



Board of Selectmen
Minutes
Tuesday, November 8, 2011 at 7:00pm
Volunteers Hall

The meeting was called to order at 7:00PM by Chair, Marie Sobalvarro in Volunteers Hall at the public library. Selectmen Marie Sobalvarro, Peter Warren, Ron Ricci, Bill Johnson and Tim Clark were all in attendance as well as the Town Administrator Tim Bragan and Executive Assistant Julie Doucet.

Marie Sobalvarro opened the meeting by taking a moment to thank all town employees and various others for their efforts during the October 29th snow storm. Town Administrator Tim Bragan added a review of the storm management will be on the December 6th meeting.

MINUTES

On a Ricci/Warren motion, the board voted unanimously to approve minutes of 10/4 & 10/18, as presented.

**INTER-MUNICIPAL AGREEMENT FOR
NASHOBA VALLEY REGIONAL DISPATCH**

Tim Bragan explained the agreement has been revised to reflect the change in the number of communities participating. He noted the estimated cost savings for each community will be \$100,000. On a Warren/Ricci motion, the board voted unanimously to approve the IMA for regional dispatch. On a Sobalvarro/Warren motion, the board voted unanimously to appoint Tim Bragan as administrative representative.

TRINITY FINANCIAL – VICKSBURG SQUARE PROPOSAL

Marie Sobalvarro thanked Trinity's President Jim Keefe, Project Manager Abby Goldenfarb and Assistant Project Manager Dan Drazen for making time to attend this meeting to answer questions from elected/appointed committees in town. She drafted a chronology of the process thus far and included the proposed changes necessary to the Reuse Plan, Bylaws and DEC requirements. Sobalvarro said questions will be asked in the following order: Board of Selectmen, Devens Economic Analysis Team, School Committee and Planning Board.

Board of Selectmen

Marie Sobalvarro asked if they could identify any other suburban communities similar to this proposal with no access to transportation and limited infrastructure. Jim Keefe did not have a particular project to refer too but acknowledged the basics for water and electric are in place. He expressed confidence in the marketability of the project. Ron Ricci asked for a project timeline. Keefe said typically a project like this will take five years to complete. He did note the difference with this one being the need for town meeting approval in three communities. He explained the first two buildings will be built with the third and fourth buildings not started until the first two are fully occupied. Keefe

said Trinity will be involved with the property for a minimum of fifteen years. They sign completion guarantees and are responsible to stabilize the buildings. Bill Johnson asked if the success of this project is contingent on continued growth of Devens or is Devens continued growth dependant on this project. Keefe said this is hard to determine but is confident this project will benefit the future growth of Devens. Johnson followed up by asking if MassDevelopment had explicitly done an analysis of how this particular project would offer needed housing support for existing businesses or anticipated businesses, and Keefe was not aware of any such analysis. Tim Clark commented on this project being similar to their Mattapan Heights project minus the access to transportation and enhancement to community life. He thinks this project will have some challenges to overcome considering the target population of low to moderate income and their ability to commute to employment if necessary. Keefe struggled to understand this concern considering people are finding transportation now and will continue too. As far as more services he referenced the close proximity of downtown Ayer and the already established businesses in Devens. He said it would not be economical or sustainable for Trinity to develop more commercial space because of this project. Sobalvarro and Clark noted the Vicksburg Square area is isolated from many services such as grocery stores and gas stations. Sobalvarro acknowledges this project benefits Trinity but notes Harvard needs to determine how it will benefit us.

Devens Economic Analysis Team

Members present: Victor Normand, Paul Green, Duncan Chapman

Victor Normand asked if Trinity would go forward with this project without the low income tax credits. His understanding is DHCD has a number of projects already approved therefore considering the proposed timeframe commitment of credits may be uncertain. Keefe said due to their credibility with DHCD over the years he is confident this project will rank competitively. Keefe and Normand debated the market unit rates, income restrictions and eligibility along with the need for this type of housing development. Keefe referred to Harvard's Affordable Housing Plan calling for housing in Vicksburg Square. Normand said this project will meet affordable housing needs but the need does not have to be satisfied with just one project. He does not understand how this project fits into the Reuse Plan. Paul Green referred to some similar projects in Leominster and wondered about recreation for children. Keefe said they have flexibility to offer programs as well as recreation facilities. They do not do pools. He commented on the existing playing fields located in Devens.

