

Harvard Devens Jurisdiction Committee Meeting
August 2, 2023: 11AM
Meeting Conducted Via Zoom

Members attending: Victor Normand, SusanMary Redinger, Paul Green, Don Ludwig, John McCormack

Members absent: Heather Knowles, Kara Minar, Tim Myllykangas, George Glazier

Others Present: Neil Angus (DEC) joined approx. 11:25AM.

Victor Normand called the meeting to order at 11:03 AM

The minutes from July 5, 2023 were approved unanimously.

Devens Finances – Questions for MassDevelopment

Don is still waiting to hear back from Meg Delorier from MD (Mass Development) for a meeting to review the financial statement discussed in previous meetings. He will stay on it. Members are looking forward to seeing the financial comparisons year to year.

Jurisdiction Timeline:

Paul Green put together a draft of a possible timeline for a sooner disposition date. It's complicated putting this together but it's important to get our arms around this process. Paul walked members through the document. The first step was to think through all of the phases with the tasks/steps listed out.

The first phase is called General Principles and is essentially what the HDJC has done over the past year in listing out the issues of concern. Essentially a one year process for the other towns.

Next step is Broad Consensus were parties get together and identify areas of agreement and align on those and set aside the other areas.

Next is the Research Phase were we bring in the consultants and go through the whole RFPI process and work through the details/challenges/complexities. End up with a list of recommendations/options from the consultants and begin the final negotiations from there. Time allocated for this part of the process is one year.

The state legislature will take at least a year to approve the final language, according to Jamie Eldridge. The draft timeline allows two years for this given past precedence of legislative passages.

Then there is a Transition Phase that follows before full resumption.

Based on this work, Paul believes that the earliest we could resume jurisdiction is 2029 – four years earlier than the mandated 2033.

Members discussed the timeline and Victor's suggestion of bringing it forward to the other towns.

John raised the point that more time may be needed if county/town lines are being changed as part of the final solution.

SusanMary suggested seeking consensus from the other parties on the general phases/action steps before presenting the timeline, but members felt there was already general agreement for moving up disposition and this may help create a sense of urgency.

Victor will put this on the agenda for the next Framework committee meeting and invite Paul to walk members through the document.

Victor indicated that the chair of the Select Board, Rich Maiore had suggested in response to Senator Cronin's legislative attempt to take over Vicksburg Square (VS) for housing that we deal with VS separately. If jurisdiction over that is decided first then the zoning changes could be done separately as well and settle that issue. Members discussed the pros/cons of creating a carve out for VS. Don added that he and Rich had talked to Jamie at the parade about this carve out in light of the press for housing.

SusanMary questioned the role of the HDJC in dealing with the carve out despite our having an advisory role in this process for many years. She also raised the concern of having VS as a point of leverage which would go away if it's decided sooner than the rest of the disposition issues, e.g. MD may pay for a consultant, but might be more inclined if VS is still in play. Also, where does the carve out stop – what about the fields, and before you know it you're dealing with other issues and it's gone to the legislature and things have been decided without the chance to review.

Would it make sense to have a Super Town meeting to move up the date? What level of consensus or buy in would the state legislature need?

So many issues/questions need to be answered before the towns can come to an agreement in a super town meeting. The HDJC has heard that the Devens residents should stay together but we have no consensus on that and we haven't answered some basic questions e.g. schooling, taxes – all of which a consultant would help with.

Paul – not sure it's possible. Fundamentally the carve out would mean that all of VS would go to one town/jurisdiction. If, hypothetically all of VS goes to Ayer there will be questions – don't we have to geographically connect it to Ayer? Then you'd have to take the ball fields, and have the benefit of the industrial property.

Is there a way to carve out jurisdiction just for VS. Neil – we don't know the ultimate outcome. It should be part of the whole process. What is the best approach? Start the conversation now given the housing crisis. Do it in parallel. Move up the planning date and get the process going.

Neil said that the DJFC is working on it. The RFEI (Requests for expression of interest) for a consultant is on the agenda for the next meeting.

If VB is torn down and rebuilt then town boundaries may not need to be moved. Feasibility of renovation?

Neil – tear down. 2 points to consider. Buildings are on National Register of Historic Places so you can't just tear them down without significant review. They are also built like tanks so they will be expensive to tear down and there have been studies in the past that the best use for this would be residential and it could happen with the appropriate tax credits and financial assistance from the state and federal government.

If the cost is reduced to zero, it can make this feasible as a market rate project. There is a strong market for first time home buyers. Don't rule out a market rate component to that housing.

Affordable housing, special needs (e.g. seniors). MD has the capacity to attract those resources to a development.

Paul, from his experience on DEAT (Devens Economic Advisory Team) when Trinity Financial proposed redeveloping VS in the past both Ayer and Harvard voted it down because they viewed the housing as 100% affordable. So another 100% affordable housing project would most likely not be approved by Harvard.

Victor will compile members' input on the timeline and present it at the next HDJC meeting where we can align on a final document to be presented at the next DJFC meeting.

Other Business

At our next meeting in September we'll be looking at changing the day/time of the meeting.

Public Comment

None.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 am by unanimous vote.

Respectfully submitted,

SusanMary Redinger, recording secretary