

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

December 29, 2013

Hearing slated on Salem zoning amendments

Voters to consider proposals in March

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — Residents will get a chance tomorrow night to comment on a series of zoning amendments before voting on them in March.

The Planning Board's public hearing begins at 7 p.m. at Town Hall.

The six proposed amendments would do everything from tighten current ordinances to allow for rezoning of the Police Department property on Veterans Memorial Parkway.

"We are just trying to clean them up," said board Chairman Robert Campbell.

After residents expressed their views, the board would vote to include the amendments on the ballot, Campbell said. A second public hearing would be held if necessary.

Some of the proposed amendments would simply expand or clarify language in town ordinances written more than 20 years ago, but one ordinance is aimed at rezoning the 15.5-acre site that's been home to the police station since 1966.

Another would allow healthcare facilities — including an increasing number of urgent care centers moving to Salem — to be permitted in the commercial-industrial district without the need to request a variance.

Although there's been talk of the need for a new police station for years, there are no immediate plans to build one, according to Selectmen Chairman Everett McBride Jr. and Deputy police Chief Shawn Patten.

Selectmen and Town Manager Keith Hickey discussed a proposed rezoning of the property last month to give the town more flexibility for marketing the site if a decision is made someday to sell the land and build a new station elsewhere.

The amendment calls for rezoning the site from commercial-industrial and town center property to all commercial-industrial. That's expected to increase the property's value and draw more interest from potential buyers.

"The idea is if we build a new police station somewhere else, we want to get the most money we can for it," McBride said last month.

McBride and fellow Selectmen James Keller have expressed support for construction of a public safety complex to house the police and fire departments.

Hickey proposed the construction of an \$8.7 million police station and also a West End fire station in a five-year capital improvement plan he presented to selectmen in June 2012.

But money for the two stations was later removed from the plan after it was decided they were not immediate priorities.

Campbell said the establishment of several urgent care centers and other healthcare facilities in Salem in the last few years has prompted the need to consider allowing these as permitted uses under the zoning ordinance.

Another zoning amendment would allow for more commercial development by removing restrictions on large retail stores and restaurants being established in the area of Hampshire Road and Garabedian Drive, Campbell said.

Residents can also comment on a proposed amendment to regulate the use of temporary signs for festivals, craft fairs and similar events.

Non-profit groups would be allowed to post temporary signs for special events no more than twice a year. Those signs would have to be removed within 24 hours of the end of the event, according to Assistant Town Manager Leon Goodwin.

The organizations must be registered as non-profits with the New Hampshire attorney general's office, he said. No more than two signs can be posted on a single property.

Representatives from non-profit organizations have criticized the town's efforts to restrict the placement of temporary signs, which they say are needed to promote events such as the Salem Farmers Market and annual SalemFest celebration.

Currently, temporary signs can only be posted on the property where the special events are held or with special permission from the private property owner.

The final two amendments would add provisions for conditional use permits in the Depot Overlay District and revise the procedure for giving public notice for building permit applications.

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December 16, 2013

Salem considers new temporary sign rules

By *Doug Ireland*

direland@eaglettribune.com

— — — SALEM — Dissatisfaction with the town's sign ordinance has led to more changes.

Efforts to regulate a growing number of illegally placed temporary signs throughout town has some people saying the town's regulations are unfair. But others believe more needs to be done to regulate signs.

Selectmen gave their endorsement last week to a proposal aimed at helping to satisfy nonprofit organizations while restricting the number of signs allowed to advertise festivals and craft fairs.

The amendment now goes to the Planning Board for its review and then a public hearing Dec. 30. Voters would be asked to approve the proposal in March.

Nonprofit groups would be allowed to post temporary signs for special events no more than twice a year. Those signs would have to be removed within 24 hours of the end of the event, according to Assistant Town Manager Leon Goodwin.

The signs must be no taller than 3 feet, no bigger than 9 square feet, and they cannot be illuminated, Goodwin said. A permit would not be required.

The organizations must be registered as nonprofit groups with the New Hampshire attorney general's office, he said. No more than two signs can be posted on a single property.

Representatives from nonprofit organizations have criticized the town's efforts to restrict the placement of temporary signs, which they say are needed to promote events such as the Salem Farmers Market and annual SalemFest celebration.

Currently, temporary signs can only be posted on the property where the special events are held or with special permission from the private property owner.

Selectmen voted Sept. 30 to deny farmers market organizer Jane Lang's request to place six temporary signs in rights of way around town to tell the public how to find the Lake Street market.

But it was market organizers' failure to remove temporary signs as directed in 2012 that led selectmen to ban signs in all public rights of way. Some selectmen had said the town was becoming cluttered with signs posted at intersections, along roadways and on utility poles.

Goodwin said Friday the amended ordinance would be beneficial to nonprofit groups while still restricting illegally placed signs. Otherwise, they would not be able to advertise their festivals and craft fairs.

“Nonprofits are an important part of our community,” he said. “But we also don’t want them littering the landscape with temporary signs.”

The proposal has drawn criticism from Lang, who believes the town should allow the posting of signs for the weekly farmers market. She said the market is a valuable community service that brings fresh produce to residents.

Lang has consulted with Goodwin about the amendment. She said she hoped to provide input for the proposal, but it was crafted without her help. The farmers market is not included among the organizations that could advertise special events twice a year.

“I was told they would try to do whatever they could to make it work,” she said.

Town planning director Ross Moldoff, whose department drafted the amendment, said while most organizations would be pleased with the change, the farmers market would be an exception.

“You can’t do something just for the farmers market,” he said. “You would have to do it for everybody.”

SalemFest organizer Betty Gay, a critic of Salem’s sign regulations, said the town should allow signs in rights of way. Gay said she was not given an opportunity to provide her input for the amendment and is considering filing a citizens petition.

She said the town doesn’t do enough to enforce the current ordinance, allowing some illegally placed signs to remain while others are removed.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

December 7, 2013

Windham company, growing jobs, relocates to Salem

By John Toole

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — A rapidly growing New Hampshire company with surging sales and plans to expand its workforce is relocating to Salem from Windham.

Body Armor Outlet-Granite State Police Supply plans an open house Dec. 13 for its new store at 26 Ermer Road.

“The reason is to get more space for our store and warehouse, and for more employees,” CEO Ray Bellia said.

Bellia, a Salem resident, founded the enterprise as a college student to sell online secondhand police gear in good condition.

He opened his first store in Windham in 2011 and thought it would serve his needs for years to come.

But the company’s sales have tripled to about \$3 million in just two years.

“That’s a good problem to have,” Bellia said.

A workforce of 14 is expected to nearly double next year.

Four new hires are expected in the first three to four months of 2014, with another six to eight added before the year is finished.

“That’s our goal for 2014,” Bellia said.

He concedes he never anticipated such growth.

“Our local business has just exploded since we opened the store in Windham,” he said. “We have had huge success in both New Hampshire and Massachusetts. Never once in my life did I expect this would be happening.”

The new Ermer Road facility is the former location of Lighting 101, now renovated.

The new store has 6,000 square feet of space, 10 times that of the Windham store.

“This was definitely a good move for us,” he said.

Bellia praised Windham officials for working with his company, but said it was more affordable to buy and renovate an existing building.

“Windham was great. We really didn’t want to leave,” he said. “But the cost to build was significantly higher than to buy.”

Windham officials were sorry to see the company leave town.

“Salem is lucky to have them,” said Windham community development director Laura Scott. “They enhanced the property they purchased and were a great community supporter. I understand why they decided to leave Windham and their space in Salem is perfect for their growing operation.”

Salem officials are pleased.

“We’re glad to have them in Salem and glad to have the building reoccupied,” planning director Ross Moldoff said. “It was built for Audrey’s Sew and Vac some time ago, then the lighting store moved in.”

Bellia envisions the company expanding sales to Rhode Island, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

He also is looking to grow his business by looking beyond police departments and security guards to the general public — always welcome as customers, but not previously a focus.

“Your average citizen is becoming more in tune with the tactical market and it’s just a cool factor,” he said.

The company would like to add firearms and ammunition to its inventory.

“We are applying for a license for that; it is something we would like to add,” Bellia said.

He also said the company could in the future look to add an outdoor shooting range.

The open house is scheduled for Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

In conjunction with the open house, the company is conducting a toy drive with the Homeland Heroes Foundation to support military families.

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December 2, 2013

Second furniture store proposed on same Salem site

Planning Board wants more details before making decision

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — For five years, Ashley Furniture HomeStore has stood at 14 Kelly Road, the site of a former warehouse.

Now, a second furniture store has been proposed nearby. As a matter fact, it's planned on the same lot and would also be owned by Ashoke Rampuria and AAA Realty.

The proposal calls for a 24,218-square-foot store, Ashbrook Furniture HomeStore.

It would be built adjacent to the 38,000-square-foot Ashley Furniture, part of a 68-year-old chain with stores in 10 countries. The Planning Board took its first look at the plans last week, but is seeking additional traffic and engineering details before voting on the proposal.

Approval for a 13,000-square-foot general retail store was granted by the board in 2007, but Rampuria said yesterday he decided to hold off on construction until now.

Project manager Nicole Duquette of TFMoran engineering company of Bedford told the board a second store is planned because the owner could only sell certain merchandise at the current store.

“He is only allowed to sell Ashley Furniture products,” Duquette said. “Since he’s not allowed to bring other brands into this store, he has to make a separate store.”

Duquette said the new store would offer higher-quality furniture and possibly mattresses. She did not say how many jobs could be created.

But the proposal calls for a store more than twice the size of what was proposed six years ago. It also requests 111 parking spaces instead of the 125 required by town ordinance.

The store would be built in Kelly Plaza off heavily traveled South Broadway. The site was formerly the home of a 125,000-square-foot warehouse, according to town planning director Ross Moldoff.

Moldoff praised Rampuria for the improvements made since purchasing the property.

“They really dressed it up quite a bit,” he said. “I think they have done a really nice job.”

Mold said the proposed project would have minimal impact on traffic at the intersection of South Broadway and Kelly Road. The biggest safety concern would be in the parking lot, he said.

“We were concerned about the potential for conflict between the loading area and parking spaces,” Moldoff said.

The applicant has also requested approval for two 200-square-foot signs, where zoning only allows a single 100-square-foot sign. Moldoff suggested the request be scaled back.

“I think the two 200-square-foot signs is excessive,” he said. “When you grant these, you have a lot of other merchants asking for the same thing.”

Duquette said two large signs were requested because it’s difficult to see the building from South Broadway.

The Planning Board decided to continue action on the proposal at Moldoff’s request and after board member Ronald Belanger said he wanted more information about the traffic impact.

“I feel there are a lot of questions here,” he said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

November 26, 2013

Former Salem tree farm to remain undeveloped

Town grants conservation easement

By *Doug Ireland*

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — For nearly 80 years, the 7-acre wooded parcel at 115 Bluff St. has been a part of the Banks family's lives.

It's where Robert Banks helped his father, Alden Banks, sell Christmas trees for years. The elder Banks, a handyman, inherited the land in the 1950s from a local minister for whom he worked.

The former tree farm is one of the few remaining undeveloped large parcels of land left in a town of approximately 28,000 residents with a large commercial base, including numerous shopping plazas.

The land will remain undeveloped after selectmen voted unanimously Monday to authorize a conservation easement for the property. The town's Conservation Commission agreed to the easement Nov. 6.

That means there will be no housing developments, shopping plazas or other large structures at the corner of Bluff and Millville streets — just the workshop and home where Robert Banks, 80, has lived for 42 years.

Alden Banks and his wife, Gladys, are long gone, but fondly remembered by their son. Robert said yesterday his father used to tap maple trees on the property and make his own syrup.

The couple died in their mid-90s — Alden in 2000 and his wife in 2005.

Robert said he had to subdivide the land, which was once 9 acres, to settle the estate costs after his parents died. He doesn't want to see something like that happen again and said he will continue to live there as long as possible.

"I want to preserve it in honor of my parents," he said.

Alden maintained the property and did other chores for the Rev. Frederick Heywood for more than 20 years until Heywood died in the 1950s.

He willed the land and an old home, torn down in 1970, to his loyal caretaker. Heywood was a minister at First Congregational Church in Methuen.

"He was a very handy handyman," Robert said of his father. "He did everything."

At a time when large tracts in Southern New Hampshire are being scooped up by developers for big bucks,

this is a rare instance where a property owner isn't selling off his land, according to Salem planning director Ross Moldoff.

Robert contacted the town in August, saying he just wanted to preserve the land.

He isn't receiving a large sum to keep the property as conservation land. The town is spending several hundred dollars to pay for the conservation plan and legal expenses required for the easement, Moldoff said.

The easement will not cover the three-quarters of an acre where the house is located, he said.

"We're helping him accomplish his goal of preserving the land," Moldoff said. "He wants to make sure it's not developed after he's gone."

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

November 6, 2013

Salem board rejects Coke plant proposal

Landowner expresses continued frustration with town officials

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — The Zoning Board of Adjustment has rejected plans to convert the former Coca-Cola bottling plant on South Broadway into a car dealership.

The board voted, 4-1, on Tuesday to deny a variance requested by Metscott 21 LLC of Haverhill, Mass., for permission to establish a dealership in a zone where sellers of used cars cannot be within 2,000 feet of each other. There is no restriction on new car dealers.

Property owner Joseph Scott of Metscott 21 proposed renovating the approximately 70,000-square-foot building — one of the nation's first Coca-Cola plants — so he could sell it to a car dealership.

But board members said they didn't want to grant a variance to allow another business that sells used cars. That prompted Scott to say yesterday he is tired of dealing with Salem officials and will challenge the decision.

"They want to keep telling me what to put in there," Scott said. "I'm going to take them to court if I have to."

Most new car dealers also sell a few used vehicles, project representative Mark Gross told the board. Scott said he was in negotiations with five or six potential dealers.

The Coca-Cola plant was built in 1921 and operated at 23 S. Broadway for decades, but the building has been vacant for years.

Several commercial proposals for the site were either defeated by town boards or abandoned because they were no longer economically feasible. They include plans for shopping plazas and a waste-to-energy plant.

Planning officials have been concerned that most commercial uses of the property would substantially increase traffic on heavily traveled South Broadway, also known as Route 28.

The ordinance was adopted years ago because there was a concern too many used car dealers were locating along the busy commercial strip, according to town planner Ross Moldoff.

Scott said last month a car dealership was an ideal use for the site because it would not generate as much traffic. But board members, including Robert Uttley, weren't convinced that allowing a dealership only 1,500 feet away from Toy Store Auto Sales & Service would be in the public's best interest.

"Route 28 is beginning to look like Route 1 in Massachusetts, with one used car dealer after another," he said. "I don't think this is what we want in Salem."

Vice chairman Steven Diantgikis, serving as chairman in Gary Azarian's absence, agreed.

"My concerns are we are going to put this in the heart of our community," he said.

Diantgikis said Metscott didn't prove a variance for a dealership was necessary because the property could be used for other commercial purposes.

Bernard Campbell Jr., the only board member not opposed to the request, said any use of the site would better allowing the rundown building to remain vacant.

Karen Forbes, an attorney for Toy Store Auto Sales & Service, said the request should be denied because the applicant didn't provide enough information on the project, including the dealer's name and the number of vehicles to be kept there.

"This is a proposal that is amazingly bereft of details," she said. "Because they haven't given you facts, we believe this applicant has to be denied on its face."

Scott and partner Dennis Metayer purchased the property in January 2006 for \$3.6 million. The property is now assessed at \$2.4 million, most of that for the 5 acres of land.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

November 5, 2013

Salem firms could be taken by eminent domain

Intersection project may send businesses packing

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — For 50 years, Daisy Cleaners has served residents at 14 S. Broadway. Sugar & Spice Bake Shoppe has been at 4 S. Broadway for nine years.

