

**BUSINESS, NEWS**

# OWNER ZEROING IN ON GARELICK SITE BUYER

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BY THOR JOURGENSEN | December 17, 2018

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Lynn, Ma. 12-17-18. The Garelick Farm building is being sold to another commercial company. (Owen O'Rourke)

LYNN — Garelick Farms owner Dean Foods is poised to sell the shuttered Lynnway dairy plant to one of 10 developers who have expressed an interest in bringing a new commercial business to the 17.5-acre site.

“We have met with 10 potential developers who have met with Dean through their broker. We expect notification very soon on who will be the new owner,” said Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (Lynn/EDIC) Executive Director James M. Cowdell.

He said developers have submitted primarily commercial redevelopment proposals during the last two months to Dean, the Dallas-based firm that announced Garelick’s closing in May and the layoff of 300 employees, many of them Lynn residents.

Cowdell said Dean, through Cushman & Wakefield broker Scott Gredler, told the city last week that it had begun to review proposals to buy the Garelick property. He said as soon as the city is informed of the buyer’s identity, “we will sit down and figure out how we can help.”

Cowdell referred questions on specific details about developers and potential purchase prices to Gredler.

Gredler did not return calls from the *Item* and, in a statement replying to a request for information about the proposals, Dean spokeswoman Reace Smith responded: “We always try to be opportunistic with our assets as demonstrated by previous asset sales activity. From a competitive point of view, I’m sure you can appreciate that we do not comment on specific locations and/or other asset sales prior to a closed transaction.”

Deans’ May 22 announcement of its plans to close Garelick in the fall shocked city officials and company employees.

Once Dean decided to keep its core transportation employees and some other workers on the job, state labor officials and Salem-based MassHire/North Shore Workforce Board (WFB) zeroed in to find jobs for Garelick’s hourly wage employees.

MassHire North Shore Career Center Executive Director Mark Whitmore said about 80 former workers have found jobs and WFB has hired an employment specialist to assist the other 150 workers, many of whom worked for Garelick for years.

“Garelick had a loyal employee base, highly skilled. They are local folks and that is a good thing for employers,” said Whitmore.

Working with state officials, WFB applied for and received a national dislocated worker grant to pay for training and job search aid for Garelick employees.

It also sponsored a job fair at the Lynnway plant before the firm closed.

“Twenty employers came in to that fair. They were really motivated to hire,” Whitmore said.

Lynn resident Alex Cuevas worked for three years at Garelick as a plant maintenance coordinator and planner before being laid off. He dusted off his real estate license, is selling property locally and is interested in community development.

He credited local firms Traditional Breads and Kettle Cuisine with hiring Garelick workers.

“My transition wasn’t as hard as other people. Quite a few of my colleagues haven’t had success,” Cuevas said.

Garelick's closing sent ripples across the city beyond its workforce. For the Lynn Water and Sewer Commission, the loss of its biggest customer translated into a \$2 million drop in annual revenue.

"That is about a 7.5 percent drop. It really hit us in September," said Commission Executive Director Dan O'Neill.

O'Neill said the 4-percent rate hike approved in June by the commission included a 2-percent increase intended to bring in more rate revenue to offset the Garelick loss.

Cowdell said he will help schedule a meeting with Garelick's new owner and Mayor Thomas M. McGee as soon as Dean announces its choice. The timing of the anticipated news comes a week after a discussion on the city's updated Waterfront Master Plan touched on the Garelick site and the possibility of its future use for industrial purposes.

Mixed-use zoning allows residential and commercial development on the Garelick site but a business similar to Garelick can occupy the site by right.

"We would like jobs at the site. We look at it as a new opportunity," Cowdell said.



Thor Jourgensen

A newspaperman for 34 years, Thor Jourgensen has worked for the Item for 29 years and lived in Lynn 20 years. He has overseen the Item's editorial department since January 2016 and is the 2015 New England Newspaper and Press Association Bob Wallack Community Journalism Award recipient.

Thor Jourgensen can be reached at [tjourgensen@itemlive.com](mailto:tjourgensen@itemlive.com)

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