

STAR 4 OCT 67

Mt. Alto Embassy Site Is Accepted by Russia

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The 13-acre Mt. Alto Hospital site on Wisconsin Avenue NW has been accepted "in principle" by the Russian government for a new embassy, the State Department announced today, ending a long deadlock in negotiations.

The agreement will provide a site for a new U.S. Embassy in Moscow, and "the two governments are proceeding to work out the formalities for the exchange of properties," the spokesman said.

No action by the District government will be required because the Mt. Alto site is federal property. No price was mentioned in the State Department announcement. A long-term lease is the usual procedure when government property is involved.

Long Negotiations

The Moscow site is a 9.6-acre tract sloping toward the Moskova River; just behind the present U.S. Embassy.

Both nations have been dickering for a number of years as they outgrew their facilities in the two capitals. The So-

viet Embassy is now at 1125 16th St. NW.

As recently as two weeks ago, the Soviets confirmed that they had expressed a preference for Tregaron—the estate of the late Joseph E. Davies—located on a 20½-acre site in Cleveland Park.

Reportedly, the Davies heirs were asking \$3.5 million dollars for Tregaron. The Cleveland Park Citizens group endorsed the site for use by the Russians, but urged that the tract be divided into two sections, one for the embassy and the other for a city park. It was understood that this qualification was one of the factors that swayed the Russians toward Mt. Alto, in the 2600 block of Wisconsin Avenue.

Comparable Sites Desired

The negotiations have dragged on for years, mainly because each nation wanted to be sure that the sites would be comparable.

The Soviet government decided in 1963 that the Bonnie Brae estate in the Chevy Chase section of Washington would be adequate for a chancery-embassy enclave.

In 1963, the required zoning variance was granted for the site, but residents bitterly fighting the relocation obtained a court order overturning the Board of Zoning Adjustment decision. The citizens, however, failed to obtain the permanent injunction they had been seeking and a rehearing, with a new

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zoning board, then rejected the zoning change in 1964.

The board at that time ruled that construction of the chancery-embassy at Bonnie Brae would not be in the "long-run national interest" because it would mar the attractiveness of the Nation's Capital, disregarding a plea by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

The Mt. Alto site, where the old Veterans Hospital is now being razed, runs from Wisconsin Avenue to Tunlaw Road just north of Calvert Street.

The State Department announcement today said, "It has been agreed that the United States government will make available the Mt. Alto site to the Soviet government as a site for a new Soviet Embassy in the proposed exchange of chancery sites in Washington and Moscow. The Soviet government has conveyed its agreement in principle to the Mt. Alto site . . . The Mt. Alto property is valued at approximately \$3 million."