

Devens Economic Analysis Team (“DEAT”)

Minutes of October 2, 2015 Meeting

8:00 AM

Hildreth House

Paul Green, Secretary

Members Present: Steve Finnegan, Paul Green, Noyan Kinayman, Victor Normand, and Christopher Roy

Members Absent: None.

Guest: John Osborn

Victor Normand, Chairman of DEAT, call the meeting to order at 8:17am.

Old Business

Approval of Minutes

We approved the minutes of the September 18th and September 25th meetings. Victor moved and Noyan seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

Annual Report

Paul reported that he has received all of the TIFs from MassDevelopment. He will mail them to the committee.

Victor noted that TIFs are often sweeteners not a deciding factor. It takes a lot of work to enforce them; the companies must produce annual reports on employment and other conditions they have accepted.

Noyan asked if a TIF would be more important to a small business. Victor said that the size of the TIF is related to the number of jobs the company promises to create, because that is the public interest that justifies the tax reduction.

Victor distributed updated copies of the revised, draft final report and the committee reviewed it.

Paul suggested that the draft report make it clear that any time we discuss Devens, we are referring to the historic Harvard portion of Devens. Victor noted that this was in the report, but he would move the reference up to the front.

Chris commented that governance of Devens is a big issue. He said we need to first understand the requirements, then investigate creating departments to manage each area. With respect to the utilities at Devens, if Harvard secures its portion of Devens, then the utility must become part of town government. He asked how that would dovetail with the creation of a light plant and distribution system in (current) Harvard, and noted that this area is being looked at by the Harvard Energy Committee, on which he serves.

Victor said that we have been invited to talk to the Harvard Board of Selectmen on October 20, and that we should plan to attend the Master Plan presentation on October 29. The latter meeting is not interactive; it will consist of a progress report by the Master Plan consultants. There will be time for a Q+A at the end of the presentation. The consultants have requested copies of our reports, including this year. Victor gave them copies as it is a public document at this point. He expects they will use it.

The Master Plan will identify issues and suggest ways Harvard can make progress on them. The Plan looks out 10 years. Victor hopes it will be a reference document and a living document as we move forward.

Victor noted that the consultants are from Connecticut, have experience with base closings, and are new to Harvard and Devens. The consultants have said that the situation at Devens is unlike any they have previously encountered; it is unique. He is encouraged that they will produce a good report.

Noyan asked if we (Harvard) can link the Harvard and Devens commercial districts?

Paul replied that we could certainly link the roads. Barnum and Ayer Roads are parallel to each other and reasonably close. The professional engineers and planners at MassDevelopment could help us with the planning, as they have been doing for Shirley.

Paul discussed the gradual process that he used to get the members of his church to agree on the need for renovating their building, then planning the work, then approving it and starting construction. He arranged yearly votes, not simply to have a formal approval process, but to let everyone know that everyone else was on board, and to foster discussion and consensus.

Victor noted that residents of Harvard and Devens have been sharing the school system for 20 years, and that this is drawing the parents closer together.

Victor suggested that Harvard should adopt a thesis and then study it in depth. He suggested that the thesis be "Harvard should take back its portion of Devens". He said that Ayer and Shirley should also do this. Then all of the parties and the Devens residents and MassDevelopment can meet and make rational decisions. This process will take years. Paul's incremental approach feeds into this. The Master Plan will help feed into this.

Noyan asked Paul for his thoughts on the next steps, and Paul talked about establishing entrance criteria for starting disposition, then about creating a disposition process, then actually undertaking disposition.

Chris pointed out that we are not starting disposition with a blank slate; land has been sold and people live and work there.

Victor said that Chris's comment argues against incremental decisions; because some things have been settled. You don't want to resolve all of the easy stuff and then go into negotiations over the hard stuff. You also want inducements for MassDevelopment to pay for stuff, such as social programs. You want to leave a good set of items to negotiate.

Victor said that it is important for each town to have a vision of what they want. Once the parties can agree on a joint vision, the work to prepare the documents will take millions of dollars in attorney fees to record and resolve all of the issues and decisions.

Victor recalled that we had prepared two questions for the MassDevelopment annual meeting at Devens. (1) That MD should commit to a transparent process with respect to the future of Devens Utilities. The towns want an opportunity to weigh in. (2) MD should publish the measure by which we can know when they have substantially completed their work at Devens.

Paul suggested that we ask these questions again this year.

Victor noted that taxes are a concrete, visible measurement of progress towards completion of the work.

Paul suggested that we put these two questions into our final report, and Victor agreed.

Noyan asked if National Grid could buy Devens. Chris said that it could do so. Victor said that there would be a negotiation over price; that consultants would be brought into establish the value of the business. It is well-established with a relatively new infrastructure. Chris noted that if it was sold to an investor-owned utility, the rates would go up, and the Devens rate payers would not be happy.

Paul suggested that we try to keep our meeting with the BOS focused on economics; we all now know a lot about Devens but we should try to stick to the DEAT economic study at the upcoming meeting. There will be time for talking about other topics down the road.

Victor said he would update the report for the next meeting.

Paul said he would post a meeting for October 20 with the BOS, and October 29 with the MP committee.

New Business

None.

Select Future Meeting Dates and Locations

The next meeting was set for Friday, October 9, 2015, at Hildreth House, at 8:00 am.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:19 am.