



A rendering shows the proposed 850-unit mixed-use development on the South Harbor site in Lynn. (Samuels & Associates)

Lynn City Council hears plan for South Harbor site

Charlie McKenna and James Jennings

November 16, 2023 by [Charlie McKenna](#), [James Jennings](#)

LYNN — It's been smooth sailing so far for the massive project eyed for the South Harbor site, with most members of the City Council seeming supportive of the proposed \$450 million, 850-unit mixed-use development.

Mayor Jared Nicholson unveiled the project earlier this week and presented it to the council for the first time Tuesday. However, at least a pair of councilors — Ward 6 Councilor Fred Hogan, whose ward the project is located in, and Council President Jay Walsh — were part of the development team that negotiated many of the

proposal's terms. Councilors did not take a vote on the proposal, though one is expected later this month.

Only outgoing Ward 2 Councilor Rick Starbard expressed some hesitation regarding the proposal, though even he admitted "it looks beautiful."

The crux of Starbard's concerns was centered on the growing impact of a number of developments set to come online in the city in the coming months and years on Lynn's public school system, public safety, and municipal services.

"As a community charged with providing public safety, public works, public education, (I) don't think we have the capacity to address those issues with those we have now, I'd like to know what plan we have going forward for these folks," Starbard asked Nicholson.

While Nicholson didn't offer specific plans, he sought to assuage Starbard's concerns by noting projects already underway in the city to address the impact of an influx of new residents. Nicholson pointed to the new Pickering Middle School currently in development, which he said will address overcrowding in the middle school, and ongoing efforts to recruit more public-safety personnel.

Nicholson also noted that the city's Planning Department found that just 16 Lynn Public Schools students were living in a total of 827 units spread across 12 multifamily developments downtown.

"Empirically, it is not the impact on the school department one might expect based on the number of units," Nicholson said.

Nicholson additionally pointed out that increased revenue from developments like the South Harbor proposal, which is expected to generate \$6 million in tax revenue for the city, could be used to bolster municipal services.

Starbard, who owns an auto-body shop in Revere, recognized the project's potential to serve as a gateway to Lynn.

"Would I love to see that every day when I cross the bridge? Yes," he said.

Councilor-at-Large Brian Field asked Nicholson whether the city would ultimately be responsible for maintaining the proposed 8-acre public park and promenade on the site. Nicholson said the responsibility would fall on both the city and the developer,

Samuels & Associates. He added that the city would also explore getting state support from the Department of Conservation and Recreation for the open space.

“My understanding is DCR views this as (the) kind of park they might be interested in supporting,” Nicholson said.

He noted that the department’s commissioner, Brian Arrigo, was the mayor of Revere for seven years and is “very familiar” with the site.

Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn) Executive Director James Cowdell told councilors the city has long wanted to construct something on the South Harbor site that makes passersby say “wow.” This proposal, Cowdell said, achieves that benchmark.

Cowdell, a former councilor himself, said he understands the complex dynamics behind voting for a tax incentive, which the city is offering Samuels on the project — essentially allowing the company to pay the increased tax rate for the site throughout a 20-year period instead of all at once. But, he urged councilors to see the bigger picture on the South Harbor proposal.

“In Lynn, that project doesn’t work without a tax incentive, which should give the council comfort,” he said. “Everything is changing, and we need your support.”

The public was able to see an overview of the entire South Harbor Implementation Plan during a community open house at the Demakes Family YMCA Thursday night.

“This plan has been worked on by our planning department and Utile for quite some time now, and we’re putting it all together,” Hogan said. “We want to be very transparent and open and explain these things as they go on.”

City planners and Boston-based Utile Architecture & Planning, the company working with the city on the South Harbor Implementation Plan, gave a slide presentation about the project.

Several slides included maps showing the proposed usage of the entire South Harbor area, including a park, residential and commercial areas, and street improvements.

“A lot of the planning and visioning that the community did with the city focused on the waterfront stopped at the Lynnway,” said Aaron Clausen, the city’s principal planning director.

He added that the idea is to connect the neighborhoods across Lynnway so that Lynnway becomes a “connecting tissue rather than a barrier to the waterfront.”

Utile Senior Planner and Designer Taskina Tareen said that one of the goals of the project is to capitalize on both public and private development in the area.

Lauren Drago, the city’s associate planning director, emphasized that better land use planning could increase the city’s tax revenue from the South Harbor area.

One of the points of emphasis during the presentation was taking some of the traffic burden off of Lynnway.

Tim Love, Utile’s founding principal, explained that ideally, more traffic could be routed along Alley Street and Navy Road and improvements made along that stretch.

Part of this would involve the city partnering with developers to build or improve a street section around a proposed development.

“Some of the future developers are going to have the responsibility to help us achieve this,” Love said.

Another part of the plan would include moving the current River Works Commuter Rail flag stop further north, making it accessible to more people in the city.

Following the presentation, people were able to examine various printed maps of the plans more closely and ask questions.

Planners said they would consider all the input as the plans develop.



Charlie McKenna

Charlie McKenna is a staff reporter at The Daily Item covering the towns of Saugus and Marblehead, and the City of Peabody. McKenna graduated from Emerson College in 2022 with a degree in journalism. Before joining the Item, McKenna worked on The Boston Globe's metro desk. In his free time, McKenna can be found listening to Steely Dan.



James Jennings

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