

## **HRA** modifies plan to reduce housing units, increase open space

**By Dolores Sauca Lorusso**

The Hull Redevelopment Authority Tuesday night voted to modify its potential development in response to residents' feedback on the draft Urban Renewal Plan.

The authority decided to eliminate Option 1, which contained housing on the northern end of the property, and concentrate on Option 2, which contains more open space. "Based on feedback we agreed to focus on Option 2, redefining the plan to preserve as much open space as possible," said **HRA** Chair Bartley Kelly. "We will continue to gather public input on park improvements, what works and what doesn't, and what is viable economically."

In Option 2, the Phipps Street parcels remain a public open space park and seasonal beach parking. The north end, for approximately 1,000 feet in length and approximately 200 feet in width, from Phipps Street to Edgewater Road will remain undeveloped. While the **HRA** has no jurisdiction over the state parking lot adjacent to the Bergan home, the Phipps Street **HRA** parking remains seasonal beach parking and year-round resident parking for approximately 350 cars.

Architectural Designer John Ruffo described the plan as "an open space system complimented by a series of uses; bordered by potential development uses and traffic." He said the plan provides an opportunity to "link a series of parks from the memorial to North Park to, what we are calling, the promenade; creating great open space, great buildings of different scales, and a public realm to knit it all together." "A lot of initiatives have not come to fruition over the years for one reason or another, whether it was economic conditions, political infighting in the town, or developers walking away, after they got their approvals, because they thought the market wasn't the right time," Kelly said.

For instance, in the 1990s, there was a proposal to build a Star Market on the Phipps Street lot, and approximately 60 townhouses on the southern end.

"That would have created a big wall effect in that area," Kelly said. "Based on community input, the **HRA** did not go along with that development proposal." Even today, the wall effect concerns members of the community wishing to preserve the unique wide-open bay to ocean vista. Gisela Voss of Hampton Circle desires to "just leave that incredible open space on this planet open... a place where you can see the sunrise on one side and the sunset on the other."

Kelly said the **HRA**'s goal is to develop a plan that benefits the town while meeting the objectives of multiple committees working on affordable housing, the housing production plan, and redeveloping the parcel.

“It is important to strike a balance to keep open space, view corridors, and passive recreation space that is usable for the town. In the long run we think it will add tax revenue, beautify the area, provide housing, and still provide parking,” said Kelly.

“It still seems like too much building, and the green space I do see on the plan is too small,” said Brooke Shoostine of Samoset Avenue, adding that she is “glad the Star Market was not put on this space; that would have been tragic, and if we look forward 20 years from now we may feel the same way about overbuilding the space.”

M.J. Walsh of Rockland House Road said she appreciates the **HRA**'s work to “bring forward the desires of the community.” She echoed many of her Hull neighbors in their hopes to “maximize the ability to maintain as much open space as possible.”

Patrick Finn, of Telegraph Avenue, said “I don’t think people appreciate the actual size of 13-15 acres, and to expect it to stay 100% open space is unrealistic.” He said only the main parcel should be developed to prevent “overbuilding” and “aggrieving” residents by destroying their views.

Paige McWhorter of Massasoit Avenue noted the importance of being “very proactive,” explaining the project provides a “huge opportunity to lead with sustainability.” She shared an example of taking part in “green infrastructure” by building a net-zero passive house boutique hotel.

“This type of building can bring so much attention and opportunities for grants and funding,” she said. A net-zero building produces enough renewable energy to meet its own energy consumption requirements; however, it does not necessarily mean the building is entirely energy efficient, which is the goal of a passive house. Opened in Connecticut in May 2022, Hotel Marcel is the only other passive house hotel in the U.S.

McWhorter was not the only resident wishing to include environmentally friendly elements in the redevelopment. Walsh said she would also love the open space to include “an outdoor amphitheater with a solar array above it, and parking with electric vehicle charging stations.” Judeth Van Hamm, a proponent for renewable energy, shared her vision of incorporating personal solar-powered rapid transit into the plan. “It can cut 43% emissions in transportation and make a safer place to develop,” she said.

With community input, Kelly said he is “very optimistic” the **HRA** can come up with a plan the “town can get on board with.” He went on to describe the plan as “palatable and meeting the goals of the town without overwhelming the property,” while still providing avenues for economic development. The **HRA** is “trying to check all the boxes” and will continue incorporating input from community feedback.

Following the Zoom meeting, Steve Cecil, planning consultant and facilitator, said “from my perspective this had been a very effective forum. I am reading the chats as fast as I can and can’t keep up. The amount of input we have had is fantastic.”

The next set of public input meetings will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday March 14 in-person at the high school, and at 7 p.m. on Thursday, March 16 over the Zoom platform.

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