

William Stanley Business Park: Public will have say on proposed retail development

By Tony Dobrowolski, Berkshire Eagle Staff Berkshire Eagle

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PITTSFIELD -- City residents will have an opportunity next week to weigh in on a proposed \$30 million retail development at the William Stanley Business Park of the Berkshires.

The Pittsfield Economic Development Authority has scheduled a public forum for Monday that is designed to be a public presentation of the project and to solicit community input.

Cory Thurston, PEDA's executive director, said the quasi-public agency wanted to provide the developer with the opportunity to make the same presentation it made before the board two months ago to the public.

"We're trying to lay the facts out on the table for the public," he said.

Waterstone Retail Development of Needham in July proposed the construction of a 200,000-square-foot building occupied by a single retailer that would bring 200 mostly full-time jobs to Pittsfield and \$300,000 in tax revenue to the city. Waterstone had proposed a different retail development at that site in December 2011, but that project fell through.

For the project to go forward this time, Waterstone would need to obtain a signed letter of intent from PEDA before it can begin the permitting process with the city.

PEDA is charged with developing the 52-acre business park on the site of General Electric's former power transformer facility. While initial hopes were to draw a manufacturer to the site, officials have made little headway in their efforts. Still, some oppose allowing the park to be used for retail.

Mayor Daniel L. Bianchi, who is also a PEDA board member, said the presentation and discussion were scheduled to give city residents a "frame of reference" for the proposed development.

"It's kind of difficult to give people a chance to speak if they don't have a grasp of things," Bianchi said. "What I'm finding is that people don't have a grasp of the issues. If you don't attend the PEDA board meetings you may not, so it seemed reasonable to do it."

The development is proposed for building site No. 9 -- a 16-acre parcel bordered by Tyler Street and Woodlawn Avenue that is commonly referred to as "the teens."

That parcel is filled with concrete foundations and slabs left behind by General Electric. Waterstone has estimated that it will cost \$10 million -- a third of the project's total price tag -- just to prepare the 16-acre site for development.

The first part of the forum will consist of a presentation by the developer, followed by a discussion of zoning and permitting requirements for the site by City Planner C.J. Hoss.

If the demand to speak is greater than expected, both Thurston and Bianchi said it's possible that a

second forum could be scheduled. Thurston also said it's possible that Monday's forum could continue past 8 p.m., but Bianchi said, "I think we're going to try and contain it to 90 minutes."

Thurston said PEDDA could vote on the proposal at the board's next meeting on Oct. 23.

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If you go ...

n What: Presentation and public comment on proposed retail development in the William Stanley Business Park.

n When: 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday. Public comment will be limited to the final 45 minutes. Registration for commenters begins at 6:15 p.m.

n Where: Council chambers, Pittsfield City Hall

n Rules: Only city residents will be allowed to speak, subject to a 2-minute time limit.

n On TV: Live on Pittsfield Community Television.