

Your View: Grow or Risk Sliding Backward

5.22.17

As business and civic leaders in the community, we feel compelled to make our voices heard on the concept of a second business park being established on a portion of the New Bedford Municipal Golf Course.

As the project now moves forward through various public processes, the fundamental issue that needs to be kept in mind, is this—in order to deliver high-performing schools, safe neighborhoods, and a strong quality life for its residents, New Bedford must embrace fresh ideas for growing our economic base and work hard to implement those ideas.

A lot is being asked of taxpayers and local businesses, so relying on the existing tax base is not a viable long-term strategy. The existing business park in the North End is nearly at full capacity and further expansion impossible. Simply put, New Bedford must find a way to grow its commercial tax base or risk sliding backward.

The conversion of part of the golf course to a modern business park would bring, after full build-out, over 1,000 jobs and generate at least \$2 million each year in new tax revenue to help ease the burden on taxpayers and keep the city financially stable. This would represent a sea change from the mere \$100,000 the City receives from the golf course operator each year.

On the merits, the concept checks every box. The 100-acre site has great highway, rail, and airport access, and is connected to existing water and wastewater infrastructure. It is isolated from residential areas. It is free from environmental concerns, and the proposed layout avoids wetlands and unbuildable areas. It may well be among the most marketable "greenfield" development sites in the Northeast.

And the Mitchell Administration has recruited an important partner to the table. MassDevelopment, the state's lead economic development agency whose mission is job-creation and has a long track record of successful business park projects across the state. We think it is great news that MassDevelopment is partnering with the City to pursue a transformative project, and is willing to bear the risks and challenges that would discourage short-term-focused, profit-driven developers.

Finally, the concept for the new business park will allow the City to preserve the original nine-hole golf course designed by the famous landscape architect Donald Ross, and construct a new clubhouse to replace the poor quality facilities that exist today. Given that virtually every golf course in Southeastern Massachusetts is struggling to survive these days, the project offers a unique opportunity to prevent the possible closure of the entire course in the years ahead.

In the months ahead, the City and MassDevelopment will work through an array of issues, and rely on multiple public processes to make sure that all voices are heard and the final result is an asset to our community.

But what we know at this initial stage could not be more exciting or more promising. We see a win-win for New Bedford and we are proud to offer our strong support.

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