well known that this project has both its strong supporters and opponents. Over the course of the past several years, a variety of regulatory bodies have been appealed to. Each of these appeals has been thorough and resulted in a positive determination. The following summarizes the various levels of review and approvals:

- Multi layered appeal to Mass DEP regarding the wetland permitting for the project, including an adjudicatory hearing. The project prevailed.
- Public appeals to HUD regarding the Section 108 loan application and related Environmental Review. The project prevailed.
- Appeal to HUD alleging environmental injustice. After multiple city hosted meetings and testimony, the project prevailed.
- Letters to the Attorney General’s (AG) office asking them to intervene alleging a lack of community engagement and outreach. The AG sided with the city and the project prevailed.
- Petition to EEA’s (Executive Office of Energy and Environment Affairs) Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office requesting the project be subjected to MEPA review. The petition was denied, and the project prevailed.

The above intense reviews don’t preclude someone from having a different opinion on the right solution for the site. It does mean that multiple regulatory agencies have reviewed the proposed solution and found it to be sound, with appropriate community engagement, lacking in environmental racism, and in compliance with regulations.

Ongoing Flexibility

This project proposal from its inception has been greatly influenced by public input and changes generated by the same. As many of you know, over the past several months, responsive to public feedback, we took a fresh look at alternatives that might be available to bridge the divide. In doing so,

we reengaged various stakeholders, undertook an intense review of scheduling, and explored alternative approaches that like everything, had their pros and cons. What became abundantly clear is that there would be no consensus behind any alternative plan, and that any alternative would fail to garner the support it needed to move forward, leaving us with what is the worst of all options, doing nothing. Therefore, this proposal for additional funding is responsive to that and once again, presents an opportunity for compromise that provides a path forward.

Request for Funding

The request for additional funding is driven by two distinctly different variables. The first component is driven by additional funds needed to complete the project as proposed and that's driven by several factors. First, the time that has ensued as we've dealt with the various appeals outlined above has resulted in the need to update pricing to reflect cost increases during that time. Market volatility experienced in the local construction industry post-COVID due to unprecedented cost escalation, inflation, the prevailing labor market, and supply chain disruption among other factors have all contributed to increased project estimates. Therefore, our engineer has recommended that we reflect those increases by escalating costs in line with the Engineering News Record construction cost indices for the Boston area, which shows a 20% escalation. Second, additional soft costs driven by the various appeals have been incorporated into the base project costs. Finally, we have made some targeted adjustments specific to updated costs on the disposition of the historic fill as proposed for in the base project. The total of these impacts is estimated at \$1.3 million dollars.

Several months ago, we asked our engineer to also provide pricing on the incremental costs associated with excavating historic fill beyond the depth of 15 inches recommended by the project's Licensed Site Professional in keeping with DEP guidelines. The pricing estimate of \$1.2 million dollars would support the removal of soils down to (3) three feet. This option has come up in several community meetings as one that some felt would preserve future alternatives for the site and provide for the most conservative approach in going beyond what current recommendations and guidelines require. We began looking in earnest at this several months ago and have applied for a grant to support the funding needed to do the additional excavation. However, the timing of the grant is such that we will not know until later this year, therefore, the authorization to bond will allow us to proceed immediately. Should the grant be successful, we will follow up with a request to rescind the bond authorization. To be clear, this option will require an authorization to bond to be incorporated into the project.

Commitment to Best-In-Class Options

As we all know, the standards and options around synthetic turf have changed over the years and we should expect those to continue to evolve as technology changes and manufacturers respond to the unquestionable need for the durability these playing surfaces provide for active urban communities, while incorporating the latest innovations in safety and design. It's a fast-moving field, and the City Council and the community as a whole have our commitment to continue to monitor these trends and to be responsive to developments that make this a better project. To summarize, we will take every step possible to incorporate improvements in product technology right up until the time the field is installed.

I look forward to the public debate that these papers will generate. At this point, it's both necessary and healthy, and provides an opportunity for the City Council to have a say in whether this project proceeds. It is of course our hope that the above information provides a sound basis for that being the outcome.