

# Lynn is state development chief Ash's 'No. 1 priority'

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item | Posted: Wednesday, June 17, 2015 3:00 am

LYNN — “This is Lynn’s time,” state Housing and Economic Development Secretary Jay Ash told local business and political leaders Tuesday before urging them to unify around Lynn’s renewal.

“My No. 1 priority is Lynn. You have tremendous leadership, but you need to get on the same page,” Ash said.

Appointed by Gov. Charlie Baker, Ash talked tough and occasionally joked as he talked about Chelsea’s revival when he served as city development director and city manager. He said hard lessons learned in his hometown can translate into useful pointers for Lynn’s economic resurgence.

“Realize what you can do and take one step forward,” Ash said.

He told his audience at the Lynn Business Partnership’s 23rd annual meeting in the Lynn Museum how he turned away a developer proposing to replace a dilapidated Chelsea shopping mall with a storage warehouse. But Ash said he quickly learned lessons from developers.

“I was able to meet great business people who were much smarter than I was and I was lucky enough to realize that early on,” Ash said.

Working with people interested in building in Chelsea — a 1.8 square mile community that once endured state receivership — allowed Ash to promote the city’s proximity to Boston and peg Chelsea’s most visible and, often, rundown locations for renewal.

A revived Mystic Mall, new housing and a nine-story FBI regional headquarters are located or slated to locate in the city.

“If there is one thing I wish for you is that you find developers who have bought into what you have created in Lynn and are ready to repeat it over and over again,” Ash said.

He critiqued how Lynn has succeeded or fallen short in its development efforts, pointing a finger at Lynnway self-storage businesses and zeroing in on who should be the city’s future residents.

“The focus has to be on commercial development and market-rate housing. When you develop market-rate housing, you are bringing in young people who aren’t thinking about kids; they are thinking about a nightlife and they are going out and telling everybody else,” he said.

He warned city leaders to take advantage of his interest in seeing Lynn succeed even as leaders in other communities are vying for his office’s resources.

“The first sign of real difficulty and I’ll have to make a tough decision,” he said.

Ash’s “tough love” talk — as City Council President Daniel Cahill branded it — encouraged state Sen. Thomas M. McGee.

“It’s important we know what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong,” McGee said.

A. James Lynch Insurance president and Partnership executive board member Maura Lynch said Lynn city officials and businesspeople have worked for years to put some of Ash’s suggestions into practice.

“Hopefully, he is right — this is Lynn’s time,” she said.