Now, both may be forced to move as the town begins a major reconstruction of the intersection of Routes 28 and 97.

Representatives from the engineering firm Vanasse Hangen Brustlin presented plans for the project to selectmen Monday night. The project, first proposed more than 20 years ago, is expected to reduce traffic and improve safety at the heavily congested intersection.

But to eliminate the lines of cars backed up there each afternoon, several business properties may be taken by eminent domain, depending on the project's scope.

Those businesses include Daisy Cleaners and Sugar & Spice.

When Sugar & Spice opened on South Broadway, owner Brian Costa knew he would have to move his business someday because of the much-anticipated road project.

The building, which he leases, may be torn down to make way for the widened roadway.

“You have to move, you have to move,” Costa said yesterday. “It is what it is. Whatever happens, happens.”

Daisy Cleaners and a handful of other businesses may have to relocate as well, depending on whether a sidewalk and raised median are built.

But selectmen, except for Patrick Hargreaves, said Monday they didn't think the sidewalk and median were necessary. They agreed with James Keller's suggestion that enough space be left so a median could be added in the future if needed.

Jim Desjardins, owner of Daisy Cleaners and vice chairman of the Salem Depot redevelopment committee, said he has come to terms with the fact he may have to relocate his family's longtime business.

“Am I excited I have to move? Not really,” he said yesterday. “But if that’s what it takes to help — to make that improvement, then that’s just what I will do. My business will be OK.”

Costa, Desjardins and other business owners and town officials say there is so much traffic at the intersection and in the Depot area, it poses a serious safety hazard.

“People feel like they are taking their lives in their hands,” said Al Raymond, owner of DeColores Books & Gifts at 34 N. Broadway.

Desjardins agreed there is a serious problem.

“To see traffic backed up on a daily basis is troubling,” he told selectmen.

It also affects sales, the merchants said.

“We’re all losing business there,” Raymond said.

Costa said a lot of his customers complain about the traffic.

“People don’t want to get out of the traffic to pick up a cake because they know they will never get back in,” he said. “(Route) 28 is getting to be a mess.”

The plans call for left turn lanes to be added to each side of Route 28 because motorists have trouble pulling in and out of store parking lots, according to Martin Kennedy of Vanasse Hangen Brustlin.

Although less than a 10-foot-wide swath of property would have to be taken, the town would be forced to purchase entire parcels or face possible litigation, selectmen said. The businesses could not operate because most of their parking would be eliminated.

It has not been decided which buildings would be taken by eminent domain.

The reconstruction of Route 28 is expected to cost at least \$1.5 million, but buying several properties could push that figure to more than \$3 million, Selectman Stephen Campbell said. It could include anywhere from one to four or five properties taken, he said.

The \$3 million does not include the cost of any improvements to Route 97, Campbell said.

Eighty percent of the project cost would be reimbursed by the state Department of Transportation, according to Town Manager Keith Hickey.

More designs and environmental studies are needed before the construction goes out to bid in 2015. Construction is expected to begin later that year, but the timetable is still uncertain since legal battles over land takings could delay the project.

Hargreaves said the project has been debated so long, he won’t believe it’s been done until he sees its completion.

“We’ve been talking about this since 1991,” Hargreaves said. “If it ever happens, I will be in my grave.”

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

November 3, 2013

Salem police property could be rezoned

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — Selectmen will consider a proposal tonight to rezone the police station property on Veterans Memorial Parkway.

But don't expect anything to happen to the station — or the 15.5 acres on which it sits — any time soon.

Although there's been talk of the need for a state-of-the-art station for years, there are no immediate plans to build a new facility, according to Selectmen Chairman Everett McBride and Deputy Police Chief Shawn Patten.

When the board meets at 7 p.m. at Town Hall, selectmen and Town Manager Keith Hickey will discuss the need to rezone the property to get the best possible price in case it's sold, McBride said Friday.

"The idea is if we build a new police station somewhere else, we want to get the most money we can for it," McBride said.

But the town isn't expected to consider plans for a new station until 2017 or 2018 at the earliest, he said. Hickey was out of the office Friday and could not be reached for comment.

Even though the town hasn't decided whether it will sell or keep the property, selectmen need to consider all possible alternatives, McBride said.

To sell the property, the best option is to rezone it for commercial use, he said.

He said while some of the property is zoned commercial, the rest is zoned residential.

"The idea is to make it all commercial," McBride said.

The town acquired the property in 1965 and built the station a year later, according to tax documents. It's assessed at \$2.7 million.

When Hickey presented his five-year capital improvement plan to selectmen in June 2012, he called for the construction of a \$8.7 million police station and a West End fire station in addition to several multimillion-dollar road and bridge projects.

Selectmen have committed to spending at least \$4.65 million a year on road projects. The town also had several bridges included on the state's "red list" of high-priority highway projects.

While board members embraced the road and bridge projects, Selectman Stephen Campbell was shocked to see a plan calling for new police and fire stations.

“There are just things I was amazed when I saw (them),” he said.

When selectmen began reviewing the plan in December, the \$3.5 million for a fire station had been removed. Money for a new police station was eliminated later after it was decided the facility was not an immediate priority.

McBride and Selectman James Keller expressed support for a public safety complex to accommodate both the police and fire departments.

“I won’t stop fighting for it,” Keller said.

Patten said Friday that despite selectmen’s plans to discuss rezoning the property tonight, it’s not an issue police officials are considering at this time.

“We’re just focused on the operation of the department,” he said.”

Also tonight, selectmen will hold a public information meeting and hearing on the Salem Depot intersection project and hear a report from Town Moderator Christopher Goodnow on polling locations.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

October 22, 2013

Coca-Cola plant owner wants to sell to car dealer

Former bottling plant would be renovated

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — What was once one of the nation's first Coca-Cola bottling plants on South Broadway could soon become a car dealership.

But another used car dealership only 1,500 feet away, Toy Store Auto Sales, could nix plans for the 92-year-old building, which has stood vacant for years.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment has been asked to grant a variance to Metscott 21 LLC of Haverhill, Mass. The board will consider the request at its meeting Nov. 5, town planning director Ross Moldoff said.

Property owner Joseph Scott said yesterday he plans to renovate the approximately 70,000-square-foot building so he could sell it to a prospective car dealership.

Although there are no dealerships waiting to purchase the property, Scott said he was approached by a few interested in the site in the past. Otherwise, Scott said, he would have to consider selling the property for other retail uses.

A car dealership is preferred because it would generate less traffic on heavily congested South Broadway, Scott said. Planning officials have expressed concern about generating more traffic in that area.

Scott has said town planning officials thwarted efforts to use the site, making it difficult to sell or develop the property.

"I'm going to try to renovate the existing building," Scott said yesterday. "I just can't keep paying taxes on it and let it sit there."

He said he has paid thousands of dollars in property taxes and permit fees over the last seven years.

Scott said he plans to raze about 10,000 square feet of an older section of the building. He is optimistic he can obtain the variance needed for a dealership. The project would then need site plan approval from the Planning Board, Moldoff said.

The Coca-Cola plant was built in 1921 and operated at the site for decades, but the popular beverage hasn't been bottled there for years.

A longtime town ordinance prohibits used car dealerships from being within 2,000 feet each of other, Moldoff said. There were concerns years ago there would be too many used car dealerships along the busy commercial strip, he said.

The ordinance does not apply to dealerships that sell new vehicles, Moldoff said. The property is in a commercial industrial district. The owner of Toy Auto Sales, Mike Chandler, could not be reached yesterday for comment.

This would be just one of several projects planned at 23 S. Broadway in recent years. Those proposals were either rejected by town boards or abandoned because of various planning obstacles, according to Scott.

Two months ago, Scott said, he gave up on plans to develop the site after he and business partner Dennis Metayer were told by Planning Board members in 2011 that a proposed 91,800-square-foot construction and demolition recycling center was not an ideal use for the site.

“The town of Salem is extremely difficult to deal with,” he said. “I just want out of Salem.”

Scott and Metayer purchased the property in January 2006 for \$3.6 million. The property is now assessed at \$2.4 million, most of that for the 5 acres of land.

Shortly after the purchase, they proposed razing the building to build a pharmacy, restaurant and bread company, but dropped the plans. A year later, they considered razing just the plant’s additions, which were about 20 years old at the time. Some planning officials opposed razing the building, Scott said.

After several appearances before the Planning Board, a proposal for a shopping plaza was approved by the board in January 2009. But before final approval was received, prospective tenants said they were no longer interested and the project was abandoned.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

October 3, 2013

Frustation boils over at Salem Town Hall

Town manager says the inappropriate behavior will end

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — Town Manager Keith Hickey said yesterday he has taken action to stop town employees from complaining to residents that they are “overworked and underpaid” and should speak to selectmen.

“I’ve addressed it and that’s all I’m going to say,” he said.

Hickey said he was surprised to hear from Selectman Patrick Hargreaves during the board’s meeting Monday night that town employees are telling Town Hall customers they should take all their problems to selectmen.

“It is completely inappropriate,” Hickey said. “I expect it to stop occurring.”

In a five-minute outburst at the end of a nearly four-hour meeting, Hargreaves said he was angry and frustrated to have residents stop off at his business and say they were told at Town Hall to speak to him.

“I had people come to my shop that were very dissatisfied with things that were happening in town,” he said. “They were complaining about inspections and not getting things done in a proper manner.”

Hargreaves said he usually doesn’t mind when residents want to speak to him about town issues.

But when 20 residents, including three major developers, stopped off at his shop, Pat’s Lock “N” Key on North Broadway, last week to complain about problems with town services, it was just too much to take. Hargreaves said he couldn’t get his work done.

“When (town employees) are telling them, ‘Go talk to selectmen because we are overworked and underpaid,’ and they are interfering with my business, I have a problem with this,” Hargreaves said. “I really felt it was done on purpose.”

He said complaints originated from the offices in the Town Hall basement, where the town clerk and tax collector offices are located.

Town Clerk Susan Wall and Deputy Tax Collector Donna Bergeron declined to comment yesterday, referring questions to Hickey. Tax Collector Cheryl-Ann Bolouk was on vacation and unavailable for comment.

Hargreaves said he ends up fielding the brunt of complaints about town services because the other

selectmen either work in Massachusetts or do not have a business in town that people visit.

Hickey apologized to Hargreaves.

He said any town employee who complains they are overworked and overpaid will be “underworked and not paid.”

Hickey said yesterday he had no prior knowledge of the situation and did not have a reason to doubt Hargreaves’ allegations.

“I don’t think Pat overreacted,” he said.

Hickey said town employees who have complaints should bring them to their supervisor, not the public.

He said more than a dozen town jobs, including a few inspection positions, have been eliminated in the last few years, but morale is not a big problem and the work is still getting done — just not as quick as previously.

“We will continue to do the best we can,” he said.

Other selectmen came to Hargreaves’ defense, including Stephen Campbell.

“I understand how the staff feels the way they do, but there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to express that,” he said. “If it is anything like Mr. Hargreaves describes, I think we are well over the line.”

Chairman Everett McBride said town employees need to adjust to the changes.

“We made decisions and we are going to live with those decisions and the staff has to do the same,” he said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

October 7, 2013

Frozen yogurt shops proliferate in Salem

Stores are opening all over Southern N.H.

By *Doug Ireland*

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — The growing popularity of frozen yogurt shops is helping make Salem a cool place to visit.

Three shops have opened in town in the last year and two more are coming. The Planning Board will consider plans for one of the proposed shops when it meets tomorrow night.

Hemant Patel of Windham is proposing a 1,512-square-foot shop at 277 N. Broadway, the former home of Granite State Potato Chips. The longtime potato chip factory building was razed and replaced by a Dunkin' Donuts shop this summer.

Patel plans to lease space in the Dunkin' Donuts building. If he receives site plan approval, he hopes to open his business by Dec. 1.

He said he is still negotiating with several frozen yogurt chains to obtain franchise rights. Since November, Tutti Frutti, Froyo World and Frozyos have opened in Salem.

Another chain, Orange Leaf, has announced on its website that it, too, will be soon moving to Salem.

Orange Leaf plans to move to 389-396 Main St., a 22,000-square-foot plaza at the site of the former Green Barn restaurant.

The restaurant closed and was razed earlier this year after operating more than 40 years at the site. The plaza also includes a CVS pharmacy and Haverhill Bank branch.

Orange Leaf has yet to file plans with the town, according to planning director Ross Moldoff.

The increase in frozen yogurt shops is comparable to the rising number of urgent care facilities in town. Several have opened in Salem this year.

“It’s unusual we are seeing so many of them,” Moldoff said of the shops.

Salem also has numerous ice cream shops, he said. Shops that opened in recent years include Moo’s Place on Elmwood Road, Jay Gee’s on South Broadway and Jim’s Ice Cream Barn on Kelly Road.

Orange Leaf is also opening shops at 19 Manchester Road in Derry, 90 Pleasant Valley St. in Methuen and at the intersection of Plaistow Road and Main Street in Haverhill, according to the company's website. Orange Leaf spokeswoman Meredith Lynn could not be reached Friday for comment.

Patel, seeking to open his first business, said he wants to invest in a growing industry.

After seeing frozen yogurt shops prosper locally and across the country, he decided that was the kind of business he wanted to operate. It didn't matter he would face competition from other shops in Salem, he said.

"They are opening left and right," Patel said. "There was something telling me, 'There is something about this business.'"

Neth Pou, who opened Tutti Frutti in The Mall in Rockingham Park in November, said the national demand for frozen yogurt helped convince him to get into the business.

Tutti Frutti has more than 600 shops, he said. Pou said his business at the mall has done well.

"It didn't happen by accident because the product is really good," he said. "It's healthy and better than ice cream."

Frozyos opened at 517 S. Broadway in February. General manager Courtney Perry said the shop isn't worried about increased competition.

"We have our own niche," he said.

Perry said the fact Frozyos charges customers by the cup size — rather than volume — sets his shop apart from the rest.

Salem's other frozen yogurt shop is Froyo World at 240 N. Broadway, owned by Richard and Lynn Caesar. The business opened in June.

The Salem shops are among nearly a dozen in Southern New Hampshire. Others include Sweet Kiwi Frozen Yogurt in Londonderry, Billy's Frozen Yogurt in Derry and Yogurt City in Plaistow.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

September 25, 2013

Salem attracts more medical businesses

Imaging firm the latest company to move to town

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — The town has been known as a retail mecca for years, attracting scores of stores and restaurants to Route 28.

Now, Salem is making its mark as a medical community, drawing numerous businesses in the health field to prime real estate space off Interstate 93.

Yesterday, the state Division of Economic Development announced it has helped bring a medical imaging firm to town.

Gamma Medica Inc. recently opened at 12 Manor Parkway, bringing 24 jobs, according to president and CEO Jim Calandra. The company, which is leasing 8,000 square feet, plans to hire about 30 people in the next year, he said.

The start-up firm, launched in July, is a spinoff of a former California company that filed for bankruptcy protection, said Calandra, a longtime Windham resident. It specializes in improving breast cancer detection.

Gamma narrowed its choices for a new location to the San Francisco Bay and Boston areas, he said.

New Hampshire has a more favorable tax climate than Massachusetts and is able to attract highly skilled employees from the Boston area, Calandra said.

The company opted to move to Salem with help from Michael Bergeron, business development manager for the state Division of Economic Development.

Bergeron said he's worked to bring about a half dozen businesses to Salem over the last several years, including Entersys, CCS Companies and AgaMatrix, another medical device company.

"We sell the attributes of New Hampshire as a low-tax area, but we sell the Salem area as a good area for medical companies," he said.

More medical-related businesses have lined up behind Gamma, seeking approval to locate in Salem. That includes a 42,000-square-foot surgery center and medical office building proposed at 14-22 Keewaydin Drive.

