

Hull Times 3/16/2023

Past failures provide opportunity for HRA to embrace open space...

To the Editor: When I first moved into Hull in 1976 into a three-bedroom house with all varnished natural wood interior and decks for \$16,000 – compared to a Braintree house that needed lots of updates and was asking \$35,000 – it was clearly a steal. I found my home by the sea.

I soon bought the Gallant Fox restaurant on the strip adjacent to the HRA lots, which was thriving with many other small businesses. Only six months into my ownership, the Blizzard of 78 put the town completely under water. Every basement in town at sea level and a few feet above was flooded, and most utilities were out. The nearby HRA property was under five to six feet of seawater.

To make matters worse, in 1982 the HRA board was also involved in a lawsuit in which the town's select board had hearings that removed four sitting members of the HRA for "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or misconduct in office." This lawsuit kept the HRA land in limbo for many years. In the meantime, the displaced small businesses, one by one, reestablished themselves into the Kenberma area of town well over 30 years ago. The town has owned 33 acres in and around the parcel since it was all cleared in an urban renewal project in the early 1970s. Promising projects have come and gone every 10 years or so since then – but now, as then, seasonal parking for Nantasket Beach visitors is the only thing the acreage has provided. In 1987, the town was set to sell the land to developer A.J. Lane, who wanted to build a \$75 million hotel-condominium project. Then he declared bankruptcy. In 1996, the redevelopment authority rejected a plan for a Star supermarket and townhouse condos.

Hopes last rose in 2004, when Chatham Real Properties of Hyannis wanted to put 72 condos and townhouses in six-story buildings on three seaside acres, and turn 10 adjoining acres into a park.

The plan drew fierce opposition from some citizen groups. Developer Stuart Bornstein cut the number to 66 units. The conservation commission rejected it, the planning and zoning boards approved it, the state conducted an environmental review, and then a financial dispute kept it in court for years before Bornstein gave up.

After almost 60 years of trying, the town's businesses firmly established Kenberma as the town business district, making the core mission of the HRA to rejuvenate the Surfside business zone obsolete. It may, in fact, cannibalize some of our existing businesses that have invested in our town.

Also, the open space of the HRA lots have become an important community magnet for thousands of people who have come here for 30 years for the Thanksgiving bonfires, carnivals, and beach events.

The economic benefits today have shifted to a historic opportunity to retain this prized and rare piece of open space, rather than more condos or a business base that is no longer needed in this high-velocity area.

The select board should take this opportunity to correct our town's course and should place a question on this year's town election ballot for the people to decide, and hold hearings for its future. Respectfully, Philip Bellone Former select board member

HRA, select board learned from past mistakes to improve development plan...

[From the Editor: Prior to publication in the Times, Mr. Bellone published the above opinion on social media; the letter below is in response to his original posting.]

To the Editor: In regard to the **HRA** history, this is my response to the following statement: "To make matters worse, in 1982 the **HRA** board was also involved in a lawsuit in which the town's select board had hearings that removed four sitting members of the **HRA** for 'inefficiency, neglect of duty, or misconduct in office.' This lawsuit kept the **HRA** land in limbo for many years."

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the Hull selectmen were found to be in error for getting involved in the independent business of the Hull Redevelopment Authority, and were sued by the duly elected **HRA** board members, who actually received substantial financial settlements from the Town of Hull at the expense of the taxpayers.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but the improper involvement by the Hull selectmen did, as you say, keep "the **HRA** land in limbo for years."

Fortunately, the current **HRA** board is looking for the current select board to work cooperatively to implement the Town of Hull's two-way roads plan (approved by select board and town meeting voters) through MassWorks roadway grants that require economic development (which happens to be the legally defined mission of the **HRA**), and the proposed conceptual draft urban renewal plan is the impetus.

Also, the current **HRA** draft Option 2 plan is proposed to protect the immediate neighborhoods at Phipps Street (Phipps parcels remain open space park and beach parking), and Bay Street neighborhood (bayside parcels remain open space park and hotel parking).

The previous **HRA** developer proposed to build high-rise luxury condos in those locations, which had adverse impacts on the direct abutters in those immediate neighborhoods. The abutters appealed the ZBA Flexible Plan Development special permit, and the judge found the complainants to be "aggrieved parties."

The current **HRA** draft Option 2 urban renewal plan is not even in a permitting stage, and has no developer, and as proposed, will have no adverse impacts on direct

abutters, because there are no direct abutters, or immediately adjacent neighborhoods, or “aggrieved parties.”

Perhaps, the current **HRA** and select board members have learned from others’ past mistakes (as I have) and will move forward working together for progress, passive recreational public open space properly improved and maintained, jobs, economic development, tax revenues, traffic and pedestrian and bicycling improvements, resident and beach parking, and housing choices – including 15% affordable units.
Best regards, Patrick Finn