

Statement on Patriot Proposal

(by Larry Cohen – member of Landlocked Parcel Committee)

As other members of the Landlocked Parcel Committee, I have given the Patriot Proposal a great deal of thought over the last few weeks.

The Patriot proposal is a plan for 2 million ft² of office space, possibly (~~700,000ft²~~) temporary workforce housing, and 2000 units in a senior retirement village. This proposed development would be an intense use of the largest remaining open parcel of land left in Burlington by anyone's measure. The single definitive merit of this unsolicited proposal offered by Patriot Partners is the anticipated increased tax revenues, suggested as reason enough why the Town should accept this proposal. No estimate of the cost of services and resources was presented as the cost of achieving these potential tax revenue increases.

After careful consideration, I believe that we know enough about this sole source Patriot proposal to form a reasoned judgment as to the merits of this proposal to the town of Burlington. What we know so far answers five of the highest level criteria upon which a decision needs to be made.

1. (*added* Approximately) 200 acres out of 250 acres are proposed for development, leaving 50 acres called "open" space. Much of the remaining (*added* approximate) 50 acres is composed of vernal pools, wetlands, streams, which by law can not be built upon. When you additionally account for a buffer zone around the property, we are being given substantially less useable "open" space. How much lost value should we assign to the loss of 200 acres of true open space?
2. Approximately 65 to 70 percent of the land is designated as our Water Resources District (also called Zone III around our water supply). This Overlay District encompasses all properties or portions of properties whose ground and surface waters drain into the watershed contributing to our Vine Brook aquifer. Protective zoning is not a high level of protection. A few years ago, DEP did a "source water assessment" of our water supply. DEP concluded that we have numerous high risk sources around our water supply despite protective zoning. How much lost value should we assign to the loss of assurance of watershed protection for this portion of the land?
3. Patriot Partners projects an attractive revenue stream as a consequence of their proposed project. Another view is that the Town receives investment value from the property appreciation for the duration that we own this land. I do understand the Town's interest in making the most short term value out of this potential asset. However, if we pursue a sole source development path with Patriot, the Town denies itself the opportunity to compare other development options to maximize potential economic benefits to the Town. This comparison should be a slow deliberate process. Serious interest will not be forthcoming from competing project developers with alternative economic assessments until the Patriot option expires.
4. With the PDD just approved for Northwest Park, Nordblom Company has 2.75 million ft² of planned redeveloped office space in Northwest Park and the Sun Microsystems area to be built and occupied over the next 10 years (not counting the retail space, apartment, and hotel rooms approved). With the South Ave property just approved, Gutierrez Company has 1.1 million ft² of office space to build and occupy. In total, we have 3.85 million ft² of office

space alone to fill. The Town clearly benefits by having this re-developed space filled and avoiding the all-to-familiar “For Lease” signs on every street in our business district.

5. If that is not enough to make one pause, we have 5 hazardous waste sites under buildings in Northwest Park. The cleanup will be delayed if the redevelopment effort is slowed due to not having the committed tenants for the various buildings. Does it make any sense for Burlington to create competition that hurts our own interests?

What is the rush to complete the conversion of Burlington into a city with an increasingly large transient population with the attendant negative socioeconomic impacts on schools, fire, and police services? There is no deadline for the Town to make a decision regarding the Landlocked Parcel. The only time constraint is the date of expiration of the right of first refusal for Patriot to buy the land. While one can understand their interest in making the most value out of this potential asset, it should have no bearing on a Town decision of when or what to do with this property.

Even if one believes that maximum development of this land is in the Town’s interest, I submit to you that this sole source proposal is not the right project for Burlington at this time. Continuing to entertain this one specific proposal will only serve to subject us to the top down media blitz of constant ads for Ericson Communities on the radio, ads in the newspaper, comments by the Governor, articles placed in the Globe before our meetings, bus trips to Ericson, and other such pressure tactics, designed to persuade that others know how best to serve the interests of Burlington residents. I would not be surprised to find out that Patriot’s is already marketing this future space to potential clients. The intent of this effort would be to convince a company to convey their interest to Town Hall with the intention of putting additional pressure on us. This is not how we normally do things in Burlington.

So what should Burlington be doing in regards to this parcel? For the immediate future, it would make sense to publicize to our citizens that we do have legal access to the Parcel through the Turning Mills Conservation Area in Lexington with space for 12 cars under the power lines. We should promote the use of the land to our schools for environmental camp, the Boy and Girl Scout organizations and Recreation Department.

In the longer term, we could have a standing Town Meeting Committee to develop, evaluate and recommend a land use plan which would normally be completed before inviting proposals for specific land use implementation. To maximize the economic benefit of this property to the citizens of the Town, should economic development be the path chosen, competitive development approaches on the portion of the land that does not drain toward our drinking water source (as a priority) could then be solicited.

We know enough now about this sole source proposal to form a reasoned judgment Town Meeting should take up this issue at the September Meeting and decide if they wish to continue going down this path.

Submitted by:
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Landlocked Parcel Committee
August 11, 2008