

OPINION

EDITORIAL: LYNN'S FORWARD MOTION

May 16, 2018

An historic event occurred in Lynn Tuesday night when the city Conservation Commission voted 4-0 to provide the final local approval required to move the proposed 332-unit residential complex on the Lynnway forward.

Commission Chairwoman Mary Lester and fellow board members dug through a three-inch-high stack of technical documents and pored over site plans before issuing a standard order of conditions for the project. They factored into their decision public access to the city's waterfront the project developers, Lynn Redevelopment, LLC, will help provide and the environmental safeguards the developers will put in place during construction.

Make no mistake about it, construction on the former Beacon Chevrolet site opposite North Shore Community College means homes for people on a piece of windswept land that has been vacant for 35 years. The Beacon project is the spark for the entire waterfront development from the North Harbor site, where the project is being built, to South Harbor next to the General Edwards Bridge.

The \$90 million investment in the Beacon site will be the largest investment on the waterfront in the past 50 years, said Economic Development & Industrial Corporation (EDIC/Lynn) Executive Director James M. Cowdell. "This is the first investment in our new vision."

It's a vision fully backed by city councilors and by the state with financial commitments for streetscape and lighting improvements, and other work.

Predictably, no bold step forward for Lynn can be taken without detractors weighing in. Self-styled affordable housing advocates say the city needs a mix of housing reflecting local income ranges. Some of those advocates stood up against the Beacon site project on Tuesday night.

It's ironic to note that if the project's detractors stood on the Lynnway location of the new project, they could squint past the college and see Gateway North, a nearly-completed project with, as Cowdell noted, 90 percent affordable housing. All told, 30 percent of Lynn's housing stock is affordable, said Cowdell.

Critics be damned: Momentum for change and progress on the Lynnway has never been more tangible. The Beacon developers plan to have shovels in the ground this fall and EDIC last month invited proposals to revise the 11-year-old waterfront vision blueprint.

Six design firms with stellar names and reputations responded to that invitation and one will be picked by the month's end to draft a new blueprint.

That updated document is sure to feature the vision for a public walkway along the waterfront. In addition to bringing a \$90 million investment to the waterfront, the Beacon project ensures that part of that public walkway will be built and 11 parking spaces for walkway users are included in the plans approved by the Conservation Commission.

Commission members specialize in poring over project details and understand the nuances of state, local, and federal environmental regulations. But Lester gazed firmly at the big picture for Lynn's waterfront on Wednesday when she said this about the Beacon development: "We are proud as a board to be associated with a project moving the waterfront forward."

"Moving forward" is now the operative phrase for transforming Lynn's waterfront.