

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS, NEWS

NEW 800-APARTMENT 'NEIGHBORHOOD' PLANNED FOR LYNN WATERFRONT SITE

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | February 17, 2020

LYNN — After years of stalled plans aimed at redeveloping the long-vacant 17-acre waterfront site known as “South Harbor” on the Lynnway, the city’s head of economic development believes the timing is finally right.

The renewed push to redevelop the South Harbor site, which has sat vacant for three decades and is located near the General Edwards Bridge at the mouth of the Saugus River, comes from property owner Joseph O’Donnell, who purchased the land in 2005.

O’Donnell, founder of Belmont Capital, LLC in Cambridge, has submitted preliminary plans that would transform the former Harbor House site into a neighborhood of 828 market-rate apartments over three wood-framed buildings, retail space and 935 parking spaces.

The new proposal comes shortly after a groundbreaking was held in December for a \$100 million mixed-use redevelopment of the North Harbor site at the other end of the Lynnway.

James Cowdell, Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn) executive director, said the South Harbor site’s redevelopment has been in the planning stages for years, but he believes its time has come.

He noted a major issue with poorly-placed power lines that ran through the site and were precluding development was resolved about a decade ago with their \$5 million relocation to the other side of the Lynnway.

“I definitely favor development on the site,” said Cowdell. “I think it’s more a sign of the economy being strong (with) the amount of development happening. The economy is not going to be strong forever and the time to develop is now.”

The plans were presented for the first time at last week’s City Council meeting, where the proposal was tabled, and will be discussed at Tuesday’s Conservation Commission meeting. The development team needs approval from both panels for separate portions of the project.

Attorney Sam Vitali, who represented the development team at last week’s council meeting, said the project, which would be built in two phases, had the potential to be a \$210 million investment.

Vitali said the team was seeking zoning relief for a staggered building, where one portion of a high-rise building would only be three stories, which is less than the minimum five-story height requirement for developments in that waterfront district.

“(This project) would bring needed market-rate apartments to the city of Lynn, generate taxes along the Lynnway and create a new neighborhood in the City of Lynn,” said Vitali.

A site plan the developer has submitted to the city outlines a project that would include a mix of studios, and one- and two-bedroom apartments housed in three wood-framed buildings – two would be seven stories and another would be eight stories.

Residential units would be located in the upper floors in all three buildings. All would have parking on at least the first floor, and one of the buildings would also house retail space on the ground level. The majority of parking would be in garages, but the site plan calls for 323 surface spaces.

However, Chuck Morneau, an attorney with Belmont Capital, said the site plan the development team has submitted is “just a concept.” The actual plans will be developed and filed with the Planning Board after their variance from zoning requirements is approved, and after they receive other local and state approvals.

Although Morneau said the building rendering does not represent the developer’s final plans, the concept is similar to the last proposal O’Donnell submitted for the site’s redevelopment, which is outlined in the city’s newly revised Waterfront Master Plan.

That proposal consisted of three buildings ranging from seven stories on the waterfront to 13 stories along the Lynnway, which would house a total of 768 residential units; 14,500 square-feet of retail and restaurant space; and 1,143 parking spaces, according to the plan.

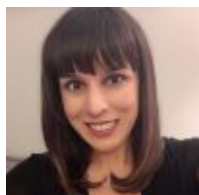
South Harbor is a key location in the Waterfront Master Plan, which describes the site as having the potential to be a “gateway” to the city, when linked with other potential developments, such as a \$500 million transit-oriented neighborhood that developer Charles Patsios is planning to build off the Lynnway at the former General Electric Co. Gear Works property.

The plan envisions a “continuous waterfront promenade from the South Harbor waterfront, across the Lynnway” which would connect to the proposed River Works commuter rail station at the Gear Works site.

Cowdell said the proposal would complement other planned developments on the Lynnway as well. Developer Patrick McGrath is planning to build 74 luxury condominiums at the former Porthole Restaurant site and has obtained “90 percent” of his required permitting for the \$192 million redevelopment of the Lynnway Mart Indoor Mall & Flea Market into 550 residential units and 10,000 square-feet of commercial space, he said.

Although Cowdell was optimistic about plans moving forward at South Harbor, he said there are challenges remaining with the site. There are easements on the land controlled by the state, EDIC/Lynn and the city and the developer will have to build around wetlands.

For the wetlands, the development team has filed a “determination of applicability” with the Conservation Commission, which will be considered at the panel’s Tuesday meeting.



Gayla Cawley.

Gayla Cawley joined The Daily Item as a reporter in 2015. The University of Connecticut graduate studied English and Journalism. Follow her on Twitter @GaylaCawley.

Gayla Cawley can be reached at gcawley@itemlive.com
