

## DEVENS UPDATE: Boards debate risks



Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates  
Atrius Health

21 Convenient Locations

Complete Care for your whole family.

By Brad Petrishen / Correspondent  
GateHouse News Service

Posted Sep 22, 2008 @ 01:06 PM

 Recommend  Be the first of your friends to recommend this.



Harvard — Selectmen updated the Devens Disposition Success Criteria in concert with members of the Financial and School committees at their Tuesday night meeting.

School Committee Chairman Stuart Sklar said the committee had some slight modifications to the criteria, but “nothing major.”

Sklar said an important element to consider is that any choice made is going to affect the school system. “Even by not making a choice, you’re still making a choice,” he said, explaining that although taking on

additional students might cause some consternation among parents, it also would lead to increased funding from the state.

“At some point we’re going to need new schools in Harvard,” he said.

School Committee Member Willie Wickman asked the selectmen to provide the number of housing units that may be added so the committee can put together accurate data as to how the town’s educational system would be affected.

Selectman Chairman Leo Blair said the current figure being discussed is 682 units, but added, “We’re too early in the process to take an educated guess on that.” He asked the committee to try to develop a few different scenarios so when selectmen are ready to provide that number they can get feedback quickly.

Wickman said it would be easier if they had the number first before getting into specifics. “I think it would really be helpful if the selectmen could decide what that number is going to be,” she said.

George McKenna of the Finance Committee put together a list of questions the town should be considering.

McKenna asked how the disposition would affect municipal service districts, including fire, water and sewer services.

Another issue is the tax rate. While Harvard has one tax rate, Devens has a split commercial rate, raising questions over how that would affect businesses should Harvard acquire full jurisdiction over Devens.

McKenna said an overarching focus of the Finance Committee is due diligence.

“Have we truly identified all risks and all opportunities?” he asked.

Selectman clerk Peter Warren said soliciting public input is the best way the town can identify such risks and opportunities. He said a public meeting will be held Saturday, Sept. 27 at 9 a.m. at the Bromfield School cafeteria in this regard. Community members will be asked to split into five groups according to their area of interest — education, economy, community, environment and administration — to discuss areas of concern which will then be discussed further in one group at the meeting’s conclusion.

“I think what we’ll get from that will be some real productive feedback,” said Blair.

Although the town has not endorsed any one of the options — total jurisdiction, partial jurisdiction or no jurisdiction — Blair said he believes the process is moving fairly smoothly. However, he cautioned that “Ayer’s stated position is they want it all,” which is in conflict with two of Harvard’s possible positions.

Copyright 2008 The Harvard Post. Some rights reserved