

TOWN COUNCIL MINUTES
Economic Development Committee
Town Hall Council Chambers
February 11, 2020 Tuesday

Present: Ed Harrington, Chairman
Christopher Heffernan, Vice Chairman
Ken DiFazio, Councilor
Fred Happel, Councilor
Rebecca Haugh, Councilor

Also Present: Christopher Primiano, SRA
Patricia O’Leary, SRA
David Rubin, SRA
Brittany Besler, SRA

Recording Secretary: Mary Barker

Chair Harrington called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Discussion – Weymouth’s Interest in the Redevelopment of the Former Naval Air Base

The chair reported that once development gets going again, the town would have concerns about providing services and long-term objectives beyond that. He noted some of the previous reiterations brought up concerns about the number of school children that could come as a result of the development. Once he was elected in 2007, the hue and cry began by townsfolk concerned with meeting Net School Spending. (Town was at 99% and if not steadily maintaining could result in state receivership.) Recently, the school population has declined from about 8,000 in 2007 to about 7,000 now. It had held steady until around 2015/2016 and shortly after the failed override attempt there was something of an exodus. Even though class sizes declined, the cost per child increased, and average standardized test scores declined. One could hypothesize that in terms of those who left the system- if the town is prepared to take them back if things improved? Were those who left a result of a parent decision that Weymouth was not investing enough in education and infrastructure? Did parents enroll their children in charter schools and can the town get them back? That is one of his main concerns. The only way it can be done is to improve the curriculum, and this would be accomplished by improving revenue. He had asked the school committee and was told it would be about \$10 million to be the best in the state. That would be one of his goals; to have an educational system second to none. He asked the members and guests for their thoughts.

Pat O’Leary introduced the other members from SRA in attendance. A master developer has been chosen, Brookfield, and is pending negotiations with the owners, Washington Capital. They are a qualified developer. Chris Primiano reported there are 67 school children on the property and the cost to educate them was \$670,000 last year. The more important factor is that Southfield returned positive revenue last year to the town of \$2.7

million and returned \$6.7 million over the last three years. The lost potential revenue is what everyone wants to get to in the future, but is dependent upon an agreement between Brookfield and Washington Capital.

There are 1122 residential units on the property and several are on the horizon: MassLight Corcoran is 265 units; Pulte Brookfield Village is 108 mixed units, Pulte NE Woodstone is 200 units, The rec complex is an asset, Stonebridge is comprised of 45 single family homes, Eventide is 211, and upcoming, 104 units in Eventide, Phase I and Phase II will be another 107 under construction (targeted completion Spring 2020). Mr. Primiano added, while all of that is residential, only 43,000 square feet of commercial is established there (a bank and the common area of the assisted living facility). That factor is what they want to increase. The sports complex is considered recreational; not commercial.

Councilor Harrington noted that 211 of the total residential is age-restricted. That leaves about 911 units that might have children; approximately 75 out of 1,000, if similar sorts of housing were to be built there. It's way too early to estimate revenue projections. Ms. O'Leary responded that once the negotiations are finalized, then it will be time to start over with a new master plan, and revisiting the whole site. No new starts are identified at this time.

Councilor DiFazio asked their opinions on what the SRA can do to maximize commercial development and how the Town Council can help. Mr. Primiano responded that without an agreement, they can't do anything at this point in time. Once an agreement is signed and a plan is in place, they will have a seat at the table and can relay the Town Council thoughts. Councilor DiFazio asked if they foresee any potential changes in zoning? Both Mr. Primiano and Ms. O'Leary responded that it could happen, but then it will fall out of a public process. She also noted the expansion of rec; the rugby team has a number of dates there, and CBS will be broadcasting the games. It's a major league rugby group, with a one-year contract with Southfield. It has huge potential.

Chair Harrington noted that he would envision a rosy future- one with plenty of revenue and minimal expense. They don't want to have to build a school or take on additional expenses and the town has to have the town's best interest taken into consideration.

Vice Chair Heffernan noted that the key to the entire project is adequate transportation. In December, he sent a letter to Secretary Pollack, warning that with the increased ridership with this development and two on the periphery coming on line shortly; ridership is already overcrowded. He takes it every day and has seen it. This is a transit-oriented environment; they must live up to that promise and make the transportation to and from Boston reliable so that it's the most desirable place to live and work. He understands there isn't an agreement in place, but it needs to be a front-burner issue going forward. Ms. O'Leary responded that they agree; in fact it is also included in discussions with the rugby group to consider shuttle services. Mr. Primiano added that they also have talked about approaching the MBTA. Vice Chair Heffernan responded that there is potential for

high speed rail to western Mass; this line has been in place for three decades and needs to be a concern.

Chair Harrington asked about the water. Mr. Primiano responded that it is the key to success of any development. It is an administration piece. Ms. O'Leary added that it is included in the 2014 legislation and still stands; it's on the master developer. Brookfield is aware they will need to come up with a water solution. To have any long-term viable productive pieces, it will have to be solved. Chair Harrington responded that the last three developers realized that, and it is one of his concerns.

