

FROM THE DESK OF
GOVERNOR MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS

October 18, 2021

His Excellency Governor Charles D. Baker
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

Picture this: a large, dilapidated hospital building is slated for demolition on the Boston Common. The State health department who built this hospital on the former park decides to build a new hospital in another part of town. Instead of restoring the parkland taken decades before, they propose a new plan: a 99-year lease for a private developer to build housing for the formerly homeless. The State does not evaluate alternative sites, conduct a feasibility study, nor provide any State funding for the new facilities. The new plan requires numerous waivers, and the housing, if all goes according to “plan,” may be built in 5 years. Moreover, they never asked the key question: *what should this land be used for today?*

This is what the Commonwealth has done in Franklin Park at the site of Shattuck Hospital. Instead of engaging community members and thinking wholistically for the neighborhood and Greater-Boston’s needs, the Commonwealth has decided to move forward with a plan to demolish the outdated building and lease the land to a private developer.

Over the course of your administration, you have put forward an agenda that provides for a healthy, and innovative Commonwealth and have made open space and sustainable infrastructure cornerstone to this work. Building on efforts to enhance and protect natural resources, your administration has awarded millions of dollars in grant funding for park improvements, open space acquisitions, and land conservation projects. As you stated yourself, “Massachusetts has great open spaces and natural resources that not only provide recreation and access to the great outdoors but make the Commonwealth more resilient to the impacts of climate change.”

The redevelopment of the Shattuck Site would directly contradict your administration’s priorities for open space, climate resilience, and natural resource conservation. Franklin Park, which has already had 40% of its land carved out for other uses, has been a key open space for neighboring communities for decades, providing recreational space and an escape from urban heat islands. The Department of Health and Human Services proposal will effectively strip land from an Environmental Justice Community who depend on Franklin Park for a gathering space for events and a welcome respite from city life.

Let’s be clear - no one debates the importance of accommodating urgently needed social services, but while hundreds of acres of state land are sold around the City and State, why is this site the only one being considered? It is not a perfect by fit any means: it does not align with current best practices for the formerly unhoused - it is not an ideal location, as the site is exceptionally isolated; it does not have access to reliable public transportation; is adjacent to high-speed roads without sidewalks or bike lanes; its nearest non-park neighbor is a cemetery. It is totally lacking in essential neighborhood amenities like stores, schools, or job opportunities. Additionally, with no clear plan and construction slated in 2025 or later, the current proposal does not even address the critical and urgent need for services across the Commonwealth.

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Unfortunately, on June 29th, 2021, DCAMM's Asset Management Board voted to move forward with a final RFP, without doing their due diligence and performing either a Feasibility Analysis or an Alternative Analysis. Nor did DCAMM engage the residents of Mattapan in whose zoning district the Shattuck Site falls. While I understand you are busy, I would love to discuss this issue with you and urge you to provide strong leadership for the park. This is not the way to make a 99-year + decision. I helped build the Shattuck back in the 1950s. Putting the Hospital in Franklin Park was a bad idea then, and it is still a bad idea today. The Commonwealth, the City and the Community deserve better. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael S. Dukakis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael S. Dukakis

Former Massachusetts Governor