

**Town of Ayer**  
**Devens Resolution Committee**  
*(Formerly Called the Ayer + Devens 2033 Study Committee)*



**Meeting Minutes from August 30, 2023**

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

**Absent:** Alan Manoian; Rebecca Jones

**Also in Attendance:** Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager; Julie Murray, Planning Board Member; Ruth Rhonemus, Resident

**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.

**Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes (August 9, 2023):**

The Committee reviewed the DRAFT meeting minutes from the August 9, 2023 meeting.

G. Tillotson asked to change the word from “pressures” to “impacts” on Page 3.

B. Schwarzel stated that there is no “t” in his last name and the word “chair” is spelled wrong on Page 3.

R. Pontbriand offered his sincere apologies for misspelling B. Schwarzel’s last name.

G. Tillotson asked that if moving forward, we should email edits in advance.

S. House stated yes.

**Motion:** A motion was made by G. Tillotson and seconded by B. Vogelsang to approve the meeting minutes from August 9, 2023 as amended. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

**Discuss and Approve Official Committee Name:**

S. Houde provided an overview of the issue. The Committee has been referred to various names in the past. Having “2033” in the current name sends the wrong connotation especially if the timeline should get moved up.

S. Houde asked for other suggestions from the Committee. He suggested perhaps “Devens Impact Study Committee” or “Ayer Devens Impact Study Committee”.

G. Tillotson proposed “Devens Resolution Committee”.

There was consensus among the Committee to go with “Devens Resolution Committee”.

**Motion:** A motion was made by G. Tillotson and seconded by B. Schwarzel to adopt the name "Devens Resolution Committee". **Motion Passed (7-0).**

**Committee Scope:**

The Committee discussed the scope of its study area.

S. Houde identified a list of potential areas to review and study as follows:

1. Land: Federal, State, conservation, military, and Super Fund lands.
2. Services: water, sewer, public safety, other municipal services
3. Service impacts for Ayer: growth impacts, population driven, land driven
4. Revenue: Devens has a separate tax rate whereas Ayer has a split tax rate

E. Sechman asked what the split tax rate is.

S. Houde explained that in Ayer there is a split tax rate meaning there is separate tax rate for residential property and a different rate (usually higher) for industrial/commercial/personal property. Many places, such as Devens, have just a single tax rate.

S. Houde continued with his list:

5. People: Residents living on Devens are a factor and that is why it is important to have someone that lives on Devens on our Committee.

B. Schwarzel asked if the Town of Ayer receives any taxes from residents on Devens.

S. Houde stated no. They pay taxes to MassDevelopment.

G. Tillotson stated that S. Houde has a great list. He stated that we need to look at the impacts on local boards and commission as well as "soft costs" starting with people as the foundation of the analysis. We have talked a lot about geographic borders but what is the governance system to look like or what do we want it to be in 2033?

S. Houde asked for clarification on focusing early on people?

G. Tillotson stated that we should focus on the people there and what they are looking for in terms of community and services. They do love their neighborhood on Devens.

B. Schwarzel stated that at the August 3 Harvard/Devens Jurisdictional Committee Meeting, Paul Greene put out a proposed timeline that looks to move the 2033 process date up. Additionally, it seemed like the people on Devens wanted to stay together. Town and County lines are important, and the Legislature does play a role in terms of boundary lines.

G. Tillotson stated that boundary lines are important and challenging. It is not impossible to change boundaries but what is the reasoning for doing so?

E. Sechman asked if we would have to resolve boundaries first, especially if they go through someone's house?

S. Houde stated that boundaries are important and that changing them would require State Legislative approval. We do not want to split up existing neighborhoods. Selectman Jannice Livingston and I have looked at Vicksburg Square which is approximately 75% in Ayer and 25% in Harvard. Let's potentially move that boundary to Ayer's benefit is one approach to the issue.

G. Tillotson stated that we cannot do spot zoning. We should look at what makes it good over in Devens? What are the pluses and minuses. What are the soft impacts?

