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STATE SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: LYNN IS POISED FOR DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

BY GAYLA CAWLEY | November 1, 2018



Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Jay Ash speaks about state housing and economic development in Lynn and Massachusetts as he addresses the Rotary Club of Lynn on Thursday. (Spenser R. Hasak)

LYNN — What happens when a governor's administration focuses all of its economic development efforts on one community?

According to Jay Ash, state secretary of housing and economic development, that's what he was challenged by Gov. Charlie Baker to find out four years ago.

"For three years now, we've been hyper-focused in Lynn," Ash told *The Item* following a Rotary Club of Lynn luncheon attended by Mayor Thomas M. McGee, state Sen. Brendan Crighton (D-Lynn) and state Rep. Daniel Cahill (D-Lynn). "We spend more time in Lynn than any other community. It's the only community where we have this group of state secretaries who meet regularly to talk about all the politics that are involved here."

This week, Ash said he took a look at the Lynn Waterfront Open Space Master Plan with McGee. He recalled that years ago when McGee was chairman of the State Democratic Party, he took him behind the Walmart on the Lynnway to show him the possibilities of the city, but also its condition.

As he began to walk, Ash recalled seeing old tires and cars, joking that he wondered on the walk if the chair of the Democratic party was taking the secretary "behind Walmart to whack him."

Ash said he was excited about discussions with property owners on the Lynnway about transforming that section of Lynn to promote mixed use development, which would include housing, retail, restaurants, recreation with outdoor activities, a waterfront walkway and a harbor walk. He said McGee, Crighton, and Cahill have been working on securing the funds.

Lynn is poised for development opportunities, Ash said, comparing Lynn to what he saw in Chelsea when he was city manager in terms of economic potential. Both communities have proximity to Boston, great transportation access, a government that is looking to grow and opportunities for business. Ash oversaw 33 major development projects in Chelsea.

In the past two years, Lynn has received 5 percent, or \$8.5 million, of the MassWorks Infrastructure Program grant funding, a program Ash administers that provides a flexible source of capital funds to municipalities and other eligible public entities to support and accelerate job growth and economic development.

That funding went toward infrastructure improvements to support the Market Basket project, the new YMCA and on the Lynnway for the former Beacon Chevrolet site, which has been dubbed North Harbor, a planned \$80 million development which will include 348 apartments.

Along with work at the North Harbor site, Ash said the administration has also been focused on the South Harbor site, which is the old Harbour House site where a 250-unit apartment development was planned, and a project involved with GE.

The problem, he said, is the land in Lynn doesn't lend itself well to development.

“To be candid, I have never seen land more messed up than the land you have here,” Ash said, referring to easements on land, environmental conditions under the land and requirements for local, state or federal authorities for building. “The land that’s the Harbour House now, I have never seen land so encumbered with so many things that are preventing development from happening. Because of (a) collaborative effort ... we’re this close to seeing good things happening there.”

In November 2015, the Baker-Polito administration, along with U.S. Rep. Seth Moulton (D-Mass), state legislators and city officials announced the launch of the Lynn Economic Advancement and Development (LEAD) Team, a cross-governmental working group that aims to promote community revitalization in the city by aligning economic development initiatives among federal, state and local officials.

“The Lynn that we’ve all hoped for quite some time, some of us may remember from years gone by, is going to be back and is going to be stronger than ever before,” Ash said.



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