

Mill Site Study Committee

Meeting minutes - October 1, 2009

Present: **Committee Members:** Kurt Amidon, Stephanie Cronin, Albert Harris, Roger Goscombe, Joan Ladik, Georgette Rogers, Sharon Santy, Jeff Sauer, and Joseph Sergi
Members absent: Ronald Karr, Ken Morgan, Matt Nesbit, and Stephen Themelis
Also present: Geoffrey Morrison-Logan and Karen Fisk of VHB, Russ Burke of BSC Group on behalf of PerryVidex

Mr. Sergi called the meeting to order at 7:09pm and introduced new member, Joan Ladik, and Russ Burke of BSC. Mr. Amidon joined the meeting at 7:25.

VBH Presentation: Mr Morrison-Logan introduced Ms. Fisk, an engineer with VHB who will be working on the Mill Site project. He stated that VHB had had an initial site visit of the Mill Site and had done significant research into the geography of the site and the environmental and regulatory challenges that might affect future site development. Mr. Morrison-Logan and Ms. Fisk offered a presentation outlining that information.

Ms. Fisk began by discussing the physical site, noting that it is large, but very elongated, and thereby presents some development challenges. There are issues with site access off Main St and Mill St due to busy roads and lack of visible frontage for potential retail. Ms. Fisk discussed the physical features of the site, including the steep slopes bordering the Mill St. residents to the west and on the northern border, as well as the culvert for Varnum Brook that runs beneath the site to the Nashua River. The site has sections in both the commercial and industrial zoning districts, although it is entirely within the Mixed-Use Overlay district. It is also within the sewer district. There are several easements: including; a sewer easement near the north and northwest borders, several railroad-oriented easements, and multiple electric-oriented easements.

Ms. Fisk discussed some of the environmental and regulatory challenges, noting that there are a variety of unidentified underground water pipes, deep basements, and potentially hazardous materials. Much of the site is within the riverfront area and therefore subject to the Wetlands Protection Act and jurisdiction of the local Conservation Commission. Much of the site is also within the 100-floodplain and almost the entire site falls within the Raytheon flood line from 1938. Ms. Fisk noted that there is an exemption in the Riverfronts Act for historic mills, although that would only affect existing buildings, few of which are likely to survive redevelopment on this particular site. The site is also within a Massachusetts ACEC, or Area of Critical Environmental Concern and subject to review by National Heritage.

Mr. Morrison-Logan opened the floor for discussion, using the Bartram & Cochran market study results as a springboard for discussion. Ms. Cronin stated that she was opposed to the retail and residential elements of the study's recommendations, saying that Pepperell is too close to Nashua to support serious retail and that residential units could be disaster for the local traffic. Ms. Ladik agreed, noting the lack of frontage and remembering the number of small gift shops that once existed in Pepperell that weren't able to survive. Mr. Amidon cited the disjointed nature of Pepperell's shopping areas. Ms. Santy bemoaned the loss of local stores that once supplied everyday needs. Mr. Goscombe suggests that diversity is a good thing for the community and that we should keep the door open to a variety of mixed-use options, at least until we understand how much space on the site is developable. Mr. Sergi agreed that this is a potential destination location that could change Pepperell's downtown for generations: "How often does a community get to open up a riverfront?" Ms. Rogers suggested that we use the proximity to NH as a plus rather than just focus on the tax-free shopping in NH. Education, she said, was a possible option.

Mr. Sergi asked when VHB will offer various alternatives for the amount of square footage. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that VHB will begin to offer that at the next meeting.

Mr. Morrison-Logan asked about the previous visioning session from last October. Ms. Rogers noted that her biggest surprise was how often open space came up as a desire for the site, although other options, like a restaurant or brew pub were also discussed.

Approval of Minutes from August 26, 2009: On a motion from Ms. Cronin, seconded by Ms. Santy, the minutes from the August 26 meeting were approved unanimously as drafted.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, October 14, 2008, at 7:00pm.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:56pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer, Mill Site Study Committee Secretary