

HRA to seek comments on development plan for long-vacant 13-acre site

By Carol Britton Meyer

The Hull Redevelopment Authority will host six public presentations of its long-anticipated draft Urban Renewal Plan during the next three months as it seeks to develop its 13-acre parcel in a way that is compatible with the town's and the community's vision for the property.

In-person presentations will be held in the Hull High School Exhibition Room on Feb. 13, March 14, and April 25. Online presentations will be available via Zoom on Feb. 16, March 16, and April 27. All are scheduled from 7 to 9 p.m.

Goals include redeveloping the property in a way that maintains the fabric of the community, avoids overwhelming the surrounding neighborhoods, and helps meet the needs outlined in the Hull Affordable Housing Committee's Housing Production Plan while also meeting the objectives of the **HRA** "in a way that fits with the community at large," **HRA** Chair Bartley Kelly told the Hull Times.

"We're not looking to get the highest and biggest use out of the property, but to create a neighborhood that moves traffic freely, with open space for the public and a connection between Surfside and the north end of Phipps Street," he said. "Now that the draft is completed, we're seeking public input."

The **HRA**'s mission is "to create a sense of place in our community through development that provides tax revenue, open space recreation, job growth, an improved business environment, event venues, and parking for Nantasket Beach within an effective and efficient traffic pattern."

Two potential site plans (identified as Option 1 and Option 2) are included in the URP.
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Option 1 and Option 2 differ only in the proposed uses on a section of the property north of the DCR parking lot, near Monument Square. Option 1 includes four-family and townhouse structures on the north end of the property, while Option 2 does not develop that area, which would remain as beach parking and potential event space. Fifteen percent of the housing will be affordable.

A 65-room boutique hotel with 5,000-squarefeet of conference/convention space is part of the URP.

About 70 percent of the site will be left as open space or parking, in addition to open space that's part of any future new development plan.

“Our charge is to redevelop the property, and [what’s described above is] what the URP calls for. There could be some changes – nothing like a seven-story building – but this is the plan we are proposing,” Kelly said. “Not on the table is doing nothing with the property, which would be a disservice to the town and to the people once living there who had their property taken by eminent domain by the government. We’re trying to strike a balance between redeveloping the parcel and providing nice, usable public open space.”

The **HRA** was created in 1961 by town meeting to accept a charter from the federal and state governments to redevelop this parcel of land, “which at that time was deemed to be substandard, decadent or blighted open areas for industrial, commercial, business, residential, recreational, education, hospital, or other purposes,” according to the **HRA** website.

Initial funding was granted at the end of 1967 in the amount of \$4.7 million to take, by eminent domain, the 76 buildings on the property.

The urban renewal area has been vacant since the razing of the original neighborhood was completed in 1976. The original plan for that parcel in the 1960s “is what created the **HRA** and allowed the properties on the land to be taken for development,” Community Development & Planning Director Chris Dilorio told The Hull Times. “That plan expired, and the **HRA** is [now] drafting a new one for the site.” During the years since the **HRA** was formed, there have been multiple development proposals that did not come to fruition.

Most recently, after denying in 2019 two responses to a request for proposals, the **HRA** determined that an approved URP was necessary in order to give the **HRA** the flexibility needed to negotiate with, and choose, developers for the property moving forward and to ensure the end result is in accordance with how town officials and residents would like to see the property developed.

The site could be developed in one of two ways: through a URP that gives the **HRA** the flexibility and ability to work with a developer to craft a development that is consistent with the plan, or through the request for proposals process, which provides for competitive bidding on the property, according to Dilorio. “The RFP process gives the **HRA** less input in the development of the project, and more emphasis is placed on financial considerations.”

The town’s role, through the select board, is to either support or not support a submission of the new URP to the state Department of Housing and Community Development for approval. The public meetings are a required part of the state process, and feedback the **HRA** receives regarding the proposal will be used to refine the URP “to address community concerns and issues, wants and needs,” Dilorio said. “Public input should help to create a better URP and assist the select board in making their decision.”

The renderings that will be presented – which are posted on the **HRA** website – are a visual representation of the plan, enabling the public to have a better understanding of what is envisioned.

:Developers would be able, and would be expected, to propose a project that differs from the renderings,” Dilorio explained. “However, any project should be generally in line with what is being presented in the URP. If it isn’t consistent with the plan, the **HRA** could refuse to move forward with the project, and/or the permitting authorities could potentially deny the permits.”

The UPR will go before the select board for a vote following the public meetings. Having an approved plan in place will allow the **HRA** greater flexibility to engage and interact with governmental agencies, potential developers, and others to achieve the objectives described in the plan.

For further information about the **HRA**, the draft URP, and to view all of the conceptual building renderings, visit www.hra02045.com.

In a related development, the **HRA** was awarded a \$272,000 state MassWorks Infrastructure Program grant in support of a two-way road design for Nantasket Avenue, Hull Shore Drive, and Hull Shore Drive Extension.

This grant provides for the continued development of the two-way concept into fully designed and shovel-ready construction plans.

This major change is geared toward improving vehicular flow and pedestrian safety and access through the area, as well as helping to resolve traffic back-ups and adding open space along the bayside of the **HRA** property. In the mid-1970s, the streets in the neighborhood were two-way thoroughfares; they expanded and changed to one-way flow in order to accommodate the anticipated development of the site.

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DEVELOPING ISSUES. The Hull Redevelopment Authority's draft Urban Renewal Plan contains artists' renderings of the types of buildings that could be built on the site, including townhouses, a hotel, and a mixed-use building. The authority is seeking the public's input on the development ideas before issuing a call for proposals.