Last night, the Planning Board was to hold a public hearing on a request from 14-22 Keewaydin Drive LLC to convert a former industrial building into medical space, according to town planner Ross Moldoff.

The Keewaydin Drive proposal is just one of several presented to the Planning Board in recent months.

Others include plans for a 8,000-square-foot medical office building and urgent care center at 159 N. Broadway, the former Service Credit Union building, Moldoff said. The Planning Board heard the site plan approval request by developer AV3 Properties two weeks ago.

Mark Gross of MHF Design Consultants, project representative for the Keewaydin Drive and North Broadway proposals, declined to comment before the board rules on the requests.

These latest proposals come on the heels of other medical firms receiving approval earlier this year, including a kidney dialysis center operated by Fresenius Medical Care North America at 19 Keewaydin Drive. Another dialysis center opened on Pelham Road, Moldoff said.

In addition, Parkland Medical Center opened a new urgent care facility on Stiles Road.

Parkland Urgent Care was one of three such centers to open along the Interstate 93 corridor in the last year. There are also centers in Windham, Pelham and Londonderry.

"In one year, it is interesting to see that much medical space," Moldoff said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

August 25, 2013

Salem church wants to build center for homeless

By *Doug Ireland*

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — The Planning Board will consider plans Tuesday for the Hope Center, a facility at Pleasant Street United Methodist Church that would serve homeless families.

If approved, the 4,560-square-foot center would accommodate up to five homeless families — or 14 people — at once as part of the Interfaith Hospitality Network established by Family Promise of Greater Rockingham County, according to George Fredette of SFC Engineering Partnership.

Fredette, project representative for Pleasant Street United Methodist, has requested a conditional use permit from the town to build the center adjacent to the church at 8 Pleasant St.

The facility would also provide the church with meeting space and serve as an area cooling center on extremely hot days, according to Fredette.

The church hosts a food pantry and many community groups, including Scouts and a day-care center, he said in his proposal to the town.

The Planning Board will conduct a public hearing on the proposal at its meeting Tuesday, which begins at 7 p.m. at Town Hall, according to planning director Ross Moldoff.

Pleasant Street United Methodist will be the fifth Salem congregation to join the network of homeless shelters, said Melanie Nesheim, board president for Family Promise of Greater Rockingham County. The church announced on its website that it's trying to raise \$400,000 for the project.

Nesheim said Family Promise had previously asked the church to join the network, but was told it was not ready to participate until its proposed expansion was complete.

The network is made up of approximately 20 congregations that provide food and shelter at 10 sites throughout the community, Nesheim said. It also helps the families find permanent housing.

“We would love to have them as our 11th host church,” she said. “We want to reach our goal to have 13 host churches.”

The network had been in an organizational phase for several years until it started to host families in late February, serving a half dozen since then, Nesheim said.

Fredette told the town that Pleasant Street United Methodist would serve homeless families four times a year through the help of approximately 50 volunteers.

Host congregations take turns providing food and shelter on a weekly basis. The network also operates a day center for the families at Calvary Bible Church in Derry.

Nesheim has said a survey of area school districts revealed there are more than 150 homeless families in Southern New Hampshire. She said the network relies on donations and fund-raisers to pay operating costs. A major fundraiser, "An Evening of Thanks & Giving," is planned for Nov. 9 at the Atkinson Country Club, she said.

The new center would not have a large impact on traffic or safety, Fredette said. The church was built in the 1860s, he said.

More information on the project is available at hopecenter-psumc.org.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

August 12, 2013

Former Coca-Cola plant remains in limbo

Property owners say town is too tough to deal with

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — For decades, what is now an abandoned building on South Broadway was once one of the nation's first Coca-Cola bottling plants.

Owner Joseph Scott is frustrated he can't sell or develop the property, blaming town planning officials for thwarting efforts to use the site. The plant, built in 1921, sits vacant at 23 S. Broadway. The popular beverage hasn't been bottled or sold there for years.

"The town of Salem is extremely difficult to deal with," said Scott of Scott Properties in Haverhill, Mass.

Scott said he's given up on plans to develop the site after he and business partner Dennis Metayer were told by Planning Board members two years ago that a proposed construction and demolition recycling center was not an ideal use for the site.

"It stopped everything," Scott said. "They have taken a \$5 million piece of property and left it empty because they are very difficult to deal with."

The project was abandoned shortly after conceptual plans for the 91,800-square-foot facility were presented to the board in March 2011, Scott said.

"I just want out of Salem," he said.

Scott said the Planning Board and Planning Department have tried to dictate what would occur the site, including the types of curbing, lights and architectural designs.

Some board members have said the 92-year-old building should not be razed. In the meantime, Scott said, he's been asked to pay thousands of dollars in property taxes and permit fees.

The recycling center, proposed by Smart Grid Development of Rhode Island, would have generated its own electricity using a wind turbine and photovoltaic panels on the roof.

Scott and Metayer, who could not be reached for comment, purchased the property for \$3 million in January 2006. The property is now assessed at \$2.4 million, most of that for the 5 acres of land.

Shortly after the purchase, they proposed razing the building to build a pharmacy, restaurant and bread company, but dropped the plans. A year later, they considered razing just the plant's additions, which were about 20 years old at the time.

After several appearances before the Planning Board, a proposal for a shopping plaza was approved by the board in January 2009. But before final approval was received, prospective tenants said they were no longer interested.

That project was dropped. Scott said town officials are discouraging economic development in Salem.

"You don't own your property in Salem, New Hampshire — the Planning Board does," Scott said. "They dictate what you can do and can't do."

But Planning Board members James Keller and Robert Campell said the board has been reasonable, just unwilling to endorse proposals unless major traffic improvements are made along congested South Broadway. Those improvements include installation of a traffic light and turning lanes.

"That (traffic) is always a big issue, particularly in that part of town," said Campbell, the board's chairman. "I think the Planning Board has been fair to Mr. Scott."

Campbell said proposals were withdrawn before the board had a chance to vote on them.

"If we don't think something is going to work at that site, we tell them so," Campbell said.

Keller, a former Planning Board chairman and the selectmen's representative to the board, said it's disappointing that Scott has left the property in disrepair, even neglecting to mow the grass.

He said the property has a lot of potential for development, but the previous plans were not suitable for the site.

Keller disagreed with Scott's contention that Salem officials are discouraging development.

"The town, from an economic development perspective, is the farthest it's ever been," he said. "There is no shortage of activity."

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

July 17, 2013

Salem to review impact fees

By Doug Ireland

direland@eaglettribune.com

— SALEM — Selectmen authorized hiring a consultant to review the town's impact fees, but only after they were told it should have been done several years ago.

The board unanimously agreed Monday to pay consultant Bruce Mayberry \$11,500 to review the impact fee structure and recommend whether amendments were needed.

Town Manager Keith Hickey said planning director Ross Moldoff told him a town ordinance requires the fees be reviewed every five years. It's been eight years since the last review, after a similar request was rejected two years ago.

Impact fees are collected from developers to help fund the additional public services required as a result of their projects. These include the need for more police and fire services, and increases in student enrollment.

The school, public safety and recreation impact fees are paid by developers to compensate the town for their projects' affect on the community. There had been no complaints from developers that the fees were too high, Hickey said.

The study by Mayberry, manager of BCM Planning of New Gloucester, Maine, will determine whether the fees are fair or even too low.

For a single-family, detached home, a developer must pay a school fee of \$3,991, a recreation fee of \$1,003 and a \$538 public safety fee.

The town collected \$150,169 in impact fees last year, according to Hickey. These include \$84,783 in school fees, \$22,850 in public safety fees, \$21,972 in road fees and \$20,564 in recreation fees, he said.

Salem has collected \$1.2 million in impact fees since 2005, Moldoff said. He said yesterday that the Planning Board had requested the review.

“We have to maintain the legitimacy and integrity of the system,” Moldoff said.

The ordinance doesn't require the fees be amended after each review, he said.

Selectmen allocated the money for the study with little comment. Selectmen's Chairman Everett McBride and Selectman Stephen Campbell said yesterday the town wants to be certain fees are being collected fairly.

“It’s three years overdue,” McBride said. “You don’t want to be overcharging. We want to be line with what we should be.”

Campbell agreed, saying impact fees need to be reviewed regularly.

“Periodically, you have to look at them,” he said. “You can’t just arbitrarily charge what you want.”

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

July 5, 2013

Salem family can live on oil-contaminated land

Problems at oil-contaminated site started in 2007

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — For six years, the Demers family has dealt with problems from an oil spill that left their Martin Avenue home unlivable.

Today, a contractor will begin demolishing the oil-contaminated basement flooded by more than 230 gallons of heating fuel in February 2007, according to Michael Demers.

He and his mother, Suzanne Demers, were forced to move into a mobile home set up on their front lawn four years ago because the house reeked of oil.

But town officials became impatient with the family's failure to correct the problems and remove the 70-foot mobile home. They faced up to \$275 a day in fines after the family's fifth extension expired in March. Town regulations only allowed the mobile home to remain for up to 90 days.

When the Zoning Board of Adjustment granted the Demerses their sixth extension Tuesday night, it came with conditions.

Instead of giving the family the nine-month extension they requested, the board ruled unanimously that they must report the progress being made each month.

"I want to see — on a 30-day basis — how much work is being done," Chairman Gary Azarian said.

That was fine with Michael Demers, who said they just need until the end of the year to pour a new concrete foundation, install a vapor barrier, and do the other work needed to live in their home again. The basement is also covered with mold, according to town health officer Brian Lockard.

"We are very happy with the decision," Michael Demers said. "We just want to get this demolition started."

The Demerses claimed an employee from Haffner's fuel company overfilled their tank. A jury cleared the Lawrence company of negligence following a weeklong civil trial in 2011. Haffner's claimed the home had a faulty tank and piping.

Michael Demers said the legal battle exhausted his 69-year-old mother's assets and they are having a tough time coming up with the thousands of dollars needed to fund the work. Several contractors are donating labor and materials for the project, he said.

When the board first heard the latest extension request a month ago, the proposed variance was tabled until the Demerses could provide more information on when they expected the project to be completed.

Board members were happy with the timeline Michael Demers provided Tuesday night.

“These are the things we have been looking for all along,” vice chairman Steven Diantgikis said. “I would like to see this timeline followed through.”

Azarian was also satisfied with the timeline. He has said the board has been extremely patient with the family in dealing with their numerous requests for extensions.

Before receiving approval to move the mobile home next to their house, the Demerses lived in a hotel for 28 months.

In 2008, the property was assessed at more than \$330,000, but has since dropped to \$191,300, according to Vision Appraisal Services. The house is assessed at just \$55,600.

Michael Demers said the latest extension will give them the time they need.

“We are just trying to get it livable,” he said. “We would like to finally be home for Christmas after six years of this.”

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

July 4, 2013

Salem won't reimburse Belanger's fees

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — SALEM, N.H. — The Zoning of Board Adjustment rejected a longtime local official's bid for reimbursement of impact fees for what the town claimed was an illegal apartment.

The board voted unanimously Tuesday against the request by Rep. Ronald Belanger, R-Salem, to refund approximately \$4,100 he said he never should have been forced to pay.

Town officials contend the apartment at Belanger's North Main Street home was built without a permit. The 24-year state representative and Salem Planning Board member told the zoning board that town inspectors gave him the approvals he needed.

"Everybody signed off on them," Belanger said. "I didn't hide anything."

But town officials said they knew nothing about the 10-year-old apartment until earlier this year. Belanger obtained a building permit in April after questions arose while he was refinancing his property.

Belanger said in an interview before the vote he would consider taking legal action if his request were denied, including subpoenaing town officials.

But the state representative and Salem Planning Board member wasn't sure what his next move would be when questioned yesterday.

"I have to talk to my attorney," he said. "I am not going to comment right now."

Belanger insisted he was granted a building permit more than a decade ago. But when Belanger went to Town Hall to check his file for the permit several months ago, he said he was shocked.

"My folder was empty," he told the board.

Belanger approached selectmen this spring to seek reimbursement of the impact fees, saying he should be exempt because the project was built two years before they were mandated by the town. Impact fees are charged for projects that would have a potential effect on town services.

Belanger accused the town's planning staff of losing or removing documents from his folder, leading to a heated debate with Community Development Director William Scott.

Belanger called Scott "arrogant."

"None of that is true," Scott said. "You cannot insult me and my staff like that."

Selectmen told Belanger that only the zoning board had jurisdiction in this matter. The zoning board decided Tuesday there was no evidence to support Belanger's claims.

He was granted approval for a two-story garage in 2001, but never an apartment, zoning board Chairman Gary Azarian said.

Azarian peppered Belanger and his attorney, William Mason, with questions about the apartment, which has been vacant since it was built.

Mason said he didn't want to debate the issue.

"I don't want to get into an argument or discussion about who said what or where documents may or may not have been within the town," he said.

Azarian said he just wanted answers.

"Nothing in the facts I have, said an accessory apartment was being built," Azarian said. "I'm trying to find out why there was never a permit at Town Hall saying they were building an accessory apartment."

Belanger said town inspectors and former Chief Building Official Sam Zannini allowed the apartment to be built. Zannini, who retired in December, could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Mason said there was no way town inspectors could not have known an apartment was being built.

"I don't want to use the term 'brain dead,' but it is what it is," he said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

June 28, 2013

Salem company earns \$50K training grant

By John Toole

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — The state awarded a \$50,000 job training grant to Salem-based Methuen Construction.

The grant will be used to train 70 workers.

The company said it will use the money both for new workers — it is recruiting for up to eight positions in metal fabrication and iron work — as well as help existing employees get ahead.

“Some of the training will be for our inexperienced teammates,” human resources manager Denise Puleo said. “Some will be to elevate teammates we have. We call our employees teammates, because that’s really what they are.”

Training is important to Methuen Construction.

“When we hire people, our goal is for them to be successful,” she said. “When they are successful, we all are successful.”

The company assigns mentors to workers and operates a program called “Methuen Construction University” to help them expand their skills.

Training isn’t mandatory, but will benefit workers in their positions and can help them advance with the company, she said.

The new positions the company is trying to fill pay \$16 to \$18 an hour for inexperienced workers, but they can eventually make \$20 to \$25 an hour, she said.

Methuen Construction was among 10 throughout the state to receive grants totaling more than \$200,000.

“We need to continue working to develop a highly skilled workforce through job training and higher education in order to attract innovative businesses, help existing ones grow and create jobs that can support a strong middle class,” Gov. Maggie Hassan said in announcing the grants.

New Hampshire’s Job Training Fund has awarded \$6.1 million in grants since 2007. It requires a company match.

“Anything that helps people get jobs is good,” Salem planning director Ross Moldoff said. “Methuen Construction has been in town for many years and we are glad to see them expand their employment opportunities.”

Moldoff sees the grant as important.

“Higher paying industrial jobs like these, as opposed to retail or service jobs, typically require some training, so the state grant makes it all possible,” he said.

Founded in Methuen in 1960 by Leon and Elizabeth Asadoorian, the business relocated to Lowell Road in Salem in 2001.

It has grown from a company dealing with residential and small commercial projects to a business that has worked on major wastewater treatment plants in the region, water reclamation projects in Arizona and the Verizon Wireless Arena in Manchester.

The company employs about 130 people with construction, fabrication and services divisions.

Puleo said the company often turns to Manchester Community College when recruiting. She said as many as 90 percent of fabrication workers have come through the college.

“We just call them up,” she said.

The company has another reason to celebrate, besides the grant.

Puleo said the company recently completed more than five years and 1 million hours without lost time to worker injury.

“Our safety record is incredible,” she said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

June 28, 2013

Community gardens bring people together

Community gardens are about more than planting

By Alex Lippa

alippa@eagletribune.com

— Andy Yasment said one of his favorite parts of a community garden is in its name. It's the community aspect.

"I just love the camaraderie of it," he said. "It's the true meaning of the word community."

