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Former Army land to provide housing, services for adults with disabilities

Needham-The Charles River Center is planning to add supportive housing and additional services for adults with disabilities on a parcel of land directly across from its main campus in Needham.

Formerly owned by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, the 3.5-acre property sits on East Militia Heights Drive, at the Dwight Road junction. Charles River completed its purchase of the land in early March.

“As we look at what we affectionately call ‘the Army land,’ we see the future for the individuals we serve,” said Anne-Marie Bajwa, Charles River President and CEO. “This land is an opportunity for us to address unmet needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who live in our community.”

Preliminary plans for the parcel include supportive housing for adults with disabilities, as well as an expansion of services and support that Charles River offers individuals and their families.

“Charles River currently touches the lives of more than 900 individuals, but we know that many more would benefit from our programs and services,” said Alice Taylor, Chair of the Charles River Center Board of Directors. “This land purchase will allow us to help even more members of our community.”

The parcel currently has 12 single-story homes, constructed in 1958, that have been unoccupied for the past five years. Prior to that time, employees at the Army’s Natick Research and Development Laboratories were housed at the site. The location is just steps from two Charles River locations, the Paul D. Merritt Center and the Grugan Center. Both buildings house day programs, and Merritt is also home to Charles River’s administrative offices.

The supportive housing that Charles River is proposing would be designed for adults with disabilities and would be a permanent addition to Needham’s low-income housing.

“Our proposed development of supported housing for adults with disabilities positively impacts the Charles River Center, as well for Needham and the state of Massachusetts,” said Bajwa. “We know our state is facing a critical shortage of affordable housing, including for the disability community. Our project helps address that need.”

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