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CITY COUNCIL VOTES TO REZONE LYNN'S WATERFRONT DISTRICTS

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | December 5, 2019

LYNN — Zoning changes officials said are aimed at encouraging development on the city's 305-acre waterfront were approved by the Planning Board and City Council Tuesday night.

The boards both voted unanimously to amend the zoning bylaws in seven districts that comprise the city's waterfront, but tabled proposed changes pertaining to the former Garelick Farms property.

“(The changes will) allow us to have the kind of development and investment that works for all of us,” said Mayor Thomas M. McGee.

With the approved zoning changes, the maximum allowable height of buildings was raised from five to eight stories in certain areas; developers will be required to seek a special permit from the council for potential buildings less than five stories in Waterfront District 1; and developers will not be required to include retail space in any residential project with more than 300 units.

McGee said the council's adoption of the zoning changes will allow the city to implement its Waterfront Master Plan and Waterfront Open Space Master Plan, to transform the city's waterfront with residential, commercial and industrial development, and open space.

The Waterfront Master Plan was approved by the City Council in September. The plan will be sent to the state for final approval, according to James Cowdell, Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn executive director.

“We are very excited,” said Cowdell. “This culminates a year’s worth of work. It dovetails nicely with the fact that a week from today, a shovel is going on the ground on the North Harbor, so these are exciting times.”

Cowdell was referencing the \$90 million development that will result in 332 waterfront apartments at the former Beacon Chevrolet site. A groundbreaking is planned for Dec. 11.

Robert Stilian, Planning Board chairman, said the decision to adopt the zoning changes was good for the city because it would bring development and downtown restaurants.

Stilian said he expects the board to revisit the zoning changes regarding the former Garelick Farms property that were tabled next month.

Complicating the matter is that Dean Foods, which owns Garelick Farms, filed for bankruptcy last month. The city cannot move forward with the zoning changes, which have been negotiated with the developer, until the matter is resolved, Cowdell said.

“It puts a big question mark on (the developer) moving forward on the sale,” he said.

The property has been under a purchase and sale agreement with A.W. Perry, a Boston real estate firm, since last April. Robert Maloney, the company’s executive vice president, said the bankruptcy announcement took him by surprise.

“We’re still planning on buying the property, but when the seller goes into bankruptcy, the courts have to approve all transactions, so that’s what we’re hoping for,” Maloney said.

Maloney said the company is satisfied with the proposed zoning changes, which would allow the firm to use the property for warehouse use and light manufacturing until the site is cleaned up and larger mixed-use development can occur.

But not everyone was happy with what was approved Tuesday. Several residents spoke against the proposed changes.

Isaac Simon Hodes, a member of Lynn United for Change, said the changes were being made to accommodate developers and undermined the city’s vision for its waterfront.

“Development is coming,” Hodes said. “There’s not too many options, but we have to make sure it’s equitable development. I fully support development that means inclusion (and) affordable housing.”

In response, Ward 1 Councilor Wayne Lozzi said the type of development the city is seeking in the area is unique.

“It’s our waterfront,” Lozzi said. “It’s the jewel of Lynn. This isn’t a case of us losing our vision. It’s about us thinking big. Instead of us going five stories, we go to eight stories ... It gives more residents an opportunity to live in the gem of our city.”



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