

Meeting Minutes
Devens Economic Analysis Team
July 27, 2010, 7:30 am
Town Hall Meeting Room
Secretary: Paul Green

Members Present: Orville Dodson, Sandy Duncan, Steve Finnegan, Paul Green, Victor Normand.

Members Absent: None.

Steve Finnegan called the meeting to order at 7:30 am.

Steve Finnegan nominated Victor Normand to serve as the chair of the committee. Sandy Duncan seconded the motion. After a brief discussion in which Victor indicated that he was willing to assume the responsibilities of the chair, the members voted 5-0 to approve Victor Normand as the chair.

Victor Normand called for nominations for secretary. Steve Finnegan nominated Orville Dodson as the secretary. Sandy Duncan seconded the motion. A discussion followed. Orville asked for a description of the duties of the secretary. Victor said that the duties included taking the minutes, preparing an agenda, posting meeting notices, and keeping track of meeting handouts (which are required to be made available under the updated Open Meeting Law). Sandy suggested having a web page to distribute our material. Tim Bragan offered the use of the Harvard Town web site. Steve volunteered to collect and distribute basic information about Devens; Chapter 498 (the enabling legislation), basic data, etc. Victor said that the Harvard Town web site already has many good documents. Victor asked Orville to review the open meeting law and report back to the committee at the next meeting. Victor said that we must be careful in our use of electronic communication; we cannot communicate, even just 2 of us, except to set dates and other minor items. Paul Green called for a vote on the nomination of Orville Dodson to be secretary. The motion passed, 5-0.

Victor then called for a discussion of potential meeting dates and times. After much discussion, the members agreed to meet every other Friday morning from 7:30 am to 9:00 am, and every other Wednesday evening, from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm. The next meeting will be Friday, August 13th at 7:30 am. The following meeting will be Wednesday, September 1st at 7:00 pm, with subsequent meetings on the same days, 2 weeks later. Orville will contact the Town Administrator's office to reserve the meeting rooms.

From the audience, Ron Ricci stated that he will be the interface for this committee to schedule time to meet with the Harvard Board of Selectmen, and will serve as the Selectman's liaison to this committee.

Victor then called for a discussion of the goals and objectives of this committee.

Steve posed the following questions in response:

- Is Devens sustainable or headed that way? At what level of government?
- Is Regionalization feasible? It could be controversial. Is it zero-sum? Have Ayer prode the services? How does regionalization cost out?

Steve noted that an Ayer selectman (Rick Gilles) has written a proposal, dated June 22, 2010, to take over government services for Devens and sell them back; Steve passed out copies of this proposal. Steve said that we should help our elected officials grapple with these questions.

Sandy asked Steve to summarize the requirements of Chapter 498. Sandy said that he would like to attend the JBOS meetings and see the JBOS in action; he felt that it was important to stay on top of the other town's activities relating to Devens.

Victor said that there are multiple areas of interest in Devens: Housing, Education, etc. He said that our charge is financial and economic issues. We (Harvard) need a good solid base on which to make decisions. We can let cultural and character issues be dealt with in Town Meeting. His questions are:

- What is the tax base?
- What are the costs to operate Devens as a municipality?

Victor said that Devens is not currently organized as a town; it is a redevelopment project, funded with state revenues and grants, etc. It is now possible to look at it as a revenue side and compare the Devens and Harvard tax revenues, especially as the same professional assessment service does both sets of valuations.

Victor said that we can estimate the costs of running Devens as a town. We can estimate the cost of education by looking at the contract Harvard has with Devens to educate the Devens children, and doing an analysis.

Victor asked each member to organize our questions and bring them to the next meeting. The next step will be to go get the information. To be credible we must be objective. We should allow for ways to update our data based on changing projections and circumstances. He said that he had written a report that analyzes all of the parcels of land at Devens, and that a summary of this report is available on the Harvard Town web site. We now have several more years of experience with Devens, which should improve our ability to make reasonable projections. We can use the information in his report to project the amount of development that will occur per acre; we know more today that when he wrote the report.

Victor said that we can also look at the cost of regionalizing the emergency dispatch services (police, fire, medical). He feels that the social aspects of such a change are not within the scope of our efforts, but that we can conduct the economic analysis.

