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GARELICK FARMS ZONING CHANGES AIMED AT SPURRING LYNNWAY GROWTH

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | February 12, 2020

LYNN — The Lynn Planning Board and City Council approved waterfront zoning changes that cater to stimulating development at the former Garelick Farms property.

But not everyone is on board with some of the new approved uses, such as truck repair, warehouse and storage space, which will not only apply to the Garelick Farms site, but the entire waterfront district where it's now located.

The former Lynnway dairy manufacturing plant has been under a purchase and sale agreement with A.W. Perry, a Boston real estate firm, since last April.

The changes, which were negotiated between the developer and the city, will allow A.W. Perry to use the property for warehouse use and light manufacturing until the site is cleaned up and larger mixed-use development can occur.

“We wouldn't have been able to buy the property without (the changes),” Robert Maloney, the company's executive vice president, said Wednesday afternoon. “That was the hurdle we had to get over before we could move forward.”

Maloney said the company plans to close on the property in May or early June, and tenants would move in two to three months later.

Before Tuesday, the 17-acre site, which includes a 40,000 square-foot warehouse, 60,000 square feet of cold storage, a processing plant, and a 10-acre lot at the rear of the building, was only zoned for dairy manufacturing.

The new zoning extends Waterfront District 3, located on the southeast side of the Lynnway, and its existing uses to the Garelick site. That will allow for light manufacturing, hotels, an apartment house, assisted living facility, and fitness center on the property.

But the other negotiated uses, such as a truck repair facility, warehouse, fish market, and fish processing, have made Ward 2 Councilor Rick Starbard “uncomfortable.” He noted those undesirable uses would also be allowed by right elsewhere in the district, which stretches around Marine Boulevard, Blossom Street and the Gas Wharf area.

Starbard was the only city councilor to vote against the changes, which passed with a 9-1 vote after they were approved unanimously by the Planning Board earlier in the evening.

“Myself, I would feel more comfortable if we, (the City Council) had the ability to issue special permits and be able to see each individual use,” said Starbard. “Some people may want to see boat manufacturing and the jobs it would create, but some folks may not be comfortable with the repair and storage of trucks on that waterfront site.”

In addition, Starbard said he doubts that he will see the Garelick Farms site redeveloped into waterfront apartments, part of A.W. Perry’s long-term vision for the property, in his lifetime. The firm’s plans also include retail, restaurants, and possibly a hotel.

Smells from the nearby wastewater treatment plant and transfer station are precluding that kind of development, and he doesn’t foresee those odors being remediated any time soon.

Starbard asked for assurances at Tuesday’s City Council meeting that the less desirable uses would not exist on the site in five years, which the company’s attorney, James Moore, said he could not guarantee.

“I can’t do that,” said Moore. “I can’t predict what would be there in 10 years. (However), if we don’t make this change, I can predict that the current use would be there in 10 years. (The property) would sit vacant, (which is) not an acceptable use for the city.”

Maloney said Wednesday afternoon that he can understand Starbard’s concerns, but if the company had to seek a special permit from the City Council for every tenant that wanted to lease the site, the company wouldn’t have been able to buy the property because it would have been “virtually untenable.”

He said the company is aiming to develop the site in five years, but the timeframe is dependent on remediating those smells from the treatment plant and transfer station, and how other planned development progresses on the Lynnway, such as projects at North Harbor, South Harbor and the former Porthole Restaurant.

“Our biggest concern is what’s nearby,” said Maloney. “We wouldn’t be able to develop it today or in the near future before that’s resolved. We didn’t buy the site to operate it as an industrial former dairy processing plant. We bought the property with the ultimate intention of redeveloping it into a mixed use that the city can be proud of and help improve the streetscape up and down the Lynnway.”

James Cowdell, Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn) executive director, said the zoning changes related to Garelick are the product of a year-long public process, which completes the final step of the city’s Waterfront Master Plan.

“We strongly endorse this,” said Cowdell.

That process was delayed by Texas-based Dean Foods, which owns Garelick Farms, filing for bankruptcy in November. The city couldn’t move forward with the zoning changes until the courts approved the sale of the property, which occurred in December.



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