S. Houde stated that his list is not end all be all. There are probably other areas we want and need to study. There is not a huge residential population on Devens. This list was intended to start the discussion on the initial scope of our efforts. We should look at revenue and tax rate over there. Some of this information is readily available.

G. Tillotson stated that he would volunteer to take the task of looking at the tax rate and the values/revenue with our Assessors. Another next step would be to look at the issues of housing and neighborhoods on Devens.

G. Tillotson stated that Vicksburg Square is the "elephant in the room". We should initially ignore it. Look at Auman Street Neighborhood first. He would volunteer to do a quick run down of the values and initial tax information on Auman Street including the street length. It is important to remember that Vicksburg Square is not currently occupied.

B. Schwarzel stated that we could deal with Vicksburg Square concurrently as we work on other areas and issues.

S. Houde stated that Vicksburg Square should remain on our radar.

G. Tillotson stated that he would take a look at the Auman Street Neighborhood and report back. S. Kelly volunteered to work on this as well.

B. Schwarzel stated that he would be interested in how many families live there.

S. Houde stated that Alan Manoian may have this information, but he is not here tonight.

E. Sechman asked if the general sentiment of the residential neighborhoods up there is to stay with Harvard?

S. Houde stated that is largely the case because of the school agreement that the children are educated in Harvard.

E. Sechman stated that Alan had mentioned the Committee going to Devens to tour it.

S. Houde stated that he would connect with Alan and try to coordinate a Devens Tour for our September meeting.

S. Schwarzel stated that we need to look at the impacts to DPW and Parks and Recreation if Ayer was to resume the various fields on Devens. Also, the issue of water and sewer?

G. Tillotson stated that Harvard does not currently have the capacity to operate a licensed wastewater facility whereas Ayer does and currently has one.

R. Kozera asked if it would be possible to create a survey with specific questions about these various issues. She would like to work on developing a questionnaire for the residents of Devens which would also provide an overview of future options to consider.

S. Houde stated that a questionnaire/survey is a great idea and that it could be further developed by this Committee.

R. Kozera stated that she would be interested in other areas that warrant investigation and that she could work on.

S. Houde stated that with respect to the land issues there is work to be done there and Selectman Livingston has been working on securing an accurate map of Devens from MassDevelopment.

G. Tillotson stated that fire and police services is another area that needs analysis and study.

S. Houde stated that analysis of public safety services has not been done since the Trinity proposal for Vicksburg Square over ten years ago. Does this Committee want to meet with Town Department Heads?

B. Vogelsang stated that we need to figure out what buildings on Devens would go to if it were to be divided.

B. Schwarzel stated that he would be interested in looking at open space and the opportunities for it up on Devens.

R. Kozera asked if we needed someone to interview Devens people, she would be interested in helping

S. Houde stated that we probably will soon.

B. Schwarzel stated that issues of land on McPherson Road should also be looked at.

S. Houde stated that the Moore Airfield would be part of the study. All of Devens is in play. He stated for the next meeting he would coordinate with Alan to set up a tour of Devens. If the tour cannot be set up for the next meeting, we should start to meet with Town Departments such as Fire, Police, and DPW to start.

#### **Committee Meeting Structure:**

S. Houde stated that the Committee in the future could also consider breaking out into work groups as long as there is not a quorum of the Committee, and no decisions can be made.

E. Sechman asked what should happen to the land that is more connected to Ayer?

S. Houde stated that one potential possibility is that the Towns take the land back and MassDevelopment remains to manage commercial properties.

G. Tillotson stated that currently loans and financial agreements between entities and MassDevelopment need to be looked at. What happens to them in the future, especially if MassDevelopment is no longer there? There are so many things to consider and study.

**Next Meeting:**

The Committee schedule the next meeting for Wednesday, September 27, 2023 at 5pm with the goal of touring Devens.

**Adjournment:**

**Motion:** A motion was made by B. Schwarzel and seconded by S. Kelly to adjourn the meeting at 6pm. **Motion Passed (7-0).**

The meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.

Minutes recorded and submitted by: Robert Pontbriand, Town Manager

Minutes Reviewed and approved by the Committee on October 25, 2023.

Signed:   
Robert A. Pontbriand  
Town Manager