Councilor Happel asked what options have been discussed- MWRA, desalinization, etc.? Ms. O'Leary responded that multiple plans were put out there; they may ask for legislative changes, but it will come out of a public process. Mr. Primiano added that what they saw is that Brookfield has handled this before and are successful developers. It is certainly an optimistic agreement. Ms. O'Leary added that Weymouth picked up the plowing there and there are other jurisdictional items that need to be addressed. Mr. Rubin added that ultimately the roads will have to be accepted. It's a convoluted system and a mess from an owner's perspective. There are convoluted ownership levels.

Chair Harrington added that the roads were not built to Weymouth's standards, but Weymouth is required to eventually take them over. Discussions about taking them over have been held off. Mr. Primiano added that new work will meet the right standards. The town complained about stacked utilities. There has been a better partnership over the last few years than in the last several. The town's administration has made itself available in the draft stage; making things more efficient.

Councilor DiFazio noted that he respects Brookfield's expertise, but after the Town Council's involvement over the last ten years; it's clear that this project is unlike any other in Massachusetts. Conceptual solutions are still undecided and he requested that this needs to be put on the front burner. How many years have they come to meetings and they still have no water or commercial development? He also provided a handout. Constituents in his district asked they be included since it will ultimately involve them. The previous developer made a commitment regarding sewer infrastructure improvements; specifically, the sewerage line running across Commercial Street, under the tracks and out to the plants in the harbor. Union Point was publicly pledging to incur all costs related to the necessary improvements to the water and sewer system in order to bring the development to full growth. The cost to install this line was to be paid out of mitigation funding with the developer. He does not want that promise to be forgotten. He realizes this is a new ball game but there are sewerage overflows taking place at the end of Hyde Street and the end of Meetinghouse Lane. There are welded caps on the manholes to prevent overflows, but when the pressure builds, they pop. He urged they continue to push to make this a reality with the new developer. He asked that his handout become part of the record. Ms. O'Leary noted that she had asked to see the results of the flow tests, which have not been provided. Councilor Happel noted that he witnessed these overflows growing up on the other side of the marsh. Councilor DiFazio responded that it is a matter of replacing old cast iron piping to newer PVC product, and they may have to

go underneath the commuter rail lines to complete, but it is having an adverse effect on the whole system. Cost is in the millions, but he urged they keep the developer held to the fire on this issue.

Mr. Rubin responded that the SRA looked at this in the past. A flow study was ordered to see what's going where. The Town Council will have one of the biggest seats at the table. This is a gigantic problem and a global solution will come from a developer who is qualified to do it through the Town Council. Town Council has the keys to the plan. They will see what the solution is, and who is paying for it before signing off.

Councilor Haugh noted this was a great update. With over 1100 units it is about 30% complete. She lives geographically at the opposite end of town in North Weymouth, but parks at Southfield and walks there. It is a dynamic place with a vibrant community within the town; not something you would see on Bridge Street or Route 18. Concern with the bottom line, but it is a vibrant community. They need to be careful about scaring people away. Embrace it. She suggested they continue to provide an update every 4-6 months; even at the committee level, it would be beneficial to hear. She asked what the councilors can do to help move it forward? Every aspect of this project is huge. She asked whether the chair can keep this matter in committee? The chair agreed; they can meet every few months once things start happening. Mr. Primiano responded that as a group, and at the request of Councilor Smart, SRA moved its meeting night to Wednesday so it wouldn't conflict with the Town Council's meetings.

Chair Harrington noted the water from Quabbin Reservoir is sufficient to supply the state, but they can't get it delivered. Have they considered approaching as a regional source? Ms. O'Leary responded that it is an option but it is a legislative change. The capacity of Brookfield will bring this back to the table. The chair responded that his first priority is to solve the water before any vertical construction begins. Councilor DiFazio brought up the mitigation issues and they will have to be brought up again. Councilor DiFazio noted that was not a result of mitigation. Ms. O'Leary responded that other options are out there. The chair asked if the desalinization plant is operational. SRA members confirmed that it is.

Councilor Haugh noted that MWRA was brought up as a solution and asked if MWRA is still one of the options under consideration. Councilor Happel asked what is the estimated capital expense to hook up? Ms. O'Leary responded that it's one of the options; several will be considered, but the cost is unknown. It depends on who you ask. There is an entry fee of \$20 million.

Councilor Harrington suggested they would like to get the principals in at some point. Water and sewer has to be the first discussion. Regional or Quabbin solution might be the first choices. He asked about Brookfield's money situation. Mr. Primiano responded they are well capitalized. They are just waiting for their agreement with Washington Capital. They brought up several parallels to University Station. They are familiar with how Massachusetts' legislation works. Mr. Rubin agreed; the concerns about solving water and sewer dovetail with their plans. They don't see a path forward without it.

Chair Harrington asked the parties to come back as things develop, and they will also bring in the principals at a future meeting. Ms. O’Leary responded that they have promised a robust public process.

ADJOURNMENT

At 7:41 PM, there being no further business, a motion was made by Vice Chair Heffernan to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Councilor Happel. **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED.**

Attachment: 1. Handout from Councilor DiFazio

Respectfully Submitted by Mary Barker as Recording Secretary
Approved unanimously at 9 March 2020 meeting