

Board drafts success criteria for Devens

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By Liz Gainer, Correspondent
GateHouse News Service

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Harvard — Spearheaded by Selectmen Tim Clark and Ron Ricci, Board of Selectmen, reviewed their draft of Success Criteria for the disposition of lands within the Devens Enterprise Zone at Tuesday's board meeting.

Chairman Leo Blair explained that the purpose of the success criteria is to establish "a yardstick by which we will take measurements ... In the end, it will show whether we did our jobs properly." As to the draft's content, Blair noted that the selectmen were "very mindful of what our friends in Ayer had produced and of what the Devens Committee had

produced."

Blair clarified that this draft is "not a discussion on disposition, it is merely a discussion on criteria ... We, as a board, have not taken a position on disposition at this time."

Harvard has three disposition options: 1) The town of Harvard will acquire jurisdiction over the entire enterprise zone or at least reversion to their historic municipal boundaries. 2) The town of Harvard will acquire jurisdiction over a portion of the enterprise zone. 3) The town would not acquire jurisdiction over any part of the enterprise zone.

At this time, each point of Harvard's success criteria carries an indication of which disposition option it is specific to — or if it is essential to any successful disposition.

Selectmen Lucy Wallace encouraged member of other boards and the townspeople to study the criterion draft and to give feedback. School Committee member Willie Wickman responded that the School Committee will be involved and that the success criteria is on their Sept. 8 meeting agenda. School Committee chairman Stuart Sklar read a prepared statement that the school committee will be "proactive" in helping to expedite the process. Debbie Ricci, Finance Committee chairman was also present.

Residents and board members settled in for an amiable and collaborative effort to improve Harvard's success criteria draft.

The first criteria topic, community reads: "Any option must clearly define a vision of what Harvard will look like in the next decade."

Deborah Skauen-Hinchliffe was curious as to why 10 years. Clark answered, that in part, "10 years mirrors the master plan." Blair added that in informal discussions he had gotten the impression that a transition period might be expected to be around eight years. In light of this, several residents asked that a longer time period also be considered.

Keith Cheveralls clarified that, also in the community section, if interior roads were to be opened, this would be limited to recreational use and would not allow commercial/industrial traffic.

The first point under education states in part that the quality of education in Harvard must be maintained. Wallace rhetorically asked what is "quality" and noted that for some people quality is tied to a small system with small class size and for others, a large system with increased course options is preferable.

In the environmental section, Skauen-Hinchliffe asked who is responsible if contamination is found tomorrow or at other time points.

Residents were also asked to consider a draft of success criteria from the Devens Citizens Advisory Committee, dated Aug. 28. The preamble began with the words "We, the citizens of the Devens Enterprise Zone want control and governance of the entire region currently called the Devens Enterprise Zone."

Also available was a letter from the Ayer Board of Selectmen to the Joint Boards of Selectmen, dated July 15. The letter summarized a disposition plan that Ayer would find successful. The first item, economic sustainability, included "at a minimum, preference for Ayer jurisdiction over entirety of enterprise zone or at least reversion to historic municipal boundaries."

The 2008 Devens timeline detailed the action-points of Ayer, Harvard, Devens, JBOS (Joint Boards of Selectmen) since June 26 and scheduled upcoming action points and meetings through Dec. 11.

Blair concluded the meeting saying that he was "proud to be a member of this Board of Selectmen" as they worked with "unified effort to make an attempt to bring all the best possible options before the voters and let the voters decide."

Harvard will hold a public forum Sept. 27 before finalizing the success criteria on Oct. 2. Chairman Blair pointed out that "we could be ready to take some action by this time next year."

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