

The sky's the limit in Lynn



PHOTO BY OWEN O'ROURKE BY THOMAS GRILLO

LYNN — Five months ago, **Jay Ash**, state Secretary of Housing and Economic Development, joined **Gov. Charlie Baker** and **Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy** on the steps of City Hall and vowed to deliver on the city's long-awaited transformation.

Today, Ash is meeting with a group of local, state and federal officials to review progress on their partnership. Their mission is to find resources that can revitalize the city and spur development on vacant and underused parcels, including the city's waterfront. "People in Lynn have a right to say, 'I've heard all this before,' but this is happening," Ash said. "I don't know which groundbreaking will be first and then...bam... there will be so much attention, so much action, so much positive development for Lynn, that it's really going to take off."

Ash is meeting with the **Lynn Economic Advancement Team**, a panel that, in addition to Ash, includes **U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton**, **Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack**, **James Cowdell**, executive director of the **Economic Development and Industrial Corp. (EDIC)**, **Environmental Secretary Matthew Beaton** and others who can cut through the bureaucracy and make things happen.

"I'm in Lynn every other week talking to developers looking at property and we've come to the table with a bag of resources," Ash said. "There are about six major projects that could take place over the next year or so. We have identified dozens of permitting issues and public actions that should advance development."

Among the projects on the wish list include:

- MBTA stop on the commuter rail at the GE property

- Continue ferry service to Boston
- A new gateway to Lynn from the city's south side
- Waterfront residential development
- Hotels and high-end retail
- Parks
- Transform GE parking lots in West Lynn into apartments

The governor, who drives through Lynn enroute to the State House from his home in Swampscott each day, has identified \$918 million in spending for economic development. Much of the cash is in programs that Lynn and other so-called gateway communities could benefit from.

O'Donnell's associate, **Charles Morneau**, said they hope to start construction next spring with a \$69 million luxury apartment project that would include 250 units in a wood frame, three-story building. **Joseph O'Donnell**, founder of **Boston Culinary Group** and **Belmont Capital** in Cambridge, is developing the 17-acre former Building 19 site on the Lynnway. The company bought the mortgage for the parcel from the FDIC in the 1990s for an undisclosed amount.

The key to the development is public transportation, he said. It would help his project and trigger more mixed-use construction in the waterfront district if the MBTA's River Works Station on the Newbury/Rockport line was not limited to GE employees. "We believe it's a great spot with spectacular views that will attract tenants," he said. "If we get public transportation, that whole area works because everyone wants to be near the T because it's the only way to get into Boston economically." While this would be the first major waterfront project to put a shovel in the ground, Morneau said his company is not a pioneer.

"We have owned the land for a long time and we are committed to make a go of it now," he said. "We're in the position to get out of the gate first and we are willing to do it, at least at that parcel, and that will give others the chance to see what the market is and what else can be built."

Minco Development Corp. has presented plans for a \$90 million mixed-use development that will include 348 one- and two-bedroom apartment units at the former Beacon Chevrolet site on the Lynnway.

Charles Patsios has plans to construct 1,200 apartments on a former GE site near the Building 19 parcel.

Gregory Bialecki, who held Ash's job in the **Patrick** administration and now works as executive vice president at **Redgate**, said the Boston-based developer doesn't have any properties under agreement in Lynn, but they are on the lookout.

"We are looking for places that are a short ride into Boston by subway or commuter rail, so the fact that Lynn is a quick trip into the city by rail checks the box for us," he said. "Our target population is seeking an interesting urban neighborhood when they get home and Lynn checks that box off too." It helps that

the Baker administration has sent a strong message to builders that the commonwealth will support new development in Lynn, Bialecki added.

Lynn's Coddell said they are also looking to General Electric Co. to boost jobs and examine several parcels in West Lynn, primarily parking lots, that could be transformed into apartments.

"If there were skeptics as far as the governor's commitment to Lynn, there shouldn't be any skeptics now," he said. "The team has worked effectively and in a very short period of time has been able to move key projects along." Ash, who is well known in the development community for bringing a revival to Chelsea over his many years as city manager, said something is happening in Lynn that can't be denied. "I have had multiple conversations with a dozen property owners in Lynn and probably another two dozen conversations with developers outside the city," Ash said. "One of those includes a big one in Boston who is used to doing billion dollar projects who said, 'I hear you guys are all in Lynn, what have I been missing and where should I be looking?'"

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