Sandy wanted to know the scope of the Ayer effort.

Steve said that the creation of a new public safety building at Devens had been delayed for now and that the plan had been to construct the new building on land that is traditionally part of Harvard.

Victor reviewed the method of financing the redevelopment of Devens. The state allocated \$2M per year for 40 years for the operating costs of Devens, for a total of \$80M. The state allocated \$120M for capital improvements. The operating costs were paid up-front; the capital funds are appropriate as needed, which is irregularly. The revenue in lieu of taxes that is collected at Devens is reinvested into capital projects.

Victor stated that he has not seen a good accounting of past and planned capital projects. He asks how much of the original \$120M for capital improvements is still unspent. He would like to see a plan for doing future capital projects, and would like to see the tradeoffs between various options. He gave an example of setting money aside to build a school. He said that a redevelopment project needs to be very flexible with respect to capital improvements because it needs to be able to adjust to the market and to the interests of the enterprises that are interested in the project. For example, early in the redevelopment of Devens the interest was for warehouse space and the improvements needed to support them. Now, the interest and investment is for waste water treatment.

Sandy asked:

- Where is Mass Development's thinking with respect to disposition?
- How much land remains to be sold?

Victor responded that the status of the available parcels is in his report. Much of the remaining land is in the North Post, which is hard to access and hard to develop. Also, the remaining parcels tend not to be contiguous.

Steve asked how we could look at the parcel analysis.

Sandy suggested that we ask Mass Development for a large, current plan of Devens.

Orville asked whether we could post our work to the web.

Victor said that the Devens redevelopment is a massive project. The utilities are a big piece, too. We probably would not be able to bring everyone up to speed on all areas; that would be a life's work. He raised the following additional questions:

- How does it affect Harvard?
- What are Harvard's issues should its land at Devens revert to Harvard?
- What are our priorities?

Steve said that he felt that we were not here to advocate for a specific scenario. But the discussion begins with taking it back, per the reuse plan specified in Chapter 498. We can have

options -- gray areas.

Victor said that each of the 3 towns will be affected by disposition, regardless of which way it is divided up. The analysis before Chapter 498 was written was that the lands would return to each town. The legislation also allows the boundaries between towns to be moved. Chapter 498 is flexible, and it is not permanent. If Harvard doesn't investigate its options, we may be ceding the direction of Devens to others.

Paul said that we were unsure of the economic impact the last time that disposition was considered. He felt it was the big, unresolved issue. The sheer size of the dollar numbers involved was a major concern. Of lesser concern were noise and road reopening issues. We need to estimate the costs, revenues, and capital plan this time to give us the information we need to make an informed decision. We didn't even discuss the capital plan last time; people were focused on the potential revenue, and to a lesser extent, on the possible costs. Now, we should be able to project the costs of governing Devens. Paul recommended that we look at:

Revenue: Refresh the revenue numbers.

Expenses: Get a good set of numbers; data from Ayer & Shirley could help here.

Capital: Create a capital expenditure schedule.

Victor said that we can't presume to know what Ayer and Shirley will want to do about Devens.

Victor said that we need tools that are renewable. As conditions change over time, we can re-evaluate the capital plan. He said that he will bring a copy of the parcel analysis to the next meeting, and will get copies of the spreadsheets that he created. Victor said that we can ask Mass Development to update the parcel analysis. The zoning is still the same. The assessments have changed, and some uses have changed since the report was written.

Victor asked everyone to think of issues and questions. He felt that it was important for us to compile a list of questions.

Sandy said that we should look at the example of the Miles Standish Park in New Bedford; not necessarily to copy it, but to understand it. This is an example of a successful BRAC reuse plan that crosses the boundaries of multiple towns. We should consider operating Devens as a separate entity as well as the cost to bring it back into the towns.

Victor said that the fact that people are living on Devens, in divided jurisdictions, adds a level of complexity. Aside from a base closure in rural, unincorporated land in Maine, it is the only base closure where local jurisdiction was suspended. The disposition of Devens is likely to be innovative.

Suggested agenda items for the next meeting:

- Chapter 498

- Historical Issues
- Existing parcel analysis, and method of getting it updated
- Questions that team members would like to see answered by our work.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded and was unanimously accepted. The meeting adjourned at 9:00am.