



Town of Ayer

Ayer + Devens 2033 Study Committee

Meeting Minutes from August 9, 2023

Attendance: Scott Houde; Rebecca Jones; Geof Tillotson; Barry Schwarzel; Alan Manoian; Rachel Kozera; Sandra Kelly; Ben Vogelsang; Eric Sechman

Also in Attendance: Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager

Call to Order: The meeting of the Ayer + Devens 2033 Study Committee was called to order by S. Houde in the First Floor Meeting Room of the Ayer Town Hall.

The members of the Committee introduced themselves.

Organization of the Committee:

S. Houde provided an overview of the Committee and indicated that per the Committee charge as approved by the Select Board, a Select Board Member is the Chair of the Committee. The Chair is responsible for setting the Committee Meeting Agenda. I will request items from members in advance and I do not want to be restrictive with agenda items. The Committee will need a Vice Chair who will be responsible for filling in for the Chair and it is a great learning opportunity. The Committee will also need a Clerk who is responsible for taking the meeting minutes of the Committee and is responsible for getting them posted to the Town's website.

Motion: A motion was made by G. Tillotson and seconded by E. Sechman to nominate Rachel Kozera as the Vice Chair for the Committee. **Motion Passed (9-0)**

Motion: A motion was made by G. Tillotson and seconded by B. Schwartzel to nominate Rebecca Jones as the Clerk for the Committee. **Motion Passed (9-0)**

R. Pontbriand volunteered to take the minutes for this first meeting and will send them to Rebecca Jones to review. He is available to answer any questions as well as to assist with the posting of the meeting minutes to the Town's website.

Alan Manoian stated that the original charge for this Committee included representatives of Ayer who are living on Devens. This is primarily in the Auman Street Neighborhood. We need to bring them into our process and on this Committee.

E. Sechman asked how we would work in the fact of having people from Devens on the Committee.

Alan Manoian stated that they are Ayer residents living on Devens.

S. Houde provided an overview of some of the issues regarding Devens and issues that the Committee will be looking at in detail: the issues of housing and the housing cap on Devens; the school agreement which currently is with Harvard but is supposed to go out to bid periodically; the issue of distrust between Ayer and MassDevelopment over the school contract as well as the police contract which is also supposed to go out to bid and does not. The current contract is with the State

Police. One of the major areas of concern comes down to the future of Vicksburg Square. Vicksburg Square is currently zoned for technology and would require a zoning change to residential for housing. This zoning change requires a Super Town Meeting which is when all three Towns (Ayer, Harvard, Shirley) hold individual Town Meetings on the same date and time at which all three Towns must approve the zoning change. This requirement is set forth in Chapter 498. Previous Super Town Meetings have failed to pass this change. Additionally, the last effort involved a private development firm, Trinity, which proposed a high percentage of low-income housing at the time. The Town of Ayer was concerned about the impacts of new residential housing on municipal services in Ayer and those associated costs. Approximately 75% of Vicksburg square is in Ayer and 25% is in Harvard.

S. Houde continued that it seems many residents on Devens prefer not to come to Ayer. We will be looking at this issue of boundaries and potentially moving boundaries in our study.

Alan Manoian stated that many residents on Devens live there as their kids go to Harvard schools.

Alan Manoian provided a brief overview of the historic boundaries of Devens using various slides. Alan Manoian also made a brief presentation of an overview of Devens.

S. Houde stated that the Base closed in 1994 and in an agreement with the State there are housing caps, and any zoning changes require a Super Town Meeting.

G. Tillotson explained that the Super Town Meetings are comprised of individual Town Meetings in Ayer, Harvard, and Shirley which happen simultaneously. Zoning changes must pass unanimously in all three Towns.

S. Kelly stated that there does not seem to be a lot of housing on Devens.

S. Houde stated that the magic number for the purpose of our study is the year 2033 which is the date for the Study Report and Recommendation to the State Legislature and Governor. There has been some talk from Harvard that they may want to try and move this date up. Our goal is to study the issues and feed that information to the Select Board as well as the Devens Framework Committee. We may even consider using a consultant.

G. Tillotson stated that the Harvard Committee has been very active and that we may be able to get a lot of the data they have been using from them.

Alan Manoian encouraged the Committee to go to the Harvard Public Access television webpage and to watch their meetings.

R. Jones asked for confirmation that Lancaster is completely out of the process.

G. Tillotson stated yes because the portion of Devens in Lancaster is an active munitions ground.

Overview of the Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law:

Robert Pontbriand (Town Manager) provided the Committee with an overview of the requirements of the Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law that apply to the Committee. All meetings of the Committee must be open to the public; all meeting agendas must be posted with the Town Clerk at least 48 hours in advance; the Committee can only meet and deliberate in a duly posted meeting.

The Committee must also keep meeting minutes that must be posted with the Town Clerk and on the Town's website. All materials the Committee uses are considered public records and must be provided to the public in accordance with the provisions under the Public Records Law.

R. Pontbriand encouraged the Committee to review the Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law and if they have any questions to consider his Office a resource for information and questions.

S. Houde stated that Committee Members should only use their Town-issued emails for the Committee's work.

G. Tillotson stated that you should never hit "reply all" with an email as it would be considered deliberation.

S. Houde stated that the Committee had already covered Agenda Items 4 (Review and Overview of the Charge of the Committee) and 5 (Overview of the Background of the Devens Disposition Issue) tonight.

Discussion on Initial Major Considerations/Issues of Disposition:

S. Houde stated that we have already touched upon this tonight. It is important that we keep an open mind as we approach the study and there could be multiple solutions to consider. We need to study and look for the best solution. I will prepare a punch list of items for study/consideration for the next meeting.

G. Tillotson stated that we need to understand the regional impacts on Devens and the surrounding towns.

R. Pontbriand stated that the Committee should review Chapter 498; consider the advantages and disadvantages to the status quo; and look at what the impacts including costs would be if Devens reverted to its historic boundaries. He concurred with S. Houde that there are many potential options/solutions to be studied and considered.

Discussion on Next Steps and the Committee's Approach:

S. Houde stated that our next several meetings will largely be focused on gathering information. Our next two meetings should be in-person. We may want to consider Zoom meetings in the future or potentially a hybrid meeting (both Zoom and in-person), but hybrid meetings are subject to the availability of Town Staff to run.

Alan Manoian stated that he wants to keep everyone engaged and that the Committee needs to do a bus tour of Devens to see these various sites.

S. Houde stated that the next meeting will be informational; we should schedule a tour; further define the specific scope of our study; and consider breaking into workgroups for specific issues.

B. Vogelsang asked if there will be a list of Committee Members and contacts.

G. Tillotson stated that you should talk with your neighbors and friends about these issues.

Scheduling of Next Meeting:

The Committee scheduled its next meeting for Wednesday, August 30, 2023 at 5pm in -person in the First Floor Meeting Room of Town Hall.

Public Input:

There was no public input.

B. Vogelsang asked if there would be any interaction with the military.

S. Houde stated potentially. He also stated that we need to get a good map of Devens.

R. Jones stated that she saw some maps in the RAB documents.

G. Tillotson stated that he would ask MRPC as well.

Alan Manoian stated that we are making history and future generations will look back on our efforts in 100 years.

Adjournment:

Motion: A motion was made by G. Tillotson and seconded by E. Sechman to adjourn the meeting at 6:20pm. **Motion Passed (9-0).**

The meeting adjourned at 6:20pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by: Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager

Minutes Reviewed and approved by the Committee on August 30, 2023.

Signed: 
Robert A. Pontbriand
Town Manager