Yasment has had a plot at the Derry Community Garden at Broadview Farm for seven years. His plot is known around the garden as the "salsa garden."

"We are lovers of hot, spicy foods," he said. "We grow hot peppers, tomatoes, carrots and cucumbers which we put in our salsa."

In Derry there are more than 40 200-square-foot plots available on a first come, first serve basis.

In Salem, this year's set of plots were reserved quickly.

"We had 27 plots this year and they were all gone in less than three weeks," said Joan Blondin, who organizes the garden.

Last year, there were 24 plots available at the space off Town Farm Road.

Blondin likened the interaction between growers there as a family reunion.

"It's like one big happy family there," she said. "Everyone knows each other and always asks how each other's plants are."

Blondin said the purpose of the garden is for those who may not be able to grow in their own yards.

"Some people just don't have the space or sunlight to grow," she said.

That's the case at Yasment's home in Derry.

"I'm off of Walnut Hill Road," he said. "That's deep in the woods, so, for me, the community garden is a necessity for me."

Arthur Nobrega of Salem was able to secure a plot this year after several years on the waiting list.

“I like to grow vegetables,” he said. “I figure if I can go somewhere and get some tips it will help out my garden.”

Nobrega said he is growing tomatoes, squash, snap peas and other vegetables in his garden. He will bring some home for his own meals, but already has plans for the leftovers.

“I plan on donating the extras to a local food pantry,” Nobrega said.

Linda Moriarty has been planting in the Salem garden for three years and also has donated what she has grown to food pantries in the past.

“We like to grow as a group,” she said. “We grow everything from corn, spinach, beans and herbs to squash, pumpkins, tomatoes and peas.”

Seeing familiar faces is something that draws Moriarty back to the garden.

“We help each other out with our plants,” she said. “We’ll talk about the best way to keep our weeds down.”

Yasment said everyone is there for the purpose, to grow food and enjoy the company of others doing the same thing.

“It’s not about competition,” he said. “It’s about collaboration.”

open house, building tour and dedication ceremony Friday afternoon.
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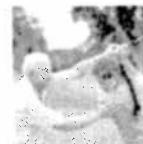
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EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

June 21, 2013

Affordable housing project completed in Salem

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — Almost a year to the day the first shovel of dirt was turned at the new Clough Farm apartment complex, state and local officials today will celebrate the project's completion.

An open house and ribbon-cutting ceremony are scheduled for 2 p.m. at the \$6 million, 32-unit complex on Braemoor Woods Road. It's the first project of its kind to be built under Salem's new workforce housing ordinance.

The goal was to provide more affordable housing in a community where residents often complain about rising property taxes and housing costs.

"I think the community is fortunate to be able to have this type of affordable housing," town Planning Director Ross Moldoff said. "It's a very high quality project."

Clough Farm is the first and only project to be built in conjunction with the town's 3-year-old workforce housing ordinance, Moldoff said. The ordinance allows for the construction of housing to serve low- and moderate-income residents who meet federal income guidelines.

Nineteen of the one- and two-bedroom government-subsidized apartments have been occupied since work was completed three weeks ago, according to builder Steven Lewis.

The rest will be occupied soon as tenants complete the application process, said Lewis, owner of Steven Lewis Inc. of Atkinson.

"There is such a need for this type of housing," Lewis said. "We have more applications than we have space."

Lewis, his partner Gino Baroni and Trident Building Group of Salem broke ground in June 2012.

The complex was built with the help of tax credits and financing through the New Hampshire Financing Authority. Rents are capped at below-market levels, which is beneficial to local residents struggling to make ends meet, Moldoff said.

"The economics are very difficult to bring prices down below market levels, especially in Salem where the land prices are very high," he said.

The complex was built at the 140-acre Braemoor Woods site off Veterans Memorial Parkway. It's next to Glenridge Apartments, an affordable housing complex for senior citizens also constructed by Lewis and Baroni.

Lewis, a builder for 44 years, said his family didn't have a lot of money when he was a child growing up in Atkinson so he wanted to give back to the community by providing more affordable housing.

The project also allowed him to use innovative construction techniques, including "green technology" and low-impact development methods, to minimize its effect on the environment, he said.

"Things I've always wanted to do, I was able to do here," he said. "I'm very, very proud of it."

The complex features rain gardens and bio-retention basins to save and replenish groundwater. There are also walking trails and a community garden, he said.

The town worked with Lewis over the last few years to ensure it would be the type of project that best served the community's needs, Moldoff said. It was approved by the Planning Board in fall 2011.

"The developer did a lot of things with the project that went above and beyond what is absolutely necessary," Moldoff said.

He said some residents were concerned about allowing an affordable housing project in town.

"I think the impression in the community was that it was going to be a low-quality project," Moldoff said. "I think the exact opposite is true — this is something the community can be proud of."

Moldoff will speak at today's ceremony along with state Sen. Chuck Morse, R-Salem, resident Jane Lang, New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority Executive Director Dean Christon and Home Builders and Remodelers Association of New Hampshire head Kendall Buck.

U.S. Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., has been invited to attend as well.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 29, 2013

Senior housing project proposed in Salem

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — A 48-home senior housing project has been proposed on the former Edward Searles property off Pond Street.

If approved by the Planning Board, it's hoped construction of the 25-acre project would begin by winter, according to project engineer Karl Dubay. The board was to take its first look at the project last night.

It's the first senior housing project to be proposed in Salem in years, town planning director Ross Moldoff said.

The project, for residents 55 and older, is proposed by developer Timothy Oriole of Pelham.

What's unusual about this proposal is that it would be built on part of what was once the sprawling Searles estate.

The property's turn-of-the-century caretaker's cottage, stone walls and bridges would remain intact and be incorporated into the project, Dubay said.

Searles, best known for the English-style stone castle in Windham that bears his name, owned several hundred acres in Salem, Windham and Methuen, Dubay said.

"It was an absolutely huge estate," Moldoff said.

The renowned interior decorator was born in Methuen in 1841 and inherited a fortune upon the death of his wife, Mary.

Searles, who also built Stillwater Manor in Salem, died in 1920.

Dubay, principal of The Dubay Group, said the old caretaker's cottage would be converted into a meeting room for residents and an office — without destroying its historical integrity.

"That will be saved and preserved," he said.

The stone walls and two stone bridges Searles built on the property would be renovated and extended in some cases, Dubay said.

"We will actually be replicating those," he said.

The property, which stretches to World End Pond, also includes numerous walking trails that will be enhanced as well. A large English-style garden would be added, Dubay said. Part of the project would abut Merrimack Valley Golf Club in Methuen.

Dubay said the project would meet a need in the community for high-quality senior housing. The homes proposed would be freestanding, he said. Salem currently has eight senior housing projects, Moldoff said.

“There will be walkways everywhere,” Dubay said. “The demand for these homes is very strong in the Salem and Methuen market.”

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 24, 2013

Future uncertain for The Rock

Death of casino bill disappoints many in Salem

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — What seemed like a good deal to town and Rockingham Park officials proves there's no such thing as a sure bet.

Disappointment was strong yesterday after the state House of Representatives voted, 199-164, Wednesday to kill legislation that could have brought a \$600-million-plus casino and entertainment complex to the former racetrack.

Legislative approval of expanded gambling in New Hampshire was expected to pump millions of dollars into the state and local economies.

Now, the question is whether Rockingham Park — a Salem institution for more than a century — can remain open without a casino.

Millennium Gaming of Las Vegas recently unveiled its latest plans for a 300-room hotel and entertainment venue at the park. Passage of Senate Bill 152 could have meant 5,000 video slot machines, 150 table games and up to 3,000 construction and gaming jobs at the park. The bill would have authorized a single casino and many saw Millennium and The Rock at the front of the pack.

Millennium spokesman Rich Killion insisted yesterday his company remains committed to Rockingham Park and the people of Salem. Millennium will not sever its six-year relationship with the park, he said.

Millennium has an option to purchase the 170-acre property, an option the company extended this winter. Millennium co-CEO Bill Wortman personally has a 20 percent ownership stake in the racetrack.

Yesterday, Rockingham Park president and general manager Edward Callahan said he's not sure what's in the cards for The Rock.

A casino was the only serious alternative among the many presented to him over the years, he said.

"I'm sure in the next month or two we will sit down and review all the options," he said. "We really haven't pushed anything else there."

Callahan said he isn't sure what those options are at this point.

"I just think away and beyond gaming — whether it's residential, industrial or commercial — anything could be an option," he said.

Opening casinos in Massachusetts will stymie any competitive edge New Hampshire could have gained by adopting expanded gambling, he said.

It's in the Legislature's hands, Callahan said. Lawmakers will be forced to raise and create new taxes to fund the state's needs, he said.

"The state just took a major step forward toward an income tax," Callahan said. "Property taxes will rise."

Callahan and Killion said even if expanded gambling is eventually approved, a slimmed-down plan — such as a slots parlor — would not be a viable option at The Rock.

"If all you are going to do is just put in a bunch of slot machines, I don't see that as being a great benefit to the town or the state," Callahan said. "Personally, I don't think that's what people would be looking for."

Killion agreed.

"That's not even a consideration," he said.

To compete with casinos in Massachusetts and Connecticut, New Hampshire has to provide something that's similar, if not better, Callahan and Killion said.

"Rockingham Park and Salem are still the best location in New England for a casino," Killion said. "We think that is the best fit and that remains."

Callahan said the charitable gaming that still takes place at the park will suffer as people flock to more luxurious facilities south of the border.

Last year, \$2 million in charitable gaming was generated at The Rock, he said.

"Down the road, it could be half that," he said.

Callahan said developers have presented him with numerous business proposals over the years.

Probably the most unique was a plan for an indoor ski area — 38 stories high — presented four years ago, Callahan said. That project is now being built in New Jersey, he said.

"In the end, I don't think they had the best interests of Salem in mind," Callahan said of all the developers. "I'm not sure anyone would like to see a 38-story anything here."

Salem's five selectmen said yesterday they were disappointed in the House's vote, especially since a casino seemed like the best alternative for Rockingham Park.

A casino would probably have the least impact on town services, compared to a major residential or business complex moving to the site, Selectman Stephen Campbell said. That's because the casino would have to provide its own security and would be billed for emergency services, he said.

Without a casino, Campbell said, he doesn't see The Rock remaining in its current state for long.

"That's just too valuable a property to just sit there," he said. "I always thought the casino was the best opportunity for Salem and the state."

Selectman James Keller agreed.

"It's certainly a blow and disappointing and perplexing," he said of the House vote. "I think certainly a casino was the most viable from an economic perspective."

Selectman Patrick Hargreaves is among those who believe lawmakers ignored the 81 percent of Salem voters who said they wanted a casino at the polls in March.

Of Salem's nine representatives, only five voted to ignore the House joint committee's recommendation that the bill was inexpedient to legislate. Had the full House rejected that recommendation, some 19 proposed amendments would have been heard, opening up the possibility of passage.

Those five lawmakers, all Republicans, were Reps. Gary Azarian, Ronald Belanger, Robert Elliott, Anne Priestley and Joseph Sweeney.

Three Salem Republicans agreed to accept the recommendation, effectively killing the casino bill they were Reps. Patrick Bick, Marlinda Garcia and John Sytek. Rep. Bianca Garcia did not vote.

"That's real discouraging when you have four people who didn't listen to the people who wanted a casino," Hargreaves said. "When are they going to wake up?"

Selectman Michael Lyons said Salem officials will continue to work with Callahan as he plots the future of Rockingham Park.

"We have worked with them with the zoning in the past and we will work with them in the future," Lyons said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 24, 2013

Dunkin' Donuts, businesses to replace potato chip company

Doughnuts will soon replace potato chips

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — For a century, the aroma of freshly baked potato chips emanated from the white clapboard building that once stood at 227 N. Broadway.

Granite State Potato Chips is gone, the building razed. It's being replaced by a 5,400-square-foot structure — and the smell of freshly baked doughnuts.

Dunkin' Donuts is expected to open around July 4 and three other businesses would lease space there, according to site supervisor Matt Breault of KDB Enterprise. The shop is one of several Dunkin' Donuts franchises owned by local businessman Anthony Quadros.

The project received site plan approval from the town Planning Board in March 2012, and was granted a variance by the Zoning Board of Adjustment a year earlier, town planning director Ross Moldoff said.

Work at the site began in January, Breault said. Yesterday, approximately 15 workers were busy getting the building ready, which included putting up siding, he said.

“We will work up to the last day,” Breault said.

Dunkin' Donuts will occupy 2,000 square feet on the first floor, with approximately 1,500 square feet of adjacent space available for retail, Breault said. There are two units on the second floor — each about 1,000 square feet — available as office space, he said.

But regardless of the businesses that move there, the North Broadway site will probably always be best known as the former location of Granite State Potato Chips.

It was an institution in Salem until closing in 2007 after 102 years, but the company's sign still stands on the property.

Granite State Potato Chips was so popular that many people stop by to check out the construction and reminisce, Breault said.

Breault, whose company is based in Dracut, said he wasn't familiar with the potato chip business until he began working there.

“No, but everyone else is,” he said.

The company, founded by William J. Croft and owned and operated by several generations of his family, earned a glowing reputation for its freshly baked chips. They were sold in white plastic buckets with the profile of the Old Man of the Mountain part of its widely recognized logo.

Selectman Patrick Hargreaves, who grew up down the street, recalled yesterday the smell of baking chips when he would open his front door or a window.

While playing at a nearby field, that smell was too much for a young boy to ignore, he said.

What was even better was when owner William "Buddy" Croft — a descendant of the founder — would give Hargreaves and his friends handfuls of chips.

"Granite State Potato Chips was awesome," said Hargreaves, now 51. "We used to go there all the time and get a bucketful of chips."

Inside was a well-known photo of President Dwight Eisenhower tearing open a bag of Granite State Chips during a visit to New Hampshire.

Moldoff, also a longtime Salem resident, said Granite State Potato Chips earned a legacy of its own in town.

He said one of the most unusual calls he received during his many years at Town Hall was from a woman who complained about the business.

Trees between Granite State Potato Chips and her property had just been cut down, he said.

"She said her clothes on her clothesline now smelled like potato chips," he said. "It was kind of neat to have (the company) in town. It was unique."

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 22, 2013

N.H. House says 'no dice' to casino

By John Toole

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— CONCORD — The House voted this afternoon to kill a New Hampshire casino proposal, 199-164.

By a wider margin, the House then ruled out possible reconsideration, 212-152.

It's unclear whether the issue is completely dead, because some observers, including former Senate president Arthur Klemm of Salem, have speculated the Senate could try to revive the casino debate procedurally on its end.

But the House vote would indicate that's an uphill battle at this point.

Sen. Chuck Morse, R-Salem, earlier today said the Senate would not try to put a casino amendment into the budget bill, insisting the casino decision rested with the House.

"It's up to them," Morse said.

The House debated the Senate-passed casino bill, Senate Bill 152, for more than two hours. It would have licensed one casino by bid with local approval.

By a roll call vote, the full House accepted a joint House committee recommendation that the bill was "inexpedient to legislate." That meant more than a dozen proposed amendments never received any consideration by the committee or the full House.

The House rejection is a major blow to Salem, where Las Vegas-based Millennium Gaming Inc. has an option to buy Rockingham Park and had a \$600 million-plus redevelopment plan it said could create 3,000 construction and gaming jobs.

At Town Meeting in March, 81 percent of Salem voters approved a non-binding referendum to allow a casino in that town.

Today's debate pitted economic interests versus concerns over regulation and quality of life.

Southern New Hampshire lawmakers who spoke on the issue focused on potential jobs and revenues for the state.

"We have no other source of revenue," Rep. Frank Sapareto, R-Derry, told the House.

Rep. Gary Azarian, R-Salem, said a casino would help finish Interstate 93 widening and create jobs.

