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MEMORANDUM

TO: Eileen M. Donoghue, City Manager *EMD*

FROM: Camilo Espitia, Chief Design Planner

DATE: May 6, 2021

SUBJECT: Merrimack River Boathouse Concept

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is excited to share an idea that could advance a key element of the Open Space and Recreation Plan: increasing water-based recreation. After site planning work in response to a community inquiry, we believe it is possible to use one acre of City-owned land at 1190 Pawtucket Boulevard for restaurant, entertainment, and/or retail space situated above a boathouse for recreational and competitive rowing. This would fill a critical need and take advantage of an underutilized property without impacting the City's long-term infrastructure needs at the adjacent Water Department. A short presentation is included with this informational update that explains this idea in detail.

The Merrimack River Rowing Association (MRRRA), a nonprofit member-based organization open to all regardless of rowing experience with over 100 members reached out to DPD for potential solutions to the decreasing public access to recreational rowing opportunities. Recently, a neighboring club in Methuen ceased operations and the modest space UMass Lowell leases to MRRRA at the Bellegarde Boathouse means that they must turn away potential members and cannot expand programming.

After learning of this community need, DPD researched the spatial needs of typical rowing clubs including the MRRRA, researched available publicly- and privately-owned riverside property upstream of Pawtucket Falls, and created a conceptual diagram of a possible boathouse orientation on 1190 Pawtucket Boulevard. This alternative would be near the Commonwealth of Massachusetts boat launch (used for other types of boats), not interfere with any proposed alternative location for the Rourke Bridge, and not preclude other uses on the remaining three acres of 1190 Pawtucket for the Water Dept. or other City needs.

The concept design includes additional restaurant and entertainment space because Lowell lacks many spaces along the river for these uses and because of the possibility of the for-profit use aiding the financing of a non-profit and/or low-cost boathouse use. We see this as a rare opportunity to shape riverside development in furtherance of the Open Space and Recreation Plan and a community need. Next steps would include continuing to define this concept and moving forward to a disposition of the one acre of 1190 Pawtucket.

CH/crt

Attachment

Cc: Yovani Baez-Rose, Design Planner
Christopher Glenn Hayes, Neighborhood Planner