

Harvard Devens Jurisdiction Committee Meeting
June 7, 2023: 11AM
Meeting Conducted Via Zoom

Members attending: Victor Normand, SusanMary Redinger, Paul Green, Don Ludwig, Heather Knowles, John McCormack, Kara Minar (joined 11:17am, left 11:32am)

Members absent: Tim Myllykangas, George Glazier

Others Present: Jim DeZutter (Devens resident), Carl Sciple (DEC), Lucy Wallace (Harvard resident)

Victor Normand called the meeting to order at 11:01 AM

The minutes from April 5, 2023 were approved as amended unanimously.

Devens Finances – Questions for MassDevelopment

Victor sent a list of questions that have been accumulating for Mass Development (MD) based on the information received from members. Don forwarded it to Meg Delorier. MD making their annual presentation at the 6/8 board meeting and they will get back to Harvard in the next week or so. Victor would like members of the HDJC to sit down with someone from MD and go over the questions in a face to face meeting. Hopefully we'll get the finalized budget as well from their 6/8 meeting.

Plan Outline to Other Stakeholders – Follow Up

The document was sent to all members of the Devens Jurisdiction Framework Committee (DJFC) with a communication to ask them to use it as a resource as they prepare for permanent government at Devens. Victor met with some members of the DJFC and asked for the takeaways from the Ayer leaders of the recent forum held in Ayer re: Devens. He reported that there is general interest in the waterfront along Nashua River (part of the North post) for environmental and recreational purposes. There is also interest in the air field. Some interest in Vicksburg Square. The town of Shirley hasn't done much. More feedback from Devens residents would be helpful. There are some new residents who thought that Devens already was a town. Hopefully the outline we've provided will be helpful to all in moving forward.

Ayer has advertised in the Action Unlimited the formulation of a committee along with a website address that has a link to a form to fill out for those who are interested in serving. Victor will follow up with the HJDC members in Ayer to offer his support.

Proposed Amendment to Chapter 498:

Marie Sobalvarro advised Victor of the legislation filed concerning an amendment to Chapter 498 proposed by Senator Cronin as part of the budget process, but was rejected. It's of no consequence immediately, but it is an example of how the legislature could move forward without the three towns' agreement.

Members discussed the concern that Senator Eldridge didn't know about the proposed legislation and the increasing demand for housing development. Would it be possible to get Senator Eldridge to say he supports the current three-town Super Town meeting mechanism for changing legislation?

Is this an indication that the legislature feels emboldened to override the towns? Did MD know about this? Did Ayer? Clearly the push for this kind of legislation has arisen from the interest/need to increase housing in the state. The housing cap was successfully raised in the past in Shirley using the process outlined in Ch. 498. The question was raised – if the legislature tries to enact changes without following the supertown meeting process, do the towns have any recourse? The legislation has the authority to make changes as long as they are in line with the state constitution.

Can we use this opportunity to move up the timeframe? e.g. we don't want to wait 10 years and ask our legislators to endorse this and put it before the legislature and the DEC and MD. Once it is in the towns' hands it would be under the control of our planning board, select board, ZBA, etc.

How close are we? Ayer is now moving and coming up to speed which is good. Shirley's decision may be left in the hands of their Select Board. Using the historical boundaries seems to be a practical starting point. Then, what data do we need to have? What do we already agree on, and how do we work out the areas that need compromise?

Are there things about Chapter 498 members would like to see changed? If so, send comments to Victor who is compiling a list? Basic amendment is to move the date to 2024 to begin planning with a plan to be developed in three years. Absent a consensus plan, Chapter 498 is dissolved and the dissolution reverts to the town boundaries.

Any housing developments, including Vicksburg Square, would be more likely to succeed if the towns have already agreed on the resolution. Money can be awarded to a single town much more easily that way.

What's the best way to get things going? Could Senator Eldridge help with the effort to secure funding for a consultant with the understanding that housing development would be easier in the long run. How do we get MD to take this seriously and move before 2029 with funding?

Get the planning date advanced would be the most effective way? Can we offer to meet with the newly appointed representatives from Ayer, and the Shirley SB and get them up to speed. Do a brain dump with all we know.

What is the vision for Vicksburg Square? It straddles line between Harvard and Ayer. Ultimately there is no agreed upon vision. Devens residents don't want high density, affordable housing allotment, rentals but that's the only financially profitable avenue for a developer. The Select Board would like more input from residents on options (which we don't really have). Stakeholders need to be aligned first. If the towns and the participants had a vision for Vicksburg Square it would make it easier to have an argument to present to legislators for supporting the towns in moving forward sooner. VBSq not currently zoned for housing. Previous attempts to rezone has failed multiple times. Funding to underwrite the conversion of VBSq by a developer relies on building a certain kind of housing as mentioned earlier.

Would the SB be interested in holding a public hearing on supporting the effort to move up the timeline and advance the planning date? Then we'd go to the SB in Ayer and Shirley and enlist them. It would protect the towns from being at the whim of the legislature.

An executive order of Governor Weld that gave the director to the legislature for the development of the land. Perhaps we could go directly to Governor Healy and advocate for her to initiate the change. She does have control over the MD board.

Victor will reach out to Ayer and see if there is interest in getting together with the HDJC to kickstart the conversation about advancing the timeline.

The SB will be discussing the inclusion of resuming jurisdiction along historical boundaries or reconfiguring the lines instead at the upcoming retreat on June 21st. Members understand that the town voted to study resuming full jurisdiction but pushback has always come up along the way. The SB will also be discussing the establishment of term limits for members. Typically, the SB has taken into consideration members who would like to re-up and recognizes the importance of retaining members with historical knowledge.

Other Business: None

Public comment: None

The meeting was adjourned at 12:19 by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

SusanMary Redinger, recording secretary