"These are not low-paying jobs," Azarian said.

Rep. David Campbell, D-Nashua, said failure to open a casino would create a giant funnel for revenue dollars flowing from New Hampshire to Massachusetts.

"That's billions with a 'B,'" Campbell told the House.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 22, 2013

Victorian Park to close after 22 years

Victorian park to close after season

By Doug Ireland direland@eagletribune.com,

The Eagle-Tribune

— SALEM — Labor Day will mark the end of an era at Victorian Park.

Owner Larry Belair said yesterday he and his wife, Verna, are retiring and selling the 22-year-old miniature golf course and family entertainment center. The park will become the new home of Bien Soigne spa of Windham.

A building that was once an arcade will feature a Himalayan salt cave. The greens and ice cream parlor will disappear, and the grounds will feature a meditation garden and place for yoga.

But for the couple, both 73, it's bittersweet, Larry Belair said.

"For us, it will be a sad day when the closing of the park finally comes," he said. "We loved our years in this business."

Belair said he's been trying to sell the property for at least eight years, but it was difficult because of the slumping economy. Miniature golf is also seeing a decline in popularity, he said.

More young people are interested in Facebook and texting their friends than playing a round of mini golf, Belair said.

"The kids don't put the iPhones down long enough to pick up a putter," he said.

For more than two decades, Belair said he and his wife have looked forward to the park's opening each April after spending four months in Florida.

But next April will be different.

"We may not be rushing up I-95 to get here by April 1 anymore," he said. "We've already booked a river cruise in April to see the Tulip Festival in Holland."

Belair, a builder for 35 years, said he opened the park in 1992 after seeing how popular miniature golf had become in Florida. He and his wife visited 100 courses before coming up with their own design.

The Haunted Mansion, one of the park's most popular features each fall, closed five years ago after a similar attraction opened at Canobie Lake Park, he said.

Belair said more than 175 young people worked at the park over the years, including all 10 of his grandchildren. The Belairs attended many of their employees' weddings.

"The great relationships that we built with the young people who worked for us was the best part of our years at Victorian Park," he said.

A reunion of past employees and their families is planned at the park June 29, he said.

More than 50 former employees from across the country plan to attend with their families, Belair said.

"Some of those kids are approximately 40 years old now," he said.

The end of an era for Victorian Park marks the beginning of a new era for Bien Soigne, which owner Kay Sharron plans to open on the four-acre North Broadway site in October.

"It's been an institution in this area for years," Sharron said of the park. "I'm a big miniature golf fan, so I will be sad to see it go, but at least we will be benefiting."

Sharron said she's been looking for additional space, including more parking, for years while remaining close to her customer base. Her current location is a mile and a half away, she said.

A unique feature at her spa will be a Himalayan salt cave — a room lined with ancient, imported blocks of salt. Spending time in a salt cave is therapeutic, especially for those suffering from respiratory illnesses, Sharron said.

The Planning Board granted approval for the 6,000-square-foot location in March, town planner Ross Moldoff said. He said Victorian Park has been a good neighbor in town for years, recalling when he used to bring his own children to the park.

"It's really been an institution in the community," Moldoff said. "It's a great family entertainment facility. We were lucky to have it in the community."

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 15, 2013

Salem lawmaker accused of having illegal apartment

By *Doug Ireland*

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — Town officials say it's an illegal apartment, but Rep. Ronald Belanger, R-Salem, claims the town knew about it all along.

Belanger went before selectmen Monday night to request they reimburse him for \$5,000 in fees he doesn't believe he should have paid, leading to a heated exchange.

Belanger, a longtime state representative and former selectman and Planning Board member, had an apartment built within his North Main Street home a decade ago, but it was never rented out.

When he recently went to Town Hall to get an occupancy permit for the apartment, he was presented with an empty file. Belanger was told he had been granted approval for construction of a garage, but not an apartment above it.

"Nothing we have on file ever indicates there was ever proposed to be an apartment on that side of the floor," Town Manager Keith Hickey told selectmen.

Selectmen's Chairman Everett McBride Jr. said he reviewed a decade-old video of a zoning board meeting when a variance was granted for Belanger's garage.

"There was no discussion of an apartment," McBride said.

Belanger and his attorney, William Mason, insisted the town knew about the apartment.

"We weren't trying to do something to mislead the town," Mason said.

Selectmen questioned why Belanger was appearing before the board for a waiver of traffic impact and betterment fees, something the Zoning Board of Adjustment would usually grant.

"It's clear we don't have authority here," Selectman Michael Lyons said.

Belanger and Mason said Community Development director William Scott told them it was a selectmen's issue. They said because the town didn't start charging the fees until 2005, Belanger shouldn't have to pay them for an apartment completed in 2003.

"(Scott) was kind of arrogant to me and told me I have to go before the Board of Selectmen," Belanger told the board.

Hickey said Scott never would have told him that.

Scott, who had just addressed selectmen, became angry.

“None of that is true,” he said. “You cannot insult me and my staff like that.”

Belanger insisted the town lost or removed the file’s contents.

“There was plenty of stuff in there before,” Belanger said.

Hickey also became agitated.

“I don’t want to sit here and debate this,” Hickey said. “We have already taken about 20 minutes more than we should have taken.”

Mason said he would present Belanger’s request to the zoning board.

“We will be happy to provide Mr. Belanger his file,” Hickey said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 9, 2013

Full house hears new plans for The Rock

Casino plan impresses crowd, but House tally close

By John Toole

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— — SALEM — Area residents last night praised the redesigned \$600-million-plus Rockingham Park casino plan.

But it's lawmakers who need convincing, even some of Salem's nine representatives.

A forum at the track drew a standing-room crowd of about 200 and there was strong support for the plan.

But one local lawmaker said four of his colleagues who oppose the plan could be key to the plan's advancement or demise.

The 48-minute event at times seemed more of a pep rally for House passage of Senate Bill 152, which would license one casino in New Hampshire for \$80 million by bid with local approval.

Rep. Robert Elliott, R-Salem, told residents a joint House committee studying the bill is split, with 20 lawmakers in favor, 20 opposed and five undecided. Their recommendation is due next week.

Elliott said the full House vote also is close — as tight as eight votes — and Salem's divided delegation could make the difference.

There are four no votes in the Salem delegation, according to Elliott. He identified them as Reps. Patrick Bick, John Sytek, Marilinda Garcia and Bianca Garcia, all Republicans.

"Turn them yes and that could make it a winner," Elliott said.

In an interview later, Elliott said he has no doubt the four lawmakers could be decisive players in the casino debate in Concord.

"This would be a historic moment for the representatives of Salem if this bill passed," he said.

Las Vegas-based Millennium Gaming Inc., which owns an option to buy the track and intends to bid for a casino license, held the forum to showcase new redevelopment plans.

Besides a casino geared to the bill that would allow 150 table games and 5,000 slot machines, the project includes a 300-room hotel, entertainment venue of up to 1,500 seats, a spa and convention space.

Architect David Climans said the project would feature classic New England architecture.

“So it will be timeless, so it will fit in with the community,” Climans said.

The complex would be reconfigured on the 170-acre site near Exit 1 of Interstate 93.

The new racetrack — Millennium has yet to determine whether racing would be thoroughbred or harness — would parallel Route 28.

The main entrance would be off Rockingham Park Boulevard.

Millennium co-CEO Bill Wortman said the company intends to hold festivals, perhaps blues or barbecue events, in an outdoor area near the track.

Parking lots and decks would accommodate 8,000 vehicles and 4 to 5 million visits per year.

“This will be a destination resort,” Wortman said.

A pond and fountain would greet casino visitors.

“A grand approach to this sophisticated and elegant building,” Climans said.

Larry Belair of the NH Casino Now group asked Wortman what would happen to charity gaming while the new complex is developed.

Wortman said developers may leave part of the existing facility in place during construction to accommodate charity gamers, but he didn’t rule out temporary relocation off site.

Sponsors say the casino development will bring \$100 million annually in revenues to the state for highways, colleges and economic development. Wortman said racing would bring the state additional revenue.

Millennium has estimated more than 3,000 construction and gaming jobs would be created, plus more as neighboring businesses benefit from the resort.

Sen. Jim Rausch, R-Derry, one of the casino bill sponsors, said the House vote should not be in doubt, given what the project would mean for the state.

“We should be 100 votes ahead,” Rausch said after the forum. “We need to move our economy forward.”

Wortman paused to thank Salem voters for their passage, by a 4-1 margin, of a nonbinding referendum at Town Meeting in support of a casino.

“That was a very good message to send,” Wortman said.

Rockingham Park president Ed Callahan said he hoped 201 members of the 400-member House will find the redevelopment plans as spectacular as he does.

Residents who viewed the plans were pleased.

“Finally, Rockingham Park will be used once again to its full potential,” Marion Leriche of Salem said. “This is wonderful, as far as I can see.”

Nick Russo’s family, from Everett, which is competing for a Massachusetts casino, also has a home on Islington Pond in Salem.

“I think this is a great idea,” he said. “My family and I are 100 percent behind it.”

“Awesome,” is how Chanel Simard, who is active with local Salem charities, described the project. “I wish they had these architectural drawings a year ago and were passing them around up north in Concord.”

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 8, 2013

Salem plaza receiving makeover, new tenants

By *Doug Ireland*

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — An old landmark is getting a new look.

Workers are completing a major redevelopment of Plaza on Broadway, a 38,000-square-foot shopping center that's been a mainstay in the community for 51 years.

Yesterday, the two-story building's facade received a new coat of stucco as an excavator tore up ground out front. Part of the inside was being renovated as well.

The plaza at 356-366 S. Broadway is perhaps best known as the former home of Seaworld Pet Center before it closed several years ago.

Soon, it will be the new home of Harbor Freight Tools, a chain store with at least 400 locations across the country. It's only other New Hampshire store is in Amherst.

A half-dozen businesses have occupied the plaza at any one time over the years. Only two remain — Bull Moose Music and Gently Loved Baby. Other recent tenants include Partyrama and Sunless Tanning Parlor.

The property is leased by PGSI Properties of Salem, owned by Paul Garabedian and his family. Garabedian also owns Paul Garabedian and Sons Construction.

Renovations began about a month and a half ago, according to Christine Garabedian of PGSI.

There is no definitive date for when the project will be completed and when Harbor Freight would move in, she said.

“The project is moving forward and we’re looking forward to having Harbor Freight in there,” she said.

A huge Harbor Freight banner is stretched across a chain-link fence in the plaza. No one from the company could be reached for comment yesterday.

Harbor Freight will occupy about 16,000 square feet, Christine Garabedian said. Three smaller spaces are available, including two that are approximately 6,000 square feet.

“We’re been talking to other tenants, but nothing is final yet,” she said.

Town planning director Ross Moldoff said redevelopment of the plaza is an economic boon for Salem — a popular spot for shoppers for decades.

Moldoff recalled taking his children, who are now grown, to Seaworld Pet Center and also Pet World.

He said Harbor Freight will be a welcomed addition.

“We’re excited to have them in Salem,” Moldoff said. “That has been vacant for a while.”

Moldoff said he was pleased PGSI chose to renovate, rather than demolish and starting over.

“The Planning Board and I enjoy working with applicants who are upgrading existing buildings,” he said.

The project received site plan approval from the board in November, Moldoff said.

Bull Moose store manager Kris Wood said the construction has had little or no impact on the business. Bull Moose has its own large banner, saying it’s open.

“We’re making do,” he said. “We’ve got loyal customers. They will find a way to get here, no matter where the construction is.”

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 5, 2013

Millennium ups the ante with hotel, entertainment

Millennium adds hotel, entertainment venue to casino plan

By John Toole

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — Las Vegas-based Millennium Gaming Inc. this week will unveil an expanded Rockingham Park redevelopment plan, including a 300-room hotel and an entertainment venue seating up to 1,500 people.

Millennium co-CEO Bill Wortman, who is traveling to New Hampshire for the presentation, hesitated to put a price tag on the revised plans, but said it would exceed the \$450 million the company discussed previously and more closely resemble those estimated for proposed casinos in Massachusetts.

“It will be quite a bit in excess of \$600 million,” Wortman said.

He also believes the new plan will mean more jobs, both for construction and operation of the gaming complex, which would include a casino and a return of live horse racing.

Horses first started running at The Rock in 1906. A grandstand fire in 1980 halted racing for four years. Racing stopped in 2009. Simulcast racing continues and would under Millennium’s proposal.

Millennium previously projected 2,000 construction jobs and 1,300 permanent jobs.

“I think the number of employees will go up,” Wortman said.

He is expected to present the plans Wednesday night at Rockingham Park.

The revised plans recognize both the suggestions of New Hampshire residents who want to see The Rock redeveloped as a casino and the changing marketplace, with Massachusetts moving forward with casinos, he said.

“We will release a new look to Rockingham Park, a larger destination resort,” Wortman said.

The old \$450 million plan was designed around a slot machine venue — before Massachusetts decided to authorize casinos, he said.

“We needed to develop New Hampshire’s version of a very competitive product,” he said.

Wortman repeatedly stressed the new design would make the casino a regional destination casino.

“We think Rockingham Park and Salem, N.H., is the best gaming location in New England,” he said.

Price tags on the proposed casinos in Massachusetts have ranged from \$700 million to \$1.2 billion, but Wortman said some of those reflect higher construction costs, infrastructure needs or environmental issues that Rockingham Park won’t face.

Hotel, entertainment would add to experience

The new plans will keep familiar elements.

“We’ll still have the racetrack, still have the clubhouse, the stands and everything,” he said. “That’s part of the uniqueness of Rockingham Park.”

The hotel, which would include a spa, would be six floors and have 600 rooms, but could be expanded. Wortman said the idea behind the hotel is to make the facility more of a destination for the estimated 4 million to 5 million people Millennium expects to attract every year.

A proposed entertainment venue would be limited to between 1,000 and 1,500 seats, he said.

It is a tenth the size of the Verizon Wireless Arena in Manchester.

“We won’t compete with the Verizon center in Manchester,” he said.

That would put it in the middle of New Hampshire venues, much smaller than the arena, but as much as twice as large as local theaters.

“That’s the kind of thing we’ve done elsewhere,” Wortman said. “We think that works well with what we do.”

Responding to competition concerns raised by some small theaters in the state, Wortman said the venue is intended for the entertainment of people who come to visit the casino.

“Those are the people who are going to want to see our shows,” he said.

The intent of the entertainment venue is to complement the other amenities for casino customers, Millennium spokesman Rich Killion said.

He said the size of the facility means it wouldn’t compete with larger venues like the Verizon Arena or TD Garden, nor would it compete with smaller community venues.

“Basically, it’s to provide amenities to people who come. As they come back over time, entertainment is something people always want,” Killion said. “We also heard about it in February at the Town Hall meeting.”

He said the venue’s small size “shouldn’t be seen as a threat to anyone.”

There also would be restaurants at the complex, Wortman said, but plans aren’t complete and continue to evolve.

Wortman said he is not concerned by the development of casinos in Massachusetts.

“From our perspective, the project we build will be absolutely competitive,” he said.

The revised plans come as the New Hampshire House considers Senate Bill 152, which would allow the state to license a single casino by bid with local community approval.

Local support strong

At a two-hour forum in early February, Wortman heard from local residents and business owners.

Then, Salem residents, by a 4-1 margin, approved a nonbinding referendum supporting a casino at Town Meeting in March.

“Eighty-one percent is a big statement,” Killion said of the vote in March. “The entire town level of executive government is behind it and the chief of police. Factor all those things in, and we think Salem is the best location. We have a community that understands what it takes to have a facility like this.”

The Senate passed the bill, which has Gov. Maggie Hassan’s support, 16-8.

The bill calls for an \$80 million licensing fee and would require at least a \$425 million investment by the developer.

The casino could have up to 150 table games and 5,000 slot machines.