School Committee

Members present: Susan Mary Redinger, Patricia Wenger, Piali De, Kirsten Wright
Superintendent Joseph Connelly

Superintendent Joseph Connolly said their primary concern is to maintain the level of quality education they do now. Their understanding is this project could potentially add an additional seventy eight students costing up to 1 million dollars in additional funding.

They asked Trinity if a financial plan has been developed with MassDevelopment to ensure the funding necessary to continue with this level of education. Keefe said he does not foresee any reason for MassDevelopment to not continue with the contract.

Piali De asked if analysis has been conducted indicating where the revenue to sustain the cost per student will come from. Keefe answered yes and will forward the information onto them. Connelly said this would be very reassuring. Keefe confirmed MassDevelopment will be in attendance at the public hearing on November 21st to address further questions on this and noted the state is a big supporter of education. De said Harvard is capable of accommodating an increase in students it is the financial support they question.

Planning Board

Members present: Kara Minar, Michelle Catalina, Maggie Green

Marie Sobalvarro opened the discussion by noting the proposed shift in the Reuse Plan wording from a *balance* of housing between market rate and affordable to a *mixture*. Maggie Green asked what Trinity's vision for Vicksburg Square is and what attracted them to this area. Keefe said the fabric of the Devens community is what attracted them. He said they recognize from a planning standpoint it is important to consider the needs for all three surrounding communities along with the needs of the project. He explained the adjacent communities will benefit from this project as many of the services needed by residents will be accessible in the three towns. He referred to the businesses located in downtown Ayer. Abby Goldenfarb said they have spoken with current Devens residents who are slightly removed but are part of the surrounding communities and access services in those communities now. Kara Minar expressed her concern over the low income guidelines and lack of public transportation in the area. Keefe said all the more reason to provide affordable housing. Minar said it is important we recognize the importance of long term economic growth. She noted with most of the owners money going to rent how will they afford other necessities especially transportation.

Dan Drazen pointed out the three positive key points Harvard should focus on:

- 1) 40B liability reduction
- 2) Affordable housing for veterans, disabled and elderly
- 3) Assist with economic development by creation of short term construction jobs

Drazen said much of the feedback they received from vision sessions was the importance for veteran and elderly housing. He said Trinity is not here to make a quick profit. They see this project as a good investment for all the surrounding communities along with offering the opportunity to honor those who have served our country, help our elderly and provide some much needed economic development. Drazen also noted the affordable units proposed at Vicksburg Square are in Harvard's Affordable Housing Plan. He said considering the condition of the buildings it would be difficult to rehab them without tax credits. This is the most feasible way to finance this construction.

In conclusion,

Bill Johnson asked the School Committee to follow up with MassDevelopment to ensure an answer to their question as this is a large piece of the puzzle.

Jim Keefe commented there should be no presumptions that this housing should pay for itself. Marie Sobalvarro said we acknowledge this. She requested hard data on the impact of 80% affordable. She would like to see an 80/20 split.

Tim Clark assured Trinity Harvard does not question their ability to build and meet housing needs. He said based on your reputation we know the project will be top quality. Clark explained Harvard has many things to address in our Master Plan and as long as MassDevelopment is in play we are okay but we have to consider how developments will affect us in the long term. He believes the agreement with MassDevelopment will not last forever and this is something we have to consider. Clark is hopeful a successful product can be agreed upon by all.

Marie Sobalvarro again thanked Trinity for coming and reminded the other members of the MassDevelopment Board of Directors meeting to be held on Thursday morning.

Keefe ended by stating he does not want Harvard to lose sight of the compelling reasons to support this project. He acknowledges they can not answer all concerns or meet all expectations but they are positive this is achievable and will be an asset to the surrounding towns.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50PM.

Documents referenced:

**INTER-MUNICIPAL AGREEMENT FOR
NASHOBA VALLEY REGIONAL DISPATCH** - dated 10.27.2011
TRINITY FINANCIAL – VICKSBURG SQUARE PROPOSAL - handout dated
11.08.2011