

PEDA considers consultant to make business plan for William Stanley park

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PITTSFIELD -- The Pittsfield Economic Development Authority is interested in hiring a consultant to develop a business plan for the construction of a life sciences building at the William Stanley Business Park of the Berkshires.

The idea came from a suggestion made by Susan Windham-Bannister, the president and CEO of the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, when she met recently in Pittsfield with Mayor Daniel L. Bianchi and PEDA Executive Director Cory Thurston.

Windham-Bannister came to the Berkshires to assess the city's progress toward receiving a \$6.5 million state earmark to construct such a structure, after city officials in December asked the MLSC if it could provide planning funds for such a project. The earmark was actually awarded to the city of Pittsfield, not PEDA, by the state Legislature in 2008.

But for a variety of reasons, PEDA, which is in charge of bringing businesses to the park, has never received the funding.

"At the conclusion of the meeting, we suggested to the mayor that we thought a good next step would be to engage a consultant to work with him and his team to develop a business plan from their vision statement -- a plan that maps out how do we get there," Windham-Bannister said.

"I expect that the board of the [Life Sciences Center] would be open to consider funding a planning grant for a consultant using a portion of the money that was earmarked for the business park," she added.

The MLSC is implementing the state's 10-year, \$1 billion economic development plan for life sciences research and development across Massachusetts. The \$6.5 million earmark for Pittsfield was included in that legislation.

PEDA has already submitted a vision statement to the MLSC for the construction of a life sciences building. Developing a request for proposal, or RFP, to develop a comprehensive business plan for such a structure is the next step in the process to receive the funds.

Windham-Bannister said that hiring a consultant would make it easier for PEDA's 11-member board to develop such a plan.

"Everyone has a day job, if you will," she said, referring to the occupations of PEDA's board members. "Often consultants can be very helpful in coming in, taking a vision, doing the legwork, and determining how we discuss how we get there."

At PEDA's board meeting on Wednesday, Thurston said he hoped PEDA would be able to submit an RFP to the center "no later than April" so that the state agency can vote on the proposal before it breaks for the summer.

"The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center meets in May and June," Thurston said.

PEDA has spent the last year taking steps to develop what Bianchi has called a "competitive-type proposal" that would finally convince the state to free up the earmark's entire amount.

Bianchi, who is also a PEDA board member, told his colleagues on Wednesday that Windham-Bannister was pleased with PEDA's vision statement for the project, saying "she's anxious to help us out."

"There's more work to be done," Bianchi said. "They're looking at making a sizable investment out here. She wants to make sure it will be successful."