Proponents have said a New Hampshire casino could bring in \$100 million in revenue each year for the state to pay for highways, colleges and economic development.

Wortman said when the casino opens would depend on actions of the Legislature. But, he said, under the parameters of the Senate-passed bill, Millennium could have it up and operating by 2015.

The company is ready to pursue licensing if the state authorizes the casino, he said.

“We’re going to be ready,” he said.

A license could be issued as early as late summer of 2014. Local approval would still be required, but that would not appear to be an obstacle in Salem.

Many Bay State customers anticipated

Wortman said he’s heard nothing in the discussion at the Statehouse that concerns him at this point.

“I think what’s going on now is the House is vetting this particular issue,” he said. “They are asking the questions that need to be asked.”

Wortman’s position is the state should be comfortable about looking to a casino as a source for revenue because The Rock is ready for it and future competition will be limited in neighboring states.

Millennium has an option to purchase Rockingham Park, an option the company extended this winter. Wortman said he personally has a 20 percent ownership stake in the racetrack. The site includes 170 acres, presumably enough for future expansion.

Despite the approval of three casinos and one slots parlor in Massachusetts, Millennium officials still anticipate some two-thirds of its customers in Salem would come from the Bay State, Killion said.

“You have so many people living within a concentric circle of one to two hours from Salem, N.H.,” Killion said. “It happens to be the front door for New Hampshire is Exit 1 off Interstate 93.”

He also said potential casino sites in Everett, Mass., and at Suffolk Downs would require significant infrastructure improvements and traffic mitigation. That’s not the case in Salem, he said.

“It sits at the doorstep of Massachusetts,” Killion said, “and the infrastructure is in place.”

When Wortman talked about a proposed casino in 2007, he said Millennium could have a temporary gaming facility up and operating within six months. That’s no longer part of the plan.

“A temporary facility is not part of the plan essentially because the competitive environment has changed,” Killion said. “In competing with Massachusetts, our assessment is, getting a permanent facility up and going is in the best interest of the state and community, in getting the revenue it is anticipating and in competing with Massachusetts head on.”

If SB 152 passes, Millennium would be in competition with other casino developers for the state’s sole license. Killion said he doesn’t know how many potential bidders there would be, but has heard as many as five, perhaps more.

“We will compete and compete hard,” he said. “We’re very optimisitic this is the right community and that Rockingham Park’s the right facility.”

Staff writer Jo-Anne MacKenzie contributed to this report.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 3, 2013

Salem official takes big pay cut, heads to Amesbury

CD director leaves Salem after 12 years

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — Community development director William Scott is leaving to work closer to home, but he's also taking a pay cut of more than \$20,000 a year.

After 12 years with Salem, Scott said his new job with the town of Amesbury will mean a much shorter commute from his Newburyport home.

But Scott didn't offer an explanation for why he accepted a deputy community development director position that pays \$22,620 less than the \$92,705 he earns in Salem.

Salem officials praised Scott for his service and said he was leaving on good terms. They said they could not comment on his behalf.

Selectmen and Town Manager Keith Hickey will discuss plans to replace Scott at the board's meeting Monday night. Hickey said they could consider changes to the job description, but it would remain a full-time position.

"Bill had a pretty unique skill set, so it's going to be a challenge to find someone to fill his shoes," Hickey said. "We'll try to come up with a game plan on how to move forward."

It's hoped a replacement can be found by July, he said.

Hickey said Scott told him last week that he accepted the Amesbury job, but would remain with the town until June 24.

He begins working part time in Amesbury on May 23 and will work there every Thursday until he starts on a full-time basis June 25.

Scott will start with an annual salary of \$70,085 in Amesbury, but that increases to \$72,537 after six months, according to Amesbury chief of staff Eric Gregoire.

Scott did not return messages Wednesday or yesterday, but he did release a lengthy statement detailing his 12 years of accomplishments in Salem.

"The Amesbury position provides an opportunity to continue to focus on economic and community projects," he said in his statement.

Scott started in Salem in May 2001, overseeing the senior center project. Before that, Scott worked in similar positions for Newburyport and North Andover.

He described his efforts to secure state and federal grants for numerous projects — a skill that Hickey and Selectmen's Chairman Everett McBride Jr. said have helped revitalize Salem.

These projects helped lure many new businesses to town, Hickey said.

"He's gotten millions and millions in grants for this town," McBride said.

Both officials said Scott will be missed.

"He's just a real team player, a great guy and a really bright guy," Hickey said.

"He is a great asset to the town," McBride said.

McBride said selectmen and Hickey will carefully review the community development director's position before considering how it should be filled.

"We will have to decide where we go from here," McBride said.

Staff writer Mac Cetullo contributed to this report.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

May 1, 2013

Amesbury hires Scott as deputy director

By Mac Cerullo
Staff Writer

— — — AMESBURY — The Community Economic Development department is getting some badly needed reinforcement as Mayor Thatcher Kezer announced the hiring of Bill Scott as the city's new Deputy Director of Community Economic Development.

Scott, a resident of Newburyport, is the current Community Development Director for Salem, N.H., where he has worked since 2001. He has also worked in North Andover and Newburyport and has over 25 years of professional economic development experience to his name.

Kezer touted Scott's hiring as a coup for Amesbury and added that he expects Scott will ultimately succeed Joe Fahey as Community Economic Development Director. He said finding someone with top-notch economic development credentials was among his top priorities, and the fact that Scott is familiar with the area was an added bonus.

"We were looking for someone with a lot of economic development skills, rather than just planning skills," Kezer said. "We had a lot of people with planning backgrounds apply, but we were looking for a guy that got big projects done."

While in Salem, Scott oversaw the economic development of a community that has a population of nearly 30,000 and over 6 million square feet of commercial property. He also utilized grant funds to retrofit three fire stations with LED lighting, instituted a computerized traffic system and managed the creation of a fiber network for municipal buildings to eliminate T1 networking costs.

In North Andover, where he worked in multiple capacities from 1996 to 2001, he established a Master Plan, Tax Increment Financing plans and served as the project manager for the community's new youth center and senior center, which were funded through donations and grant funds.

Scott was also instrumental in many major development efforts in Newburyport between 1989 and 1996, including the creation of the Firehouse Civic Center, the reestablishment of the CDBG grant programs and improvements for the Cashman Park ramp and Fish Pier. He also obtained \$1.8 million in funds for the Newburyport Police Station.

"A key part of getting projects done is communicating the information about the projects in a way that people can understand it and support it," Kezer said. "He was top notch on that."

Scott will begin on a part-time basis on Thursday, May 23 and will work in the office every Thursday after that until Tuesday, June 25, when he will officially start full-time. Scott will initially earn a starting salary

of \$70,085, but that will bump up to \$72,537 after six months of employment, according to chief of staff Eric Gregoire.

By taking the Deputy Director position, Scott is also taking a substantial pay cut. According to public municipal finance records, Scott earned \$96,971.27 in gross wages last year while in Salem, N.H.

Kezer said Scott was likely willing to take the pay cut in the short run because of the opportunity to move back up to his original position in the near future.

“It’s an opportunity,” Kezer said. “Part of the presumption is that when Joe decides to retire, he’ll move up and get back to what he was.”

Fahey has served as Amesbury’s economic development director since 1979, and city officials expect he will likely stay on for at least two more years to see the Lower Millyard redevelopment project through to its completion.

The hiring of Scott will allow Fahey’s department the ability to focus more resources on other projects that the city wants to move forward, including the development of the Golden Triangle between I-95 and I-495.

“Starting off, Joe’s pretty much working the Lower Millyard, so we’ll try to keep [Scott] focused on the other projects we need to keep moving along,” Kezer said. “So as he gets spun up on these issues, he’ll obviously be a support for Joe on the Lower Millyard stuff too.”

The Community Economic Development department experienced layoffs in 2009 following the economic downturn and has been operating with just five employees. As the economy begins to improve and more projects start to go forward, getting more help in the office for Fahey became a priority for both Kezer and the City Council, who budgeted for the position in this past year’s municipal budget.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

March 6, 2013

Sal's proposes redevelopment in Salem

Redevelopment would include three new buildings

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — Big changes are planned at Sal's Pizza on North Broadway.

Representatives from Sal's are scheduled to appear before the Planning Board on March 14 to present plans for redevelopment of the restaurant property at 29-39 North Broadway, according to town planning director Ross Moldoff.

Sal's wants to demolish its building and an adjacent structure on the 1.1-acre site to construct three new buildings, according to the proposal by principal and senior project manager Kevin Dandrade and engineer Richard Friberg Jr. of TEC Engineering of Lawrence.

The two Sal's representatives notified the town last week they would seek approval for a pizza restaurant and pub, a second restaurant, and room for offices and retail — providing space for several businesses, Moldoff said.

“It's a big redevelopment,” Moldoff said yesterday. “I'm very excited about it. I think they will be very attractive buildings.”

Brothers Sal and Mike Lupoli opened Sal's first store in Salem in 1990. The North Broadway location opened in the late 1990s, Moldoff said.

Sal's, headquartered in Lawrence and owned by Lupoli Companies, now has more than three dozen restaurants in several states.

The second building to be demolished was occupied by Portland Glass for years and is now home to an antique business, Moldoff said.

The new pizza restaurant would be located in a 3,520-square-foot, single-story building. The second restaurant, which would likely cater to the breakfast crowd, would be in a two-story building next door, according to the proposal.

There would be 2,000 square feet for the restaurant on the first floor and 2,000 square feet of office space on the second floor.

The third building would feature 2,000 square feet of retail space on the first floor and 2,000 square feet of office space on the second floor.

One key aspect of the project is that all the parking would be behind the buildings, allowing for the front to be attractively landscaped — something retailers and community planners relish, Moldoff said.

“That’s a planner’s dream,” he said.

Even though an additional building would be constructed, the overall square footage would be reduced from 13,399 to 11,520.

The entrance to the plaza would be relocated and the site designed to accommodate the future widening of North Broadway. Pavement would removed and a landscaped buffer strip would be built along North Broadway. The site would connect to the rail trail.

The project represents a continuation of the positive redevelopment already taking place in the area, Moldoff said. Sal’s is down the street from Tuscan Kitchen and Tuscan Market, Moldoff said.

“That will be a big help in getting the Depot area going,” Moldoff said.

Dandrade and Friberg could not be reached for comment yesterday.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

March 5, 2013

Salem restaurant to move after 42 years

Green Barn to move, may reopen this fall

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — After 42 years, The Green Barn restaurant will close its doors March 24 and move to another part of town.

That means the large, former dairy barn at 5 Hampstead Road will be razed to make way for a 22,000-square-foot shopping plaza, owner Carl Bohne said. An adjacent home will be torn down as well, he said

“We plan on reopening in the fall,” Bohne said yesterday. “We have two possible sites in Salem, but we are not sure which one.”

The shopping plaza received unanimous approval from the Planning Board last week, town planning director Ross Moldoff said. The Zoning Board of Adjustment has granted several variances for the project,

“We have our permits,” Bohne said. “Everything was approved.”

The project will include a 13,000-square-foot CVS pharmacy, a bank, restaurant and two other businesses proposed by developer Thur Ken. Bohne said he and Thur Ken will lease the property.

The project would create at least 50 full-time and 50 part-time jobs, according to Bohne, and include major safety improvements at the intersection of Hampstead Road and Main Street.

Construction is expected to begin in April, Bohne said. He said it was premature to identify the two potential sites for the restaurant.

Bohne, who runs the restaurant with his wife, Margaret, said they have received numerous calls from customers ever since plans for the shopping plaza were announced last summer. He has insisted the restaurant — one of the oldest in town — would remain open and said he hoped it would stay in Salem.

“We are continuing to tell them we will be back as soon as possible,” he said.

Bohne’s parents, Bill and Francis Bohne, bought the former Shermer Farm property in 1969 and started a delicatessen, specializing in sausage and smoked meats. The restaurant, known for its German cuisine, opened in July 1970 and the Steinkeller Lounge nine months later.

No public celebration is planned after the final meal in the 19th-century building is served in three weeks, Bohne said.

The restaurant's employees — eight part time, two full time — received layoff notices last week, he said. Bohne said he would like to keep the staff, but it's not feasible since the restaurant will be closed for several months.

"Hopefully, we can get most of them back," he said. "It is a difficult situation, but we'll be helping them in any way we can."

Bohne said the restaurant has had many local customers over the years. He urges them to return for a final meal at the current location.

The former barn was built in 1880 and rebuilt after being struck by lightning and burning in the 1940s, Bohne said previously.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

February 21, 2013

Salem board to consider big projects

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — Tough economic times have taken a toll on Southern New Hampshire communities in recent years, leading to many empty storefronts.

But Salem is making a comeback, attracting new businesses and spurring economic development. So, when the town's Planning Board meets Tuesday at 7 p.m., it will have a full slate of projects to consider — a sign of a revitalized business community.

Town Planning Director Ross Moldoff said board will consider proposals for a 22,000-square-foot retail plaza, a four-story office building and the newest project — a kidney dialysis center.

The dialysis center is proposed by Fresenius Medical Care North America, which is working with the property owner, Brooks Properties, to bring the facility to 19 Keewaydin Drive, Moldoff said yesterday.

"I think it would be a welcome addition," he said. "I believe it will be the first dialysis treatment center in Salem."

Fresenius is no stranger to the medical field. The Waltham, Mass.-based company has 2,100 dialysis facilities in North America, with 11 in New Hampshire, according to Fresenius spokesman Jon Stone. They include a center in Londonderry.

"We are interested in opening the clinic in Salem to address a need for these services in Southern New Hampshire," Stone said.

Fresenius needs Planning Board approval because a treatment center would be considered a change in permitted use for the property, located in a commercial-industrial district, Moldoff said.

If approved, the facility would occupy 6,700 square feet in an industrial building that is already home to The Learning Path child care center and InterCoast Career Institute, he said.

Fresenius hopes to open in Salem by late summer, employing eight people, Stone said.

The location is only a short distance from where Osomor LLC and Crosby Advisors LLC propose a 75,000-square-foot office building at 28 Keewaydin Drive.

A public hearing on the office building project will be held Tuesday night. The Zoning Board of Adjustment recently granted a variance to allow for a four-story, 61-foot-tall building that would

accommodate 220 employees, bringing jobs to the area. The variance was needed because regulations prohibited buildings more than 45 feet tall and three stories high in that district, Moldoff said.

Crosby, which moved to 11 Keewaydin Drive from Boston two years ago, manages holdings of Fidelity Investments owner Edward "Ned" Johnson III and his family.

The third project to be considered Tuesday is the retail plaza proposed by developer Thur Ken at the site of The Green Barn restaurant.

Thur Ken received a variance from the Zoning Board of Adjustment on Jan. 3 and seeks site plan and subdivision approval from the Planning Board.

If approved, the shopping center would be built at the corner of Hampstead Road and Main Street. It would include a 13,000-square-foot CVS pharmacy, a bank, restaurant and a several other businesses.

But that means the former dairy barn that's been home to The Green Barn restaurant for 42 years would likely be demolished and the business moved to another location in the area, according to owner Carl Bohne.

The three projects to be considered Tuesday are among several economic development initiatives that have helped spur growth in Salem the past few years. The biggest was the arrival of computer networking giant Enterasys in January, bringing more than 600 jobs to the former Cisco Systems building at 9 Northeastern Blvd. Enterasys relocated from Andover, Mass.

Last year, several other businesses also moved to Salem. They included Liberty Utilities, Aldi supermarket, Lord & Taylor, and restaurants such as Popeyes, Jake's Wayback Burgers and Jay Gee's.

Other businesses expanded, including Rockingham Toyota and Honda and Tuscan Kitchen restaurant. Tuscan Kitchen owner Joseph Faro also opened Tuscan Market last fall.

