

## Mixed opinions on proposed retail project at William Stanley

### Business Park

By Jim Therrien, Berkshire Eagle Staff Berkshire Eagle

Posted:

BerkshireEagle.com

PITTSFIELD -- A crowd of more than 100 jammed City Council chambers Monday for a wide-ranging forum on a large retail project proposed for the William Stanley Business Park.

After a presentation from the developer, Waterstone Retail Development of Needham, more than two dozen speakers -- favoring or decrying retail development in what was envisioned as industrial space at the park on former GE property -- stepped in succession to the microphone.

The Pittsfield Economic Development Authority board, which held the forum, is considering the retail plan for a 16-acre parcel in the 52-acre park it manages. Executive Director Corydon Thurston has said the board could take a vote on the issue at its next meeting on Oct. 23.

"I don't feel as though hope is a strategy," said Ronald Marcella, who along with other members of his family supported the Waterstone plan. He referred to the lack of proposals from industrial firms.

Denis Guyer, a former state representative, said in contrast, "Pittsfield has always been a place of big ideas." He urged the PEDDA board to "think bigger than this for the city."

Pittsfield's Community Development Director Douglas Clark, who spoke after the presentation by Waterstone representatives, opposed retail development in the park and made points others later echoed.

Noting the developer's contention the unnamed retail store would be "a catalyst" for industrial development, Clark said the project would be taking about half the available space in the park, since Silver Lake and other features reduce the developable land on the 52 acres.

A proposed life sciences center at the park, which is awaiting a decision on state funding, "is going to be the catalyst" at the Stanley Park, he said, urging PEDDA to take "the long view."

However, many speakers contended the city has waited long enough for industrial development that hasn't materialized. They also cited the significant development cost of dealing with PCBs or other industrial contamination in old foundations on some parcels, which Waterstone has said it will mitigate at a cost of about \$10 million.

The entire proposed investment is \$30 million, they said, adding that similar projects elsewhere in Massachusetts have been spearheaded by retail projects and then became mixed use later.

Opponents cited the lower pay of typical retail jobs compared to advanced technology manufacturing, which they said is surging in the U.S. and across Massachusetts. Specialized manufacturing, especially close to research facilities, is an emerging trend, they argued.

"Stay true to your vision of life sciences and advanced manufacturing," said Jason "Jake" McCandless, the superintendent of Pittsfield schools. That work and those jobs are what "we aspire to [for our children] in the city of Pittsfield," he said.

Ellen Kennedy, president of Berkshire Community College, and Bill Muholland, a dean at BCC, argued for staying the course in search of advanced manufacturing development.

Resident James Haggerty said, "It's been 10 years and nobody has bit," referring to potential industrial tenants for the Stanley Park. "Please give us more tax revenue. Go with the Waterstone project."

Frank Engel said the plan was "an opportunity to get us out of neutral." There still would be land for industry at the park, he said.

Lewis Cuyler said, "They do not make any more [industrial] land ... Retail should be in the downtown area," he said. "We do not need any more big box stores."

Supporters of the project said they believe no industry is likely to move in and pay millions to mitigate former GE foundation sites on the land, but this retail firm has pledged to fund that.

Opponents stressed that manufacturing would bring greater prosperity to the entire area, and a retail business might simply put another store in Pittsfield out of business, resulting in no net gain in employment.

Among those arguing for PEDDA to stick to its original vision, Van Shields, executive director of the Berkshire Museum, said not only research and advanced manufacturing firms could collaborate in the area. The creative economy could feed off research and specialized engineering as well, and industry could benefit from it, he said.

Michael Ward, a former city councilor, said he wondered why the retailer was not named by the developer, adding that there often is a reason for such secrecy.

Esther Bolen admitted to being unsure which argument was best, saying the city doesn't need more low-income jobs, but adding that, on the other hand, "who is going to come here?"

To reach Jim Therrien:

[jtherrien@berkshireeagle.com](mailto:jtherrien@berkshireeagle.com),

or (413) 496-6247

On Twitter: @BE\_therrien