

Walmart Proposal Draws Curious to Business Park Open Houses

By Joe Durwin

iBerkshires Correspondent

03:21AM / Monday, September 19, 2016

PITTSFIELD, Mass. — The Walmart store proposed for the William Stanley Business Park has generated a lot of discussion didn't translate into an influx of visitors at the park.

But those who did attend the three recent open houses expressed their interest and concerns about the controversial project.



The 15-acre Site 9 in the William Stanley Business Park is being considered for a Walmart Supercenter.

"I think everyone came with pretty much that focus in mind," said Pittsfield Economic Development Authority Executive Director Corydon Thurston, who told iBerkshires the three dates — held on Aug. 24, 31, and Sept. 14 — drew a combined crowd of "about a couple dozen."

"Everyone that came wanted to see where [the proposed site] was, and how it would be oriented, and things of that nature," Thurston said. He added that along with its primary mission of generating interest in the developable parcels of the park, the tours were also an important part of PEDA's attempt to maintain public transparency.

"We want people to feel comfortable, and know that we're not hiding anything," he said. "We're trying to do our best, and showcase the property."

These three open houses follow an event in May focused specifically on the Waterstone Development proposal to site a 190,000 Walmart Supercenter on a challenged lot in the small urban business park near Tyler Street. Another public presentation will be held by Waterstone on Monday, Sept. 19, at 6 p.m. at Morningside School.

Touring the business park, PEDA Board Chairman Mick Callahan outlined some of the many challenges to that particular piece of property, which includes millions of dollars in re-grading and remediation to be shovel-ready for any new development.

On a typical "greensfield," or uncontaminated, site, Callahan noted, the average cost of development may range anywhere from \$80,000 to \$175,000 per acre. At the uniquely challenged "Teens" site (so dubbed because it once held General Electric buildings

numbered in the teens), the cost will be closer to a half-million dollars per acre. Waterstone's current proposal to develop the site will total approximately \$30 million to \$32 million, an expenditure Callahan called "the largest private investment in Pittsfield in many years."

Retail would be essentially limited to this portion of the business park in PEDAs emerging vision. Additional parcels on the East Street side of the park are more suited, he said, to "light industrial, office, and R&D uses," and the more buildable areas on this side of the rail line that segments the property could accommodate as many as a half dozen such companies, depending on their size.

On the Kellogg Street side, across the newly opened Woodlawn Avenue Bridge, another small lot already contains a buildable foundation for a medium-size facility, what Callahan called "an affordable opportunity, that has a lot of possibility."

"In the scheme of things, we're a very small business park, compared to a lot of what we're competing with," Callahan told iBerkshires. "Our goal is to build the tax base and create jobs."

Not only does PEDAs believe that Waterstone's Walmart proposal will address both goals, but the North Carolina-based developer has eluded to its interest in working with PEDAs on other non-retail projects at the park.

"Waterstone is a multi-dimensional developer that is now nationwide. They have industrial, commercial, warehousing, retail, and R&D," said Callahan, adding "we've also talked to them a bit about 'where do we go from here.'"

In the meantime, PEDAs remains open to all interested parties, and will arrange viewings for anyone who wants to know more.

"We're happy to show people the property absolutely any time that we have time. They don't have to wait for an open house," said Thurston.