

A swift ending to a big project: Factions can't agree on what ultimately caused the 'no' vote

By **John Hilliard / Daily News Staff**
Sunday, November 13, 2005

WAYLAND -- When voters stopped progress on the proposed Town Center project, they brought a swift end to a process marked by bickering boards, a heavy PR campaign, an active grassroots initiative and questions whether the center would be a boon or bust in town.

Now developers are eyeing either a Chapter 40B housing project with more than 400 bedrooms at the 56-acre site or filling up the existing 410,000-square-foot office building with commercial tenants.

"The shame of it all is that the town has lost a tremendous opportunity," said selectmen Chairman Michael Tichnor.

The proposed Wayland Town Center was a compelling idea for residents -- a blend of housing, commercial and retail space at the former Raytheon site on Rte. 20.

Plus, Boston developers the Congress Group and KGI Properties -- in a joint effort named Twenty Wayland LLC -- promised to be good neighbors, estimating thousands in new tax revenue would be created by the project, and a development agreement with at least \$3 million to mitigate the project's impacts.

While a vote of 745 to 619 supported the bylaw at special Town Meeting on Nov. 1, those numbers fell short of the two-thirds majority needed to enact it.

"I think people's busy schedules worked against us the most," said Alison Moore, spokeswoman for Twenty Wayland LLC. "The average working family lacks the time and energy to fight the fight at Town Meeting."

With that support, would developers consider a second round for the Town Center project?

"My understanding is that the ship has sailed," said Moore.

The process

Tight deadlines marked the process from beginning to end. Congress Group President Dean Stratouly told officials that financial pressures meant site owners needed a zoning bylaw to allow the project to be approved by this fall.

But town boards say broken lines of communication made the job more difficult.

Planning Board Chairman Larry Stabile said a completed development deal negotiated between selectmen and Twenty Wayland -- which placed limits on the Town Center -- would have been useful in preparing the zoning bylaw.

"The communication wasn't as tight as it should have been" between boards and selectmen, said Stabile.

A lack of detail was also a constant problem, said Stabile, as his board developed the zoning bylaw to permit the Town Center.

"We wanted to get specific," said Stabile. "And (developers) didn't."

In the future, boards working on a project like Town Center should "all know what we're all doing at all times."

Resident Regina Mandl, a member of Wayland Citizens Against Reckless Development (CARD), said the town needed a project manager to ensure data was getting to the boards.

"I think it was necessary, given the volunteer boards we have and the numerous issues which were unanswered," said Mandl.

Project spokeswoman Moore said boards were asking for too much detail too soon.

"The nitty gritty gets dealt with in the master special permit process," said Moore. "It wasn't appropriate to deal with it until the zoning got changed."

Meanwhile, changes in the project were frequent. Developers stressed they were pitching a "conceptual" plan of the Town Center, and it showed. In a few months, the original



Michael Tichnor.

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538,000-square-foot development was cut to 410,000 square feet, studies were constantly redrafted for newer proposals, and tax revenue estimates fell from more than \$770,000 to \$450,000 by Nov. 1.

Boards had "infinite resources" they needed to thoroughly review the plan, Moore said, and had access to no less than nine consultants and 14 different reports on the proposed project -- produced on the developers' dime.

"If they didn't get what they wanted to get, it wasn't because the resources weren't there," she said. "I think some of the town boards needed to take responsibility for their actions."

Stabile disagreed, saying his board had to press developers for information.

"The word infinite isn't in my vocabulary when it comes to this project," said Stabile.

Impacts

Wayland CARD's Mandl, who was previously the Board of Selectmen's representative to the Master Plan Advisory Task Force, said she believed the project did not fit with the Master Plan, which acts as a guideline on areas such as land use, housing, economic development and transportation.

To meet the Master Plan guidelines, "you can't just look at square footage," she said, adding that officials needed to weigh other issues including traffic impacts and building uses.

Mandl said a failed Town Center project is no loss for Wayland.

"There are ways for the town to enjoy community life without developing the former Raytheon site," she said.

Selectmen Chairman Tichnor said officials now must search for new sources of commercial tax revenue. The town faces a \$3.3 million shortfall next fiscal year just to maintain existing services, and extra tax money could have gone a long way in easing budget shortfalls.

The Town Center project "was our last best opportunity" to develop a large-scale commercial base in a town which relies on residential taxes, he said.

"We just can't stand still as a town," said Tichnor. "We can't do nothing."

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