Donna Morris, executive director of the Greater Salem Chamber of Commerce, said yesterday that the town is clearly experiencing a resurgence in economic development.

"Salem is a great place to do business," she said. "I think it's a real positive sign."

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

February 12, 2013

Roller derby facility proposed in Salem

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — Make way for some new guests in town — guests with names like “Pixie Bruiser” and “Cruellette.”

Anyone who stands in their way, better be prepared to pay the price. Yes, real roller derby action may be coming to Salem.

Representatives of New Hampshire Roller Derby will go before the Planning Board tonight for permission to establish a 12,000-square-foot practice facility in a vacant industrial building at 11 Garabedian Drive, according to town planning director Ross Moldoff.

“This goes on the list of the things we never thought we would see,” Moldoff said.

If the Planning Board grants site plan approval, warriors on wheels will soon be skating around the spacious facility.

But fans will have to go to JFK Coliseum in Manchester to see their competitions, or “bouts.” The facility will only be for practices and scrimmages.

“We hope to move in as soon as possible,” said Melissa Martin, the five-team league’s training coordinator.

She skates for two of the teams.

Martin, who also goes by the nickname “Cruellette Lewis,” said the 60-member league is based in Nashua, and trains at both the JFK Coliseum and Roller Kingdom in Tyngsboro.

But the league needs a more convenient location it can use on a regular basis, she said.

While many members live in the Manchester area, many also live in the Boston area, Martin said. One lives in Whitman, Mass., a half-hour south of Boston, she said.

“We don’t have our own practice facility,” Martin said. “With the growth of our league, we are finding we need a place we can use seven days a week.”

It’s difficult to find a suitable location for roller derby, she said. Hockey rinks are ideal — if there isn’t any ice. But that doesn’t happen very often since they are usually used year-round, Martin said.

Cost is also an issue for the 5-year-old nonprofit organization, she said. The rental agreement would still need to be finalized if the town grants approval, she said.

“We would like to stay there as long as we can,” Martin said. “It’s a real nice central location.”

Jena Cotreau of Haverhill, aka “Pixie Bruiser,” is excited about possibly training in Salem. It’s only about 10 minutes from her home, she said, compared to traveling 45 minutes to Tyngsboro and getting stuck in traffic near Manchester.

“That would be great,” she said. “I put a lot of miles on my car and the gas is killing me.”

Cotreau said the Salem facility would be ideal, even big enough for all five teams to practice at once.

“Finding a roller derby track is almost impossible,” she said. “Sometimes, we even have to use a basketball court. … We just need space so badly.”

Cotreau, 37, is a six-year roller derby veteran and member of the Queen City Cherry Bombs.

By day, she’s a graphic designer. But when the work day is over, she’s a roller derby queen ready for the next hit.

“My body is always in pain, but I love it,” she said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

February 11, 2013

Salem ZBA grants variance for office building

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — The Zoning Board of Adjustment has granted a variance to allow for construction of a four-story office building on Keewaydin Drive that would accommodate 220 workers.

The board voted unanimously to give approval to Osomor LLC and Crosby Advisors LLC, which proposes the 75,000-square-foot office building at 28 Keewaydin Drive, according to town planning director Ross Moldoff.

A variance was required because regulations for the commercial and industrial district prohibit buildings more than 45 feet tall and three stories high, Moldoff said. The proposal calls for a 61-foot structure.

Crosby, which moved to 11 Keewaydin Drive from Boston two years ago, manages holdings of Fidelity Investments owner Edward “Ned” Johnson III and his family.

The company has told the town approximately 200 employees would work at the new building, but did not say at the hearing how many of those would be new positions.

Zoning board Chairman Gary Azarian praised the proposal, saying it would increase the town’s tax base and bring jobs to the community.

“It’s a very, very nicely designed building,” he said.

Moldoff has also said it would be a “first-class office building.”

The fourth story was required for the construction of a two-level parking garage, Azarian said.

Otherwise, the developer would have to pave a 140,000-square-foot area to provide parking, he said. That area will be landscaped instead, he said.

The project still requires additional approval from the town.

Osomor, the developer, went before the Conservation Commission Wednesday night and received approval to fill in 9,535 square feet of wetlands for the driveway and access road.

Osomor will also go before the Planning Board tomorrow for a conceptual review of the project.

Crosby managing director Geoffrey von Kuhn said his company wants to continue growing in Salem.

“We like the area and we are just exploring future opportunities for the Crosby Group,” he said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

February 8, 2013

Gaming company bets on voter approval

By John Toole

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — Millennium Gaming Inc. founder and co-CEO Bill Wortman is betting the state is ready to approve expanded gaming.

Wortman disclosed last night his company has extended its option to purchase Rockingham Park before an audience of more than 200 at the track.

Wortman said he is very optimistic about the prospects of passage for a Senate bill co-sponsored by Sens. Chuck Morse, R-Salem, and Lou D'Allesandro, D-Manchester, that could bring a casino to the track.

“We think there is as good a chance now as there has ever been,” Wortman said.

His company is ready to go with a \$450 million redevelopment plan that could create 2,000 construction jobs and 1,300 permanent jobs at the track, should the state award Millennium the right to operate a casino.

Wortman said New Hampshire still has an opportunity to beat Massachusetts to casino development. “I think there’s still time to beat Massachusetts to the marketplace.”

The Rock is the ideal spot, in Wortman’s opinion. “This is the best place in New England to have one,” Wortman said. “I would choose this over Suffolk Downs.”

Responding to questions in a nearly two-hour forum, Wortman said if the state awards Millennium a license early next year the company would absolutely open a redeveloped track complex no later than 2016.

Rockingham Park president Ed Callahan said the track intends to operate charity gaming and simulcast racing throughout redevelopment, though it could be off track elsewhere in the community.

Wortman and Callahan encouraged Salem residents to pass a non-binding referendum supporting expanded gaming at Town Meeting on March 12.

Former New Hampshire Senate President Arthur Klemm of Windham, who attended the forum, said in an interview passage of the referendum is key and will send a message to legislators that the community welcomes a casino.

“The vote on March 12 is a very important vote. We can show representatives from all over the state that this part of the state wants this type of entertainment,” Klemm said.

D'Allesandro, who also attended the forum, confirmed in an interview that the Senate bill provides for a binding vote in any community where the casino might be awarded.

Morse will detail their bill today at a Greater Salem Chamber of Commerce breakfast scheduled at 7:45 a.m. at the Atkinson Resort & Country Club.

D'Allesandro said the bill allows up to 5,000 slot machines and up to 150 table games at the casino.

Morse last week said it provides for a bid process and an \$80 million licensing fee for the state. The plan anticipates \$100 million in annual revenues once the casino opens.

The revenue would be targeted to highways, colleges and economic development.

There would be regulatory oversight from the Lottery Commission and state police.

"I think it's the right time," D'Allesandro said after the forum. "This is an economic recovery, job creation bill."

Wortman praised the legislation. "I think they've crafted a very good bill."

The Senate Ways & Means Committee holds a hearing Feb. 19.

"We are hopeful that goes well in the Senate," Callahan said.

Callahan doesn't anticipate a quick resolution in the Legislature. "This isn't going to happen overnight, by any means," he said.

Callahan said it could end up in negotiations among House and Senate conferees in June.

Wortman said the casino would attract as many as 10,000 people a day, more than four million a year.

Responding to concerns about traffic, he stressed people would be passing through the facility throughout the day, so all those people wouldn't be there at once. He also said Millennium intends to work with the community to alleviate traffic congestion.

The gaming company also would implement a points program to help area businesses that wanted to participate. Gamblers would earn points that could be applied for goods and services at businesses.

The bill also contains protections for charity gaming.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

February 1, 2013

Work begins at busy Salem intersection

Salem Depot work will take several years

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — Jayme Havens and her 4-year-old son, Joseph, anxiously waited for a chance to cross the busy street yesterday afternoon as cars sped past.

Even after the traffic light changed, they hesitated for several seconds in the cold near the Salem Depot.

They weren't sure if it was safe to cross what some have called the most congested intersection in town — Routes 28 and 97.

"It's crazy and busy," the 34-year-old Salem woman said. "It's always very busy."

The town is beginning a project that has been under consideration for years. When it's finally complete, sometime in the next several years, residents and business owners are hoping the intersection will be much safer and less congested.

Salem community development director William Scott told selectmen this week that \$195,000 in design work has begun at the controversial intersection. About 30 percent of the design has been completed, he said, the remainder will be wrapped up by November.

The state Department of Transportation will reimburse the town for \$156,000 of the cost, or 80 percent, Scott said. He did not say when construction would begin.

Scott asked selectmen if a Salem Depot subcommittee would be revived to oversee the project, expected to cost more than \$2.5 million. They decided against having a subcommittee. The town completed a major redevelopment of the Depot area a couple of years ago.

Once the intersection is redeveloped, left-turn lanes would be provided at approaches to the intersection. The town's proposal also calls for two through lanes in each direction on Route 28 and a single through lane in each direction on Route 97.

The turn lanes are expected to provide much smoother traffic flow. Traffic signal improvements are also planned nearby.

Havens said as a Salem resident, she welcomes anything that can be done to reduce traffic and improve safety at the busy intersection.

Local business owners also said they would appreciate the improvements.

“There are accidents here all the time,” said Anthony Duffy, manager of Londonderry Piano at 20 North Broadway. “Sometimes, people don’t even brake.”

Although the speed limit in that area is 30 mph, motorists are usually traveling much faster, he said.

Duffy said they frequently tell their music students to be careful when turning out of the parking lot.

“It does make us nervous,” he said.

Susan DiFraia, owner of Studio 9 Hair Salon at 9 North Broadway, said she likes having her salon in a busy commercial area.

“But, on the flip side, people avoid this area because of the traffic,” she said. “It is very congested. It is hard to get in and out of the parking lot.”

Donna Morris, executive director of the Greater Salem Chamber of Commerce, said it’s hoped the new intersection will improve safety and encourage more customers to stop off at local businesses.

Morris works in the former Depot train station at 81 Main St. She said the surrounding area has been nicely redeveloped, including the addition of Tuscan Kitchen and Tuscan Market, but traffic is a major problem.

Last year, selectmen granted approval for the widening of the intersection of Main and Pleasant streets with the goal of reducing traffic near the Depot.

Morris said she often gets stuck in traffic and welcomes the proposed improvements.

She praised the recent construction of an access road near Tuscan Market that links Main Street to North Broadway via Willow Street, reducing congestion and improving traffic flow.

“There has already been a lot of good work being done here,” Morris said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

January 31, 2013

Four-story Salem office building proposed

Crosby Advisors' project could house 200 workers

By *John Toole*

jtoole@eagletribune.com

— — — SALEM — Town boards are beginning their review of a four-story, 75,000-square-foot office building project on Keewaydin Drive that would house 200 financial services workers.

Behind the development is Crosby Advisors, a business that manages holdings of Fidelity Investments owner Edward “Ned” Johnson III and his family.

Crosby moved to Salem from Boston two years ago.

“This goes a step beyond anything out there in terms of quality,” Planning Director Ross Moldoff said. “It is a four-story, first class office building. This is something you would typically see in Andover or Boston.”

The building, to be built at 28 Keewaydin Drive, would house 200 workers, he said.

The Planning Board has a conceptual review scheduled with developers Feb. 12.

But the Zoning Board of Adjustment will hear about the project Tuesday.

Moldoff said a zoning variance is required. The four-story height would exceed town regulations that limit development on the property to three stories.

In terms of actual height, the area is zoned for buildings no taller than 45 feet. The proposal calls for a 61-foot structure.

The project also would include another element Moldoff said is atypical for development in the Salem area. That is a two-level, underground parking garage.

Crosby Advisors occupies space at 11 Keewaydin Drive. Moldoff said he did not know whether the project involves relocating employees from that building or if this is an expansion of the Crosby workforce.

The project also will be before the Conservation Commission because it involves filling wetlands, Moldoff said.

An issue town officials will discuss is eliminating a planned connection between Keewaydin Drive and nearby Stiles Road they previously approved.

“This company does not want that,” Moldoff said.

Planning Board Chairman Robert Campbell said the town had approved the connection between the roads for traffic management.

“It would alleviate traffic somewhat on Pelham Road,” Campbell said.

Though the Planning Board first heard of the project from developers last fall, Campbell said he is unaware of any feedback from businesses or residents concerned about abandoning the connection plan.

Joe Friedman, president of Brooks Properties, a development company that has been active on both Stiles Road and Keewaydin Drive, said he is aware of the proposal, but hasn’t taken a position.

“Not at this time. I don’t know if we will take a position on it,” Friedman said.

Plans on file with the Salem Planning Department identify the developer as Osomor LLC.

Records filed with the New Hampshire Secretary of State’s corporate division for Osomor and Crosby Advisors LLC list the same person as business agent, Kimberly Contreras.

Fidelity Investments did not return a phone call, nor did the engineering firm working on the project.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

January 18, 2013

'Bronto' helps improve Salem forest

Excavator mows through part of town forest

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM — The Brontosaurus has sharp teeth and devours an entire tree in a split second, but it's no dinosaur.

It's a state-of-the-art piece of equipment with sharp, swirling blades that can clear an entire forest in no time at all, chewing up tall trees and spitting them out. It's a big yellow monster with an appetite for vegetation.

It's a Caterpillar excavator with a mower attachment, known affectionately as a Bronto.

Thanks to the Bronto, what was a 2-acre patch of woods in Salem's town forest yesterday morning is now a barren plot covered with mulch. But it's destruction with a purpose.

The town has hired John C. Brown & Sons of Weare to clear part of the 205-acre forest and better control its growth. The machine is a large excavator with a 3-foot-wide mower attachment that can destroy almost anything in its path, including trees not suitable to be harvested for wood.

"All I can say is it's a big chipper," Conservation Commission Chairman William Dumont said.

He's overseeing the \$2,600 project, some of which is funded through a state grant.

Clearing the more than 20-foot birch and speckled alder trees makes way for more suitable growth, including sweet pepper bushes, blackberry bushes and sweet ferns, Dumont said.

This provides a better habitat for wildlife, attracting songbirds that find it easier to feed on seed, and ruffed grouse and wild turkeys that would nest in the new growth, he said.

It's also ideal for the rabbits, foxes and squirrels that call the town forest home, Dumont said. The new shrubbery makes it easier for them to hide from predators. It's a level of comfort not provided by a bunch of birch trees, he said.

As the Bronto and its operator, Richard Snook, completed their work yesterday — grinding trees from 7 a.m. through the afternoon, Dumont followed the large yellow excavator with a rake, cleaning up the mulch it created. Similar work was done in 2002.

“I’m surprised how fast this is going,” Dumont said, watching as tall trees disappeared with a single swipe.

John C. Brown & Sons does work in several states, including Florida, according to supervisor of operations Steve Snook, Richard’s brother. Bronto — one of 17 used by the company — is commonly used to clear areas for power lines.

How did it get its name?

“It kind of looks like a brontosaurus and it eats trees,” Steve Snook said.

Fred Borman, a natural resources specialist for the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension, served as an adviser for the project. The Bronto makes a tough job much easier, he said.

“It can take down trees and shrubs in seconds flat,” he said.

The work at the town forest was supposed to end this afternoon, but it was obvious the rapid, roaring Bronto would be done well before then.

Part of the site is along the Hitty Titty Brook, which was shrouded from view by tall, drooping trees until Bronto made its visit.

“The stuff grows fast,” Dumont said. “It was at the stage where you couldn’t see through it, but you knew (the brook) was there.”

Clearing the trees will also make it easier for wildlife to see and reach the brook and a nearby pond for drinking water, he said.

The work also provides more space for hikers, snowshoers and cross-country skiers who use the forest on a regular basis, Dumont said. Several people, including a couple on snowshoes, stopped by yesterday to chat and inquire about the large machine, he said.

