

# Mill Site Study Committee

*Draft* - Meeting minutes - November 18, 2009

**Present:** **Committee Members:** Stephanie Cronin, Albert Harris, Ronald Karr, Joan Ladik, Ken Morgan, Matt Nesbit, Georgette Rogers, Jeff Sauer, Joseph Sergi, and Stephen Themelis  
**Members absent:** Kurt Amidon, Roger Goscombe, Sharon Santy  
**Also present:** Geoffrey Morrison-Logan and Douglas Landry of VHB, Selectman Joe Hallisey, Russ Burke of BCS, and 42 Pepperell residents.

Mr. Sergi opened the meeting at 6:36pm and introduced members of the Mill Site Study Committee and Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB). Mr. Sergi then offered a brief history of the Mill Site Study Committee and its activities to date, a short description of Chapter 43D and expedited permitting, and an overview of the current Master Planning process. He noted that this was to be the first of three public meetings eliciting input about the Master Plan.

**VBH Presentation:** Mr. Landry thanked everyone for coming and set the goal for the night as to define the possibilities for the Mill Site and not necessarily to espouse one of the three specific plans that VHB would present.

Mr Morrison-Logan began with an approximately 30 presentation describing the methodology to date and outlining the existing conditions and zoning, physical, traffic, legal, and regulatory constraints of the Mill Site. [This presentation recapped information presented at previous Mill Site Study Committee meetings.]

Mr. Morrison-Logan then introduced the three development scenarios. Scenario 1 is based on the Market Study and includes multiple retail spaces, a restaurant, an inn or B&B, a health club, a professional office building, and 24 residential units. Scenario 2 includes a smaller level of commercial and retail spaces, still includes a restaurant and B&B, and adds an arts center in the middle of the site and a civic park in the rear (north) of the site. Scenario 3 includes retail and a restaurant near Main St., an office and health club building north of that, a multi-purpose recreation field in the middle of the site, and a park in the northern most third of the site, as well as a possible civic or municipal use. [See the minutes from November 5 for more details of the three scenarios.]

Rich Castellano asked about the current environment state of the site and what would be required in order to clean it up. Mr. Sergi said that we have several previously completed environmental reports and that they are available on the Mill Site Committee webpage, but that done provides a complete picture of potential hazards and that more testing would be required should the site be re-developed for anything beyond industrial usage.

Robert Allen asked about water usage and whether developing the site would hurt the Town's water supply. Bob Lee said it would likely have a minimal impact.

Cathy Forrest asked about who owns the site and who is going to clean it up. Mr. Sergi described the current ownership and the possibility that a private developer could, at any time, build something far different than any of the proposed scenarios. However, he said, by offering a potential developer a clear path forward, the Town is increasing that chances that something will get down on the site and, ideally, the chance of getting something desirable to the Town.

Scott Butcher asked about ownership liability should another building fall and cause damage or injury.

Bill Kenison said he preferred scenario 3, but said that traffic would be a real problem for any development at the site. He suggested that a traffic pattern ought to be looped in through the Mill St. entrance/egress.

Mr. Morrison-Logan asked the audience to offer specific comments and critiques of each scenario individually.

Phil Durno asked about traffic and suggested a traffic light at the Mill/Main intersection would solve many of the potential traffic problems.

Mark Boyajian asked if there had been any consideration of using the site for a Town Hall, Public Safety Complex, or other Town building. He also suggested that there was a great opportunity to create a connecting loop with the Rail Trail. Mr. Sergi said there have been discussions about municipal buildings, but that it would be very expensive to the Town and that, at this time, the Town is focusing first on the potential to generate tax revenue from the site.

Cathy Forrest asked again who owns the site. Mr. Sergi said it was PerryVidex. Ms. Forrest asked if the Town will ever own the site. Mr. Sergi said that was not yet known and would need to be decided by the Town and Town Meeting. Ms. Forrest said she was worried about new expenses that would raise taxes or cause deeper service cuts. Mr. Sergi said that this process was only a planning exercise and was far ahead of committing municipal dollars. He added that many towns go through this type of planning process to aid to the redevelopment of blighted property.

