

Lynn launches urban renewal planning process

Olivia Haydar

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LYNN — The city has launched an urban renewal planning process for the South Harbor neighborhood, advancing efforts to revitalize long-vacant waterfront properties owned by private companies.

The process has been underway since last year, when the City Council unanimously approved the creation of a redevelopment authority to establish projects aimed at improving the city's waterfront. The city's Planning Department originally requested the urban renewal plan to support those redevelopment efforts.

If adopted, the plan would provide city officials with additional tools to help shape redevelopment projects and their impact on residents.

City planning initiatives such as the South Harbor Implementation Plan (SHIP), created in 2023, focus on guiding future development in the South Harbor neighborhood. The Lynn Planning Department has faced ongoing challenges working with Gearworks and National Grid, which own acres of unused waterfront land in the city.

“We are thrilled to see momentum building around our urban renewal efforts and SHIP,” Mayor Jared C. Nicholson said. “Ensuring that growth along our waterfront is truly inclusive has been a top priority. As we plan to revitalize these spaces, our goal is to create a vibrant, accessible destination that reflects and benefits every resident in our city.”

Principal Planning Director Aaron Clausen said the 60-acre Gearworks property, located next to the River Works commuter rail station, represents a significant redevelopment opportunity.



“It could be both a housing and economic job creation opportunity,” Clausen said.

Clausen said several National Grid-owned waterfront properties have remained “stuck,” meaning they have not been developed despite their potential to support economic growth and create jobs.

As the planning process moves forward, the city has awarded a contract to Newburyport-based Innes Land Strategies to prepare the urban renewal plan. The firm was selected because of its experience working on similar projects in Salem, Lawrence, New Bedford, Fall River, Brockton and Watertown.

The project will be funded through a Municipal and Tribal Technical Assistance Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance’s Federal Funds and Infrastructure Office, which supports local governments undertaking infrastructure projects.

Because both the National Grid and Gearworks properties are located in Ward 6, Ward 6 Councilor Fred Hogan said the urban renewal plan will help “unlock the waterfront’s full potential.”

“The progress in this area is generating real excitement across our entire community, and we look forward to being a part of this effort,” Hogan said.

The plan prepared by Innes Land Strategies will build upon the goals established in SHIP and Vision Lynn, both of which focus on transforming the South Harbor neighborhood based on community input. The city, the Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC/Lynn), the newly formed Lynn Redevelopment Authority and residents will work together to identify projects that will have a positive impact on the neighborhood.

Lynn Redevelopment Authority member Charles Gaeta said the city’s difficulty working with National Grid has left its waterfront properties undeveloped.

“This is the start of a long process, but it’s also the result of years of planning and community engagement,” Gaeta said. “The groundwork has been laid through Vision Lynn, the city’s comprehensive plan, and many other initiatives. Now we’re moving from planning to action, and that’s a significant milestone.”



City officials plan to develop surveys, facilitate community discussions, create an interactive website and prepare a list of potential property acquisitions. They will also conduct build-out analyses, including the possibility of a mixed-use neighborhood on the Gearworks site.

Clausen said the mixed-use concept was shaped by community feedback.

“There were three things that the community was looking for: more affordable housing opportunities across the city, more jobs, more access to jobs that have a wider range of skill sets and opportunity for growth, and then both of those two things, combined with new development, strengthen the tax base,” Clausen said.

Clausen said redevelopment throughout the district could result in 3,000 to 4,000 housing units and thousands of new jobs.

He said expanding the city’s tax base through redevelopment of the Gearworks and National Grid properties would allow Lynn to invest in “better schools, more parks, better maintained open space and public safety.”

EDIC/Lynn Executive Director Danya Smith said the plan could play a key role in the city’s long-term economic growth.

“As we prepare this urban renewal plan, which builds upon a lot of the previous community engagement, this gives the city another tool in our toolbox to realize that growth,” Smith said.

According to the mayor’s office, a draft of the urban renewal plan is expected by September. Final approvals from the City Council, EDIC/Lynn, the Lynn Redevelopment Authority, the Planning Board and the state are anticipated by December.