



Town of Ayer

Devens Resolution Committee

Meeting Minutes from the October 25th 2023 Meeting

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

Also in Attendance: Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager; Ruth Rhonemus, Historical Commission

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

Follow Up Discussion of the September 27th Tour of Devens

A. Manoian – Will investigate possibility of future tours/access to Moore Army Airfield, McPherson Road property, and interior of Vicksburg Square to help committee gain increased understanding of property conditions, issues, etc.

R. Jones – Visited Watertown Yards, former site of the Watertown Arsenal, and Brighton Marine, former site of US Marine/Navy medical facility and service member housing. Both properties contain similar buildings to Vicksburg Square, and were turned over to their respective municipalities in the 1980's. They have been reclaimed and repurposed into revenue-generating uses that serve the surrounding communities, with recreational and healthcare facilities, residential units, retail and commercial/industrial offerings. She will provide photos and additional information to Alan M. for review and discussion with the full committee at a future meeting.

A. Manoian – Vicksburg Square is currently in an “Innovation & Technology Zone” established in 1996.

Discussion/Plan to collect and Study Municipal Service Data Applicable to Devens Disposition Study

Alan M. – The Devens Community (not Mass Development) website has a wealth of information about Devens, including tax information. Devens currently has a split tax rate. Ayer's business tax rate is 50% higher than Devens'.

Both county & town boundaries (between Worcester/Middlesex and Harvard/Ayer) run through multiple buildings, both residential and commercial, including Clear Path for Veterans and Vicksburg Square.

G. Tillotson - The Devens business “Suez Water Systems” is the Devens utility operator.

S. Houde – The Tax rate difference will be a significant issue to work through and may need to be addressed. Three possible ideas – separate tax zones (Ayer vs. Devens); adjustments via Town Meeting; blanketing Devens with Ayer tax rates. Harvard will have the same issues with their portion of Devens.

S. Houde – Massachusetts doesn't have separate industrial vs. commercial rates.

How are Devens owners/properties currently billed or taxed for services such as utilities, (gas/electric/water/sewer/cable/internet/road maintenance &

plowing/police/fire/EMS/police/schools/etc.)? Is this different for residential vs commercial? State vs. Federal properties?

G. Tillotson - It's possible that adding Industrial/Commercial Devens properties to the Ayer tax base could generate enough revenue to cover expenses for services, and still have a surplus. So, we might be able to lower tax rates for Industrial/Commercial.

S. Houde - Also, must consider needs of Ayer required to support the services needed by Devens, i.e. managing & maintaining conservation lands; additional hazmat training & equipment for AFD; management & maintenance of recreational areas & facilities; Superfund site monitoring, maintenance & management; infrastructure (roads; water/sewer; dams; lakes & ponds; street lighting & signage, etc.

G. Tillotson – AFD has additional equipment for hazmat, etc. stored near the Devens HHW facility.

A. – Manoian - The rail Line (Hill Yard Intermodal Transportation Facility) is wholly owned by PanAm, not Mass Development, and is the main barrier to Harvard's ability to directly access Devens.

A. Manoian – Also need to consider differences in zoning/planning/permitting and associated processes between Devens and Ayer. Devens (Mass Development) currently has an expedited permitting process. There is also a cap on the number of residential units able to exist on Devens, instituted when Devens was created under Mass Development. The only means to change or lift the cap is via petitioning the state legislature and requires prior approval via a Super Town Meeting (Ayer/Harvard/Shirley).

S. Houde – Starting point: Consult various Ayer Dept. Heads for potential costs vs. tax revenues, make a recommendation to J. Livingston (Ayer's Selectboard Representative to 3-town Devens Super Committee) to discuss with Harvard & Shirley. Also need to compile an overview of current businesses (buildings, impacts, services, etc.) department head consultations. Ex. Pharma facilities may need more water & sewer capacity than similar-sized buildings and have special hazmat needs/risks.

Scheduling of Next Meeting

S. Pontbriand With multiple committee members heavily involved with town budget work for the next few months, plus multiple major holidays, the monthly meeting schedule will need to be adjusted.

R. Pontbriand – based on holiday schedules and budget season, with impacts on everyone's availability, an early December meeting will be scheduled, with the next meeting pushed out 6 weeks into early February. Sub-working groups can still gather if they won't make a quorum.

Public Input

Adjournment

Renee L M Dow - Clerk