

Burlington Union

Patriot disputes Friends' claims

By Bruce Coulter

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Burlington -

Stephen Rice, one of the principals of Patriot Partners, said Monday the complaints concerning his company's proposal for what has become known as the landlocked parcel are based on misinformation, rather than facts.

"We've been studying the issues for a while," he said. "We understand there are some people who don't want any development at all."

Further, the "economic engine" created by the proposal would give residents better access to the forest, he added.

Very few people, Rice said, have been accessing the open space, and those who have, are doing so illegally.

Robert Buckley, an attorney with Reimer and Braunstein of Burlington, who is representing Patriot, took issue with allegations the development would create acres of asphalt.

The New England Mountain Biking Association, Buckley said, in its online forum, was mounting a "PR campaign" to keep open space, and accused the group of "trolling" for Burlington residents for support.

He also claimed the group considered the forest a private reserve, rather than town property.

A review of the group's Web site displayed three comments on the issue, one of which read: "It is time now ... to not 'hide the PR,' but to make it known, and widely known, that on any given day, over 25 people are visiting throughout the day, always in here walking, riding, skiing, or bird watching, nature walking, etc., and we need to 1., ride here, 2, make a stink about it."

Buckley noted the Erickson Retirement Community in Hingham, Linden Ponds, was built with open space in mind, adding that trails run through the property, "up to the edges of the buildings."

He also pointed to Lexington Technology Park, a 96.5-acre development spearheaded by Patriot as a prime example of the company's commitment to retaining open space.

"There is not only plentiful open space, but we protected it," he said.

The Burlington proposal, Buckley said, would provide adequate space for the life science and retirement community and make the remaining open space usable and accessible to residents.

For the time being, Rice said no deal is imminent, noting no engineering or geotechnical studies have been completed.

“We’re a long way off from moving forward with anything,” he said.

Ultimately, it’s up to the Landlocked Study Committee to decide what to do with the property.

“The committee must decide if our proposal has merit,” said Rice.

If moved forward to Town Meeting, he added, it must pass by a two-thirds vote.

Asked about concerns regarding workforce housing for some 700 Erickson employees, Rice emphatically denied any such proposal had been put forth, but rather, said the subject had been broached for the life science portion of the proposal.

Even then, said Buckley, “it’s not a major component of the project.”

Further, Rice added, a proposal for workforce housing is subject for review by the committee.

Buckley stressed the project is an opportunity for Burlington to capitalize on the money the town has paid for the past 20 years, adding the town has “virtually no life science community in town.”

Patriot, Buckley noted, is looking for a sense of direction from the town, adding the issue needs to move in the next few months, given the Legislature’s approval of Gov. Deval Patrick’s life science initiative, to plant a stake in the ground.

Erickson, it was noted, could move forward elsewhere if it looks like it won’t happen in Burlington.

In addition to the tax revenue the town would collect, seniors choosing to live in the complex would also be spending money locally, helping businesses small and large.

“It would also create hundreds of jobs for high school kids in town,” said Rice.

Further, he noted, Erickson offers scholarship programs for high school students who are employed for a certain number of years.

Buckley and Rice were in agreement that neighboring towns abutting the parcel would have to be consulted as well, saying it would be important to take into account the sensibilities of abutters.

Patriot, Rice said, has developed Lexington Technology Park, Wayside Commons, and in conjunction with Mohawk Partners and Atlantic Management, “owns or manages more than 3 million square feet in Boston.” The group has also undertaken developments in eastern Massachusetts and Colorado.

“We’ve been through this process before in Wayside Commons with vocal opposition,” said Rice. “We listen and get beneficial ideas. At the end of the day, we can’t satisfy everyone.

“But we do want to be open and receptive and address these concerns as we can,” added Rice.

Should the study committee and ultimately, Town Meeting, approve of Patriot’s proposal, the town stands to reap a windfall with the purchase price as well as the potential tax revenues.

Patriot, Rice said, is “willing to pay a comparable reasonable price to the town,” but did not offer any numbers.

“At the end of the day, whatever the price is, its impact will pale compared to the amount that our project is projected to generate,” he said.