Allan Wilayto said he did not like Scenario 1, saying that it would create too much traffic. He said he did not see the value in having a B&B in that area.

Martha Spaulding asked if there had been any consideration of elderly houses. Mr. Sergi explained that the Mill Site Committee had been told that the market for elderly housing was saturated.

Scott Butcher asked about the economic feasibility of each scenario. Mr. Morrison-Logan answered that this was beyond the scope of VHB's contract, but that Scenario 1 followed the Market Study with the intent of offering a developer a reasonable return.

Robert Allen asked how much control the Town would have over a developer under any of these scenarios. Mr. Sergi said that a private developer is free to do what they want, but that the Town can contribute to economic viability by doing a lot of the planning work and laying out a clear path that could dramatically lower development planning costs. Mr. Allen said he didn't think that anyone would go to a theater in this Town.

Mr. Castelano asked if we know the plans of the current owner. Mr. Sergi said he wants to sell the property and has no interest in development.

Mark Hussey asked if there anything the Town can do to stop a developer from doing whatever he wanted. Mr. Sergi said that would require the Town purchase the property, although he refined that statement to say that the Town could theoretically enter into a conditional P&S which could then be turned over to a private development who agreed to follow the Town's recommendations for the site.

Mr. Hallisey reminded the meeting that the three scenarios are only a tool for the Town to tell a potential developer what we'd like to see there. He commented that the river is an asset and suggested a canoe retail establishment, a fishing store, or something that would take advantage of the river.

Greg Gurgas asked if there was a way to approach the current owner about selling the site in sections; for example, having the Town buy the section along the river in order to create a riverwalk. Mr. Sergi said that the owner has been approached about sub-dividing the site and is not interested in doing so. He also commented that there are costs associated with things like a riverwalk.

Cathy Forrest said that she has never walked along the river, but asked about the potential safety concerns about a river walkway. She also commented that the penstock is unattractive and not going anywhere. Mr. Sergi acknowledged that there are challenges to Mill Site redevelopment, but said that there are opportunities here that we should not ignore.

Mark Boyajian asked if we know how much the owner wants for the property. Mr. Sergi said that this question gets ahead of ourselves.

Dave Armstrong said that Varnum Brook runs underneath the Mill Site and that part of this redevelopment could open Varnum Brook. It would, he suggested, be an asset to the fishery as well as the aesthetics of the site and of

the Town in general.

Russ Burke, of BSC representing PerryVidex, asked if the parking parcel across Mill St. from the co-generation plant had been considered as part of these scenarios. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that it had not yet been.

Mark Boyajian said that he liked the centralized location of the arts center in Scenario 2 because it brings the development together.

Mark Hussey asked why a developer would spend any money of anything other than Scenario 1. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that it would depend on development capacity.

Rob Rand asked if it would be possible to combine elements from the different scenarios. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that it was quite common.

Allan Wilayto asked about the \$80 million in leakage (money from Pepperell citizens that gets spent out of town) and what it was. Mr. Sergi said that most of the leakage was from groceries and food service/restaurants. Mr. Wilayto said he preferred Scenario 2. Mr. Sergi agreed that he preferred Scenario 2 as well. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that each of the Scenarios required more work.

Linda Pozerski suggested that unless someone donated part of the land to the Town, then Scenarios 2 and 3 aren't very likely.

Mr. Hallisey said that he preferred Scenario 1 and 2. He said that the Town has enough soccer fields, but that a hockey rink could be well used since hockey is popular in the area.

Steven Skinner, who lives near the site, said that keeping the rear section of the site as open space would afford a view of the covered bridge.

Anne Hussey asked if the 60-foot building height zoning limit was from current grade and said that, generally, going down in elevation into a site usually doesn't work.

Sandra Farrell said that she liked the retail space, the residential uses, and suggested a youth center.

Mr. Morrison-Logan and Mr. Sergi thanked everyone for attending and said that we hoped to see everyone back at the other public meetings to continue this planning process.

**Next Meeting:** Wednesday, December 2, 2009, at 7:00pm at Pepperell Town Hall.

**Adjournment:** The meeting ended at 8:28pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer, Mill Site Study Committee Secretary