

Lynn eyes development on Beacon Chevrolet site

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By Thor Jourgensen/The Daily Item

He still needs to complete a land swap with state officials, but Lynnway landowner John Granese may have “a serious buyer” for the five-acre Beacon Chevrolet site, a city attorney said this week.

“He’s told me he has a serious buyer and, hopefully, in three weeks he’ll know if there will be a closing or not,” said the assistant city solicitor, James Lamanna.

Granese, of Marblehead, moved a step closer last week to developing the waterfront site dubbed North Harbor by city planners when he bought a 2,200 square-foot lot adjacent to his land through a city auction for \$100.

“This leaves the whole site assembled under one entity: That’s good for the city of Lynn,” city Solicitor Michael Barry said.

Ward 5 City Councilor Brendan Crighton called the auction sale “good progress” toward an eventual Beacon site deal. Crighton convinced colleagues last fall to adopt a state law providing a faster permit-granting process for waterfront projects.

“Things seem to be going smoothly,” he said, referring to a Beacon site discussion a month ago with state officials.

Granese and state officials still need to complete a more complicated transaction involving an easement running through the middle of the Beacon site and a vacant piece of land at 119 Exchange St. in the shadow of the overhead commuter rail tracks.

Under the terms of 2003 state legislation, Granese gains possession of the easement in returning for turning the small downtown lot into a park.

State appraisers must determine the value of both pieces of land before the swap can occur and Granese can develop the Beacon site, said Economic Development and Industrial Corporation Director James Cowdell.

State Sen. Thomas M. McGee said state officials and legislators met a month ago to gauge progress in the appraisal process.

“The owner is working closely with state agencies,” McGee said.

Granese and his attorney, David Ankeles of Peabody, could not be reached for comment Tuesday or Wednesday.

Any progress toward development on North Harbor — a vacant swath of land along the bend in the Lynnway opposite North Shore Community College — is notable because of the site’s history.

The former car dealership location was slated for a 25-story office and residential project that never materialized.

The city acquired the site through a delinquent property tax taking and City Council members thought they had the stage set again in 1995 for Beacon Chevrolet’s development only to see former developer Kenneth Carpi pull out of the project a year later.

Within months, former development powerhouses John O'Brien Jr. and Michael Miles, with Granese, proposed an \$18 million North Harbor project that first required cleaning solvents and motor oil off the former car dealership site. The cleanup took place but an Ohio firm's plan to buy the land never materialized and the site sat empty while city planners and councilors crafted a new, encompassing vision for Lynn's waterfront over the last several years.

Granese has been the site's sole owner since 2006. If he can develop the site — and Crighton is optimistic about Granese's chances — city zoning ordinances allow him to build a mix of residential and retail projects on the land, or offices and even a hotel up to eight stories.

Crighton is not the only councilor who wants to see Granese positioned to make a development deal.

“We need to get the state to expedite setting the value on the easement,” Council President Timothy Phelan said.

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