“It’s a nice place to snowshoe,” he said. “I love it out here.”

Salem’s town forest, tucked off Shadow Lake Road, is a secret to many, Dumont said.

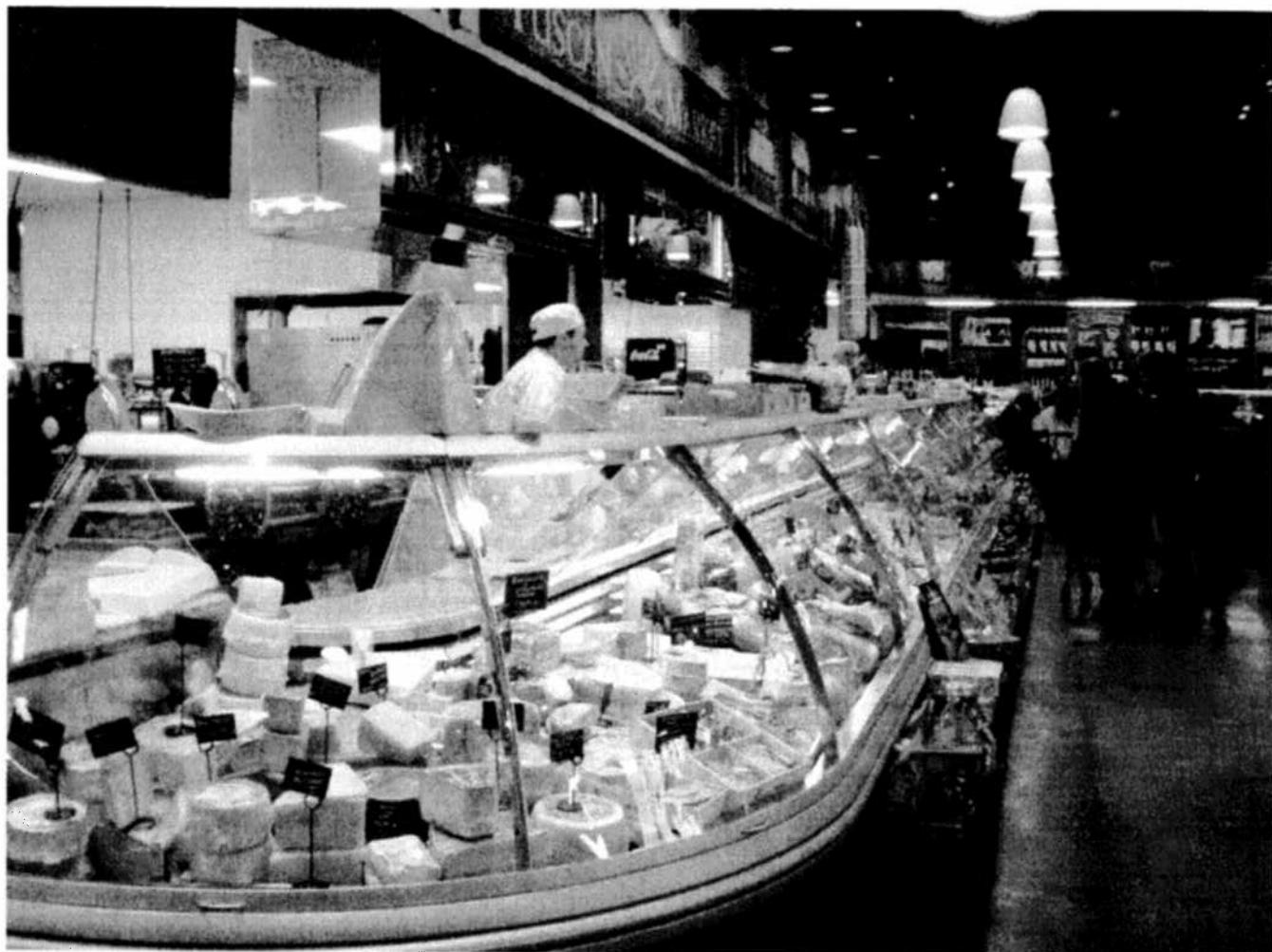
“A lot of people come down here and say, ‘I never knew this was here,’” he said.

The Boston Globe

Food & dining

An Italian market worth the drive

By Lisa Zwiren • GLOBE CORRESPONDENT • JANUARY 15, 2013



PHOTOS BY LISA ZWIRN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Glass cases filled with Italian, French, and Spanish cheeses and deli meats

SALEM, N.H. — If you think nothing of traveling an hour for really good bread, then a ride up Interstate 93 into New Hampshire is in order. At Tuscan Market, not only are the loaves large, flavorful, and crusty, but you'll find plenty of Italian cheeses, meats, freshly made pastas, prepared foods, and gelato. With this delectable selection of food — some of it made right in front of you — the miles quickly become insignificant.

Tuscan Kitchen, both owned by Joseph Faro. The entrepreneur's vision is to "bring our brand of scratch Italian to this area." Faro, whose family has been in the food and bakery business for generations, is the founder and former owner of Joseph's Gourmet Pasta & Sauces, which he sold to Nestle Prepared Foods in 2006.

He puts his pasta-making experience to good use. Specialties include butternut squash cappellacci (little hats), lobster ravioli, four-cheese ravioli, and pappardelle. Sharing the case with imported cheeses from Italy, France, and Spain, and prosciutto di Parma and dried sausages are the market's own mozzarella, burrata, fresh sausages, and dry-aged beef. It's easy to take home a ready-made feast: fresh pastas and sauce, meatballs or chicken Parmigiana, sides of oven-roasted vegetables, a ricotta pie or tiramisu to top it off.

Paula Parker of Amesbury heard about the market from co-workers. "Everybody raves about it," she says. She likes that it offers "all kinds of things from Italy."

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▾

Mornings at the market bring the aroma of crusty ciabatta, cranberry walnut bread, seven-grain loaves, pastries, and espresso. Midday traffic is brisk as folks settle in at the cafe for sandwiches, salads, and thin-crust pizza. Chris Hertrich, from Methuen, works construction in the area and stops in frequently. On this day, he's waiting for a pressed Italian sandwich, filled with sliced meats and provolone, and a cup of tomato soup. He likes it here. "They use fresh ingredients and it's a nice atmosphere," he says.

Later in the day, customers shop for dinner. A small wine cellar boasts bottles "from every wine-producing region in Italy," says wine director Joseph Comforti. "Some are from small-production wineries and others are just hard to get."

Bruce and Cheryl Moro of Deerfield, N.H., have dined at Tuscan Kitchen a few times, but it's their first visit to the market. "I'm impressed," says Bruce Moro. "They're not afraid to put out samples so you can try the bread and cheeses." The couple is buying a jar of chutney, dried tomatoes in olive oil, Paesana roasted garlic tomato sauce ("I usually make my own," says Cheryl, feeling a tad guilty, but she points

Related

- Recipe for osso buco



LISA ZWIRN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Joe Faro amid the fresh bread at his Tuscan Market in Salem, N.H.

Drive up Interstate 93 to New Hampshire and you'll be rewarded with good Italian bread - Food & dining ... Page 3 of of lamb. "Normally, we wouldn't pay \$26," says Bruce, holding up the bag of marinated lamb loin, "but we're going to try it for dinner tonight and see if the quality is there."

Faro, who grew up in nearby Lawrence, remembers when his family shopped at local neighborhood stores for what were then ordinary Italian ingredients, now considered artisan foods. "Sadly, we buy our groceries where we buy our flat-screen TVs," he says. "I'm trying to go backward." As the owner of Tuscan Brands and "chief food taster," as he likes to be known, Faro gains inspiration from frequent trips to Italy. In the fall, a second Tuscan Kitchen and small market is scheduled to open in Burlington.

Sicilian-born Pierpaolo Marchese, who works behind the meat and cheese counter, says many Italian immigrants shop here. "They love the authenticity," he says.

Tuscan Market 67 Main St., Salem, N.H. 603-912-5467, www.tuscanbrands.com.

Lisa Zwirn can be reached atlisa@lisazwirn.com.

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January 12, 2013

Enterasys relocates 600 jobs from Andover to Salem, N.H.

Enterasys completes move from Andover

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — It was exactly a year ago that Enterasys announced it was moving out of Andover and returning to the Granite State after more than a decade, bringing approximately 600 jobs.

Last week, the computer networking giant completed its three-week move to the former Cisco Systems building at 9 Northeastern Blvd., according to spokesman Vala Afshar.

“In our 30th year, we’re moving back to New Hampshire,” Afshar said yesterday. “There is certainly a lot of nostalgia here.”

Enterasys is a spinoff of Cabletron Systems, founded by former New Hampshire Gov. Craig Benson and business partner Robert Levine in Levine’s Rochester garage in 1983.

Afshar said it was a chore moving 600 employees and all its electronics and laboratories from its former 150,000-square-foot site on Minuteman Road in Andover to the new 190,000-square-foot headquarters in Salem.

But the move to Salem was welcomed by employees, Afshar said. Many still live in New Hampshire and will no longer have to pay Massachusetts income taxes, he said.

“They were definitely excited with the move, not just because of the compensation benefits,” he said, “but because you are moving to a bigger, better building.”

Employees had a voice in the move, he said, even helping choose carpet colors. Enterasys is leasing space in the 650,000-square-foot building, which is home to several other businesses, including Comcast and CCS Companies call center.

Enterasys began moving in mid-December, only a week after receiving its occupancy permit from the town. The company relocated during the holidays — a slow time for many businesses — because it would have the least impact on customers, Afshar said.

“The move couldn’t have been better,” Afshar said yesterday. “It’s not a traditional office move.”

Finding a larger location was the key reason behind the move, Afshar said. The Andover site served the company well for many years, but Enterasys needed more space. About 60 employees were added in recent months.

“It was an incredibly difficult decision to move here,” he said. “But there are just too many positives. ... We’re in a building where the sky’s the limit.”

When Enterasys announced its move in January 2012, president and CEO Chris Crowell said the company considered locations in both states and weighed the options, especially New Hampshire’s lower tax burden. He also said the Salem location would also provide easier access to Manchester-Boston Regional Airport.

Massachusetts officials, including Andover planning director Paul Materazzo and Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Joseph Bevilacqua, were disappointed. They said Enterasys’ move would be a tremendous loss to the community as the Bay State battles to keep businesses from moving out of state.

But what is Massachusetts’ loss is expected to be New Hampshire’s gain, bringing thousands of dollars in annual tax revenue to the state.

Salem officials are praising the move.

“I think it’s a great thing for the community,” town planning director Ross Moldoff said Thursday. “It’s a huge asset.

Greater Salem Chamber of Commerce executive director Donna Morris said Enterasys will bring much-needed jobs to town and help revitalize the local economy.

“We look forward to working with them,” she said.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

January 5, 2013

Salem plaza project gains momentum

The Green Barn would move, but stay open

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — Plans are moving forward to build a 22,000-square-foot shopping center at the site of The Green Barn restaurant.

Developer Thur Ken received a variance Thursday from the town's Zoning Board of Adjustment and will go before the Planning Board for a public hearing Tuesday.

If approved, the shopping center would be built at the corner of Hampstead Road and Main Street. It would include a 13,000-square-foot CVS pharmacy, a bank, restaurant and two other businesses, town planner Ross Moldoff said.

But the 19th-century building — a former dairy barn — is expected to be razed and the popular restaurant relocated, owner Carl Bohne said.

If the project is not approved, The Green Barn will remain where it's been for the last 42 years, Bohne said.

Ever since plans for the project were announced last summer, customers have asked about the restaurant's future.

"We reassured them we're staying open, which we are," Bohne said yesterday. "They have been very good to us."

But it's premature to speculate whether the business will stay at 5 Hampstead Road in Salem or move, he said.

"It's far too early to tell," said Bohne, who runs the restaurant with his wife, Margaret.

Bohne has said construction of the plaza would allow him to maximize his property's potential and improve his restaurant. The widely recognized name would not change.

The Bohnes would continue to own the property, along with Thur Ken, and rent out the buildings. The project would create at least 50 full-time and 50 part-time jobs, he said, and include major safety improvements at the intersection of Hampstead Road and Main Street.

The zoning board has granted several variances for the project, Moldoff said. The latest, approved unanimously Thursday, involved setbacks for the bank, he said.

The hearing before the Planning Board was continued from Nov. 27. There were issues with the CVS design, which did not conform with town planning regulations requiring a residential-style building, Moldoff said.

“It was more of a strip-style building,” he said.

Project representatives could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Only one resident has expressed concern with the project, Moldoff said.

Vasilios Papaefthemiou, 60, of 3 Hampstead Road said he supports the proposal, but has concerns about how it would affect his property.

He is especially concerned about traffic, drainage, lighting and trees to be put in between his home and the plaza. The newly planted trees are to serve as a barrier, he said.

“But I’m going to die before they grow up,” he said.

Papaefthemiou said he needs two sump pumps to keep water out of his basement. He’s afraid digging at the site will cause further problems.

“I might end up having a swimming pool in my basement,” he said.

Papaefthemiou said he is also concerned about lights from the plaza shining on his home.

The Green Barn is one of the oldest restaurants in Salem. Bohne’s parents, Bill and Francis Bohne, bought the Shermer Farm in 1969. They started a delicatessen, specializing in sausage and smoked meats.

The restaurant, which specializes in German cuisine, opened in July 1970.

EagleTribune.com, North Andover, MA

January 1, 2013

Former Salem official to plead guilty to drug charges

By Doug Ireland

direland@eagletribune.com

— SALEM, N.H. — Former Zoning Board of Adjustment Chairman and state Rep. Ronald “Tony” Giordano has agreed to plead guilty to drug charges.

Giordano, 54, was scheduled to face trial in Rockingham Superior Court next week for allegedly selling Oxycodone, a painkiller. Jury selection was to begin Monday, Jan. 7.

Giordano confirmed yesterday he reached a plea bargain with prosecutors, but referred all questions to his attorney, Thomas Torrisi of Methuen. He is scheduled to plead guilty Feb. 14.

Giordano has been free on \$10,000 cash bail following his arrest Dec. 30, 2011. He was the focus of a monthlong investigation by Salem police, who said they found more than 100 Oxycodone pills while searching his home on Lois Lane.

Giordano faces three counts of selling Oxycodone and a charge of conspiracy to violate drug laws. Each of the felony charges is punishable by three and a half to seven years in state prison.

Torrisi said since his arrest, Giordano has intended to admit his mistake and take responsibility for his actions by pleading guilty.

The Rockingham County attorney’s office was only recently notified of the decision. County Attorney James Reams said he could not comment on the case.

Torrisi did not say how many charges Giordano would plead guilty to.

“The final details of the plea agreement are still being worked out,” Torrisi said yesterday.

Giordano resigned from the zoning board just three days after his arrest, which stunned Salem officials, even though he had a criminal record in Massachusetts.

Giordano was just one of three Salem officials to resign from office in a two-year period for criminal conduct.

He served two stints in Massachusetts prisons in the early 1980s after he was convicted on five charges of forging checks and another charge of stealing a pair of handcuffs.

Giordano later lost races for the Lowell City Council in 1983, 1991 and 1993, blaming the media for exposing his criminal past. Giordano, then named Ronald Gordon, changed his name and moved to Salem in the mid-1990s.

But controversy followed Giordano to New Hampshire, where he was elected to the state House of Representatives in 2000. Two years later, he was found guilty of sexually harassing Statehouse secretary Dorothy Pike, who was awarded \$175,000 in damages and \$12,666 in lost wages.

Pike claimed Giordano forcibly kissed her and groped her at work. Giordano claimed he only made a sexually explicit phone call to Pike at home while he was drunk.

Giordano resigned his seat in August 2002, but not because of the harassment lawsuit. Four months earlier, he took a job with U.S. Sen. Bob Smith, R-N.H., but then realized he could not be a federal employee and an elected official.