



News

CITY TAKES THE LEAD WITH DEVELOPERS

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Charlie Patsios talks about the future of the land that used to house the old General Electric gear plant site during the economic development tour today. Item Photo by Owen O'Rourke

By Thomas Grillo

LYNN — **Jay Connolly** admits he is “somewhat of a stranger to Lynn,” but the vice president of Beverly-based Connolly Brothers Inc. registered for Tuesday’s city development tour of Lynn to find new opportunities.

“The city seems to have lots of potential, proximity to Boston and waterfront opportunities, so it’s exciting to see it,” Connolly said.

More than 100 investors, developers, lenders, brokers and contractors like Connolly boarded three buses for a glimpse at the city’s development opportunities.

“It’s encouraging to see so many new faces looking at Lynn,” said **Matthew Picarsic**, managing principal of RCG, a Somerville-based real estate firm whose Lynn projects

include the Boston Machine Lofts building on Willow Street. "Lynn has lots of opportunities ... and it seems ready to go."

Hosted by the **Economic Development & Industrial Corporation of Lynn (EDIC)**, **MassDevelopment**, the state's economic development agency, **U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton** and the **Lynn Economic Advancement and Development (LEAD)** team, the tour showcased acres of waterfront land and more than a dozen underdeveloped properties in the downtown.

Charles Patsios, the Swampscott developer who is preparing to build a \$500 million complex on the 65-acre former General Electric Co. Gear Works property that will feature 1,200 apartments adjacent to the train stop, met the tour on his site.

"Lynn has the best of the best and it's been hidden in plain sight for so long," he said. "Lynn is the next Charlestown, East Boston, South Boston, North End, Somerville, Cambridge, Kendall Square, all of those components can be found in Lynn. The future is Lynn ... the opportunities abound."

Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy welcomed the visitors at the ferry terminal parking lot on Blossom Street extension, telling them that few people know there are 200 acres of undeveloped land available in the city, much of it on the waterfront. She urged them to let their imaginations stay open throughout the event. "Hopefully, you will come back with some ideas to transform Lynn," she said. "All of us are standing by, ready to make that happen for you."

Jay Ash, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development and a member of a LEAD team, said he's excited about Lynn's present and future. He said the response he's received about investing in Lynn has been encouraging.

"For those of you who are thinking about development in Lynn, I can't think of a better place to make an investment," he said. "It's a jewel along the water. This place is happening. We are prepared to work with you to help make your development successful. We know that together there are great days ahead for Lynn and we are happy to be a small part of it."

Gregory Bialecki, who held Ash's job in the Patrick administration and is now a principal at Redgate, the Boston-based developer who is considering Lynn, said as housing prices soar in places like Somerville and Chelsea, Lynn is the next logical place to build apartments.

"Twenty years ago, people said Chelsea was not on the list of where people with choices would want to live, but they've turned the corner," he said. "The conditions are ready for it to happen in Lynn."

Sen. Thomas McGee (D-Lynn) sang the city's praises to the potential investors, telling them Lynn has a vibrant sense of community that is unmatched.

“Our waterfront offers one of the most beautiful sites on the East Coast and there are regional water transportation opportunities,” he said. “I know I’m biased living here in Lynn, but people in this city really care about this community.”

State Rep. and City Council President **Daniel Cahill** said so many elected officials gathered for the tour because they believe in the city.

“We have done lots of rezoning, so you will see lots of build as-of-right possibilities, a very exciting phrase to developers, and we have expedited permitting,” he said. “You will find some great parcels and great investments.”

Just before the tour, **James Cowdell**, EDIC’s executive director, said the downtown has been rezoned to allow for conversion of industrial buildings into housing. As a result, he said, more than 300 new residents live downtown.

He provided a preview of the stops along the trek including 545 Washington St., the five-story former home of Prime Manufacturing Co. that is zoned for commercial use on the first floor and residential above; 11 Spring St., a six-story building across the street from the MBTA that has been used for location shots for Hollywood movies; 40-48 Central St., vacant buildings with adjacent parking which comprise a site for multi-story, market rate housing above commercial space; 38 South Common St., and the 1893 state-owned Lynn Armory that is on the National Register of Historic Places and is available for sale.

In addition, Cowdell noted there are multiple sites available on the waterside of the Lynnway including 40 acres owned by National Grid that could be developed.

“The sky’s the limit,” Cowdell said.

State Rep. Brendan Crighton (D-Lynn) said the city is finally getting noticed, in part, because they have a full set of tools in their toolbox to help developers.

“We want to show off the city and get feedback to see if there are things we can do better,” he said.

U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton met the tour at the Lynn Museum & Historical Society and compared the proximity of Lynn to Boston in the context of Brooklyn and Manhattan.

“Think about how Brooklyn has taken off in the last 10 years and it’s not just the Brooklyn of 50 years ago” he said. “There are a tremendous number of start-ups, a great tech scene and all sorts of things that are very much relevant to today, not just the economy of old. That’s the kind of thing we want to see in Lynn.”

At the start of the tour, about two dozen members of Lynn United for Change, a community organization that supports affordable housing, used the gathering to advocate for low- and moderate-income units. They held signs that read “Lynn Says No To Gentrification” and “Lynn Families Before Developer’s Profits.”

"In this city, we need affordable housing that's accessible to the working people of our city," said one protester through a bullhorn.

City Councilor-at-Large **Brian LaPierre**, who was present during the protest, said the developer's tour was not the time or place to air their grievances over housing.

"I would not go along with 100 percent of the units in a new development being affordable. But I am sympathetic to their cause. But the details are subject to them talking to the developers to see how many affordable units, if any, developers are willing to do."

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