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Poll: 5 out of 6 stakeholders endorse Devens as a town

By Nathan Lamb



DEVENS - A poll of the Devens stakeholders taken Monday showed that five of the six parties have endorsed the January proposal from the Devens Disposition Executive Board (DDEB) to establish Devens as a town.

The poll was taken at the onset of the Coordinating Committee meeting, which serves as an

executive board for the DDEB.

The sixth stakeholder is Harvard. It plans to put the question to its voters, and has not endorsed the Devens-as-a-town scenario. However, they have agreed to remain involved with the process.

The town's position centered on two separate votes taken on Feb. 7, said Coordinating Committee and Harvard selectmen Chairman William Marinelli.

Those tallies produced a 2-2 split on endorsing the Devens-as-a-town scenario and a 3-2 vote for Harvard to stay involved with writing up a memorandum of understanding to solidify the agreements within the proposal, he said.

The proposal -scenario 2B - would create a new town and return the jurisdiction of certain outer areas of the former base to the host communities. It would also involve a revised reuse plan at Devens and a transition period where MassDevelopment would stay on as the municipal authority.

While the Harvard town meeting vote would be advisory in nature, Marinelli gave no indication as to how the selectmen would vote following it.

"I will never predict what the ... Board of Selectmen will vote," he said.

There are two selectmen on each side of the issue in Harvard, said Marinelli. All are saying their position has popular support.

The vote was intended to clarify that, he said.

"I can't tell you how Harvard will vote, but I can tell you there will be some clarity on where Harvard stands," said Marinelli.

This vote precedes the main vote scheduled for November, when the disposition proposal will be put on the ballot for ratification.

While the other stakeholders said they endorsed the proposal without substantial changes, Ayer Selectman Paul Bresnahan acknowledged there is some dispute over how Harvard's vote affects their decision.

"There's not 100 percent agreement on the result," he said.

Ayer voted to approve scenario 2B, but had done so with the provision that they preferred option one. In that scenario, Ayer would resume jurisdiction over all its portions of Devens. The motion included a stipulation Ayer would vote down scenario two if any other community did so.

That did not happen, Bresnahan said, so Ayer is moving forward with its

endorsement.

"The key statement is (that) in the absence of any other support for scenario one, we support scenario two," said Bresnahan.

In the case of Shirley, selectmen Chairman Leonardo "Chip" Guercio said there had been no major changes since the previous discussions. He said the Shirley selectmen had approved the proposal by a 2-0 vote, and the third group of selectman was expected to support the proposal as well.

While Guercio admitted that there are still issues, such as reaching an acceptable housing number formula for Shirley, he was optimistic that they could be resolved in coming months.

"Nobody is asking the community to vote on this tomorrow," he said.

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