

*Burlington Union*

## **Discussions on parcel underway**

**By Arthur Katz**

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Burlington -

The Burlington Landlocked Parcel (LLP) Study Committee began deliberations Monday night in Town Hall, chaired by Nolan Glantz, a member of the Ways and Means Committee.

Eight of nine members were on hand as the group began to put together a framework designed to comply with the desire of Town Meeting for a discussion and “expression of views” about the largest parcel of undeveloped land in town. Planning Board Joseph Impemba was absent.

Over the next several months, the 247 acres lying along the south side of Route 3, parallel to Northwest Park, will be the subject of the committee’s focus.

The site is accessible on foot from Bedford and Lexington, but not from Burlington, and was acquired by the town in an eminent domain proceeding in 1985. As part of that court action, Burlington entered into a 20-year option agreement with PC Burlington, Inc., which owned the property at the time.

Patriot Partners, owner and developer of Wayside Commons, currently has the controlling interest in the option, and has expressed interest in purchasing and developing the property.

Glantz opened the meeting by asking, “to hear from town residents and Town Meeting members as the process unfolds.

“Tonight, we want to set the framework for future discussions and hear briefly from Patriot Partners, but this is an organizing session, and broad public input will be scheduled for a later day,” said Glantz.

Robert C. Buckley, senior partner at Riemer and Braunstein, and representing Patriot Partners, told the committee, “We want an open dialogue to provide the maximum amount of information about the property and our interest. We are building a Web site that will cover everything that is published about the project, and provide an opportunity for questions and answers from the public.”

“Patriot Partners wants an interactive process and the concept we have developed over the past two years is not set in stone,” said Patriot principal Stephen Rice. “When we became aware of the site four years ago, we wondered if the town wanted to do something about it in the future. At the time, we had been appointed receiver of the option by the Delaware Chancery Court, and

entered into an agreement with the State of Washington Retirement Board, the sole shareholder in the original corporation and which is now our limited partner.

The firm proposes to develop three uses for the property: open space, including the wetlands on the site, a senior living development and a life sciences laboratory and manufacturing component.

“The latter two uses would have much more limited impact on the town and on town services than other types of residential and commercial development,” said Rice, adding Patriot has an agreement with Ericson Retirement Communities, a company with 23 communities in its portfolio, to develop a senior living complex on the LLP if the town agrees to sell the property.

Rice went on, “What we want to put forward is a plan with sound economic value, a plan that embodies smart growth principles, that is economically viable, complementing what is already in place, which considers the impact on the community, and which takes into consideration the enormous cost of access to the property.”

Rice was referring to the need to cross Route 3 from Burlington with either a tunnel and a bridge, or both. Access by anything but foot traffic from Bedford and Lexington is effectively denied by a narrow strip of conservation land put in place by the towns around the site to prevent development and access from those towns.

In his brief presentation, Rice told the committee that the option price is negotiable, as far as Patriot Partners is concerned.

“We will negotiate a commercially viable price with the town,” he said.

As reported earlier this year, by 2010, the town will have paid close to \$14 million for the property, based on a court-ordered \$10.5 million price, which was negotiated down to \$8.2 million and subsequent interest.

No current value has been assigned to the land, in part because Town Meeting in 2007 refused to provide funds for such an evaluation.

Rice and Buckley promised a much more detailed presentation at the committee’s next meeting July 21.

For the foreseeable future, the committee will be meeting the first and third Monday of each month at 7 p.m. in the main conference room on the second floor of Town Hall. The will not be a meeting the first Monday of September.

Board member Larry Cohen, chairman of the Conservation Committee, suggested that the property be “banked” rather than sold.

“In a real emergency in the future, the town may very well want to have it available,” he said. “It has real conservation value as well, for I have seen deer and turkeys on the land, as well as a

broad array of plant species. There is also the issue of watershed protection. I believe the site has ground and surface water that contributes to Burlington's water protection.

"If the town decides to leave it as it is, my grandchildren may be very happy to have the space," said Cohen, who also questioned whether the committee would look only at short-term issues, or consider the long-range goals of the town.

There was little input from the six residents on the audience beyond a suggestion that an outside organization such as the Audubon Society or the Trustees of Public Reservations be brought in for consultation. The meeting was televised live on Burlington Access Cable Television.

Other members of the committee include Thomas Conley, Jr., Capital Budget, Shari Lynn Ellis, Land Use Committee, Albert Fay, Jr., Board of Selectmen and Planning Board, Richard Howard, Bylaw Review Committee, Phyllis Roussell, Land Use Committee and Terry McSweeney, Board of Health.