

Devens Economic Analysis Team (“DEAT”)

Minutes of February 6, 2015 Meeting

8:00 AM

Town Hall Meeting Room

Paul Green, Secretary

Members Present: Victor Normand, Paul Green and Christopher Roy.

Members Absent: Steve Finnegan.

Victor Normand, Chairman of DEAT, called the meeting to order at 8 am.

Old Business

Approval of Minutes

Paul was unable to prepare the minutes in time for this meeting. He promised to have them ready for the next meeting.

New Business

Review Devens FY2015 Property Valuations

Victor discussed the recently concluded Devens property valuations for FY2015.

He noted that we have used the same overall model for estimating the revenue and expenses of the Harvard portion of Devens for several years now, and have that no one has seriously criticized the method. He considers that this is now a settled issue, and we should move on to research and discuss other topics related to Devens.

Victor feels that the revenue needed to sustain Devens is achievable; it is just a matter of time. Devens now has 4 million square feet of space, out of 8 million potential square feet, and MassDevelopment has said that they may apply to the DEP to raise the limit above 8M sq. ft.

Victor would like to find a range of dates when the Harvard portion of Devens will break even.

Paul said that he agreed with Victor on the overall model and on sustainability. He thinks it is time for Harvard to learn from Shirley and make some decisions as to what we want from Devens and MassDevelopment.

Victor asked whether and how having a full time planner (we now have a part-time planner) would affect the character of the town. He asked whether change was inevitable.

Chris said that Concord has 2 full-time planners. The Concord Planning Board is still heavily involved in the effort, however.

Paul said that he believed that the elected Planning Board members would still own policy decisions.

Victor noted that Harvard's part-time planner has not yet done much with Devens.

Victor said that the need for, and work assigned to, a professional staff would increase as a result of Devens, and that the cost of this work could be covered by revenue from Devens. We (the town) need to have a discussion about this.

Paul noted that just executing to the reuse plan, and creating the basic infrastructure at Devens, required a lot of planning and design. He thought that MassDevelopment had done a good job executing the reuse plan.

Victor said that MassDevelopment is rebuilding Jackson Road per the reuse plan. He also said that the Harvard Master Plan will lightly touch on Devens, and passed out an email from Judy Barrett on this subject. In her letter, Judy notes in her email that a fiscal impact analysis can be deceptive and biased no matter who prepares it; the data and methods are debatable. Her estimates showed a more negative impact than our methods, but that any estimating method was debatable. She went on to say that the issue is not so much the level of shortfall but rather the gross increase in the overall town budget. She estimates that the town budget would increase by 20% as a result of taking on Devens, from \$22M to \$26M.

Victor stated that he didn't plan to revise our revenue and cost projections for Devens again this year. He thought it was time to go in a different direction.

Review Proposed Devens Zoning Changes

Victor stated that he must recuse himself from any committee recommendations because he has a client who is negotiating with MassDevelopment for a parcel of land at Devens.

Paul stated that he didn't see any reason for Harvard to vote against the zoning changes. He said that he had heard that some people were concerned about the addition of medical offices in Shirley, but that it was his opinion that people didn't like to travel far to see a doctor or dentist; hence, many medical practices staff multiple sets of offices (e.g., his own medical plan has offices in multiple towns, as does his optometrist).

Devens Redevelopment

Paul also noted that it was not true that seniors were zero-cost. Just as children require schools, seniors, seniors require assistance with transportation, housing, medical care, and so on. He thought that helping seniors fit within the goals of MassDevelopment's work at Devens.

Victor wondered what impact of the zoning changes would have on MassDevelopment's capital, and what would be the economic impact on Devens and the surrounding area. What would be the impact on infrastructure? He was curious as to who had funded the economic study that led to the changes; if it was MassDevelopment, could Harvard ask for a similar study?

Victor described how a conservation restriction could work for Rogers Field. He said that the devil is in the details, because the agreement must specify the allowable uses forever, must say who will enforce the restrictions. There must be an agreement as to how the upkeep is funded, and how the enforcement is funded.

The issue over on Grant Road is that the new commercial area is closed to an existing housing area.

MassDevelopment will hold a public hearing on February 10, 2015 at 7pm in Volunteer's Hall in Harvard. They will present their proposed zoning changes and take questions.

On February 24, MassDevelopment will come before the Board of Selectmen and ask the BOS to take a position, and schedule a Special Town Meeting for a formal vote.

Select Future Meeting Dates and Locations

Our next meeting will be February 27, 2015 at 8:00 am in the Town Hall Meeting Room.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 am.