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Politics

Foes critique Martin Walsh's City Hall sale plan

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT SEPTEMBER 16, 2013

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Boston mayoral candidate state Representative Martin J. Walsh announced a proposal Sunday to revitalize downtown by selling City Hall Plaza to a private developer and moving government services somewhere nearby — an idea sharply criticized by some of his opponents.

“This area must evolve from a 9-to-5 weekday government-dependent culture to a culture economically driven to add value 24/7,” Walsh said in a statement from his campaign.

He estimated City Hall could fetch between \$125 million and \$150 million. Putting it under private ownership, he said, would generate \$10 million to \$12 million a year in property taxes.

The city, he said, would then invest the generated revenue into universal early-education programs, parks, art, and a “rainy-day” fund. Residents would have input about how to spend the money, he said.

Walsh said City Hall would be replaced by a mixed-use development that could include hotel, office, retail, and residential spaces. He likened it to Rowes Wharf .

Boston’s new City Hall would be built on public or private property somewhere in the Government Center, Downtown Crossing, or Financial District areas, he said. The site would be near the MBTA and other services.

It would be built, paid for, and owned by a private developer, selected through a bid process, Walsh said. The developer, he said, would rent the property to the city for 20 to 40 years at a fixed price.

The city would receive an estimated \$5 million to \$6 million in tax revenue annually during the lease, he said. Once the lease expires, the city would buy the property for \$1.

One year after City Hall Plaza opened in 1968, it received



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Rep. Martin Walsh said City Hall would be replaced by a mixed-use development that could include hotel, office, retail, and residential spaces.

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several national awards for its architecture, engineering, and accessibility. A magazine declared it “the best public building of our time,” according to [Friends of Boston City Hall](#), a group that advocates for its preservation.

But others consider the concrete structure, a drab, fortress-like eyesore. Several years ago, the travel website [VirtualTourist.com](#) ranked it the [world’s ugliest building](#).

The idea of moving City Hall has been discussed for decades. In 2006, Mayor Thomas M. Menino [proposed](#) selling the plaza to private developers for between \$300 million and \$400 million and using that money to build a new City Hall on the South Boston Waterfront.

But, after some [outcry](#), including fears that moving to South Boston would make government services difficult to reach, the proposal floundered.

Walsh said his plan differs from past City Hall relocation proposals because he would construct the new building in the downtown area, and his proposal also incorporates “economic growth.”

However, Menino’s failed proposal touted economic benefits too.

Four of the mayoral candidates competing in the Sept. 24 preliminary election blasted Walsh’s proposal.

“The citizens of Boston are hungry for bold new ideas, not just another conversation about moving City Hall,” said candidate and City Councilor Michael Ross.

Bill Walczak’s campaign spokeswoman Dee Dee Edmondson said the former health care executive would rather focus on “things that actually matter to people, like jobs and housing.”

Like Walczak, Suffolk District Attorney Daniel F. Conley’s mayoral campaign, said his efforts focus on issues such as jobs and housing.

City Councilor Felix G. Arroyo said in a statement he is open to a City Hall move, but proposes “making little City Halls in all of our neighborhoods.”

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